

A ‘New Newspaper’: *Sin Po* and the Voices of Progressive Chinese Indonesian Nationalists, 1910-1949

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Abstract

This thesis examines the emergence and development of the Chinese Indonesian run newspaper *Sin Po* from 1910 to 1949 focusing on how it shaped political and social thinking and discourses in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia. I argue that *Sin Po* played an essential role in creating a class and identity consciousness, encouraging organisation and solidarity and formulating new ideas and tactics for the Chinese community and at the same time sustaining and building a political movement for its readers.

Throughout this thesis, I use different lenses to focus attention on the work the paper undertook to address key issues for the ethnic Chinese and promote particular causes. I show how *Sin Po* engaged in a sophisticated way with a host of social and political issues: race and racism across colonial society, the appeal of Chinese and at times Indonesian nationalism, the need for civic and social equality, and the civic duty of Chinese to help others. By studying *Sin Po*, this research attempts to provide a more sophisticated analysis of the complex dynamics of Chinese Indonesian society. Moreover, it will delve into the sensitive issue of the relationships between Chinese Peranakan and other communities in Indonesia.

To evaluate the contributions of *Sin Po*, this analysis examines how it reported on events in China as well as local political developments and issues of concern to the Chinese community in Indonesia. Placing the paper in the context of colonial society and comparing it at times to other publications I also consider contestation and coherence between *Sin Po* and other Chinese newspapers to gauge the uniqueness of this paper.

This thesis relies in method on a close reading of the paper *Sin Po* and contextualised analysis of how the paper presented topics, issues and developments to its readers. Through an in-depth analysis of *Sin Po*, I argue that Chinese political orientation should not be treated as a constant and monolithic; instead, it must be seen as fluid, multi-faceted, and continuously evolving. The complexity of the nations and imagined communities promoted by newspapers in this period is what made *Sin Po* and other Sino-Malay newspapers so dynamic and important.

Declaration

I certify that

- i. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy except where indicated in the preface;
- ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and
- iii. this thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of front matter, bibliographies and appendices

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Ravando', written over a horizontal line.

Ravando

[18 April 2023]

Preface

Key ideas and content from this thesis have been presented at academic conferences and seminars including:

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Writing this PhD thesis has been a lengthy endeavour with intermittent ups and downs. As it turns out, writing a dissertation is more than just an intellectual voyage; it also involves meaningful encounters, travel, and conversations with old and new acquaintances. As is the case with all students, behind me lies a community of individuals who have, in their own unique ways, helped me traverse a path marked by confusion, anxiety, humiliation, and ultimately pleasure and happiness.

I would like to extend my warmest thanks to my primary supervisor, Kate McGregor. Her tireless support, patience and steadfast belief in my ability have remained the foundations upon which my work has been built. Her critical comments and suggestions were essential; I not merely survived her supervision but came out stronger and more critical because of it. I also express my greatest appreciation to associate supervisor, Antonia Finnane, for her strong support, fruitful insights, and valuable critiques, especially on Chinese history, as well as for supporting the completion of this study from start to finish. I am also deeply grateful to my committee chairs, Andrew May and Zoe Laidlaw, whose thoughtful recommendations on potential avenues of research and secondary sources helped shape several key arguments within this thesis; and to Sean Scalmer who helped me to get the waiver for my tuition fee during the final year of my study.

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Without the assistance and intervention of many people, the thesis would not have progressed as it has. In Melbourne, the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies

(SHAPS) has provided me a comfortable workplace where I have received systematic training as a historian. I also had the privilege of teaching at the University of Melbourne, and I thank Edwin Jurriens, Ken Setiawan and Justin Wejak who provided me with these opportunities. Many thanks, as well, to Kate McGregor for employing me as a research assistant.

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Notes of Translation

This thesis examines a Chinese Indonesian newspaper that was published in the multilingual society of multilingual society of 20th century Indonesia. As such, it naturally includes sources that were often written in either Dutch, Malay, Chinese, or a combination of the three. I italicise non-English language quotes and phrases while providing an accompanying English translation. For reference, please view the glossary of terms and abbreviations for a list of phrases, terms, and organisational names that are commonly used in this thesis. All translations and mistakes are my own.

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

<i>Bangsa</i>	Race, nation.
<i>Bin Seng</i>	People's Voice, a lower-priced (f. 4/month) daily issued by <i>Sin Po</i> .
Bumiputera	Son of the soils, indigenous Indonesian
Chung Hwa Hui (CHH)	The Chinese Association, a Dutch-educated Chinese political party formed in 1928.
Djawa Hak Boe Tjong Hwee	General Educational Association of Java
Europeesche Lagere School (ELS)	Dutch primary school for Europeans during pre-war Indonesia.
Gerakan Rakjat Indonesia (Gerindo)	The Indonesian People's Movement, a left-wing party before World War II.
<i>Hoakiao</i>	Overseas Chinese.
Hogere Burgere School (HBS)	Dutch secondary school during pre-war Indonesia.
Hollandsch Chinese School (HCS)	Dutch primary school for the Chinese during pre-war Indonesia
Hua Chiao Tsung Hui (HCTH)	General Association of Overseas Chinese, an organisation sponsored by the Japanese military administration during the occupation. This organisation was called Kakyo Sokai in Japanese.
<i>Inlander</i>	a Dutch term for the native Indonesians. It has been considered as derogatory by the people concerned.
Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging (ISDV)	Indies Social Democratic Organisation, established in 1914, it transformed into the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) in 1920.
Jang Seng Ie (JSI)	the first modern and not-for-profit health institution established by Chinese community on 24 December

	1924 in Batavia. On 1 June 1965, it changed its name to Rumah Sakit Husada.
<i>Kapitan</i>	a Dutch term for “Captain”, a title granted to a Chinese officer in the colony by the Dutch authorities. Also spelled as <i>Kapitein</i> .
Kuomintang (KMT)	Chinese Nationalist Party, founded by Sun Yat-sen in 1912.
<i>Kung Yen</i>	Public Declaration, a newspaper which was issued in December 1936 and served as a backup newspaper if <i>Sin Po</i> was forced to close by the authority.
<i>Majoor</i>	a Dutch term for “Major”, the highest title for a Chinese officer in colonial Indonesia, selected by the Dutch colonial government.
Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs (MULO)	Junior High School (literally: More Comprehensive Elementary Education).
Naamloze Vennootschap (N.V.)	Limited liability company.
Nederlandsch Indische Artsen School (NIAS)	Netherlands Indies Doctors’ School, located in Surabaya.
Pao An Tui (PAT)	Peace Preservation Corps, was established in 1945 in Medan by some Chinese on the advice of the Chinese consul to safeguard Chinese property and lives during the Indonesian War of Independence.
Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI)	Indonesian Nationalist Party, established by Soekarno in July 1927 and disbanded in 1930.
Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI)	The Indonesian Communist Party. Banned in 1965.

Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (PTI):	The Indonesian Chinese Party, formed in 1932. an Indonesian-oriented political organisation.
<i>Perniagaan</i>	Commerce, a Sino-Malay daily published in Batavia in 1907. The name was changed to <i>Siang Po</i> in 1930.
Servants of Society (SOS)	a Chinese Peranakan political organisation based in Surabaya, founded immediately after the independence of Indonesia. It backed the Republic of Indonesia during the Indonesian War of Independence.
Siang Hwee	Chinese Chamber of Commerce.
<i>Siang Po</i>	The name of <i>Perniagaan</i> after July 1930, representing the Chung Hwa Hui before 1934.
<i>Sin Tit Po</i>	a major Indonesia-oriented Chinese Peranakan newspaper before World War II. Affiliated with the PTI.
Soe Po Sia	Reading Club, a KMT-affiliated Chinese revolutionary organisation.
School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen (STOVIA)	School for the Education of Indigenous Doctors, located in Batavia.
School ter Opleiding van Indische Tandheelkundigen (STOVIT)	School for the Education of Indies Dentists, opened next to the NIAS in 1928
Tiong Hoa Hak Tong (THHT)	Chinese School, the name of earliest Chinese schools established by the THHK.
Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (THHK)	A Hokkien term for the Chinese Association, the first Chinese organisation in Java which advocated Confucianism and established Chinese-medium schools. Ceased operation in 1958.

Tionghoa Peranakan	or Chinese Peranakan, the origin of the term is ‘anak’, Indonesian for child, thus “child of the land”, were Chinese born in Indonesia – frequently of mixed Chinese and Indonesian ancestry – who were partially assimilated into the local culture.
Tionghoa Totok	or Chinese Totok, from Javanese, signifying ‘new’ or ‘purity’, were Chinese-born individuals who maintained a cultural and linguistic orientation towards China.
Tjina	or “Cina” according to the New Spelling, a derogatory term for China and Chinese.
Volskraad	“People’s Council”, an advisory body in Indonesia established by the Dutch before World War II.
Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC)	Dutch East India Company (1602-1799)
<i>Vreemde Oosterlingen</i>	Foreign Orientals
<i>Wijk</i>	Quarter (of city or town)
<i>Wijkenstelsel</i>	Quarter system

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 1910, Lauw Giok Lan (1883-1953), the secretary of Tiong Hwa Hwee Koan Batavia (THHK, The Chinese Association), conceived the idea for a Chinese Peranakan newspaper.¹ He understood a newspaper could be utilised to improve the situation of the Chinese people, who at the time were frequently victims of the discriminatory policies of the Dutch colonial government. Lauw shared his idea with Yoe Sin Gie (1880-1957), a prominent Peranakan businessman who was also the commissioner of THHK Batavia. On 1 October 1910, they agreed to establish a Malay-language weekly called *Sin Po* (*Hsin-pao*), meaning “The New Newspaper”.

The name Yoe Sin Gie gave to the paper reflected his vision that it would provide Malay-speaking readers with high-quality news. He and Lauw thought that the Chinese Peranakan media in the colony had so far failed to represent either the voice or aspirations of the Indonesia-born Chinese, known as the “Chinese Peranakan” or “Chinese Indonesian”, especially in Batavia.² They intended that *Sin Po* would fill that void. Lauw initially acted as *Sin Po*’s editor-in-chief while Yoe became the director and business manager. In the beginning, most authors and contributors of *Sin Po* were graduates and benefactors of Chinese schools, namely the THHK.³

Both Lauw and Yoe recognised the significance of newspapers for members of the *Bangsa Tionghoa* (a term that can be interpreted as meaning either Chinese people or the Chinese nation). They wanted the paper to become a forum for Chinese Indonesian, especially during a rapid period of change, dubbed by Shiraishi as “*zaman bergerak*” (an

¹ “Sin Po 25 Taon,” in *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935* (Batavia: Sin Po, 1935), np.

² Leo Suryadinata uses the term “Chinese Peranakan Press” to refer to the daily and weekly newspapers that were published and managed by the Chinese Peranakan community. They were mostly written in Low Malay and targeted primarily at Chinese Peranakan audiences. Meanwhile, Tom Hoogervorst utilises “Sino-Malay” (*Melajoe-Tionghoa*) as a categorical shorthand for Malay writings by (partially) Chinese-origin individuals. He argues that “Malay” here refers only to the language of these texts, which is distinct from the language of ethnic Malays. See Leo Suryadinata, *The Pre-World War II Peranakan Chinese Press of Java: A Preliminary Survey* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1971), 2-3; Tom Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned: Indonesia’s Chinese Print Entrepreneurs, 1911-1949* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021), 10.

³ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan: Tokoh Pers yang Peduli Pembangunan Bangsa, 1894-1984* (Jakarta: Yayasan Nabil & Hasta Mitra, 2009), 38.

age in motion).⁴ They believed that *Sin Po* could play a crucial role in disseminating diverse ideas for the advancement of the *Bangsa Tionghoa*. By emphasising their *Bangsa Tionghoa* identity, Lauw and Yoe perceived themselves and the community to which they were connected as distinct from the Dutch and Bumiputera populations (literally means “son of the soils”, indigenous Indonesian).⁵

Sin Po rapidly emerged as a vehicle for the Chinese Peranakan to express their political and cultural aspirations. The paper enabled people from different backgrounds, particularly the *kaoem moeda Tionghoa* (Chinese youth), to actively participate in public life. Instead of relying primarily on Chinese Indonesian leaders or the colonial administration to speak for them, the paper provided space for Chinese Peranakans to debate key issues and negotiate their unique position in colonial society from 1910 onwards.

Aims

This thesis examines the emergence and development of *Sin Po* from 1910 to 1949 by focusing on how the newspaper contributed to political and social thinking and discourses in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia. In so doing, this thesis aims to contribute to several fields of research. Firstly, it aims to add to existing knowledge about the development of Chinese Indonesian identity and Chinese contributions to society from the 1910s to the late 1940s. Secondly, it aims to complexify understandings of the Chinese diaspora and connections to China in this same time period by detailing how links to China both gave the community a sense of identity but also a sense of either joint or diverging interests from other Indonesians. Thirdly, drawing on broader literature about the role of the press, this thesis aims to provide a detailed study of how one newspaper contributed to the development of progressive thinking within and beyond one community.

⁴ Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁵ Since its inaugural edition, *Sin Po* had already used the term “Bumiputera” to replace the Dutch term “inlander” (native), which carried strong pejorative connotations.

This research utilises *Sin Po* as a window into the political dynamics surrounding the development of modern consciousness in Chinese Indonesian society from the early to the mid-20th century. By ‘modern consciousness’ I refer to a growing sense that members of this community were part of China, culturally or politically – an awareness that drove the Chinese Peranakan, particularly the Chinese youth to think about and take steps to improve their position in the social, economic, and political spheres of life.

In this thesis, I argue that *Sin Po* played an essential role in creating a class and identity consciousness, encouraging organisation and solidarity, formulating new ideas and tactics for the community and at the same time sustaining and building a political movement for the readers of this publication. I consider *Sin Po* not merely a ‘reflection’ of Chinese community spirit, but also an active agent in shaping urban elites and community leaders across Chinese Indonesian society from the early 20th century onwards. In addition, I argue that *Sin Po*’s journalists tried to influence public opinion both consciously and unconsciously. Some of them went further by playing roles in numerous political and social movements in colonial Indonesia.⁶

Moreover, *Sin Po* also contributed to cultivating a sense of the Chinese spirit. The paper often published articles on issues relevant to Chinese communities, but at the same time, it tried to activate these communities. Chapter II of this thesis, for instance, demonstrates how *Sin Po* actively promoted health-related infrastructure, medicines, and knowledge, while also sharpening the political sensibilities and sense of civic duty of the Chinese community through these health-related issues. Chapter IV on the Sino-Japanese War similarly illustrates how the paper tried to rally support for China in the form of raising money for the war effort.

This thesis approaches the newspaper from a variety of angles to consider its evolving content, the context within which it evolved and how it was received by a range of audiences. In order to fully contextualise the emergence of the paper and its development this thesis considers how socio-political changes, transnational networking, the rise of new Chinese elites or classes in society, and technological and communication developments shaped the paper. To evaluate the contributions of *Sin Po*, this analysis examines how it reported on events in China as well as local political developments and

⁶ See Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 38-42.

issues of concern to the Chinese community in Indonesia. Placing the paper in the context of colonial society and other publications, I also consider contestation and coherence between *Sin Po* and other Chinese newspapers to gauge the uniqueness of this paper. From 1910-1949 the Chinese community had to navigate complex changes at home and abroad in China ranging from increased discrimination in colonial society to the development of shared causes with other Indonesians through to experiences of extreme violence in the Indonesian War of Independence (1945-1949).

By probing these questions, the thesis considers what insights *Sin Po* offers regarding broader issues of modern identity and community formation and the experiences of diaspora including the forms of nationalism and racism that have shaped this community. The primary research question is: How did *Sin Po* contribute to shaping Chinese Indonesian society and to their understanding of their place in the colony and in the broader *Bangsa Tionghoa* or *Bangsa Indonesia*?

This study covers the first forty years of *Sin Po*, through to the end of the Indonesian War of Independence. Through a close reading of the paper the thesis covers the dynamic period of 1910-49 during which time there were shifting relations between Bumiputera/Indonesian and Chinese Peranakan and changing relations between Chinese Indonesian and China. Throughout this period, I argue that *Sin Po* shaped the social, cultural, and political transformations of the Chinese community.

The Emergence of Sino-Malay Press in Colonial Indonesia

The rise of newspapers as a new medium of communication in the colony was connected to global revolutions in transport and technology which began in the mid-19th century. The transport revolution, evidenced by the commencement of steamship services in 1851 and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 as well as the technology of railways, made transport and communication across large distances faster. At the same time, the invention of new print and communication technologies, such as telegraphy and the linotype machine, transformed how news was transmitted and shared.

The early periodicals and printing presses in colonial Indonesia were created by Western traders, intelligentsia, and missionaries as private companies. The first printed newspaper in the Indies was the short-lived *Bataviasche Nouvelles en Politique*

Raisonnements (1744-46) which was published in Dutch by the Castle Printing House and regarded as the first ever printed newspaper in Indonesia.⁷ Most of its contents were comprised of government notices, auction news, and advertisements.⁸ Over thirty years later the *Vendu Nieuws* (1776 - 1809) appeared then the *Bataviasche Koloniale Courant* (1810), and the *Bataviasche Courant* (1816).

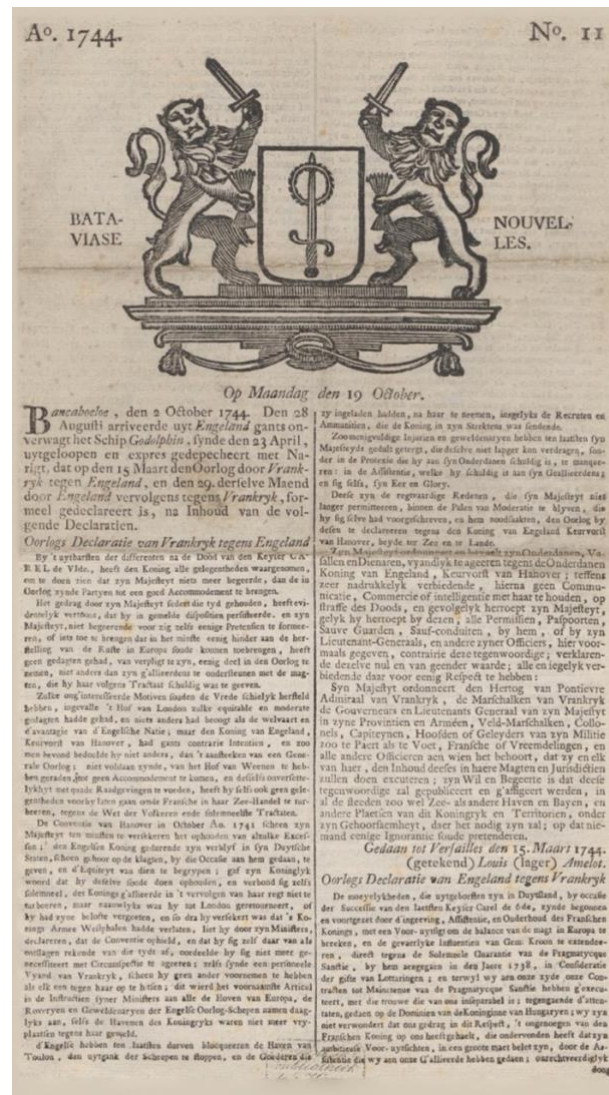


Figure 1. Cover page of *Bataviase Nouvelles*, dated 19 October 1744. Frequently regarded as the first newspaper ever printed in Indonesia. Source:

<https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010728185:mpeg21:p001>

⁷ David Hill, *The Press in the New Order Indonesia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1994), 26.

⁸ Ahmat Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness (1855-1913)* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1995), 2-5.

The second quarter of the 19th century marked the beginning of a new era for newspapers. Privately owned printing presses and privately printed newspapers began to emerge, including *Bataviaasch Advertentieblad* (Batavia, 1825), *Nederlandsch Indisch Handelsblad* (Batavia, 1829), *Soerabaijasch Courant* (Surabaya, 1837), *Semarangsche Advertentieblad* (Semarang, 1845). All these papers were published in the Dutch language and therefore read primarily by Chinese, Arab, and Indian merchants, literati, and religious reformers. However, after the introduction of linotype machines to Java's markets and the easing of press regulations, several Chinese Indonesians became actively involved in the printing business.⁹

The involvement of Chinese Indonesian in the Malay press can be traced back to 1869 when Lo Tun Tay became an editor for *Mataharie* (Sun) newspaper in Batavia. However, until the second half of the 19th century, their participation in newspapers was limited to writing letters, translating, contributing articles, and working as typesetters for Dutch or Eurasian-controlled publications.¹⁰ Their roles began to increase when Chinese businessmen took over control of a number of papers. In 1885, Lie Kim Hok, a Chinese Peranakan educator who would become known as the “father of Chinese-Malay literature,” purchased a printing press from D. J. van der Linden's widow. Lie previously had served as the editor of *Bintang Djohar* (Star of Venus, previously known as *Biang Lala*) under the mentorship of the missionary Linden.¹¹ Lie also acquired a share of the Batavian daily newspaper called *Pembrita Betawi* (Batavian Reporter).¹² Then in 1887, Sie Hian Ling, a *Luitenant-titulair der Chinezen* (Titular Lieutenant of the Chinese) in Semarang, a position of prominence in the civil administration of colonial Indonesia, began to publish a tri-weekly newspaper in Semarang entitled *Tamboor Melayoe* (Malay Drum). Most news and articles in the paper were derived from European and Chinese media. The publication, however, only lasted until the second half of 1889 due to financial

⁹ Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 77-78.

¹⁰ A number of Chinese Peranakan newspapers were issued before the inception of THHK in the year of 1900, namely *Courant Doemingo* (Batavia, 1894), *Pertja Barat* (Padang, 1894), *Sinar Terang* (Batavia, 1888), *Penghentar* (Ambon, 1897), *Tjahaja Sumatra* (Padang, 1898). See Adam, *The Vernacular Press*, 67-71.

¹¹ Tio Ie Soei, *Lie Kimhok, 1853-1912* (Bandung: L.D. “Good Luck”, 1958), 49.

¹² However, Lie Kim Hok did not own the press for long because at the end of 1887 the company was dissolved and the printing press was sold to Albrecht & Co., which resumed the publication of the *Pembrita Betawi*. See Ahmat Adam, *The Vernacular Press*, 65.

issues.¹³ During this period, other Sino-Malay periodicals began to appear in smaller cities across Java, such as Sukabumi, Buitenzorg, and Bondowoso.

Most of the early Sino-Malay presses failed to survive, primarily owing to financial challenges.¹⁴ They were unable to sustain a sufficient number of stable subscriptions to continue publishing. Despite the fact that the majority of these newspapers were published for only one or two years, these periodicals are valuable primary sources on the Chinese in Indonesia. In contrast to the Bumiputera press, the Sino-Malay press tended to have greater access to financial backing through family and commercial connections. The combination of access to finance and a wealthier clientele resulted in the Chinese press achieving far more stability than the Bumiputera press.¹⁵

There were other factors that also drove some Chinese Indonesian entrepreneurs into newspapers in the late 19th century. The depression of 1882-1885 decreased sugar and coffee prices on the global market, and the collapse of the Chinese monopoly trade in these goods led many Chinese to take their chances in the newspaper business. The content of the majority of early Chinese Peranakan periodicals typically consisted of translations of ancient Chinese texts about Chinese traditions and beliefs. Few took an interest in publishing critical pieces on the fate of the Chinese community in colonial Indonesia. Instead, these papers were rather elitist catering only to ‘men of letters’ or educated men. At that time, education for Chinese women was not a priority for the community or the colonial government, and women’s issues were rarely covered in newspapers. These papers generally reflected a poor standard of journalism, and their contents were intended to amuse a few rather than to educate the wider population. However, with the turn to the 20th century which was also marked by the rise of Chinese nationalism, circumstances in Indonesia began to gradually change.

¹³ *Bintang Soerabaia*, 30 November 1888.

¹⁴ The Sino-Malay press refers to the daily and weekly newspapers published by the Chinese Peranakan before and after Indonesian independence. Managed and owned mostly by Chinese Peranakan, these papers were usually written in *Malay* and intended primarily for Chinese Peranakan readers. See Leo Suryadinata, *The Pre-World War II Peranakan Chinese Press of Java: A Preliminary Survey* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1971), 2-3.

¹⁵ Robert Henry Crawford, “The Daily Indonesian-Language Press of Djakarta: Analysis of Two Recent Critical Periods,” *PhD. Thesis*, (New York: Syracuse University, 1967): 115.

Chinese Grievances

The Chinese were and continue to be a small, heterogeneous, and multifaceted minority in Indonesia. Evidence of Chinese traders in the Indonesian archipelago dates back many centuries. Historian Anthony Reid asserts that Chinese settlers entered the archipelago as part of the invading Mongol troops that arrived in Java in 1293.¹⁶ From the rise of the Dutch VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, Dutch East India Company, 1602-1799) in the archipelago onwards, the Chinese in colonial Indonesia were consistently engaged in commerce.

Chinese migration to the archipelago increased in the 19th century as a result of the introduction of steam ships and the opening of the Suez Canal. In 1844, there were roughly 108,275 Chinese in Java, with Batavia having the largest population at 31,764, followed by Surabaya and Semarang with 11,680 and 9,500 Chinese settlers respectively.¹⁷ This figure increased substantially over the following decades. In 1920, for instance, the number of Chinese immigrants in Batavia increased to 116,525.¹⁸ According to the 1930 census, there were 1,233,214 Chinese in colonial Indonesia or 2.0 per cent of the total population (see Table 1). Almost half of them lived on the islands of Java and Madura (582,431), and slightly over half (650,783) resided on the islands of Sumatra (448,552), Borneo (134,287), Celebes (41,542), and other islands (26,542).¹⁹

¹⁶ Anthony Reid, "The Rise and Fall of Sino-Javanese Shipping," in Geoff Wade (ed.) *China and Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2009): 74.

¹⁷ P. Bleeker, "Bijdragen tot de Statistiek der Bevolking van Java," in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, vol. 4, (Batavia, 1847).

¹⁸ See Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 32; "Batavia in 1912," *Koloniaal Tijdschrift*, (1912): 1421-1422.

¹⁹ In Java and Madura, most of the Chinese lived in cities (31.2 per cent) and smaller towns (27.5 per cent), with a total of 58.7 per cent living in urban areas. See Ong Eng Die, *De Chineezers in Nederlandsch Indie: Sociografie van een Indonesische Bevolkingsgroep* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1943), 15-19.

Table 1. Growth of the Chinese Population in Indonesia (1860-1930)						
<i>Year</i>	<i>Java</i>	<i>Sumatra</i>	<i>West Borneo</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Outer Islands</i>	<i>Total</i>
1860	150,000	-	-	-	72,000	222,000
1880	207,000	94,000	28,000	15,000	137,000	344,000
1895	256,000	159,000	38,000	17,000	213,000	469,000
1905	295,000	195,000	48,000	25,000	268,000	563,000
1920	384,000	304,000	68,000	54,000	425,000	809,000
1930	582,000	449,000	108,000	94,000	651,000	1,233,000
Source: G. William Skinner, "The Chinese Minority," in <i>Indonesia</i> , ed. Ruth McVey (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1963): 99.						

During the colonial period, the Chinese population was typically divided into two distinct categories: "Totok" and "Peranakan". Chinese Totok (from Javanese, signifying 'new' or 'purity') were Chinese-born individuals who maintained a cultural and linguistic orientation towards China. Meanwhile, Chinese Peranakan (the origin of the term is 'anak,' Indonesian for child, thus "child of the land") were Chinese born in Indonesia – frequently of mixed Chinese and Indonesian ancestry – who were partially assimilated into the local culture. Many Peranakans spoke Malay, Javanese, or other local languages fluently, and frequently had a solid understanding of Dutch, but generally lacked Chinese proficiency.²⁰ As shown in Table 2 below, more than 85 per cent of those classified as Chinese Peranakan resided in Java.

²⁰ See Mely G. Tan, "Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*, eds. Melvin Ember, Carol Ember and Ian Skoggard (Boston, MA: Springer, 2005): 795-6. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-29904-4_82; Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 9-10; Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 32.

Table 2. Chinese Peranakan and Totok Communities in Indonesia, 1920			
<i>Region</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Peranakan</i>	<i>Totok</i>
Java	384,000	268,000	116,000
Sumatra	304,000	18,000	286,000
West Borneo	68,000	-	68,000
Elsewhere	54,000	27,000	27,000
Total	810,000	313,000	497,000
Source: Charles Coppel, "Mapping the Peranakan Chinese in Indonesia," <i>Papers on Far Eastern History</i> 8 (September 1973): 143-67.			

In general, the majority of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia enjoyed a privileged economic position within colonial society as they controlled the majority of medium-sized business enterprises and played an active role in import and export trade. At the end of the 19th century, however, the Dutch colonial government decided to replace opium farms in various regions, which previously had been dominated by the Chinese, with a government opium monopoly. This experiment started in Madura (1894) and East Java (1896) and led to the collapse of the revenue farm system (also referred to as tax farming), which eventually ended the centuries-old Chinese monopoly on the opium farming system in the whole colony in 1898.²¹ As a result, the Chinese financial losses were massive, and their economic position deteriorated rapidly. They could no longer earn a significant profit from the business and lost their main source of livelihood.

Following this, the Dutch also restricted the movement of ethnic Chinese by tightening discriminative ordinances such as *passenstelsel* (travel pass system) and *wijkenstelsel* (residential zoning system), in 1897 and 1900 respectively.²² Meanwhile, the absolute and arbitrary powers of the police court system or the *politierol* introduced in 1868 continued to operate and were frequently used to persecute Chinese and

²¹ Lea Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism: The Genesis of the Pan-Chinese Movement in Indonesia* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960), 25-26.

²² Adam, *The Vernacular Press*, 72.

Bumiputera communities.²³ Furthermore, in 1900, the Dutch colonial government introduced the ‘ethical policy’ (*ethische politiek*), backed by liberals labelled the ‘ethici’ (ethicists). The ethical policy had the dual primary aims of improving the welfare of the locals and promoting the ‘native awakening’ through the introduction of several policies, such as transmigration, irrigation, and education.²⁴ In practice, however, this policy oftentimes alienated the Chinese, giving them the impression that they were being treated like stepchildren.²⁵

Further to this, some Dutch ethicists and European journalists propagated the notion that the monopolistic control on trade the Chinese exercised needed to be abolished in order to safeguard the locals from Chinese economic exploitation. After the collapse of the opium farming system, the Chinese still held control over the taxes on consumption (liquor, tobacco, rice, palm sugar), gambling, transportation (tollgates, toll bridges over river passes), slaughtering livestock, pawnshop farms, among others.²⁶ The proponents of the ethical policy began a campaign against the Chinese community, accusing them of taking advantage of the Javanese. They deliberately promoted negative views of Chinese participation in a variety of commercial endeavours by characterising them as *aterling* (misbehaving) and *sluw* (cunning).²⁷ The financial situation of ethnic Chinese was negatively impacted by these new regulations and labelling, which also stripped them of their former privileged position as reputable concession holders and tax collectors.²⁸ In

²³ Mona Lohanda, *Growing Pains: The Chinese and the Dutch in Colonial Java, 1890-1942* (Jakarta: Yayasan Cipta Loka Caraka, 2002), 209.

²⁴ Lea Williams, “The Ethical Program and the Chinese in Indonesia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, vol. 2, no. 2, (July 1961): 35-36.

²⁵ Sim Ki Ay, “De Chineesche Nederzetting in Nederlandsch-Indie,” *Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih*, Extra Nummer, (ca. 1920): 45.

²⁶ See Mona Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia, 1837-1942: A History of Chinese Establishment in Colonial Society* (Jakarta: Djambatan, 1996), 179; John Butcher & Howard Dick (eds.), *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1993).

²⁷ Ming Govaars, *Dutch Colonial Education: The Chinese Experience in Indonesia, 1900-1942* (Singapore: Chinese Heritage Center, 2005), 201.

²⁸ Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 41.

essence, the Chinese no longer served as a buffer between rulers and the ruled. They were merely ordinary subjects without significant privileges.²⁹

The experience of being excluded from the select benefits arising from the Dutch ‘ethical policy’ and targeted both by discriminatory regulations and through high taxes, forced the ethnic Chinese to re-evaluate their position in the colony.³⁰ These experiences provided fertile ground for the development of Chinese nationalism. Moreover, the situation also stimulated unity among Chinese in Indonesia and encouraged them to rely on the Chinese Imperial Government for assistance and protection. As Lea Williams has argued, ‘The passive feeling of the separateness of the Indies Chinese was transformed into vigorous nationalism.’³¹

At the same time, the disastrous defeat of China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), encouraged the foreign powers to make further demands for concessions from the Chinese government. It was in this period that Chinese nationalism developed. Along with the launch of a reform movement known as the “Hundred Days of Reform” or Wuxu Reform, the Guangxu Emperor and his reform-minded allies, including Kang Youwei (1858-1927), Liang Qichao (1873-1929), and Tan Sitong (1865-1898), began to revolutionise and modernise fundamental sectors of China society such as education, the military, industry, and so on.³²

Meanwhile, the Chinese in Indonesia and other parts of the world were closely monitoring the movement’s progress, and print culture became a key medium for learning about evolving developments in China. They started to show receptiveness to new ideas from China, thanks to advancements in technology which allowed these ideas to be more

²⁹ Kwee Tek Hoay, *The Origins of the Modern Chinese Movement in Indonesia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1969); J.F. Scheltema, *De Opiumpolitiek der Regeering en de Vrijheid der Drukkers in Nederlandsch-Indie* (The Hague: W.P. van Stockum en Zoon, 1903), 9.

³⁰ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 210.

³¹ Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 19.

³² The Hundred Days of Reform or Wuxu Reform was an unsuccessful 103-day national, cultural, political, and educational reform campaign that occurred between 11 June and 22 September 1898 under the late Qing dynasty. The objectives of these reforms included: transforming the government from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy; constructing a modern education system; modernising China’s military and adopting modern training and drill methods; and rapidly industrialising all of China through manufacturing, commerce, and capitalism, among others. See Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Gue Zarrow, (eds.), *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002); Shiping Hua, “The Meiji Restoration (1868) and the Late Qing Reform (1898) Revisited: Strategies and Philosophies,” *East Asia* vol. 21(3) (2004): 3–22.

rapidly communicated across national borders. They also began to challenge the colonial government's discriminatory policies and started their own organisations and presses to express themselves politically. All of these elements contributed to the rise of Chinese nationalism and later served as the impetus for Lauw Giok Lan and Yoe Sin Gie to establish *Sin Po*. Crucial also to the rise of Chinese nationalism was the decision of a group of Chinese Peranakan in Batavia to establish the Tiong Hwa Hwee Koan (Chinese Association, THHK) on 17 March 1900, an organisation devoted to encouraging and fostering Chinese culture in Indonesia.³³ THHK became the first modern Chinese association of its kind in the colony, and its ideas critically shaped the thinking of *Sin Po*.

The Emergence of Tiong Hwa Hwee Koan

The founding of the Tiong Hwa Hwee Koan (THHK) was a watershed in a process of Chinese resicination in colonial Indonesia.³⁴ It marked the beginning of a reaffirmation of the Chinese Peranakan's economic position and an effort to challenge colonial discrimination by strengthening their identity. As Mona Lohanda has argued, the THHK successfully "called upon the Peranakans to accept modernisation and to pursue progress through education while advocating a return to Chinese identity through practising the teachings of Confucius."³⁵ By emphasising education -a field in which ethnic Chinese felt the most underprivileged relative to Europeans or Bumiputeras- the THHK was able to foster a revival of Chinese identity through Confucian practice in Chinese language schools. Thanks to the Dutch attitude of disregarding Chinese education, the Chinese in the colony created stronger relationships with the Chinese government.

In 1901, THHK initiated the establishment of modern Chinese schools (Tiong Hwa Hak Tong) by employing modern curriculums, pedagogical techniques, and progressive instructors. The THHK schools swept throughout the colony like a tidal wave,

³³ THHK was founded by several educated and enlightened Chinese Peranakans, namely Phoa Keng Hek, Lie Hin Liam, Lie Kim Hok, Khoe A Fan, Khouw Kim An, Khoe Siau Eng, Khouw Lam Tjiang, Tan Kim San, and Tan Tjong Long. See Nio Joe Lan, *Riwajat 40 Taon dari Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan Batavia, 1900-1939*. (Batavia, 1940).

³⁴ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 64.

³⁵ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 238.

nurturing a corporate identity among Chinese Peranakan as well as pride in China and Chinese culture. They became a symbol of the new Chinese nationalist movement.³⁶

By 1911, there were 93 THHK Chinese schools across Indonesia. Outside of Java, THHK schools were inaugurated in Sumatera (Sibolga, Padang, Palembang, Muntok, Sungailiat, Pangkal Pinang and Tanjungpandan), in Borneo (Pontianak), and Sulawesi (Makassar).³⁷ Over the next twenty years this number rapidly increased. By 1934, *Sin Po* estimated there were about 318 THHK schools all over the Indies, while the Office for Chinese Affairs estimated there were 450 schools.³⁸

The Chinese government paid attention to the founding of THHK. The Imperial Government believed the schools could be used to attract Chinese immigrants residing in other countries back to China. In 1903, Kang Youwei visited Java to deliver lectures to Confucian associations in Java, and two years after his visit, the Chinese government began a vigorous campaign in 1905 by dispatching a number of emissaries to Java in an attempt to win the support of the Chinese in Southeast Asia. The first envoy, led by Lauw Soe Kie, a representative of the Chinese Education Ministry, arrived in Java in 1906. He was sent by the Imperial Government to standardise and oversee Chinese education in colonial Indonesia.³⁹

Just a few months later, another emissary was sent under the command of Wang Fong Cheang, in order to meet the request of the Djawa Hak Boe Tjong Hwee (The THHK School Association in Java) for an inspection of the educational system.⁴⁰ From that point on, Chinese officials were dispatched to colonial Indonesia virtually every year to maintain strong ties with the Chinese living there.⁴¹ The Imperial Government sent other emissaries in modern warships to Batavia (1907), Semarang (1909), and Surabaya (1911). The THHK schools were also invited to send their graduates to the Chi Nan Hsueh T'ang,

³⁶ Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 14.

³⁷ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 56.

³⁸ See "Onderwijs Tionghoa di Indonesia," *Sin Po Jubileumnummer, 1910-1935*, np.

³⁹ Oiyen Liu, "Creolised Confucianism: Syncretism and Confucian Revivalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century in Java," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 51, Issue 1-2, (June 2020): 171. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000272>

⁴⁰ Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 87.

⁴¹ Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 92.

a government university for Chinese overseas in Nanjing, to pursue further study. Between 1907 and 1911, the Imperial Government invited around 200 Chinese youths from colonial Indonesia, covering all costs.⁴²



Figure 2. Lauw Soe Kie's visit to THHK Buitenzorg in 1906. Source: Nio Joe Lan, *Riwajat 40 Taon dari Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan Batavia, 1900-1939* (Batavia, 1940).



Figure 3. The alumni of THHK students were sent to Nanking (1906). Source: Nio Joe Lan, *Riwajat 40 Taon dari Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan Batavia, 1900-1939* (Batavia, 1940).

⁴² Nio Joe Lan, *Riwajat 40 Taon dari Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan*, 80-82.

Following the formation of THHK, other Chinese organisations began to emerge in Java, and they were effective in bringing the Chinese in the colony closer to the Imperial Government. Among these organisations were the Siang Hwee (Chamber of Commerce), which represented Chinese business interests, and Soe Po Sia (Book & Newspaper Club), which became the centre of the Kuomintang organisation that sought to promote Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary doctrines.

Furthermore, several radical and covert nationalist organisations also emerged in the colony, including the Ten Men League, the Kong Tong labour union, the Blood and Iron Union, and the National Salvation Brigade. In 1920, the Dutch colonial government deemed these organisations to be threatening, and all of their operations were proclaimed illegal. A number of their leaders were deported, and the Chinese press was tightly monitored.⁴³

The rise of the Chinese nationalist movement in colonial Indonesia was driven by at least three major organisations, namely THHK for educational and cultural nationalism; Siang Hwee for commercial nationalism; and Soe Po Sia for political nationalism. All these organisations, with the backing of the Sino-Malay press, particularly *Sin Po*, consistently campaigned and exerted pressure on the Dutch colonial government to improve the status of ethnic Chinese in the colony. They became vociferous exponents of Chinese nationalism and served as a symbol of this growing national consciousness. In addition, they also made a significant contribution to strengthening the attachment of Chinese people to their ancestral land.⁴⁴

Therefore, the early decades of the 20th century marked a phase of 'national awakening' for the Chinese community in colonial Indonesia, characterised by the emergence of novel concepts, new forms of organisation, and a new terminology that brought about significant changes in the political, social, and religious milieu of the colony.⁴⁵ The founding of the THHK in 1900 fostered the emergence of political and identity consciousness among Chinese Peranakan. Many consciously turned newspapers

⁴³ Liem Thian Joe, *Riwajat Semarang* (Batavia: Boekhandel Ho Kim Yoe, 1933), 247-49.

⁴⁴ Donald Earl Wilmott, *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 5-6.

⁴⁵ Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion*.

into propaganda machines allowing these communities not only to communicate with one another but also to contest the colonial system. This environment precipitated a rapid proliferation of ‘organs’ or mouthpieces of a pan-Chinese movement. It was this emerging political atmosphere which created the momentum for the founding of *Sin Po* and other Sino-Malay newspapers with the aim of nurturing the Chinese nationalist spirit.

Through a close analysis of *Sin Po*, this thesis contributes to several fields of research. First, it contributes to broader studies of newspapers and identity formation. Second, it contributes to studies on the Sino-Malay Press and Chinese identity in Indonesia. Third, it offers insights into the processes of construction and reconstruction of the collective identity of the Chinese in colonial Indonesia.

Studies of Newspapers and Identity Formation

Benedict Anderson argues in his renowned book *Imagined Communities* that the interplay between printing (technology) and capitalism (economic dynamism) provided the impetus for the wide dissemination of common messages, while simultaneously homogenising languages and creating ‘national’ mother tongues. Through the collaboration of writers, printers, publishing corporations, and book merchants, it not only fostered the growth of a literate audience but also created a vernacular readership whose boundaries frequently helped define the nation. Print capitalism contributed to the formation of contemporary vernaculars through which nations are ‘imagined’. Newspapers, in particular, provided readers with a customised imagined world which, through the newspaper’s ‘dailiness,’ was presented as a ‘steady onward clocking’ of events in time.⁴⁶

While Anderson espouses a general theory of how newspapers functioned in relation to the development of nationalism other authors have provided more specific studies of how particular papers contributed to the developments of nationalism, revolution, reform and new ways of thinking. Reflecting on the role of the press for minority or politically disempowered communities Jim Mac Laughlin opines that print capitalism and provincial presses were essential in fostering different imagined

⁴⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 33.

communities or nations in 19th-century Ireland. Both Unionist nationalists and Irish Republicans viewed them as foundations of nation-building.⁴⁷ In the case of Iran, Afshin Marashi contends that the circulation of newspapers, the proliferation of novels, and the vigour of literary-polemical debate in the years preceding the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) all contributed to the success of the revolution. All of these signalled the emergence of an Iranian public sphere capable of articulating a consensus opinion purporting to represent the national community.⁴⁸

Across the broader region of Southeast Asia and Australia, there are important studies of presses run by local Chinese communities which were similarly diasporic and minority communities. In the context of British Malaya, Chen Mong Hock illustrates how the origins and growth of the Chinese press in the colony ties with the history of journalism in China. She demonstrates how the content of Chinese newspapers in Malaya steadily transformed from a focus on classicist editorials, imperial decrees, and unverified but entertaining hearsay to serious reporting and political propaganda. Moreover, she shows how these papers pushed for queue-cutting, modern education and Western science and against opium addiction.⁴⁹ As I will show in this thesis, the role that these papers played mirrors that of *Sin Po* of the Sino-Malay press in colonial Indonesia which promoted similar reform initiatives. In the context of post-war Singapore, Thum Ping Tjin has also tracked how rising rates of literacy, along with significant public interest in political matters including Chinese rights and independence, led to a rapid expansion of the Chinese press' readership.⁵⁰ The newspapers' position at the nexus of Singapore's political, cultural, and social spheres allowed them to operate as intermediaries between old and new ideas. A valuable aspect of Thum's work is his close attention to the journalists' choices of language, the cultural frameworks they employed to construct their

⁴⁷ Jim Mac Laughlin, *Reimagining the Nation-State: The Contested Terrains of Nation-Building* (Pluto Press, 2001), particularly Chapter VII, "Pressing Home and the Nation: Print Capitalism and 'Imagined Communities' in the Nineteenth Century," 187-209.

⁴⁸ Afshin Marashi, "Paradigms of Iranian Nationalism: History, Theory, and Historiography," in *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie (University of Texas Press, 2014), 14-15.

⁴⁹ Chen Mong Hock, *The Early Chinese Newspapers of Singapore 1881-1912* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1967).

⁵⁰ Thum Ping Tjin, "Chinese Newspapers in Singapore, 1945-1963: Mediators of Elite and Popular Tastes in Culture and Politics", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 83, no. 1 (298) (June 2010): 53-76

arguments, and the sources of authority they cited in support of their findings in order to analyse Chinese ideals and preconceptions. Through this analysis, Thum explains how these newspapers facilitated the formation of shared identities and platforms among heterogeneous communities.⁵¹ My thesis pays similar attention to the framings journalists used within *Sin Po* and the effects these framings had on Chinese identity.

Focusing on Chinese-language newspapers in Australia, Mei-fen Kuo's 2013 book is also methodologically useful for this thesis because of the way she uses newspaper articles as primary sources to examine Chinese-Australian relations and identity formation in Chinese Australian publications from the late 19th to early 20th century.⁵² Drawing on Anderson's 'imagined communities', Kuo demonstrates how alliances between newspapermen and civic institutions "shaped new patterns of urban leadership." She analyses how newspapers engaged with local, national, and transnational diasporic print communities, where "local concerns were blended with sentiments about home, the motherland, and the world."⁵³ By using a similar approach, this thesis also examines how *Sin Po* navigated the relationship between the Chinese in Indonesia and civic institutions and its role as a catalyst for the development of social activism in Indonesia (see Chapter II and Chapter IV).

Reflecting more deeply on the process of identity formation and the kinds of values promoted by newspapers in the region Su Lin Lewis has highlighted how newspapers are connected to the rise of cosmopolitan civic societies through a comparative study of Rangoon, Penang, and Bangkok.⁵⁴ She argues that urbanites in Southeast Asian port cities began developing their own print cultures in the late 19th century, becoming a hub of intersecting 'print worlds' that linked growing reading

⁵¹ For similar research please see Mark Emmanuel, "Viewpapers: The Malay Press of the 1930s," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 41(1), The National University of Singapore, (2010): 1-20; Matthew Philip Copeland, "Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam," *PhD. Thesis*, Australian National University, (November 1993); Shawn Frederick McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period*. (California: University of California Press, 2007).

⁵² Mei-fen Kuo, *Making Chinese Australia: Urban Elites, Newspapers and the Formation of Chinese-Australian Identity, 1892-1912* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2013).

⁵³ Mei-fen Kuo, *Making Chinese Australia*, 12.

⁵⁴ Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 140.

publics. Her work is useful for its emphasis on the connections between papers and societal groups which is replicated in the *Sin Po* - THHK connection described above in the case of Indonesia. In short, apart from facilitating a new consciousness of the world and its connectedness, newspapers were instrumental in the formation of new conceptions of national consciousness, which were anchored in a shared language and history and helped to connect global communities across national border. In this thesis, I show how *Sin Po* and other Sino-Malay press linked China to Indonesia, serving as a bridge and mediator between these geographic and cultural places.

Studies on the Chinese Identity and Sino-Malay Press in Indonesia

Over the past decades, historical research on ethnic Chinese in Indonesia has focused on issues of citizenship, memory, and identity with a strong emphasis on re-examining the status of Chinese Indonesians after the fall of the Soeharto regime in 1998.⁵⁵ Some studies focus on new areas of Chinese engagement such as in the theatre and sports,⁵⁶ while others

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Irine Gayatri (ed.), *Tionghoa dan Ke-Indonesia-an: Komunitas Tionghoa di Semarang dan Medan* (Jakarta: Pustaka Obor, 2019); Hew Wai Weng, *Chinese Ways of being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2018); Wu Ling Chong, *Chinese Indonesians in Post-Suharto Indonesia: Democratisation and Ethnic Minorities* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018), Siew-Min Sai and Chang-Yau Hoon (eds.), *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed: History, Religion and Belonging* (London: Routledge, 2013), Pamela M. Allen, "Deconstructing the Diaspora: The Construction of Chinese-Indonesian Identity in Post-Suharto Indonesia," in *Asian Futures, Asian Traditions*, ed. Edwina Palmer (Kent: University of Canterbury, 2005). 128-39; Susan M. Giblin, "Being Chinese and Indonesian: Chinese Organisations in Post-Suharto Indonesia", *PhD Thesis*, University of Leeds, (2003). However, the 2016 publication of the three-volume book "Tionghoa dalam Keindonesiaan" deserves special recognition and praise as it attempts to recapitulate the long journey of the Chinese community in Indonesia and their contributions to various fields in Indonesia. See Leo Suryadinata and Didi Kwartanada (eds.), *Tionghoa dalam Keindonesiaan: Peran dan Kontribusi bagi Pembangunan Bangsa* Vol. I, II, III. (Jakarta: Yayasan Nabil, 2016).

⁵⁶ See Deddy Oetara & Fandy Hutari, *Tan Tjeng Bok: Seniman Tiga Zaman, 1898-1985* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2019); Taufiq Tanasaldy, "Legacy of the Past: Chinese Indonesian Sporting Achievements During the Sukarno Era," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 173, no. 1 (2017): 53-82; Doris Jedamski, "... and then the Lights Went Out and It was Pitch-Dark: From Stamboel to Tonil — Theatre and the Transformation of Perceptions," *South East Asia Research*, vol. 16, no. 3 (November 2008): 481-511.

have begun to draw comparative connections between the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia and Chinese overseas in other countries.⁵⁷

Much of the research into the historical development of ethnic Chinese identity in the period upon which this thesis focuses (1910-1949) was completed in between the 1960s and 1990s. Lea Williams' 1960 study, for example, brilliantly discusses the political and cultural awakening of the Chinese Indonesians in colonial Indonesia, including the birth and development of the various pan-Chinese associations in the colony.⁵⁸ Covering similar territory to the outline I provide above, Williams argues how the need for nationalism was the result of a series of events occurring around the late 19th century, as a result of the major Chinese grievances, the collapse of the Chinese Officers' institution, the Confucianist revival, and the closer contact between Chinese overseas and the outside world, particularly with China.⁵⁹ Unlike this thesis, however, her work does not pay close attention to the role Sino-Malay newspapers and journalists played in this process of political and social awakening.

Several other classic works on Chinese history by Mona Lohanda, Mary Somers Heidhues, Charles Coppel, and Donald Wilmott are used extensively in this thesis to contextualise Chinese political participation in Indonesia in the Dutch colonial period.⁶⁰ These studies help set out the context in which *Sin Po* operated. Other studies shed

⁵⁷ Widya Fitrianingsih, *Anak Cucu Kolonial: Identitas, Pengalaman, dan Memori Perempuan Tionghoa di Belanda* (Yogyakarta: UGM Press, 2017); Hew Wai Weng, "Beyond 'Chinese Diaspora' and 'Islamic Ummah': Various Transnational Connections and Local Negotiations of Chinese Muslim Identities in Indonesia," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 29, no. 3 (November 2014): 627-56; Hong Liu, *China and the Shaping of Indonesia, 1949-1965* (Singapore: NUS Press and Kyoto University Press, 2011); Dirk A. Buiskool, "The Chinese Commercial Elite of Medan, 1890-1942: The Penang Connection," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 82, no. 2 (297), (December 2009): 113-29.

⁵⁸ Lea Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism: The Genesis of the Pan-Chinese Movement in Indonesia* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960).

⁵⁹ Further on these topics see also Widjajanti W. Dharmowijono, *Bukan Takdir: Kisah Pencitraan Orang Tionghoa di Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2021); Mona Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia, 1837-1942: A History of Chinese Establishment in Colonial Society* (Jakarta: Djambatan, 1996); Charles Coppel, "The Origins of Confucianism as an Organized Religion in Java, 1900-1923," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, (Mar., 1981): 179-196.

⁶⁰ Mona Lohanda, *Growing Pains: The Chinese and the Dutch in Colonial Java, 1890-1942* (Jakarta: Yayasan Cipta Loka Caraka, 2002); Charles Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983); Mary Somers Heidhues, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964); Donald Earl Wilmott, *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University, 1956).

important light on the THHK, which as noted above, was integrally linked to *Sin Po* and the development of Chinese nationalism in Indonesia. Ming Govaars has provided a comprehensive analysis of the education of ethnic Chinese in colonial Indonesia.⁶¹ She speculates on how several factors such as the Great Depression, increasing economic competitiveness, decreased colonial expenditures for education, and the Japanese invasion of China contributed to the 1930s resinicisation of the Chinese Peranakan in Indonesia, or what the author refers to as the neo-Chinese Movement. This study is relevant to my examination of how the emergence of *Sin Po* fitted into a process of social and political change in the early 20th century.

The thesis also analyses new themes in research on the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia such as their contributions to health activism and an analysis of how major events in China shaped Indonesian Chinese relations and Dutch Chinese relations. Research into the history of health is a fairly recent development pioneered in particular by Hans Pols, but to date the precise role of the ethnic Chinese and the newspaper *Sin Po* in advancing health activism has not yet been canvassed.⁶² The thesis also captures for the first time how the ethnic Chinese navigated evolving events in China in particular the 1911 Revolution, the influence of Sun Yat-sen and the Sino-Japanese War, through the lens of *Sin Po*. The impact of these events and how they were interpreted by the Chinese in the colony, especially through the medium of newspapers, has not been widely researched to date. In this way the themes taken up by this research offer fresh insights into a range of issues across colonial society.

A topic that has received more recent attention in studies of ethnic Chinese is anti-Chinese violence. Violence against the ethnic Chinese can be traced back to the late 18th century, long before the rise of Indonesian nationalism.⁶³ New interest in this topic was

⁶¹ Ming Govaars, *Dutch Colonial Education: The Chinese Experience in Indonesia, 1900-1942* (Singapore: Chinese Heritage Centre, 2005).

⁶² See Hans Pols, *Nurturing Indonesia: Medicine and Decolonisation in the Dutch East Indies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁶³ There have been a number of historians who mark the massacre of more than 10,000 Chinese in Batavia in 1740 as the beginning of a period of anti-Chinese violence in Indonesian history. See, for instances, Daradjadi, *Geger Pacinan, 1740-1743: Persekutuan Tionghoa-Jawa Melawan VOC* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2013); Mona Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia, 1837-1942: a History of Chinese Establishment in Colonial Society* (Jakarta: Djambatan, 1996); Leonard Blussé, "Batavia, 1619-1740: The Rise and Fall of a Chinese Colonial Town," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 12 (1), (1981): 159-178.

to some extent sparked by the 1998 violence which triggered reflection on the fact that many regime changes in Indonesia including the 1965-68 period included anti-Chinese atrocities.⁶⁴ This thesis deals with several cases of violence against the ethnic Chinese but particularly cases that occurred in the Independence War (1945-49). A few scholars have examined this violence in detail, such as Mary Somers Heidhues, Taomo Zhou, and Geza Surya Pratiwi.⁶⁵ However, they have rarely reflected on how Chinese Peranakan newspapers were typically quite thorough in documenting and reporting the chronology of that anti-Chinese violence from day to day.

Early in 2023, a book entitled *Revolutionary Worlds: Local Perspectives and Dynamics during the Indonesian Independence War* was launched as part of the research program “Independence, Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945-1950”. Three articles from this book discuss the fate of the Chinese during the revolution as well as different ideas of independence, survival strategies, mobilisation, and contestation of authority.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, those are more focused on the Sumatra region, which *Sin Po* did not generally report widely on, except for Palembang. These works offer a critical entry point for my broader and more complex investigation in Chapter V of larger-scale atrocities in Java which *Sin Po* reported on with great detail.

While several scholars have attempted to write about the history and the contribution of the Sino-Malay press, many largely only document the names and details of newspapers rather than providing a contextualised analysis of their content. As early as the 1950s Justus van der Kroef and Mochtar Lubis started to open up discussion about

⁶⁴ Jess Melvin, “Why Not Genocide? Anti-Chinese Violence in Aceh, 1956-66,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2013): 63-91; Jemma Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia, 1996-1999* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006); Twang Peck Yang, *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia and the Transition to Independence, 1940-1950* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1998); J.A.C. Mackie, “Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia, 1959-68,” in *The Chinese in Indonesia: Five Essays*, ed. J.A.C. Mackie, (Melbourne: Nelson, 1976).

⁶⁵ Mary Somers Heidhues, “Anti-Chinese Violence in Java during the Indonesian Revolution, 1945-49,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, No. 3-4 (September-November 2012), pp. 381-401; Taomo Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); Geza Surya Pratiwi, “Kekerasan Terhadap Golongan Tionghoa pada Masa Revolusi di Malang, 1945–1949,” *Lembaran Sejarah*, vol. 18, no. 1, (2022): 78-94.

⁶⁶ Mawardi Umar, “A Successful Transition. The Chinese in Revolutionary Aceh, 1945-1949,” 317-338; Anne van der Veer, “Navigating Contested Middle Ground: Ethnic Chinese in Revolutionary East Sumatra, 1945-1950,” 339-354; Erniwati, “Everyday Life of the Chinese in Revolutionary Padang, 1945-1948,” 355-378. See Bambang Purwanto (eds.), *Revolutionary Worlds: Local Perspectives and Dynamics during the Indonesian Independence War* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023).

the Sino-Malay press and acknowledged the important role of the vernacular press.⁶⁷ However, these publications were very much surveys of the range of newspapers published rather than offering detailed analyses of the publications.

There are also some more general histories of the vernacular press in Indonesia. However, many of these studies rely too heavily on the early works of Djamaludin Adi Negoro,⁶⁸ Parada Harahap,⁶⁹ H. Soebagijo I.N.,⁷⁰ and Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo,⁷¹ which only lightly touched on the Sino-Malay press. Even though each of these authors was a notable journalist during their lifetime, they frequently confuse the names of people associated with the early press and the names of newspapers, and despite following patterns of popular publications in Indonesia, they rarely provided references to support their claims.⁷²

Ahmat Adam's work written in 1995 is valuable for its comprehensive account of the rise of the vernacular press (including the Sino-Malay press) in colonial Indonesia.⁷³ His survey, however, stops in 1913 when the development of the vernacular press was still at its peak. Adam's chronological and thematic approach to the development of the press does not examine the complex multi-ethnic politics that informed the development of, and content of, particular papers. Moreover, Adam's work does not incorporate scholarly insights into the role of the press in the development of nationalism and identity such as Benedict Anderson's renowned theory on print capitalism and the creation of an 'imagined community'.

⁶⁷ See Justus van der Kroef, "The Press in Indonesia: By-Product of Nationalism," *Journalism Quarterly* 31 (Summer 1954): 337-46; Mochtar Lubis, "The Press in Indonesia," *Far Eastern Survey*, vol. 21, no. 9 (June 1952): 90-94.

⁶⁸ Djamaludin Adi Negoro, *Falsafah Ratu Dunia* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1949).

⁶⁹ Parada Harahap, *Journalistiek: Pers- en Spreekdelictenboek* (Weltevreden: Uitgevers Mij. Bintang Hindia, 1924); Parada Harahap, *Pers dan Journalistiek* (Medan: Indische Drukkerij, 1941); Parada Harahap, *Serba Sedikit Tentang Ilmu Pers* (Jakarta: Akademi Wartawan, 1952).

⁷⁰ H. Soebagijo I.N., *Sejarah Pers Indonesia* (Jakarta: Dewan Pers, 1977).

⁷¹ Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo (ed.) *Sejarah Pers di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Departemen Penerangan, 1978).

⁷² See for example, Sudarjo Tjokrosiswojo (ed.), *Kenangan Sekilas Perjuangan Surat kabar* (Jakarta, 1959); H. Mohammad Said, *Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Pers di Sumatra Utara* (Medan: Waspada, 1976); H. Mohammad Said, *Sejarah Pers di Sumatra Utara dengan Masyarakat yang Dicerminkannya, 1885-1942* (Medan: Waspada, 1976); Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo, *Perkembangan Pers Berbahasa Melayu di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Panitia Buku Standard Sejarah Indonesia, 1973).

⁷³ Ahmat Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness, 1855-1913* (New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1995).

In the absence of comparable works, Leo Suryadinata's research on the Sino-Malay press published in the late 1970s to 1980s remains the most frequently cited.⁷⁴ By employing a robust historical methodology, Suryadinata was able to convey to his audience the origins and early evolution of the Sino-Malay press in Java. He has provided an in-depth assessment of the various political viewpoints of the Chinese minority in colonial Indonesia, as well as the diversity and unique characteristics of each group in the colony. In his study, however, he opted for historical, chronological, and narrative approaches, with little comparative analysis or synthesis. Thus, Suryadinata does not provide an analytical framework for comprehending the evolution of the Sino-Malay press and the socioeconomic factors that contributed to its growth.

In addition, his work lacks concrete details and complexity because of Suryadinata's continuous emphasis on disparate newspaper orientations. Borrowing Liem Koen Hian's concept of "tiga aliran" (three streams),⁷⁵ he divides Chinese society into three primary groups: Sin Po Group, Chung Hwa Hui (CHH), and Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (PTI), and he rigidly saw each group as a separate entity, hence eliminating the potential of collaboration between each group during certain occasions. On the contrary, as shown in this thesis, the relationship between these three groups was rather fluid. Even though they regularly engaged in acrimonious polemics, these groups periodically 'fought' together against oppressive and racist Dutch policies, particularly those directed towards the Chinese community. Chapter II, for instance, illustrates how *Sin Po* and CHH collaborated to eradicate the opium trade and how they developed the most effective treatment for opium addicts. Chapter IV similarly reveals how, in reaction to the escalating tensions between China and Japan in the early 1930s, these three political streams worked together to launch a vigorous anti-Japanese campaign.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ See Leo Suryadinata, *The Pre-World War II Peranakan Chinese Press of Java* (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1971), 1-35; Leo Suryadinata, "A Short History of the Indonesian Chinese Press," in *The Chinese Minority in Indonesia, Seven Papers*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Chopmen Enterprises, 1978), pp. 129-41; Leo Suryadinata, "Pers Melayu Tionghoa," in *Beberapa Segi Perkembangan Sejarah Pers di Indonesia*, ed. Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo (Jakarta: Departemen Penerangan, 1980): 35-64; Leo Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java, 1917-1942* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981).

⁷⁵ Liem Koen Hian, "Tiga Aliran Politik Dalem Doenia Tionghoa Peranakan," *Sin Tit Po*, 26 August 1932.

⁷⁶ See for instance *Sin Po*, 20 September 1931; *Siang Po*, 21 September 1931.

Other than the aforementioned studies, research on this topic is still in the early stages.⁷⁷ The majority of previous studies of *Sin Po* have only used this newspaper as an important reference source. This research, however, takes a different approach by positing *Sin Po* as an active subject that, from its inception, was capable of giving new colour to the highly fluid and dynamic nature of Indonesian politics. Through the lens of *Sin Po* and its representation of imagined communities, I observe the paper's role as a political and cultural mediator, as well as how it shaped the collective identity and sense of belonging of Chinese communities in colonial Indonesia.

More recently in 2019 and 2021, Nobuto Yamamoto and Tom Hoogervorst, have respectively written about censorship and the Sino-Malay patois. Yamamoto demonstrates how colonial fear paved the way for the creation of the two primary forms of censorship, *persdelict* (press offence) and *persbreidel* (press restriction), as weapons to grasp, control, and influence public opinion, as well as to strengthen the legitimacy of rulers.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Hoogervorst reaffirms the importance of voluminous print production (novels, periodicals, educational materials, poetry and plays) as a way to understand the strong connection between printing, vernacular language, popular culture, and colonial modernity.⁷⁹ Hoogervorst's work is particularly valuable to this thesis because of his approach to what he calls 'ungoverned Malay' as a response to colonialism and the nation-state. By demonstrating how the "language of dissidents" transcended authority's control, Hoogervorst illustrates how the Sino-Malay press promoted cultural revivalism and political debate in colonial Indonesia. As a linguist, however, Hoogervorst

⁷⁷ A few exceptions may be noted for Andreas Pandiangan, Aimee Dawis, and Chang-Yau Hoon's works. However, their research focuses mostly on the Chinese press and media in post-Suharto Indonesia. More recently, a book detailing the history of *Pewarta Soerabaia*, one of the major Sino-Malay newspapers during the Dutch colonial era, was also released. However, the author concentrates his research mostly on the years 1947 to 1966, most likely due to a paucity of sources. See Andreas Pandiangan, "Chinese Press after the New Order: Caught between the Continuity of Idealism and the Logic of the Market," *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 4, Issue 3, (2003): 401-19; Aimee Dawis, *The Chinese of Indonesia and their Search for Identity: The Relationship between Collective Memory and the Media* (New York: Cambria Press, 2009); Chang-Yau Hoon, *Chinese Identity in Post-Suharto Indonesia: Culture, Politics and Media* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); Isnaini Nur Amalina, *Surat Kabar Masyarakat Tionghoa di Surabaya: Pewarta Soerabaia, 1947-1966* (Surabaya: Pustaka Indis, 2021)

⁷⁸ Nobuto Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1910-1942* (Leiden: Brill, 2019). See also Ravando, "Review" [Review of the Book *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1910-1942* by Nobuto Yamamoto], *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 177, no. 1 (2021): 162-164

⁷⁹ Tom Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned: Indonesia's Chinese Print Entrepreneurs, 1911-1949* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021).

focuses more on the development of Sino-Malay language as a “counterforce to dictates of colonialism, the nation-state, and conventional wisdom.”⁸⁰ Despite the fact that he utilises *Sin Po* as one of the major sources in his book, Hoogervorst does not analyse in detail *Sin Po*’s role as the primary actor in the political development of the Chinese Peranakans in Indonesia.

Several early works on the Sino-Malay press also provide invaluable context for this thesis. Scholars and journalists such as Wu Ming-Kun,⁸¹ Liem Thian Joe,⁸² Tio Ie Soei,⁸³ and Claudine Salmon,⁸⁴ have provided important insights into the history of the Sino-Malay press, including background on the financial resources that underpinned this, the influence of particular papers, the printing industry, and even the relationship between Sino-Malay and Bumiputera newspapers. However, much of this research primarily only catalogues publications and provides minimal content analysis, synthesis, or comparison. Consequently, there is no comprehensive history of the political, social, economic, intellectual, and cultural history of the period during which the Sino-Malay press emerged and evolved and how the writers contributed to new discourses.

In addition, several writings of *Sin Po*’s key figures, such as Ang Jan Goan (working for *Sin Po* from 1922 to 1958), Kwee Kek Beng (1922-1947) and Nio Joe Lan (1935-1958), have significantly contributed to establishing an early foundation for studying *Sin Po*.⁸⁵ However, their writings on this topic are still very much in their infant stages and do not cover other important aspects of the paper, such as the role of *Sin Po* as ‘health activist’. Therefore, this thesis offers the first comprehensive study of this newspaper.

⁸⁰ Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 153.

⁸¹ Wu Ming-Kun, *The Chinese Press in Java* (Yenching: Yenching University, Department of Journalism, 1937).

⁸² Liem Thian Joe, “Journalistiek Tionghoa-Melajoe,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie* No. 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845 (May-June 1939).

⁸³ Tio Ie Soei, “Pers Melaju-Betawi dan Wartawan,” *Istimewa*, 1 August 1951.

⁸⁴ Claudine Salmon, *Literature in Malay by the Chinese of Indonesia: A Provisional Annotated Bibliography* (Paris: Maison des Sciences de L’Homme, 1981).

⁸⁵ Kwee Kek Beng, “De Chineesche Pers in Nederlandsch-Indie,” *Koloniale Studien*, (1935): 194-224; Nio Joe Lan, “Dari Harian Tionghoa-Melaju Mendjadi Harian Indonesia Nasional,” in *Kenangan Sekilas Perjuangan Suratkabar: Sedjarah Pers Sebangsa*, ed. (Djakarta: Indonesia Raya, 1958): 312-319.

It is evident that there are considerable gaps in the literature on the ways the Sino-Malay press shaped ideas in the colony. This is in part perhaps due to the lack of availability of records of these papers. There are, however, fairly complete records of *Sin Po* available on-site and online (see the next sub-chapter on sources). Therefore, through an in-depth analysis of *Sin Po*, I argue that Chinese political orientation should not be treated as a constant and monolithic; instead, it must be seen as fluid, multi-faceted, and continuously evolving. The complexity of the nations and imagined communities promoted by newspapers in this period is what made *Sin Po* and other Sino-Malay newspapers so dynamic and important.

There is far more overlap than previously assumed between different factions in the ethnic Chinese community. By studying *Sin Po*, this research attempts to provide a more sophisticated analysis of the complex relations within Chinese Indonesian society. Moreover, it will delve into the sensitive issue of the relationships between Chinese Peranakan and other communities in Indonesia. In this regard the thesis charts both moments of hope when these communities were unified, for example, in response to the sense of loss they felt at the death of the leading Chinese nationalist Sun Yat-sen, who was a source of national inspiration for many, through to periods of fracture in the Indonesian revolution during which Chinese Indonesians were targeted by Republicans in campaigns of violence. This thesis relies in method on a close reading of the paper *Sin Po* and contextualised analysis of how the paper presented topics, issues and developments to its readers.

Sources and Methods of Reading News Articles

The primary source base of this thesis is primarily a range of *Sin Po* publications that were published between 1910 and 1949. This includes *Sin Po Maleische Editie* (Sin Po Malay Edition), *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie* (Sin Po Weekly Edition), *De Chineesche Revue* (The Chinese Review), *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie* (Sin Po East Java Edition), *Bin Seng* (People's Voice), and *Kung Yen* (Public Declaration). These publications were published with varying degrees of regularity. While the entire print runs of some of these publications have seemingly been lost, a significant number of issues have been preserved

and digitised.⁸⁶ The print runs of two of these publications *Sin Po Maleische Editie* (1910-1960) and *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie* (1923-1942) are relatively well preserved in Monash and Leiden University libraries and these two publications serve as the main source base for this thesis.

Nevertheless, some of these materials are likely missing, damaged, or destroyed. War and instability spanned almost the whole period, and institutes for collecting and preserving archives (including the library of *Sin Po*), had to contend with the scourge of war.⁸⁷ I was unable to locate *Sin Po* collections from November 1911 to January 1913, which are crucial for analysing *Sin Po*'s opinions on the 1911 Chinese Revolution and observing the newspaper's transition from a weekly to a daily format. To cover the void, I decided to utilise alternative sources published by *Sin Po* journalists, including memoirs and *Sin Po*'s special publications.⁸⁸

Reading various editions of *Sin Po* from 1910-1949 it is clear that they provide a plethora of knowledge about the social, political, economic, and cultural life of the past. The paper made it possible for the reader to 'imagine' vast, interconnected societies that had not previously experienced any specific sort of togetherness. Throughout this thesis, I use different lenses to focus attention on the work the paper undertook to address key issues for the ethnic Chinese and promote particular causes. In Chapter I, for example, focusing on the issue of identity I draw on a range of newspaper articles to show how *Sin Po* emerged as a platform on which people could articulate their Chinese identity. I also demonstrate, however, how *Sin Po* drew together *kaoem moeda Tionghoa* (Chinese youth) from various backgrounds and gave them a valuable space for the expression of public opinion. Through letters to the editor and opinion essays, for instance, *Sin Po* was

⁸⁶ See for instance "Sin Po Collection" at Monash University Library, <https://repository.monash.edu/collections/show/117>; See also the National Library of Indonesia <https://khastara.perpusnas.go.id/landing/detail/1383898>

⁸⁷ The National Library of Indonesia in Jakarta still retains the majority of *Sin Po* collections. The collection is most likely still the most comprehensive in the world. However, some surviving materials at the library were damaged to varying degrees by worms and as a result of insufficient facilities for the preservation and restoration of documents, severe natural conditions, excessive humidity, etc.

⁸⁸ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan: Tokoh Pers yang Peduli Pembangunan Bangsa* (Jakarta: Yayasan Nabil & Hasta Mitra, 2009); Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun Sebagai Wartawan, 1922-1947* (Batavia: Kuo, 1948), *Sin Po Jubileumnummer, 1910-1935* (Batavia: Sin Po, 1935).

able to give a voice to the voiceless. It was able to break the tradition that associated the newspaper realm with the *tjabang atas* (literally meaning “highest branch”) only.⁸⁹

In other sections of the thesis, I focus on polemics and the particular uses of language by editors and journalists. *Sin Po* routinely engaged in complex and evolving disputes with other publications, twisting the meanings of opposing narratives and intentionally playing with one another’s language. In order to fully comprehend these polemics, I sometimes use a comparative method, which entails reading the text alongside parallel articles in other newspapers and in comparison. Comparisons of reporting in other Sino-Malay papers such as *Perniagaan* and *Keng Po* or Bumiputera newspapers are therefore used.

Behind *Sin Po* lay a vast, complicated world of literary production and multilayered social networks. To complement my analysis of newspaper sources, this thesis also draws on memoirs, autobiographies, and *Sin Po* special publications that were published by *Sin Po*’s editors to provide greater context to the work of the paper. Kwee Kek Beng and Ang Yan Goan have, for instance, written important memoirs, which documented the decades of their life as *Sin Po*’s editor and director, respectively.⁹⁰ These memoirs offer insights into how these key actors regarded their own society and the wider globe and how they organised and disseminated news that the public would have access to. Kwee and Ang constantly emphasised that *Sin Po* was not only a business, but it was also an institution that shaped ideas for the public. This is a useful observation that I have taken on board in how I conceptualise the newspaper, especially in the chapter concerning the role of the paper in promoting knowledge about health.

In addition to analysing text-based articles that appeared in *Sin Po* this thesis also employs visual analysis to reflect on the meanings attached to photographs, cartoons, and

⁸⁹ *Tjabang atas* was a privileged social elite that dominated Indonesia’s political, economic, and social life, particularly during the colonial period. They were the relatives and descendants of the Chinese officers, who were in high-ranking colonial civil administration with the titles of *Majoer*, *Kapitein*, and *Luitenant der Chinezen*. See Liem Thian Joe, *Riwayat Semarang* (Jakarta: Hasta Wahana, 2004); Steve Haryono, *Perkawinan Strategis: Hubungan Keluarga antara Opsir-opsir Tionghoa dan Cabang Atas di Jawa pada Abad ke-19 dan 20* (Rotterdam: Steve Haryono, 2017); James R. Rush, *Opium to Java: Revenue Farming and Chinese Enterprise in Colonial Indonesia, 1860-1910* (Singapore: Equinox Publishing, 2007).

⁹⁰ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun Sebagai Wartawan, 1922-1947* (Batavia: Kuo, 1948); Kwee Kek Beng, *Djamblang Kotjok, 1929-1954* (Jakarta: Gula, 1954); Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan: Tokoh Pers yang Peduli Pembangunan Bangsa* (Jakarta: Yayasan Nabil & Hasta Mitra, 2009).

comic strips that were published in *Sin Po*. As the Japanese invasion of China progressed in the late 1930s, the use of such visual imagery intensified. They were frequently used not only to illustrate Japanese brutality, and to a large extent to demonise the enemy, but also to promote the nationalist message of the strength of the Chinese troops. This topic will be discussed in depth in Chapter IV.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is composed of five chapters and follows a thematic and partly chronological approach. Chapter I examines the development of *Sin Po* and charts how the newspaper began to significantly shape public opinion, notably by nurturing the Chinese nationalist spirit. The chapter establishes the broader context of the development of Chinese Peranakan newspapers in Indonesia from the end of the 19th century up until the launch of *Sin Po*. I argue that *Sin Po* became an essential platform for the Chinese people in colonial Indonesia to promote nationalist sentiment while reinforcing a sense of community struggle and identity.

The paper promoted the idea of the civic duty of Chinese Peranakan as subjects of China, which grew stronger with the commencement of the Chinese Revolution in 1911. I analyse how reporting on events around the Chinese Revolution inspired a new sense of Chinese nationalism among the readers. In addition, this chapter highlights the emergence of multiple streams within Chinese society, each of which had a distinct political orientation, and how in this context *Sin Po* represented a distinct political faction known as ‘*aliran Sin Po*’ (the *Sin Po* stream). It explains how despite the existence of this stream, *Sin Po* formed shifting alliances with other streams as well.

Chapter II follows a thematic approach and provides the first-ever analysis of the involvement of *Sin Po*’s journalists in ‘health activism’ during the 1920s. Their efforts were focused on promoting health-related infrastructure, medicines, and knowledge. Additionally, their work served to enhance the political sensibilities of the Chinese community and fostered a sense of responsibility towards the broader community through the lens of health issues. They frequently emphasised the elevated mortality rates among the Chinese and Bumiputera and noted the urgent need for increased healthcare resources, improved sanitation protocols, and enhanced public health infrastructure. During this

period, *Sin Po* served as a platform for the advancement of new ideas pertaining to health and societal well-being, encompassing the propagation of new medical knowledge. The journalists and editors imparted knowledge to their readers regarding the potential health hazards, particularly those associated with opium consumption.

Chapter III focuses on the theme of inter-ethnic relations and the development of nationalism in the colony offering new insights into sources of unity between Chinese and other Indonesians that are evidenced in the paper *Sin Po* and the role the paper played in negotiating these relationships. It begins by outlining how *Sin Po* drew the Chinese and Bumiputera communities together in 1914 by highlighting the inequality they experienced in comparison to the Dutch, especially before the law. Through this strategy, the editors of *Sin Po* underlined the necessity for closer collaboration between both nations. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the far-reaching impacts of Sun Yat-sen's death on the ethnic Chinese and Bumiputera societies. I argue that the nationalism of Sun Yat-sen was a source of inspiration for both groups and that the remembrance of his death united the communities. The role of *Sin Po* in reporting and disseminating information about the commemoration was essential in inspiring a sense of nationalism among the Chinese in the colony.

Chapter IV takes up the theme of how *Sin Po* reported on the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1942) and how this in turn affected relations between different communities in the colony. *Sin Po* utilised particular written and visual discourses about the war as crucial tools to influence its readers' views about the war. This chapter argues that *Sin Po* largely followed the trends of the Chinese media in framing the war as an act of brutal aggression, often engaging in stereotyping of the Japanese, especially via the use of cartoons and graphic photographic images to highlight Japanese atrocities, but at the same time to promote 'the might' of the Chinese army. The reportage promoted a strong sense of us and them cementing, in turn, a sense of heightened nationalism amongst Chinese Indonesians but also causing fractures in relations between some Indonesians and the Dutch. Further to this, the paper played an important role in launching and promoting relief aid for China. Through first-hand reporting from China and publications from people on the ground, *Sin Po* granted readers access to a developing worldwide community, while simultaneously facilitating in the growth of a sense of national identity

and patriotic zeal. The chapter concludes with some reflections on the shutdown of *Sin Po* during the Japanese occupation and the persecution of Chinese people by the Japanese.

Chapter V examines how the paper reported on a period of crisis for ethnic Chinese during the Indonesian Revolution/Indonesian War of Independence (1945-1949). After restarting publication following the Japanese defeat, *Sin Po* was able to report on and evaluate the vulnerable position of the Chinese during the period. The chapter analyses *Sin Po*'s reporting on attacks against the ethnic Chinese assessing how the paper advocated for the community in a context of crisis. *Sin Po* strived to raise alarm about this violence and indeed prevent its continuation. In the context of frequent silence in Republican newspapers about this violence, *Sin Po* provided a voice to the voiceless. The paper was also able to counter sentiments in nationalist papers that falsely emphasised that all Chinese were Dutch collaborators and spies.

This thesis concludes by outlining the important strategies *Sin Po* employed to influence public opinion, particularly among the Chinese community. The concluding chapter emphasises the ups and downs of Chinese and Indonesian relationships, which deteriorated during the Sino-Japanese War and culminated in extreme estrangement between 1945-1949. In addition, this section briefly discusses the final two decades of the publication including some name changes which reflected a shift from advocating Chinese nationalism to advocating Indonesian nationalism. The paper became the primary voice of the Chinese community in Indonesia from 1949-65. It was in fact so influential that Indonesia's first president Soekarno even used *Sin Po* as a mouthpiece for his propaganda to gain support from the Chinese Peranakan community. In the next Chapter, I return to the context of the early 20th century and rising Chinese nationalism to further contextualise the political milieu from which the paper sprang.

CHAPTER I

THE RISE OF CHINESE NATIONALISM AND THE EARLY YEARS OF *SIN PO*, 1880-1930s

From *Sin Po*'s initial inception on 1 October 1910, both Lauw Giok Lan and Yoe Sin Gie had understood the significance of including more China-related articles in every edition. In addition to translating the legendary tale "Sam Kok" (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) and turning it into a serial narrative that was always avidly anticipated by its readers,¹ Lauw and Yoe also regularly published historical and cultural narratives from China that could pique their readers' interest.² One important feature that contributed to *Sin Po*'s initial success was the opportunity this weekly provided to *kaoem moeda Tionghoa* to express their thoughts, concerns, and opinions regarding Chinese problems in the colony. According to historian Didi Kwartanada, the majority of *kaoem moeda*, especially in Java, were prominent entrepreneurs, journalists, authors, and community leaders with a progressive worldview. They desired a higher status in the colony and believed that embracing modernity was the only way to attain a 'civilised' position in colonial society.³ It was in this context that *Sin Po* "gradually became an organ for Chinese youth" (*lambat laoen telah mendjadi organ kaoem moeda Tionghoa*), and many of its contributors went on to pursue careers in journalism and political activism after being inspired by the paper.⁴

This chapter examines the development of *Sin Po* and how the newspaper began to significantly shape public opinion, notably by nurturing the Chinese nationalist spirit

¹ *Sam Kok* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) was based on a 14th century historical novel written by Luo Guanzhong. *Sam Kok* is acclaimed as one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature and it is arguably the most widely read historical novel. See Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 86; *Sin Po*, 12 November 1910.

² See, for instances, "Khong Hoe Tjoe," *Sin Po*, 1 October 1910; "Hoa-Kiau di Lam-Yang pada Tempo Doeloe," *Sin Po*, 8 October 1910.

³ See Didi Kwartanada, "The Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan School: A Transborder Project of Modernity in Batavia, c. 1900s," in *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed: History, Religion and Belonging*, ed. Siew-Min Sai and Chang-Yau Hoon (London & New York: Routledge, 2013): 27-28 & 39.

⁴ "Sin Po 25 Taon," in *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*, np.

especially amongst the *kaoem moeda*. The choice to publish in Sino-Malay was critical to the paper's success but further to this the paper adopted a number of innovative strategies to try and capture reader interest and involvement. I argue the paper provided an opportunity for the Chinese people to express nationalism while reinforcing a sense of community struggle and identity. Through its critical reporting, *Sin Po* established a forum for addressing and discussing the future of the Chinese in colonial Indonesia. The paper enabled Chinese people but especially the *kaoem moeda*, who were increasingly considered by the community as the motor of progress (*kemadjoean*), to follow a range of events in colonial Indonesia and elsewhere, and understand them from a Chinese perspective.⁵ Shiraishi notes how the word *kemadjoean* is intertwined with several Dutch words that have comparable meanings, which were also used frequently by the colonial government, such as *vooruitgang* (advance), *opheffing* (uplifting), *ontwikkeling* (development), and *opvoeding* (upbringing).⁶ All of these terms often appeared in *Sin Po* and became a major topic of discussion regarding the future of *Bangsa Tionghoa*.

Furthermore, I argue in this chapter that the paper promoted the idea of the civic duty of Chinese Peranakan as subjects of China, which grew stronger with the commencement of the Xinhai Revolution in 1911. I analyse how reporting on events around the Revolution inspired a new sense of Chinese nationalism amongst the readers of *Sin Po*. In addition, this chapter highlights the emergence of multiple streams within Chinese society, each of which had a distinct political orientation, and how in this context *Sin Po* represented a distinct political faction popularly known as 'aliran Sin Po' (the Sin Po stream). This did not, however, mean that *Sin Po* always held different positions to other streams of thought across Chinese society.

Fostering Chinese Cultural Values and a Sense of Community

Language was critical to fostering Chinese Indonesian identity and a sense of identity language. As established in the introduction, most of the early newspapers in the colony were Dutch-language papers and the use of this language replicated the cultural beliefs of

⁵ "Sin Po 25 Taon," in *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*, np; Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 80.

⁶ Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion*, 27.

the colonial power. In 1901, for the first time in colonial Indonesia, newspapers with Chinese titles using Low Malay (*Melajoe Rendah*) intermingled with Chinese characters appeared. As Tom Hoogervorst has argued, during this period, the Low Malay dialect flourished despite colonial restrictive measures. This language performed complex functions as Hoogervorst wrote that it:

became an enforcer of complex language behaviour, able to assume formal, humoristic, poetic, practical, Chinese-like, European-like, educated, or abusive properties as the context demanded. It connected readers and writers from different regional, social, and ethnoreligious backgrounds. In doing so, it did what neither Dutch nor the legitimated standard Malay could achieve: to capture the everyday life of people whose aspirations, anxieties, and antics would have otherwise vanished into the mists of time.⁷

The adoption of Low Malay (*Melajoe Rendah*) was revolutionary in the development of the Sino-Malay press in colonial Indonesia.⁸ Following the growth of newspapers and periodicals in Low Malay in the mid-19th century, people in major port cities and urban centres of Java and the Outer Islands started to use Low Malay as the medium of communication. This language was important for a range of Indonesians in enabling the articulation of cultural values. It served as the Chinese Peranakan's primary language of written communication because it was practical, flexible, egalitarian, and efficient. Although many Chinese Peranakans spoke Malay, Javanese, Dutch, or other local languages fluently, they were generally not proficient in Chinese. Consequently, the Sino-Malay newspapers of the time generally promoted literacy in Romanised Malay, which became a platform for popular culture throughout the whole region of the Indies.⁹

Using the Sino-Malay language, the earliest Chinese Peranakan press focused on renewing interest in Chinese culture and challenging Peranakan stereotypes. With the

⁷ Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 19.

⁸ Low Malay was already used between the locals and foreigners throughout the Malay Archipelago, even before the creation of Batavia in 1619. This de-ethnicized urban Malay comprised a variety of dialects and registers known variously as Low Malay (*Melajoe Rendah*), Bazaar Malay (*Melajoe Pasar*), and Batavian Malay (*Melajoe Batavia*) (*Melajoe Betawi*). See Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 12.

⁹ Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 6 & 38.

establishment of the Republic of China following the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, the Chinese Peranakan press also began to foster political ideas. In this “age of motion”,¹⁰ these Peranakan newspapers played a crucial role in disseminating new ideas to the public, contributing to the emergence of modern thought and a belief in the need to modernise Chinese Indonesian society. The papers not only reported on events, but also opened up space for dialogue within and outside this community.¹¹

By the beginning of the 20th century, print culture had expanded outside urban areas in Southeast Asia, standardising vernacular languages and fostering a sense of ‘horizontal’ association among speakers of the same language who had never met. Port cities like Batavia, Semarang, and Surabaya evolved as informational hubs and the cradles of a new print culture, where people discovered new ideas, voices, and chances to express their thoughts via the local press.¹² These cities became incubators for industrialisation, institutional transformations, ideals of progress, individualism, physical health, and the influx of capital – a sequence of interconnected phenomena that we have come to recognise as ‘modernity.’¹³

Following the proliferation of hundreds of newspapers in Batavia, the city became the most important information hub in colonial Indonesia. The Chinese population in Batavia became the largest and continuously increased in number. In 1905, Batavia was home to 92,520 Chinese, compared to Surabaya (26,646) and Semarang (32,740).¹⁴ Thus, the Batavia-based newspapers served as a model for publications in other major cities, including Semarang, Surabaya and Yogyakarta on the island of Java, Palembang and Medan on Sumatra and Banjarmasin on Borneo.¹⁵ As a late colonial Indonesian journalist,

¹⁰ Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion*.

¹¹ Andreas Pandiangan, “Chinese Press after the New Order: Caught between the Continuity of Idealism and the Logic of the Market,” *Asian Ethnicity*, vol. 4, issue 3, (2003): 408.

¹² Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in Motion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 179.

¹³ Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 3-4.

¹⁴ “Chineezen”, in *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indie* (Vol. I), (’s Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1917): 487.

¹⁵ Dozens of Peranakan Chinese periodicals began to flourish in the early 20th century, such as *Li Po* (Sukabumi; 1901), *Pewarta Soerabaja* (Surabaya, 1902), *Sien Po* (Surakarta, 1902), *Taman Pewarta* (Surakarta, 1902), *Loen Boen* (Surabaya, 1902), *Warna Warta* (Semarang, 1902), *Chabar Perniagaan* (Batavia, 1903), *Ho Po* (Sukabumi, 1903), *Ik Po* (Surakarta, 1905), *Tiong Hoa Wie Sin Po* (Bogor, 1905), *Seng Kie Po* (Batavia, 1906), *Sinar Tiong Hoa* (Bondowoso, 1908).

Liem Thian Joe, pointed out, “wherever there is a Chinese Peranakan newspaper, a journalist from Batavia must have worked there.”¹⁶

Several proprietors of the Sino-Malay press were distinguished not only by their vision of the printing industry as a lucrative business but also by their engagement with principles and political perspectives. They realised that newspapers could actively shape the discussion about and within the Chinese community. In addition, an increasing number of Chinese were interested in journalism as a career, especially the politically dissatisfied *kaoem moeda*, many of whom were drawn to journalism and became a vital force in anti-colonial activism.¹⁷ Although the *kaoem moeda* were heavily influenced by Dutch modernity, they were also shaped by non-Dutch sources of influence and models of modernity, such as THHK school teaching materials, which focused on Chinese versions of modernity.¹⁸

Up until July 1911, Java had a population of about thirty million, yet there were less than thirty newspapers published there. Lauw Giok Lan contrasted the situation with Amsterdam, which had 273 newspapers running as of 1909 with a population of under two million people.¹⁹ As noted by *Sin Po* in an article from 8 April 1911, journalism in the Indies was immensely challenging at that time because

a journalist’s soul is always in danger, punishment is always a threat to a paper or journalist, the readers are very few, the business is not necessarily profitable, and the subscribers are not necessarily loyal.²⁰

This quotation highlights the risks faced by the newspaper industry in terms of political censorship but also the challenge of limited literacy across the population. Based on the

¹⁶ Liem Thian Joe, “Journalistiek Tionghoa-Melajoe (I),” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 6 May 1939.

¹⁷ Robert Van Niel, *The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1984).

¹⁸ Didi Kwartanada, “The Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan School,” 39.

¹⁹ “Pers,” *Sin Po*, 1 July 1911.

²⁰ “Pakerdja’an jang Berbahaja,” *Sin Po*, 8 April 1911.

1930 colonial census, roughly 75 per cent of Europeans, 29 per cent of Chinese, and 6.4 per cent of Indonesians were literate.²¹

Moreover, *Sin Po* also asserted how many people thought the newspaper business was “*tida bergoena*” (useless) and that papers often “*moeat toelisan omong kosong*” (published nonsense pieces). They questioned why someone would be willing to spend between f. 12 and f. 20 per year for a single newspaper subscription, demeaning the journalism industry as one that “earns money without working hard.”²² These attitudes arose from the tendency at that time of many newspapers to rely more on hearsay reports rather than collecting more thorough and accurate information. The justification for this sort of practice was that a newspaper’s duty was to record whatever was heard. Consequently, news on murders, robberies, legislative processes, *Volksraad* (People’s Council) meetings, and even governor-general visits were frequently reported informally and negligently.²³

Lauw Giok Lan and Yoe Sin Gie claimed that this condition posed a significant difficulty they wanted their paper to overcome. Therefore, from the very beginning, they wanted *Sin Po* to “be a torch for all those who are in darkness” and to “serve as an effective bridge” between the governing (*fihak jang memerenta*) and the governed (*orang jang terprenta*).²⁴ On 1 October 1910, amidst the euphoria of the Chinese Revolution, Lauw and Yoe agreed to establish *Sin Po* to improve the quality of journalism in colonial Indonesia and to provide balance to the Dutch-dominated media.

Sin Po’s Strategies to Create an Engaged Readership and a Successful Paper

Lauw Giok Lan and Yoe Sin believed the growing movement for reform in China could positively influence the situation of the Chinese in colonial Indonesia. These two men envisaged that *Sin Po* could be a platform to communicate the spirit of reform in China and promote a new sense of Chinese identity. In order to fulfill their desired mission for

²¹ Amry Vandenbosch, “The Netherlands Indies,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 226, (March 1943): 87.

²² “Pers,” *Sin Po*, 1 July 1911.

²³ “Pers,” *Sin Po*, 1 July 1911.

²⁴ “Pers,” *Sin Po*, 1 July 1911.

the paper they had to use creative strategies and an inclusive discourse to try and increase its reach. With an affordable price of f. 1.50 for three months, *Sin Po* targeted readers throughout colonial Indonesia, particularly those interested in nationalism, politics, and culture. The paper was advertised as being “for all nations” (*oentoek segala bangsa*) and invited submissions in Chinese, Dutch, English, and other languages, which were afterwards translated into Malay.²⁵ The following statement appeared in the first edition of *Sin Po*:

We hope that the righteous people of all nations (*orang-orang boediman segala bangsa*), whom we have respectfully asked once more, will contribute their thoughts which will be beneficial to the movement at this time. Hopefully, there will be an opportunity for improvement in misguided situations (*perkara-perkara jang sesat*) that have tormented most of the Indies population.²⁶

Through this quotation, the editors not only emphasised the inclusiveness of this weekly publication, in which all voices were invited to contribute, but they also made it obvious that they wanted to address colonial injustices. Lauw and Yoe envisioned that the newspaper would serve as an agent of change to ameliorate the suffering of those oppressed by the colonial system. The comment also suggested that reader contributions would be crucial to the publication.

²⁵ “Pada redaktur dari ini surat kabar mingguan orang boleh kirim karangan-karangan yang tertulis dengan huruf Tionghoa dan dengan huruf Latin bahasa Belanda dan Inggris, yang oleh anggota-anggotanya redaksi nanti disaling ke dalam bahasa Melayu rendah dan dimuat dalam weekblad ini apabila dirasa ada faedahnya.” See *Sin Po*, 15 October 1910.

²⁶ *Sin Po*, 1 October 1910.



Figure 1.1. The inaugural edition of *Sin Po*. Source: *Sin Po*, 1 October 1910.

The inaugural edition of *Sin Po* drew immediate interest from readers. They complimented *Sin Po*'s initiative to translate a section of the Dutch expert on China Henri Borel's *Het Daghet in den Oosten* (Twilight in the East)²⁷ a famous text in which he predicted a Chinese revolution and the story of *Sam Kok* (Romance of the Three

²⁷ Henri Jean Francois Borel (1869-1933) was born in Dordrecht on November 23, 1869. He studied Hokkien Chinese at Leiden University (1888-1892) and completed further study in Xiamen, China. Borel spent another four months in Beijing in 1909, where he studied Mandarin. He served as an interpreter of Chinese and later a government officer for Chinese affairs in the Dutch East Indies from 1894 to 1916. He was stationed in Makassar, Surabaya, Semarang, Pontianak, and Tanjung Pinang. Borel wrote a lot of articles, essays, translations, and books about China. His pieces influenced how the Netherlands viewed China in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This book became a bestseller and was reprinted several times. Henri Borel, *Het Daghet in den Oosten* (Amsterdam: L.J. Veen, 1910). An English translation appeared as *The New China: A Traveller's Impressions* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912). See Koos Kuiper, *The Early Dutch Sinologists, 1854-1900: Training in Holland and China, Functions in the Netherlands Indies* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 281-83.

Kingdoms) into Low Malay. *Sam Kok* was hailed as one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature and both Lauw Giok Lan and Yoe Sin Gie realised that the story was immensely popular among Chinese in the colony. Therefore, *Sin Po* decided to include the Batavian-Malay translation of *Sam Kok*, beginning with the first edition. Even though the Chinese in Indonesia could acquire the Singapore translation of *Sam Kok* from any bookshop in Batavia, most readers found it hard to appreciate due to the use of a different Malay dialect.²⁸

It is difficult to determine how and where *Sin Po* obtained its news at the very beginning. Initially, *Sin Po* did not subscribe to any foreign news agency and did not have direct telegraph service. The first and most prevalent practise was to translate, reproduce, or summarise feature articles from newspapers in Batavia and other major cities in Indonesia. Another strategy was to rely on letters from subscribers or contributors, allowing *Sin Po* to become a forum for the expression of opinions and ideas.

There was no clear division between domestic and international, or local and outstation news in the early *Sin Po*. Everything was dumped onto pages. However, *Sin Po* provided a categorisation for leisure readings, such as *Tjerita Sam Kok* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms), *Mitsal and Papata* (Proverbs) *Pengiboer Hati* (Humorous Column) *Europa Cuisine* (European Cuisine), which proved to be very popular among *Sin Po*'s readers.²⁹

Lauw and Yoe realised that the continuation of *Sin Po* depended heavily on subscribers. Therefore, in order to attract more readers, *Sin Po* decided to include a quiz or contest in the earliest editions. *Sin Po* was the first newspaper outside of Dutch newspapers to use such a strategy. The “Badean” (meaning riddle) programme allowed readers to answer a riddle, a puzzle, or a mathematics problem. It was a successful method for attracting new readers and subscribers. *Sin Po* got 996 submissions from readers for its first monthly quiz.³⁰

²⁸ Liem Thian Joe, “Journalistiek Tionghoa-Melajoe (II),” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 13 May 1939, 24.

²⁹ See *Sin Po*, 1 October 1910; *Sin Po*, 8 October 1910.

³⁰ The prize for this quiz was a 14-karat gold-plated Chronometer Cyma watch from the A.W.W. Co. of Waltham, Massachusetts, valued at f. 60. All answers had to be sealed in an envelope with 80-cent stamps and forwarded to the *Sin Po*'s office in Glodok. All surplus stamps were donated to the Chinese Marine

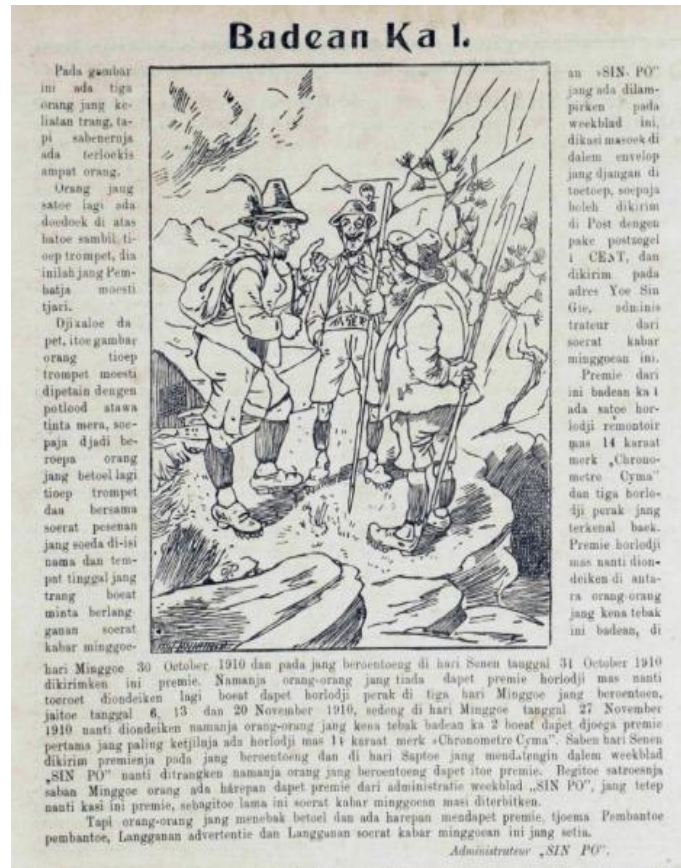


Figure 1.2. The first 'Badean' held by *Sin Po* in which *Sin Po* invited all the readers to solve the riddle. Source: *Sin Po*, 29 October 1910.

In contrast to the majority of the Sino-Malay press at the time which tended to avoid discussing politics, *Sin Po* was already critical to the emergence of the political consciousness of *Bangsa Tionghoa*. This was reflected in the remark made by Lauw Giok Lan in the third edition of *Sin Po*, which reads:

Sin Po's publication necessitates a major movement for *Bangsa Tionghoa*; thus, I believe *Sin Po* will be supported by our *tongpauw* (compatriot) in regard to the natural movement that also awakens the Chinese's consciousness.³¹

Foundation, and the sweepstakes were performed in front of the directors of THHK Batavia. See *Sin Po*, 5 November 1910.

³¹ *Sin Po*, 15 October 1910.

By using the term *tongpauw* the paper signalled an inclusive community of all ethnic Chinese, not just one for the highest Chinese elites whose opinions dominated other papers.

Lauw and Yoe also hoped that *Sin Po* would guide its readers to a better future by giving a voice to the Chinese Peranakan who had been marginalised by the colonial regime.³² To reference this transition to a better future the terms ‘darkness’ and ‘light’ were frequently used in Javanese literature.³³ Benedict Anderson and Godfrey Nunn observed the use of these phrases to construct dichotomies ranging from tradition to modernity, sleep to wakefulness, *kolot* (backwards) to *maju* (progressive), and *masih bodoh* (still ignorant) to *sadar* (aware).³⁴ The renowned letters of Javanese author and Indonesian feminist pioneer Raden Ajeng Kartini, were also published under the title *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (From Darkness to Light) in 1911.³⁵

Sin Po used several strategies to promote its mission of guiding Chinese Indonesians to the light and being a new voice for Chinese Peranakan. In contrast to other Sino-Malay publications, which tended to be apolitical, *Sin Po*’s editorials and articles often focused on local political events, criticising the arbitrariness of the colonial government and Chinese elites. Therefore, most *Sin Po* authors wrote anonymously or under pseudonyms, such as *Hemeling*, *Jupiter*, *Butatuli*, *Asiaticus*, *Novice*, or *Young Hannese*. The guise of anonymity was particularly prevalent in publications not only to

³² *Sin Po*, 15 October 1910.

³³ In 1873, Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita, a notable Javanese *pujangga* (court poet), penned *Serat Kala Tidha* (Poem of a Time of Darkness). The poem offered descriptions of *Zaman Kalabendu* (Crazy Era), including times of flood, earthquake, and volcanic eruption in the natural order, as well as starvation, violence, and immorality in the social order. Ranggawarsita stated that there might never be a new ‘time of light.’ See Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita, *Serat Kala Tidha* (Surakarta: Persatuan, 1933).

³⁴ Benedict Anderson has indicated that about 25 per cent of Indonesian newspapers published between 1900 and 1925 have one or more of the following terms in their titles: *matahari* (sun), *surya* (sun), *bintang* (star), *nyala* (flame), *suluh* (torch), *pelita* (lamp), *sinar* (ray), *cahaya* (radiance), *api* (fire), and *fajar* (dawn). Some Chinese Peranakan newspapers bear the same stamps to represent their larger symbols of revival and regeneration, such as *Tjahaja Timoer* (Malang/Radiance of the East), *Bintang Timor* (Surabaya, Star of the East), *Mata Hari* (Semarang/Sun), *Sinar Terang* (Batavia/Ray of Light), and *Tjahaja Sumatra* (Padang/Light of Sumatera). See Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons* (New York: Verso, 1998), 79-80; Godfrey Raymond Nunn, *Indonesian Newspapers: An International Union List* (Taipei: Chinese Materials Research Aids Service Center, Occasional Series No. 14, 1971).

³⁵ Raden Ajeng Kartini, *Door Duisternis tot Licht: Gedachten over en voor het Javaansche Volk* (Semarang: Van Dorp & Co., 1911).

protect journalists from the possibility of an indictment but also to enable them to forfeit their social status by utilising pen names.³⁶

Sin Po garnered the attention of the Chinese community instantly. After only two months, the editors received so many correspondence letters on a daily basis that they were not able to publish all due to a shortage of space.³⁷ These correspondence pages were essential because it allowed literate men and women from diverse Chinese communities, classes, and age groups, to participate in the public discourse. These pages ushered in a new era of reader-author engagements, allowing a broad range of individuals to create a body of ‘public opinion’. As Su Lin Lewis has argued in the context of British Malaya, the publication of correspondence letters signified a profound conceptual change, “creating not only an ‘imagined community’ of readers but a community of individuals, each with their own take on the social, cultural, and political issues of the day.”³⁸

Along with *Sin Po*’s rapid growth, the company’s management decided to secure an individual printing press to cut printing expenses. To begin with, the paper was published by Kho Tjeng Bie at Pintu Besar, Glodok.³⁹ However, in May 1911, both Yoe Sin Gie and Lauw Giok Lan decided to acquire a printing company located in a small house at Jalan Asemka No. 9, Glodok, Batavia. This strategy effectively reduced *Sin Po*’s expenditure and enabled them to expand the business.⁴⁰

Sin Po had to look for additional sources of cash to keep the publication afloat. At first, its subscriptions were just a small portion of revenue. Additionally, they were rather unreliable. *Sin Po* thrived because it had several income streams outside of subscriptions including a substantial income generated from advertisements.

On 24 February 1912, the *Sin Po* company officially became N.V (*Naamloze Vennootschap* / Public Company) with a nominal capital of f. 100,000. The first director was Yoe Sin Gie and he was assisted by several commissioners, namely Yoe Sin Hin,

³⁶ Liem Thian Joe, “Journalistiek Tionghoa-Melajoe (III),” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 20 May 1939, 15.

³⁷ *Sin Po*, 3 December 1910.

³⁸ Lewis, *Cities in Motion*, 160.

³⁹ Since VOC (*Vereeniging Oost-Indische Compagnie*/Dutch East Indies Company) times, Glodok has been designated as a residential area for Chinese community.

⁴⁰ “Pembrian Taoe,” *Sin Po*, 20 May 1911.

Tan Sam Kioe, Lauw Giok Lan, and Lie In Eng.⁴¹ With its own printing press and a growing circulation in a few years, the newspaper was becoming increasingly prominent.

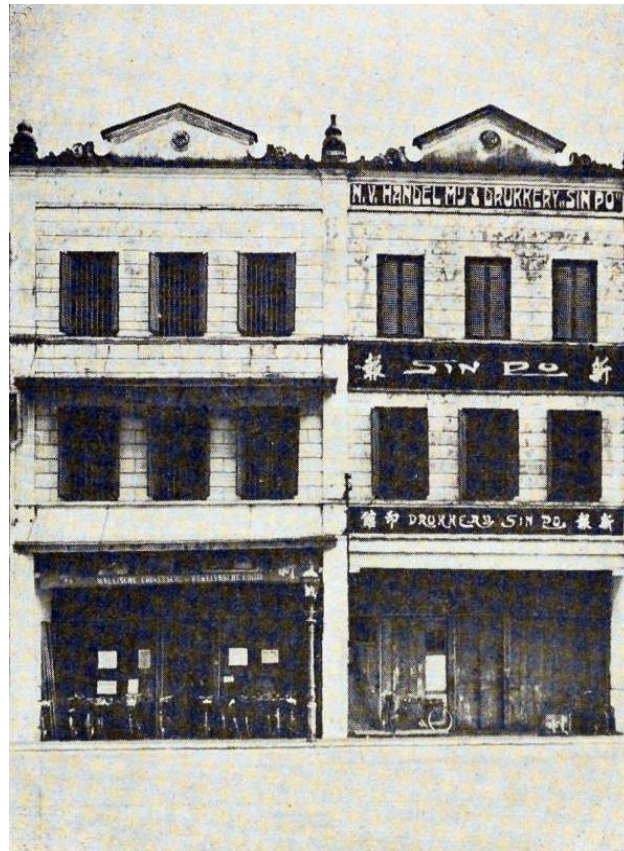


Figure 1.3. *Sin Po*'s printing house at Jalan Asemkade No. 9, Glodok, Batavia. Source: *Sin Po Jubileumnummer, 1910-1935*

Within a year of circulation, *Sin Po*'s popularity skyrocketed, and subscriptions became steadier. A group of readers submitted a joint letter to the editor, requesting that the paper shift from weekly to daily publication. In addition, they advocated for regular updates on the most recent events in China. On 1 April 1912, due to this repeated demand, the board of *Sin Po* decided to make *Sin Po* an official daily newspaper. The paper simultaneously boosted the capital of N.V. Handel Maatschappij & Drukkerij Sin Po from f. 100,000 to f. 300,000, giving *Sin Po* the greatest capital base across the Sino-Malay newspapers in the colony.⁴²

⁴¹ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doe Poeloe Lima Tahun*, 21.

⁴² Meanwhile, the capital of other prominent Chinese newspapers, such as *Sin Tit Po* (Surabaya) in the 1920s was f. 25,000; *Pewart Soerabaia* (Surabaya), f. 30,000; *Keng Po* (Batavia), f. 50,000; *Djawa Tengah* (Semarang), f. 60,000; *Sin Chung Hwa Pao* (Medan), f. 100,000; *Matahari* (Semarang), f. 250,000.

The shift from weekly to daily publication resulted in significant changes to the newspaper's quality and layout. The size of *Sin Po* was enlarged so that the newspaper was more or less equal in size to a modern broadsheet paper. The news section was vastly improved and began to be somewhat departmentalised. The board of *Sin Po* believed that news of high quality could be a commodity, and that credible and investigative journalism could generate high circulation and sales. Therefore, all *Sin Po*'s news and views were placed in a special section of the daily. Editorials written in a simpler and more critical tone became a common feature on the front page of *Sin Po*'s daily. Through this editorial, *Sin Po*'s editors attempted to sell the paper, particularly through their sharp and insightful analysis of current affairs.

If an article was too long, it would either be published in several instalments or continued on the following page. On the second page, under the main heading *Kabar Kota* (City News), *Sin Po* updated its audience on the most recent Batavian events. Meanwhile, the headers *Hindia Nederland* (Dutch East Indies) and *Kawat Sin Po Loear Hindia* (*Sin Po*'s Coverage Outside the Indies) on the same page covered the most current news from regions outside of Batavia and international news, respectively.

Using these various strategies, *Sin Po* dominated the publishing industry during the period. With a circulation of over 10,000 copies in the 1920s, *Sin Po* became the largest selling daily and most prestigious Chinese Indonesian newspaper in colonial Indonesia. The paper successfully evolved into a forum for discussing, debating and advocating for the future of Chinese people in the colony.⁴³

Even though *Sin Po*'s editorial team was dominated by Chinese Indonesians, such as Lauw Giok Lan, Tan Hoat Laij, and Hauw Tek Kong, the board had no choice but to appoint Jacobus Rudolph Razoux Kühr (1882-1958), an Indo-European who had served as an inspector for the colonial *Binnenlandsch Bestuur* (Interior Administration), as the first editor-in-chief (*hoofredacteur*) of the *Sin Po* daily. At the time, there was an unofficial consensus among Sino-Malay and Indonesian publications that it would be preferable for a Dutch, Indo-European, or Ambonese to hold the position of chief editor

See *Handboek voor Cultuur- en Handelsondernemingen in Nederlandsch-Indie* (Amsterdam: De Bussy, 1935).

⁴³ Suryadinata, *The Pre-World War Peranakan Chinese Press in Java*, 10.

because they possessed privileges as Dutch citizens that most Chinese or Bumiputera did not.⁴⁴

It should be noted that after the 1740 Chinese massacre in Batavia, colonial society became segregated along racial lines. This segregation was first legally regulated and implemented in 1818, based on *regeeringsreglement* to classify three main groups: Europeans, *Vreemde Oosterlingen* (Foreign Orientals), and *Inlanders* (Indonesian Natives), each with their own legal rights and privileges. Therefore, as a European, Kühr enjoyed greater freedom and security in his politically perilous profession as a journalist than a person of a different ethnic background.⁴⁵

If a major incident occurred in relation to *Sin Po* that required a Dutch citizen to appear in court, Razoux Kühr would be investigated in the high court owing to his European background. In contrast, a Chinese or Bumiputera would be obliged to face it in a lower court, where discrimination would likely occur. These separate court systems also led to wide variations. The same offence could result in someone being declared innocent by the high court or sentenced to several months in jail in the lower court. In addition, jails for both categories were differentiated, with high-class prisons for Europeans and low-class prisons for non-Europeans.⁴⁶ This kind of discriminatory legal procedure was often highlighted in *Sin Po*, with the paper routinely launching scathing criticisms against the colonial authorities for such injustice.

On 9 May 1912, Yoe Sin Gie resigned as director of the *Sin Po* daily, and Oey Tjioe Yong swiftly succeeded him. However, Oey stayed in *Sin Po* for only a few months before leaving in 1913. Hauw Tek Kong, who had previously been a regular contributor to *Sin Po*, was given the responsibility. A few years later, J. R. Razoux Kühr resigned from *Sin Po* on 27 April 1916, reportedly due to health issues, and Kwee Hing Tjiat, the

⁴⁴ This situation did change over time. Tom Hoogervorst observed that, beginning in the 1920s, an increasing number of Chinese did acquire European legal status. They became “equated” (Dutch: *gelikgesteld*, Malay: *dipersamakan*, *diglekestel*) or, in the jargon of British colonialism, regarded as part of the European and Allied races. In a mixed Malay-Hokkien idiom, such people were commonly referred to as *toenphoa* (1.5-guilders-Europeans), a derisive reference to the cost of mailing an application letter for a legal equation. See Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 31.

⁴⁵ The first Chinese Peranakan who became a chief editor in colonial Indonesia was Sie Hian Ling who worked for *Bintang Semarang* daily. See Kwee Kek Beng, “De Chineesche Pers in Nederlandsch-Indie,” 103.

⁴⁶ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 38.

former chief editor of *Palita* in Yogyakarta, succeeded him. As a result, Kwee became the first editor-in-chief of *Sin Po* from a Chinese background. Under Kwee and Hauw's leadership, the paper campaigned for a more robust Chinese nationalism and was very critical of Dutch colonial rule. Nevertheless, Kwee only worked for the company from the beginning of 1919 until Tjoe Bou San (1891-1925), the former chief editor of *Tjhoen Tjhioe* (Spring and Autumn) and *Hoa Tok Po*, replaced him.⁴⁷ The latter was a Batavia-based Peranakan weekly with a strong connection to the Chinese revolutionary organisation Soe Po Sia, which was actively involved in several revolutionary activities of Sun Yat-sen and in which Tjoe was a member.⁴⁸

Tjoe was a pivotal figure who contributed to *Sin Po*'s widespread recognition. Under Tjoe's direction, *Sin Po* became an embodiment of overseas Chinese nationalism in the colony.⁴⁹ One of his most significant contributions was the formulation of "aliran *Sin Po*" (*Sin Po* stream), a political philosophy he described as follows: (1) *Bangsa Tionghoa* must retain their national identity as Chinese and refuse to assimilate with any other group. (2) *Bangsa Tionghoa* must continue to aspire to become Chinese, and as foreign residents, they should not participate in domestic politics or have representatives in the Volksraad (People's Council).⁵⁰ While Tjoe repeatedly emphasised the importance of the Chinese in Indonesia to retain their identity as *Bangsa Tionghoa*, he also argued that the Chinese must also support the Bumiputera's fight for "self-government".⁵¹

⁴⁷ Throughout his tenure as a journalist and editor, Tjoe Bou San was recognised as an avid writer and translator. His works were serialised in a number of newspapers and also published in book format. His primary focus was the Malay translation of European novels and Confucian works. See Claudine Salmon, *Literature in Malay by the Chinese of Indonesia*, 360–1.

⁴⁸ Leo Suryadinata, *Prominent Indonesian Chinese: Biographical Sketches* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1995), 208.

⁴⁹ Leo Suryadinata, "Tongmenghui, Sun Yat-sen and the Impact on Indonesia: A Revisit," in *Tongmenghui, Sun Yat-sen and the Chinese in Southeast Asia: A Revisit*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Chinese Heritage Centre, 2006): 180.

⁵⁰ In December 1916, under governor-general Van Limburg Stirum, a semi-legislative institution called *Volksraad* was founded. Through the *Volksraad*, the Bumiputera were able to participate and discuss issues related to the Indies. Nevertheless, the power of this quasi-parliament was limited as it only had advisory powers. Despite the fact that a section of the council was elected, only a minority of the people possessed voting rights. See Harry J. Benda, S. L. van der Wal, *De Volksraad en de Staatkundige Ontwikkeling van Nederlandsch-Indië: Een Bronnenpublikatie. The Peoples Council and the Political Development of the Netherlands-Indies, Tweede Stuk 1927-1942* (Leiden: J.B. Wolters, 1965); Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Taoen*, 20.

⁵¹ Tjoe passed away on 3 November 1925 in Batavia at age 34 due to *longontsteking* (pneumonia). After Tjoe's passing, his position was split in two, with Ang Jan Goan serving as director and Kwee Kek Beng as editor-in-chief. Under their leadership, *Sin Po* thrived immensely and continued to promote Chinese

Under Tjoe's leadership, *Sin Po* also gained a reputation for being highly critical of the Chinese Officers, who served as “*hoofden der Chineezzen*” (heads of the Chinese) and intermediaries between the Dutch colonial government and Chinese communities. Typically, they were appointed by the Dutch based on their wealth.⁵² In *Sin Po*'s opinion, they were harmful to the Chinese nation. The newspaper frequently denounced them as a Dutch instrument used to protect the control of the colonial authorities. It criticised them for doing nothing to end hostility against the Chinese minority and even accused them of working with the coloniser to oppress their own people.⁵³ The outspoken tone in *Sin Po* articles caused its popularity to immediately soar. At the same time, however, it also gained a lot of enemies not only among Dutch officials but also within different sections of Chinese society particularly those who worked as colonial elites.

In just a few years, *Sin Po* assumed an important position in the political sphere of colonial Indonesia. This is evidenced by the fact that those who supported *Sin Po*'s perspective became known at the time as the *Sin Po* group.⁵⁴ With over four thousand subscribers in April 1912, *Sin Po* became the fastest-growing Sino-Malay newspaper in colonial Indonesia.⁵⁵ The paper developed as a forum for ideas with strong inspiration drawn from China which reinforces Benedict Anderson and Christopher Bayly's argument that the press circulated 'models' of nationalism.⁵⁶

Although *Sin Po* presented itself as a Chinese nationalist newspaper, its circulation was not limited to Chinese Peranakan. Non-Chinese persons also read *Sin Po* as a way to understand the changing political constellations in the colony and across the

nationalism in the colony. One of their important initiatives was to subscribe to the largest news agency in the Indies, ANETA (General News and Telegraph Agency/*Algemeen Nieuws en Telegraaf Agentschap*) in 1926. See Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 71-2.

⁵² There were three distinct grades of *Majoer* (Mayor), *Kapitein* (Captain), and *Luitenant der Chinezen* (Lieutenant of the Chinese), based on the incumbent's status in the governmental hierarchy, the significance of their territory, or individual achievement. See Mona Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia, 1837-1942: A History of Chinese Establishment in Colonial Society*. (Jakarta: Djambatan, 1996); Onghokham, “Chinese Capitalism in Dutch Java,” *Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 27, no.2, September 1989): 157-58; P. H. Fromberg, *De Chineesche Beweging op Java* (Amsterdam: Uitgeversmaatschappij Elsevier, 1911), 40.

⁵³ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 39.

⁵⁴ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java*, 21-2.

⁵⁵ *De Expres*, 17 April 1912.

⁵⁶ Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 241; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

world. *Sin Po* was indeed renowned for providing many updates on global developments but particularly those occurring in China.

There is no doubt that *Sin Po*'s meteoric rise and the 1911 Chinese Revolution (Xinhai Revolution), which was the culmination of long disputes between reformists and revolutionaries, were interrelated. As soon as the Revolution broke out, *Sin Po* pledged itself to take the standpoint of Chinese nationalism. It transformed into a forward-thinking and strongly nationalistic platform of primarily left-wing pro-Sun Yat-sen factions. The paper even stated that it had become "the sole *orgaan* in Java in which *Hoakiau* can express their sympathies for the nationalist movement in their ancestral country."⁵⁷ Thus, it was unsurprising that *Hoakiau* (Chinese overseas) in Indonesia regarded *Sin Po* as a public organ for the Chinese nationalist movement.

Sin Po and the 1911 Revolution

Between 1894 and 1911, two different and opposing streams of political nationalism emerged in China, one led by Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), a fervent republican and anti-Qing revolutionary, and the other by Kang Youwei, a pro-Qing and pro-monarchist reformist.⁵⁸ Kang believed the Qing court had been overtaken by ultra-conservative and corrupt forces of the Empress Dowager, who had jeopardised China's modernisation project by obstructing his "Hundred Days of Reform". In addition to a major reorganisation of the government apparatus, Kang also demanded a synthesis of the finest aspects of classical China with Western modernity. Kang envisaged a constitutional monarchy as the ultimate form of government for China. In contrast, Sun Yat-sen called for a full-scale revolution to overthrow the Qing monarchy.⁵⁹

Sun Yat-sen offered a vision of how to reform China. He stated that the tyrannical, incompetent, and corrupt Manchu dynasty had to be abolished, and a new, capable, and virtuous administration had to be established, led by Han Chinese. Sun rallied and

⁵⁷ *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*, np.

⁵⁸ Ching Fatt Yong, "An Historical Turning Point: The 1911 Revolution and its Impact on Singapore's Chinese," in *Sun Yat-sen: Nanyang and the 1911 Revolution*, ed. Lee Lai To and Lee Hock Guan (Singapore: ISEAS, 2011), 149.

⁵⁹ Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000).

organised the various Overseas Chinese groups, particularly in Southeast Asia, to support the political changes he and his comrades were striving to bring about in China. They were no longer considered the weak backup of the imperial motherland, required solely in times of emergency. Instead, they were lauded as the architects of a new China. Together, they would fuel a revolution that would usher in a golden era of modernism, equality, and justice in China.⁶⁰

Together with Song Jiaoren and other Revolutionaries, Sun Yat-sen founded a secret society and underground resistance movement in Tokyo named Tongmenghui (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) on 20 August 1905. This group desired a bloody revolution in China rather than constitutional reform. Subsequently, its branches extended over the globe. In 1906, Sun Yat-sen founded the Singapore branch, which became the hub of Tongmenghui activity in Southeast Asia. It later established Soe Po Sia (Book and Newspaper Club) throughout the region, including the Indies, to disseminate Sun's revolutionary theory. Numerous local Chinese were persuaded by the propaganda to return to China and die for their nation.⁶¹

However, owing to the restrictions of the oppressive Dutch colonial authority, Sun Yat-sen was never able enter to the Indies; thus, the majority of Chinese in Indonesia only knew about his ideas. His anti-imperialist and revolutionary ideas, particularly the Three Principles of the People, which can be summarised as civic nationalism (*minzuzhuyi*), democracy (*minquanzhuyi*), and the livelihood of the people (*minshengzhuyi*), influenced broad sections of the *kaoem moeda* in colonial Indonesia.⁶² Lea Williams has studied how Sun's ideas and the 1911 revolution affected the Chinese movement in Indonesia, but a closer examination of *Sin Po*'s reportage reveals how this event drove the Chinese in Indonesia, including the Chinese press, to become more nationalistic and politicised. In particular I show how the paper promoted increased sensitivity to colonial prejudice and discrimination and actively opposed such policies.

⁶⁰ Yu-long Ling, "Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Doctrine and Impact on the Modern World," *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, (April 2012): 5.

⁶¹ Suryadinata, "Tongmenghui, Sun Yat-sen and the Impact on Indonesia," 173.

⁶² Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 171.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate all surviving records of *Sin Po*'s coverage of the Chinese Revolution, but the paper did publish a commemorative report in 1925 reflecting back on the significance of the revolution for the paper and how it covered the revolution. *Sin Po* argued that their reporting on the 1911 Revolution stimulated nationalistic feelings among the local Chinese. In the wake of the Wuchang Uprising in October 1911, the *kaoem moeda*, with *Sin Po* serving as their mouthpiece, made a vital contribution to the emergence of Chinese nationalism. Lauw and Yoe led *Sin Po*, on behalf of Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Alliance, to publish a series of articles promoting the movement. *Sin Po* editorials originally published in 1911 and re-published in 1925, indicate the paper was already critical of the Qing monarchy before the Revolution, and that these criticisms grew more vehement following the Wuchang Uprising.

Most of *Sin Po*'s news articles and editorials on the 1911 Xinhai Revolution that I have been able to locate narrated the struggle and triumph of the Revolutionaries. The Revolutionary Army was frequently described as courageous and competent, whereas the Qing army was portrayed as cowardly, cunning, and oppressive. The paper often highlighted the persecution, corruption, and ineffectiveness of the Manchu administration and criticised the Qing court's failures to protect the empire from domestic and foreign foes. *Sin Po* argued that events such as the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1865), the Opium War (1839–1860), and the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) had already demonstrated China's weakness under the Qing empire. Thus, *Sin Po* argued that while the Qing Dynasty remained in power, there could be no genuine reform.⁶³ This analysis shows us that *Sin Po* was a vital mouthpiece for the Chinese Revolutionaries to convey their vision and mission to the *hoakiao* in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, it is important to observe that Chinese society in Indonesia at the time in reality politically fluid, although the vast majority of people could be divided into two factions: pro-Revolutionaries and pro-Reformists. The latter group was represented particularly by Chinese elites, such as Chinese Captain (*Kapitein der Chineezen*) and Chinese Major (*Majoor der Chineezen*) who were the representatives of the Dutch colonial government. They actively criticised the Revolutionary movement using the

⁶³ *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*, np.

daily newspaper *Perniagaan*, which was controlled by local *Kapitan* groups. After the Xinhai Revolution, *Perniagaan* became *Sin Po*'s adversary, and functioned as a mouthpiece of *Chung Hwa Hui* (The Chinese Association, CHH), a Batavia-based conservative and pro-Dutch organisation founded in 1928.⁶⁴

By the beginning of November 1911, with the seizure of Shanghai by the Revolutionary troops, *Sin Po* started to express genuine optimism about the impending revolution. According to the paper, the enormous turmoil in China forced the Manchu government to listen to the people's wishes. An article from November 1911 stated it was already too late because "the people no longer trusted the government's promises."⁶⁵

The Xinhai Revolution in 1911 led to the formation of a Republican state.⁶⁶ On 29 December 1911, a convention of provincial representatives in Nanking selected Sun Yat-sen as the "provisional president" of the Republic of China. This position was later promised to Yuan Shikai, who commanded the Beiyang Army, the military of northern China, if he could convince the Qing rulers to abdicate.⁶⁷ On 12 February 1912, the eight-year-old emperor Puyi renounced his throne, leading to the formation of the Republic of China (*Zhonghua minguo* or *Tiong Hoa Bin Kok*, as the local Chinese coined it). The new republic created a national flag of red, yellow, blue, white, and black signifying the country's five ethnic groups: Han-Manchu-Mongol-Hui-Tibetan, respectively.⁶⁸

The revolution captured the attention of Indonesians who followed global affairs and led to changing perceptions amongst the Chinese. Analysis of *Sin Po* shows that in this period the Chinese in Indonesia ceased using the term "Tjina" (Chinese) and began using the term "Tiong Hoa" (or *Chung-hua* in Mandarin), indicating a growing sense of

⁶⁴ Further a history of *Chung Hwa Hui* see Leo Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java*, Chapter II, "The Birth of the Chung Hwa Hui"; Klaas Stutje, "The Complex World of the Chung Hwa Hui: International Engagements of Chinese Indonesian Peranakan Students in the Netherlands, 1918-1931," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. 171, no. 4 (2015): 516-542.

⁶⁵ *Sin Po*, 4 November 1911.

⁶⁶ Arif Dirlik & Roxann Prazniak, "The 1911 Revolution: An End and a Beginning," *China Information*, 25(3), (2011): 216.

⁶⁷ Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 139.

⁶⁸ Louise Young, "When Fascism Met Empire in Japanese-Occupied Manchuria," *Journal of Global History* 12 (2), (July 2017): 283. doi:10.1017/S1740022817000080

self-worth and identification with Chineseness.⁶⁹ According to Tom Hoogervorst, non-Chinese speakers of Malay often used the term *Tjina* as a racial slur against ethnic Chinese.⁷⁰ Despite being historically neutral and had been used to refer to China and Chinese since the 17th century, the term *Tjina* had steadily gained derogatory connotations. After the Chinese Revolution many Chinese began referring to themselves more frequently as “orang Tiong Hoa” instead of “orang Tjina.”⁷¹ Furthermore, from the mid-1920s, several Hokkien terms, such as *Binkok* (the Chinese Republic), *kiaopao* (countryman residing overseas), *Tiongkok* (China, literally the Middle Kingdom), *tjouwkok* (homeland), and *tongpao* (compatriot) also gained prominence, particularly among nationalist groups,⁷² and *Sin Po*, as the largest Sino-Malay newspaper at that time, helped popularise the terminology so that it would be better known among Chinese people.

Meanwhile, *Sin Po* continued to publish numerous articles regarding Sun Yat-sen’s political activity. It regularly profiled Sun’s ideas and his ambition to transform China into a strong, stable, and respected nation. *Sin Po* therefore served as a key means for communicating and indeed promoting Sun Yat-sen’s ideas in the colony.⁷³ Sun’s Three Principles of the People and his ideas of Pan-Asianism, for example, were discussed and positively appraised many times in *Sin Po*.

Following trends in Republican China *Sin Po* also became one of the primary proponents of the movement to eliminate the queue (*gerakan boeat hapoesken thauwtjang*). This was among the most frequently discussed topics in *Sin Po* at the time. In China a key symbol of the resistance to Manchu imperial rule was the act of cutting off the queue, that is cutting a hairstyle associated with the Manchus (*orang boan*) who reigned in China during the Qing period.⁷⁴ In the Indies the hairstyle was associated with

⁶⁹ Tan, “Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia,” 795.

⁷⁰ Hoogervorst gave several examples, such as *tjina babi* (Chinese pork butcher), *tjina goenoeng* (Chinese from the mountains), *tjina koentjir* (pigtailed Chinese), *tjina loleng* (Chinese who cannot say the R), *tjina mindring* (Chinese loan shark), and the exclamations *Tjina mati* or *Tjina mampoes!* (Dead Chinese). See Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 33.

⁷¹ *Sin Po*, 16 March 1912.

⁷² Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 35.

⁷³ “Sun Yat Sen (1866-1924),” *Sin Po*, 15 May 1924.

⁷⁴ Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 106.

the racial slur “*tjina koentir*” (pigtailed Chinese). Following the Revolution, *Sin Po* observed that many Chinese cut off their queues and reported positively on these actions as not just a gesture of resistance but also a crucial component of a political revolution.⁷⁵

Sin Po’s opinions and editorials on new trends in Republican China attracted a large readership among the Chinese community and progressive Peranakan thinkers. Readers urged *Sin Po*’s editors to increase their coverage of China.⁷⁶ Most Chinese in the colony rejoiced because they believed that a strong modern China would help them improve their own social and legal standing, following the example of the rise in status of the Japanese in the colony as Japan modernised. Moreover, the Revolution provided the Chinese with a sense of pride. As Mona Lohanda argues they became more sensitive to injustice and no longer perceived the Dutch coloniser as superior or invincible given that the imperial order had been overthrown in China. Criticism of Dutch colonialism became harsher.⁷⁷

Sin Po regarded the downfall of the Manchu dynasty as a sign of the emergence of a strong, modernised Chinese state, and the perception of Chinese power also increased accordingly. As a way of supporting the new Republic, *Sin Po* advised wealthy Chinese entrepreneurs to invest and establish enterprises in China immediately. In addition, it urged China to allow overseas Chinese investment. The paper further argued that “the success of overseas Chinese depends on China, and China’s progress depends on overseas Chinese”. Hence, both parties would benefit from this partnership.⁷⁸

Sin Po’s hopes for the new China, however, were immediately dashed after Sun Yat-sen transferred the presidency to Yuan Shikai on 12 March 1912. With Sun’s resignation, Yuan became the new provisional president in Beijing.⁷⁹ The paper realised that Yuan Shikai’s elevation to power was not consistent with Sun’s ideology and the

⁷⁵ Leo Suryadinata, “The 1911 Revolution and the Chinese in Java: A Preliminary Study,” in *The 1911 Revolution: The Chinese in British and Dutch Southeast Asia*, ed. Lee Lai To (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1987), 123.

⁷⁶ *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*, np.

⁷⁷ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 138.

⁷⁸ *Sin Po*, 17 February 1912.

⁷⁹ Zhengyuan Fu, *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 153-54.

revolution had not achieved its aims.⁸⁰ Yuan began persecuting and eventually outlawed the Kuomintang (KMT) after the party opposed his request for a massive foreign loan in the National Assembly. This situation resulted in the Chinese community in colonial Indonesia dividing along political lines, with one faction supporting Yuan Shikai and the other supporting the KMT.⁸¹

On 18 January 1915, Japan took advantage of the war circumstances in Europe to impose the 21 Demands on China, which gave Japan a decisive role in finance, law enforcement, and political matters, thereby transforming China into a Japanese protectorate. Yuan also devised a way to make himself president for life and even attempted to create a new imperial monarchy with himself as emperor.⁸² After Yuan Shikai died in 1916, the country descended into the chaos of the warlord era.⁸³ Sun Yat-sen, who was hailed as the “father of the revolution,” was in exile once more between 1913 and 1916, but he returned to lead a new revolution, based in Canton. His ideas remained a source of inspiration for *Sin Po* and the ethnic Chinese community and nationalists more broadly. This was strongly demonstrated by the reactions to his death in Chapter III.

The Emergence of Tiga Aliran among Chinese Indonesians

Even though the majority of the Chinese population in colonial Indonesia welcomed the formation of the Republic of China in 1912 with jubilation, the political landscape of the Chinese community following the 1911 Revolution was incredibly fluid. The Chinese became increasingly involved in the affairs of the Indies, but their viewpoints were rarely unified. Some of them pledged allegiance to the colonial regime, while others continue to oppose the regime.

Liem Koen Hian classifies this Chinese Peranakan community into so-called “three streams” (*tiga aliran*), each of which had a distinct vision for the future of the

⁸⁰ *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*, np.

⁸¹ *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*, np.

⁸² Madeleine Chi, *China Diplomacy, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1970), Chapter III.

⁸³ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 141-42.

Chinese community in Indonesia: (1) the China-oriented *Sin Po* group; (2) the conservative, Dutch-oriented Chung Hwa Hui (henceforth CHH, founded in 1928); and (3) the Indonesia-oriented Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (hereafter PTI, founded in September 1932).⁸⁴ However a close analysis of how these three organisations positioned themselves suggests it is not that easy to categorise these groups as always independent.

The relationship between these three streams was often characterised by collaboration and hostility. In the study of Chinese Peranakan politics in colonial Indonesia, CHH is frequently contrasted with the *Sin Po* group.⁸⁵ Until the mid-1920s the *Sin Po* group became the main political force in local Chinese politics, leading a reorientation of the local Chinese in Indonesia towards China. However, in 1928, a group of Dutch-educated Chinese was successful in establishing Chung Hwa Hui, to challenge the *Sin Po* group. CHH was established by parliamentarian and landlord Kan Hok Hoei (H.H. Kan), following preliminary congresses in 1926 and 1927. It was indirectly affiliated with the Peranakan student association Chung Hwa Hui Nederland, which was founded in Leiden in 1911 and bore the same name. CHH in Java wanted the Chinese to accept Dutch 'subjection' and identify the Indies as their 'country'.⁸⁶

Sin Po, however, emphasised that the CHH in Java was distinct from the CHH in the Netherlands. It argued that the CHH in Java consisted of Chinese individuals who were loyal to the Dutch government, while the CHH Nederland appeared to favour the movement among Easterners over their loyalty to Western nations. Furthermore, *Sin Po* also noted that the majority of CHH Nederland members publicly supported the Indonesian national movement and often engaged with Indonesian students in the Netherlands.⁸⁷

Most of CHH members were Dutch-educated, upper-class Peranakans known as the "*tjabang atas*", a group of privileged old gentry families that dominated the Dutch colonial institution of the Chinese officership.⁸⁸ Due to its elitist leadership, *Sin Po* often

⁸⁴ Liem Koen Hian, "Tiga Aliran Politik Dalem Doenia Tionghoa Peranakan," *Sin Tit Po*, 26 August 1932.

⁸⁵ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java*, especially Chapter II, Chapter III, and Chapter V.

⁸⁶ Suryadinata, "Tongmenghui, Sun Yat-sen and the Impact on Indonesia: A Revisit," 181 & 186.

⁸⁷ "Chung Hwa Hui dan...Chung Hwa Hui," *Sin Po*, 3 August 1929.

⁸⁸ Among them were Khouw Kim An, the fifth *Majoer der Chinezen* of Batavia, Han Tiauw Tjong, and Loa Sek Hie; as well as representatives of ethnic Chinese conglomerates, such as Oei Tjong Hauw, the head

referred to the organisation as the “Packard Club”, a satirical reference to the expensive American-brand cars that most of CHH leaders used.

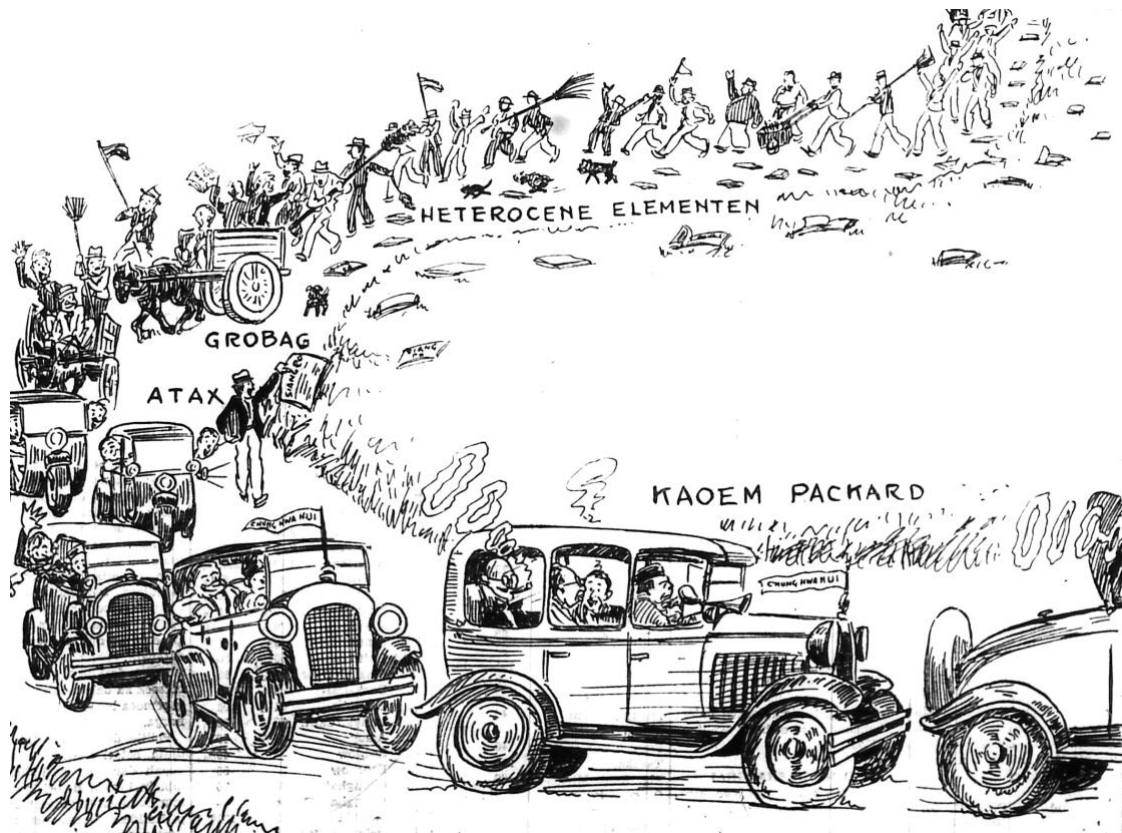


Figure 1.4. One of *Sin Po*'s satirical caricatures that describes CHH as “Kaoem Packard.” In the caricature, *Sin Po* depicted CHH officials travelling comfortably in a Packard while its supporters relished the car's dust and smoke from behind. Source: *Sin Po*, 4 December 1932.

The rise of CHH sparked intra-Chinese polemics on political, cultural, and linguistic allegiances.⁸⁹ *Sin Po* repeatedly engaged in extensive polemics with CHH on a broad range of issues, including the legal status of the Chinese people in Indonesia and the future of Chinese schools, particularly those administered by the THHK.⁹⁰ The paper stated that, within the CHH, the executives rarely talked with a unified voice, even when discussing their own organisational principles. Han Tiauw Tjong, the former president of CHH Nederland (1919-20) and a member of Volksraad (1924-29), for instance, once

of Kian Gwan, Asia's leading corporation at the time, and Thio Thiam Tjong, a business magnate from Semarang.

⁸⁹ Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 48.

⁹⁰ See for instance “CHH dan THHK,” *Sin Po*, 3 & 13 December 1928.

claimed that CHH Java was loyal to the Dutch. This claim, however, was immediately refuted by Kwee Djie Hoo, a CHH Java executive, who described the organisation as neutral.⁹¹

Sin Po argued that the CHH's attitude, which was openly aligned with the extreme political right, the Vaderlandsche Club (Fatherlands Club), endangered the position of the Chinese in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the paper was aware that there were indeed a few progressive and visionary CHH members, but "the majority of them were so rotten that they cause other members to rot."⁹² It further highlighted how CHH was frequently inconsistent to implement its organisation's values, or in *Sin Po*'s phrase "had twelve faces" (*memiliki doea belas moeka*). Kwee Djie Hoo, for instance, once said that CHH did not distinguish between wealthy and poor Chinese, everyone had the same rights and responsibilities. However, at the same time, CHH rejected the membership of the Chinese Totok on the grounds that they "cannot interfere with politics in the Indies."⁹³

Sin Po strongly opposed the notion and believed that the division between the Peranakans and Totoks was no longer significant after the 1911 Revolution. The paper noted that both groups had played a key role in the development of various fields in Indonesia, particularly the economic sector, and that the Totoks deserved the same political rights as the Peranakans. *Sin Po* further argued that it was essential for the Peranakans and Totoks to collaborate more closely in order to demonstrate the unity and strength of the *Bangsa Tionghoa* to the world.⁹⁴

After the Xinhai Revolution, the editorial board of *Sin Po* saw the need to develop a regular link between Chinese Totok and Peranakans. At the time, there were no Chinese-language periodicals in Batavia, so the Totoks, the majority of whom could not speak Malay, had to subscribe to newspapers from the British-controlled Straits Settlement or write to their relatives in China to hear about the recent events there. At that time, proficiency in Mandarin had become an essential component of pan-Chinese reformism,

⁹¹ "Doea Belas Moeka," *Sin Po*, 16 November 1932.

⁹² "Chung Hwa Hui Kombali Lotjot Tjelana," *Sin Po*, 17 December 1932.

⁹³ "Doea Belas Moeka," *Sin Po*, 16 November 1932.

⁹⁴ *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*, np.

and through the THHK, it had become a symbol of progress and national pride and was regarded as prestigious enough to compete with Dutch, English, and Malay.⁹⁵

Therefore, on 12 February 1921, *Sin Po Chineesche Editie* (Sin Po Chinese Edition) was published for the first time in order to serve the Totok community in Java and to compete with the KMT's official newspaper, the *Thien Sung Yit Po*. Another primary aim of this edition was "to promote Chinese nationalism among *Hoakiau* (Chinese overseas), eliminate provincial differences and bring about Chinese unification to build a strong unionised force from *Hoakiau*, Totok and Peranakans."⁹⁶ In short, *Sin Po* believed that the *Sin Po Chineesche Editie* would make the Totoks increasingly conscious of the movements of the Chinese in colonial Indonesia, allowing for closer cooperation between Totok and Peranakans.⁹⁷

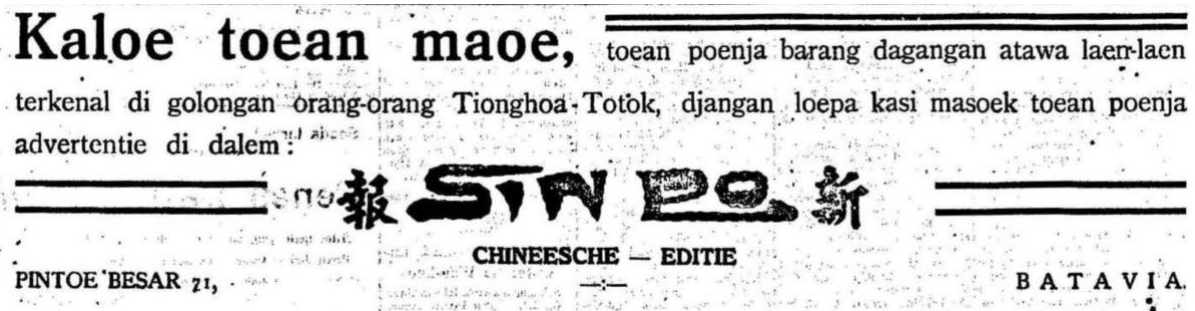


Figure 1.5. An advertisement in *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie* that encouraged its readers, particularly Chinese Totok and Peranakan, to place advertisements in *Sin Po Chineesche Editie*.
Source: *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 12 December 1922.

On another occasion, *Sin Po* also argued that the establishment of Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (Chinese Indonesian Party, PTI) would become a serious blow for CHH, as the PTI had stated from the outset that it accepted Totok and Peranakans without exception as permanent members. *Sin Po* declared in one of its publications that *Sin Po* and PTI shared comparable objectives:

⁹⁵ Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 46.

⁹⁶ *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*, np.

⁹⁷ The initial location of the *Sin Po Chineesche Editie* headquarters was situated in Pintu Besar, Glodok, prior to its relocation to Asemka where it merged with the *Sin Po* daily. Lie Chen Fu served as the first editor-in-chief of this edition, succeeded by Chuang Yu Lin from 1921 to 1927 and Hsieh Tso Yi from 1927 to 1929. Following Hsieh Tso Yi's relocation to the United States in 1929, the role of editor-in-chief remained unoccupied. Hsieh Tso Shun was then in charge of managing the workload and assumed the former chief editor's responsibilities. See *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*, np.

Our goal has always been to foster unity among all Chinese people, regardless of Totok or Peranakan, regardless the elite or the poor, regardless of whether they are Chinese, Dutch, British or any other nationality.⁹⁸

Therefore, when Liem Koen Hian decided to establish PTI in 1932, *Sin Po* embraced the organisation with open arms.

This statement is noteworthy because ten years before, while Liem Koen Hian was still editor-in-chief of the daily *Pewarta Soerabaja* (1921-1925), he and *Sin Po* had a bitter feud. Koen Hian at that time repeatedly attacked *Sin Po* and was even willing to join forces with the conservative Chinese newspaper, *Perniagaan*, to take down *Sin Po*. In the beginning, when Koen Hian had joined *Pewarta Soerabaja* in 1921, he sided with *Sin Po* and consistently opposed the conservative views of the *Perniagaan*, led by Gouw Peng Liang. His attitude towards *Sin Po*, however, immediately shifted after the publication of the *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie* (Sin Po East Java Edition) in July 1922.⁹⁹ Koen Hian relentlessly criticised the director of *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, Tan Ping Tjiat, claiming that he lacked the ability to lead a newspaper as big as *Sin Po*. Tan was the chairman of the Chinese Trade Union (King Kie Hwee) and the member of ISDV (Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging/The Indies Social Democratic Association).¹⁰⁰

Koen Hian accused Tan of orchestrating a boycott of *Pewarta Soerabaja* and labelled him a communist due to his involvement with the Bumiputera and labour

⁹⁸ “Moesti Girang,” *Sin Po*, 27 October 1932.

⁹⁹ On 12 February 1922, *Sin Po* had also begun publishing *Bin Seng* (People’s Voice), as part of its objective to reach various audiences. *Bin Seng* was a lower-priced (f. 4/month) daily, so working-class people could still read the most up-to-date news from China and colonial Indonesia. Using the pen name “Oen Tjip Tiong,” Tjoe Bou San was entrusted with the role of chief editor, while Lim Bok Sioe served as administrator. Through this new publication, *Sin Po* tried to reach more layers of society in colonial Indonesia who had the right to acquire the most recent, high-quality information. Previously, *Bin Seng* had published five trial editions (*editie pertjobahan*) on January 14, 21, 26, 4 & 8 February 1922, respectively, which were well received by *Sin Po* readers. Despite receiving a warm welcome, *Bin Seng* did not prosper. After less than a year of operation, *Bin Seng* was formally discontinued in December 1922.

¹⁰⁰ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 143-44.

movement.¹⁰¹ According to *Sin Po*, Koen Hian realised that in terms of article quality and operational management, *Pewarta Soerabaja* was inferior to *Sin Po*. Therefore, Koen Hian perceived the emergence of *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie* as a serious threat to the newspaper market in East Java, which *Pewarta Soerabaja* had dominated for many years.¹⁰²

The dispute between *Sin Po* and Koen Hian lasted months, and the attacks between the two parties took on a personal nature. Koen Hian, for instance, accused *Sin Po* of implementing “kantong-ism” (pocket lining) and “djilat pantat-ism” (bottom licking) because they prioritised profits and protecting the elite. Meanwhile, *Sin Po* referred to Koen Hian as a “kerbo gila” (crazy buffalo) because his criticisms were frequently erroneous and accused him of practicing “boedakism” (slavery) because of the view that he was enslaved by the tycoons.¹⁰³

In response to the accusations of Koen Hian and *Pewarta Soerabaja*, *Sin Po*’s administration decided to reduce the price of *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie* from f. 7.50 to f. 5 per three months beginning on 1 January 1923. This strategy was adopted in response to the *Pewarta Soerabaja*’s accusations that *Sin Po* was only interested in profiting as much as possible from *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*.¹⁰⁴



Figure 1.6. An advertisement in *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie* stated that the price of *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie* had decreased as of 1 January 1923. This decision was made in response to *Pewarta Soerabaja*’s accusation that the newspaper was only interested in profit. Source: *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 27 December 1922.

¹⁰¹ “Satoe Kontjo jang Kabetoelan,” *Sin Po*, 15 March 1923; “Sedikit Katerangan tentang Toewan Tan Ping Tjiat djadi Kita Poenja Administrateur dari Oost-Java Editie,” *Sin Po*, 14 October 1922; “Lagi Sekali Boeat Toewan Liem Koen Hian,” *Sin Po*, 8 December 1922.

¹⁰² “Kegagalannja Toewan Liem Koen Hian Poles Dirinja Sabagi Koentjoe,” *Sin Po*, 12 December 1922.

¹⁰³ “Perbantahan Sama Toewan Liem Koen Hian,” *Sin Po*, 2 Januari 1923; “Haloean Boedakisme dari Liem Koen Hian,” *Sin Po*, 23 March 1923.

¹⁰⁴ *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 22 December 1922.

In order to avoid further involvement in this controversy, *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie* felt compelled to publish a clear message in one of its advertisements. In that statement, the newspaper described Koen Hian as “worthless as a journalist” (*tida berharga sabagi journalist*) and declared all of his writings were equally lacking of value (*sama sekali tida ada harganja*).¹⁰⁵ As predicted, instead of resolving the matter, this statement only generated further contention, and this spat exposed some of the bitter tensions of competition across both the newspaper world and divides in the Chinese community.

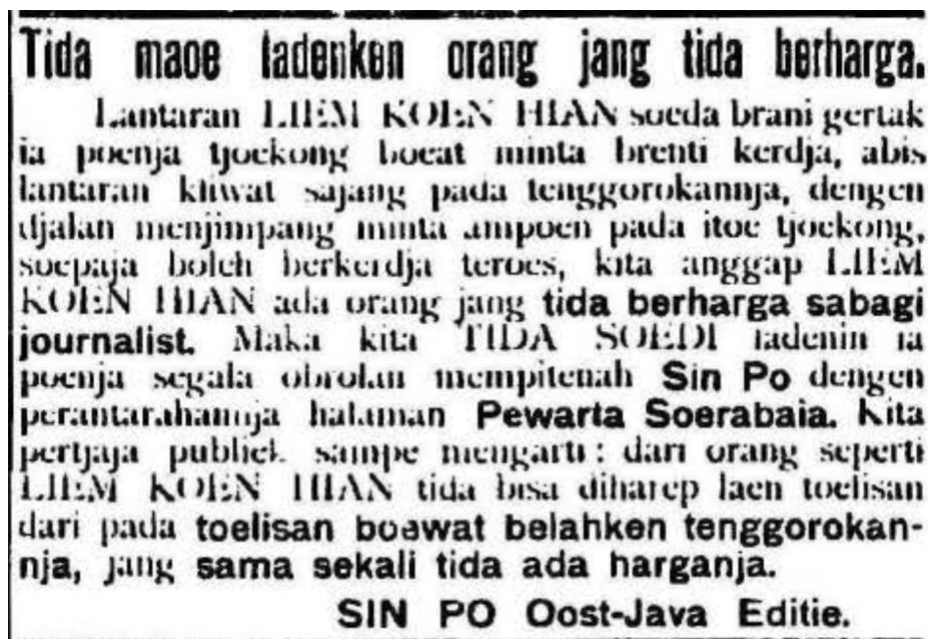


Figure 1.7. A “clarification” from *Sin Po* regarding the dispute with Liem Koen Hian that appeared in the advertising section of *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*. Source: *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 22 January 1923.

The public became disgusted and embarrassed by *Sin Po* and Koen Hian’s unhealthy debate. Some *Sin Po* readers penned letters to the newspaper’s editor-in-chief, requesting that *Sin Po* cease the polemic, which they deemed no longer substantive. They believed the controversy did nothing but tarnish the *Bangsa Tionghoa* movement and made the Chinese a source of ridicule in Dutch newspapers.¹⁰⁶ Midway through April 1923, *Sin Po* ceased responding to Koen Hian’s criticism and the polemic ended abruptly.

¹⁰⁵ “Tida Maoe Ladenken Orang jang Tida Berharga,” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 22 January 1923.

¹⁰⁶ “Sin Po dan Pewarta Soerabaja,” *Sin Po*, 25 March 1923.

Koen Hian resigned from *Pewarta Soerabaja* in 1925 and, on 25 September 1932, he founded the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (PTI), which interestingly had the full support of *Sin Po*. The paper's support signified that both sides had already reconciled and agreed to move on from their past animosity. Another reason was that both *Sin Po* and Koen Hian were now confronting the same opponent: Chung Hwa Hui.

The emergence of PTI profoundly impacted the political landscape among ethnic Chinese, which was formerly dominated by *Sin Po* and CHH. The PTI adopted an entirely Indonesian approach, such as cooperating with the Indonesian movement, naming the party in Indonesian rather than Chinese (unlike the CHH, which literally translates to "Chinese Union"), and employing Malay or Sino-Malay as the primary communication language.¹⁰⁷

CHH became one of the few parties in Indonesia to vigorously criticise the PTI's idealism. The association argued that it was impossible for the PTI to simultaneously represent the interests of Chinese and Indonesian groups. To put it more bluntly, CHH argued that the close relationship with the Indonesian movement was unnecessary. *Sin Po*, however, defended the PTI by claiming that its vision and mission were consistent with Sun Yat-sen's message, who consistently encouraged Chinese cooperation with their fellow Easterners. In one of its editorials, *Sin Po* stated:

What PTI is attempting to do is consistent with the message from Dr. Sun, whose picture was also displayed in the *clubgebouw* (clubhouse) of *Chung Hwa Hui* and whose birthday was also celebrated by the *Chung Hwa Hui* newspaper, *Siang Po*? Or maybe not?¹⁰⁸

Therefore, *Sin Po* asserted that it was appropriate for the Chinese and Indonesians to cooperate and work collectively, as both nations had been oppressed by Dutch colonialism for decades.

When several Chinese questioned why PTI did not use a Chinese name just like CHH or *Siang Hwee*, *Sin Po* responded that it was only a trivial matter which should not

¹⁰⁷ Siauw Giok Tjhan, *Lima Jaman: Perwujudan Integrasi Wajar* (Jakarta: Yayasan Teratai, 1981), 36.

¹⁰⁸ "Doea Laler Sekali Tepok," *Sin Po*, 10 November 1932.

be overstated. “Because people can easily translate it into Chinese or choose Chinese names for the organisation”. *Sin Po* provided an illustration of how Siang Hwee was also known as *Chineesche Handelsvereniging* or the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Similarly, the charity association of Ati Soetji, was popularly known also as *Po Liang Kiok*.¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, there was also concern among Chinese in Indonesia that the PTI would disregard their interests and struggles because PTI did not include the word “Tiongkok” (China) in its organisational statutes. *Sin Po* reassured them that the PTI was principally a Chinese organisation whose majority members (*gewone leden*) were also Chinese, so it would be “impossible for the PTI to disregard Chinese interests.”¹¹⁰ *Sin Po* believed that the PTI was created to protect Chinese interests, but the PTI’s strategy was undoubtedly distinct from that of the CHH. It also emphasised the inclusiveness of the PTI, which was open to all Chinese groups regardless of financial status. Insinuating the CHH, the paper stated that PTI was not created specifically for “the Packards”.¹¹¹

In essence, these three streams continued to influence Chinese politics until the invasion of Japan in 1942. Unlike the CHH and the PTI, however, *Sin Po* never evolved into a political party, despite attracting a substantial and devoted audience. Both the *Sin Po* group and the PTI continued to oppose the pro-Dutch stance and to express sympathy for Indonesian nationalism, whilst the CHH showed little intention to collaborate with Indonesian nationalists. The relationship between these three streams continued to be marked by ups and downs, demonstrating the fluidity of their relationship. Even though they frequently disagreed on a variety of political issues, these three streams often shared the same perspective on other topics, such as the opium eradication campaign, for instance, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁹ “PTI,” *Sin Po*, 28 October 1932.

¹¹⁰ “Boleh Dipegang,” *Sin Po*, 15 November 1932.

¹¹¹ “Boleh Dipegang,” *Sin Po*, 15 November 1932.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated what precisely was ‘new’ about *Sin Po*, the ‘new’ newspaper. Since its first inception in 1910, the paper had already contributed to discussion among Chinese Peranakans. One of the strategies was to create space for debates via contributor letters which writers used to try to convince others of their opinions and engage in arguments or conversations with fellow readers. In this context, *Sin Po* gave a voice to less privileged Chinese Peranakans, particularly among the *kaoem moeda Tionghoa*. The close collaboration between *Sin Po* and *kaoem moeda* was an essential element of the Chinese movement in Indonesia to create national consciousness of being Chinese in the colony.

Before the first decades of the twentieth century, the Chinese public was typically unconcerned with the domestic affairs of any country outside of peninsular Southeast Asia. China. The development of local Sino-Malay publications and Chinese schools, the formation of the Tongmenghui branch and the Chinese Reading Club (Soe Po Sia) in Batavia, and Sun Yat-sen’s influence, had a tremendous impact on the Chinese population in colonial Indonesia increasing their understanding of events in China. Each institution helped develop a transnational imagined community based on a shared idea of ‘Chineseness’ and a sense of belonging.

In the history of Sino-Malay journalism, the Xinhai Revolution of 1911 was the most thoroughly covered and widely recognised political upheaval. The 1911 Revolution increased Chinese society’s political ties with China and firmly established a China-oriented political tradition in the colony. *Sin Po* played a pivotal role in stimulating an intellectual awakening among the Chinese Indonesians by narrating the latest developments in the Republic of China. It emerged as a channel of constructive and revolutionary public opinion. Moreover, by promoting the ideas of Sun Yat-sen the paper also played an important role in constructing the concept of a Chinese nation and identity.

It did not take long for *Sin Po* to attract devoted subscribers, and it was directly attributable to the various innovations *Sin Po* was able to offer its readers. It did not hesitate to bring political risk-taking into the industry, and it was able to translate the political and public support into capital. The transformation of *Sin Po* from a weekly to a daily publication on 1 April 1912 was one indication of how the board of *Sin Po*

successfully utilised the burgeoning spirit of Chinese nationalism among Chinese Indonesians in the colony following the Xinhai Revolution of 1911 and the founding of the Republic of China in 1912.

With better news coverage, a more attractive layout, and talented journalists, *Sin Po* had become the leading Chinese paper in colonial Indonesia. It consistently promoted the political, social and intellectual development of the Chinese community, and externally, it fostered unity among the Chinese to protect their own interests. The men behind *Sin Po* used the paper for their respective causes including for political education. As we will see in the next chapter the paper was also increasingly used for civic purposes, including the promotion of healthcare and hygiene.

CHAPTER II

DEBATING HEALTH, SOCIAL WELFARE AND PHILANTHROPY: *SIN PO*'s POLITICS OF CARE, 1910-1930

Health and social welfare were topics that elites within the ethnic Chinese community took seriously and causes to which they made significant contributions. In the period 1910-1930, the Chinese Peranakan society made significant contributions to the field of medicine, with their doctors assuming pivotal roles in influencing debates related to public health. Furthermore, Chinese medicine was popular and widely promoted as affordable for all non-Dutch residents. In this same time period, a 'national awakening' was occurring among Chinese Indonesian communities in colonial Indonesia. Shiraishi describes this awakening as encompassing the emergence of "new ideas, new forms of 'organisation', and a new vocabulary that transformed the political, social and religious landscape of the colony."¹ As we have seen in the introduction and chapter one the founding of Tiong Hwa Hwee Koan (THHK) on 17 March 1900, followed by the 1911 Xinhai Revolution in China combined with the rise of print capitalism encouraged Chinese Indonesians to reaffirm their complicated position in colonial Indonesia and challenge colonial discrimination. However, alongside their increasing awakening, due to their educational background, unique abilities, and innovative approach, Chinese Peranakan also became key agents of modernity through the more specific field of health.

This chapter elucidates how *Sin Po* participated in 'health activism' by advocating for health-related infrastructure, medicines, and knowledge, while concurrently enhancing the political consciousness and sense of accountability of the Chinese community towards the wider community through these health-related issues. This important role of Chinese Peranakan in the field of health is a topic that has not been widely researched in Indonesian historiography, leading to the impression that the

¹ See Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

Chinese did not significantly contribute to developing modern medicine in Indonesia.² As I will show in this chapter, however, the Chinese played a key role as civil society actors on issues related to health from the early 20th century onwards. In fact, from the first year of publication health issues received broad coverage in *Sin Po*. The paper promoted traditional as well as modern medicine through advertising products. In addition, *Sin Po* editors routinely notified and updated the public about the outbreak of chronic diseases, such as cholera, smallpox, and the plague and ways to prevent such outbreaks.

During the 1918 Spanish Influenza outbreak, for example, *Sin Po* journalists tracked the effects of the pandemic, and the editor criticised the Indies government for suppressing the total death toll in the colony and for the government's inability to deal with the pandemic. *Sin Po* also criticised the proliferation of various hoaxes around cures for the Flu as well as the trend of irresponsible people who took advantage of the chaotic situation. *Sin Po*'s promotion of information about the Flu represented the beginning of increased attention to health issues in the paper.

In the 1920s *Sin Po* editors and journalists frequently emphasised the high mortality rates among the Chinese and Bumiputera and noted the urgent need for increased healthcare resources, improved sanitation protocols, and enhanced public health infrastructure. The emergence of Chinese Indonesian doctors who just returned to colonial Indonesia after graduating from the Netherlands or Germany marked the beginning of Chinese involvement in advancing modern medicine. They brought significant reforms to the healthcare of the poor in the colony, not only by giving free healthcare to people in need but also by initiating the establishment of health institutions, such as polyclinics. Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe, who was closely connected with *Sin Po* and frequently wrote in the paper, crucially contributed to the awakening of Chinese Indonesian and Bumiputera consciousness about the significance of modern medicine and self-hygiene especially given high rates of illness in colonial Indonesia. *Sin Po* also played a role in the founding of Jang Seng Ie (henceforth JSI, now Husada Hospital in

² For a history of Chinese doctors see Ravando, *Pejuang dan Pengayom Rakyat Kecil* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2017); Ravando, *Puji Widhi Bhakti Pertiwi: 90 Tahun Rumah Sakit Panti Nirmala (Tiong Hwa Ie Sia), Sejarah, Peranan dan Perjuangan* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2019).

Jakarta), the first modern and not-for-profit health institution established by Chinese community in the colony.

During this period, *Sin Po* served as a platform for the advancement of new ideas on health and social welfare issues, encompassing the circulation of modern medical information through its articles. Its editors educated readers about the dangers to their health, especially the dangers of opium. The paper first published numerous examples of how the substance had claimed many casualties in China and Indonesia.³ Then *Sin Po* criticised the colonial government for reaping tremendous profits from opium production while poisoning their own citizens. *Sin Po* also inserted itself in debates around the politics of health by working hand in hand together with various anti-opium organisations and activists in the Indies, to criticise the Dutch trade in opium and to reduce the number of opium addicts in the colony. The paper also used its influence to promote ethnic Chinese philanthropy to support health care.

Sin Po & The 1918 Spanish Flu

The Spanish Flu pandemic, which occurred during 1918-1919, is widely regarded as the deadliest pandemic in contemporary history, resulting in the demise of 50 to 100 million people in a brief span of time.⁴ Indonesia was also affected. Based on the work of a number of researchers, it has been estimated that a significant number of people, ranging from 1.5 to 4.37 million, lost their lives in the colony, resulting in one of the highest mortality rates globally.⁵ Colonial Indonesia was ravaged by the Spanish Flu in two

³ See, for instance, “Halnja Madat,” *Sin Po*, 14 October 1915; “Hapoeskanlah Itoe Tjandoe,” *Sin Po*, 21 September 1916; “Propaganda Anti-Opium di Tiongkok,” *Sin Po*, 11 January 1930; “Soeal Madat,” *Sin Po*, 20 August 1935; “Persetan Ratjoen Madat,” *Sin Po*, 6 March 1937.

⁴ A limited section of this topic has been published in Ravando, “Looking Back at the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic in Colonial Indonesia,” *The University of Melbourne*, 15 December 2020. <https://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/shaps-research/2020/12/15/1918-spanish-flu-colonial-indonesia/>

⁵ The figure “1.5 million” was frequently cited over several decades, until the publication of Siddharth Chandra’s article titled “Mortality from the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19 in Indonesia” in 2013. The article discusses Siddharth’s recalculation of the death rate during the Spanish Flu outbreak in the Indies, through the integration of data from various colonial sources, including the *Volkstelling* (Census), *Mededeelingen van Burgerlijken Geneeskundigen Dienst* (MBGD, Reports of Civil Medical Service), *Koloniaal Verslag* (Colonial Report), and annual population report. From his findings, Siddharth argues that the mortality rate in the Indies would be significantly higher, with an estimated range of 4.26 to 4.37 million people perished. It should be noted that this figure does not account for mortality rates in areas

distinct waves. The first wave spread between June and early September 1918, which was characterised by its mild nature and low morbidity and mortality rates. The port of Pangkajene located in North Sumatra was identified as the initial epicentre of the infection, which subsequently spread to Java and Borneo. In a brief period, the Spanish Flu had struck the regions of Tanjung Pandan (Belitung) and Weltevreden (Batavia). In June 1918 alone, it was estimated that the virus had infected roughly five per cent of the entire population of Surabaya. Meanwhile, the eastern region of Indonesia remained unaffected by the pandemic, notwithstanding the fact that some newspapers already reported a number of cases in Makassar.⁶

The second wave, believed to have occurred between the end of October and December 1918, was far more massive and deadly. During this wave, the virus rapidly spread among individuals throughout diverse regions of colonial Indonesia, including Sumatra, Celebes, Maluku, the Lesser Sunda Islands, and Papua. The Civil Medical Service reported that the transmission process was rapid and “there are almost no areas in the Dutch East Indies that are not infected by influenza” (*er was haast geen plats in Nederlandsch Oost-Indie, welke toen niet door influenza was besmet*).⁷

Sin Po was one of the very first newspapers to report on the pandemic. The first article appeared in the paper on 17 July 1918. In the edition *Sin Po* reported that 60 police officers had been infected and 100 Chinese coolies had died as a result of a “penjakit aneh” (strange disease) in North Sumatra. Doctors were unable to do anything to treat this disease other than giving quinine or aspirin as forms of relief for the fever and pain.⁸ The use of the term “penjakit aneh” illustrated both *Sin Po* and the general population’s confusion over the disease as the editor had never encountered the symptoms described as accompanying this disease before. One of *Sin Po*’s subscribers in Ciledug

beyond Java and Madura. See Siddharth Chandra, “Mortality from the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19 in Indonesia,” *Population Studies*, vol. 67, no. 2 (July 2013): 190-91.

⁶ Ravando, *Perang Melawan Influenza: Pandemi Flu Spanyol di Indonesia Masa Kolonial, 1918-1919* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2020), 134-36.

⁷ *Mededeelingen van den Burgelijken Geneeskundigen Dienst in Nederlandsch Indie*, Deel X, (1920): 145.

⁸ Quinine was already applied to treat malaria, possibly from as early as the 1600s. The substance prevails an essential anti-malarial remedy as well as other infectious diseases. Quinine was firstly discussed in *Geneeskundig Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indie* (GTNI, The Medical Journal of the Dutch East Indies) in 1891 (Vol. 31) as a cure for malaria. To date, quinine remains to play a vital part in the management of malaria. See “Bepaling van Kinine in Basten,” *GTNI*, vol. 31, (1891): 584-86.

sent a letter to *Sin Po* explaining the symptoms he had experienced from this “penjakit baroe” (new disease). The initial symptom was a high fever which could reach 41 degrees Celsius. Then the whole body suddenly became limp until the sufferer could no longer lift his/her head. After three to four days, the disease slowly began to subside. Generally, on the eighth day, the patient’s condition gradually recovered, although they might still feel weak.⁹

Spanish Flu caused extraordinary difficulties for *Sin Po*, hampering the production and distribution of the newspaper. From 14 July 1918, the number of *Sin Po* employees contracting the Spanish Flu continued to increase. As a result, they could not work efficiently. Initially, the Spanish Flu infected the newspaper folders, and *boekbinders* (bookbinders) and then it spread to the *letterzetters* (typesetters) and *drukkers* (printers). A few days later, the administrative staff of the paper were struck down.¹⁰ All of them showed identical symptoms which resembled influenza but were much more severe. Employees who were still healthy were forced to take over the work of the sick. They were so overwhelmed by the mounting tasks that *Sin Po* subscribers did not receive the paper on time for several weeks. The severity of the situation in terms of disruption to work and daily life was portrayed by *Sin Po*. Here the writer conveys the debilitating effects of the illness on the paper’s operations, indicating a genuine crisis of *Sin Po* in this period:

Meanwhile, we have almost cried several times because we are so distraught witnessing the chaos taking place in our office. Our staff, Chinese and Bumiputera, now only half of them left behind.¹¹

People’s lack of knowledge about the danger of the Spanish Flu caused *Sin Po*’s editors to increase their reportage on information related to the disease. They repeatedly emphasised that “the disease infected many people very swiftly, and regulations must be enforced tightly so many people do not become the victims.”¹² In addition, it also argued

⁹ “Tanda-tandanja,” *Sin Po*, 22 July 1918.

¹⁰ “Moesin Penjakit,” *Sin Po*, 18 July 1918.

¹¹ “Moesin Penjakit,” *Sin Po*, 18 July 1918; “Boeasnja Itoe Penjakit Baroe,” *Sin Po*, 22 July 1918.

¹² “Lagi Sekali Penjakit Spanjol,” *Sin Po*, 29 October 1918.

that people who got infected with the disease were often asymptomatic. *Sin Po* thought the situation was even more dangerous because carriers could infect others with a weak immune system.

The person who is infected with the disease and still looked healthy, could be the one who spreads the disease, so if there is someone who has the disease rather than still go to school or to the office, it would be better if they go home.¹³

By spreading messages such as this, *Sin Po* tried to counter the view promoted by government officials and colonial doctors that the flu was not fatal. It considered these views to be based either on ignorance or the political motive of maintaining *rust en orde* (peace and order).¹⁴ *Sin Po* editors believed that this attitude only made the public health situation more difficult to mitigate due to the absence of early prevention by the colonial government.

Furthermore, *Sin Po* also performed the role of health activist in the colony by trying to counter misinformation about the causes of the disease and inappropriate treatments. Upon the initial discovery of the Spanish Flu pandemic in colonial Indonesia, many people linked the pandemic to violations committed against sacred locations or the consumption of dog meat, a practise that is forbidden in Islam. The disease was also perceived by them as a manifestation of natural law or a form of curse resulting from a combination of factors such as avarice, wrongdoing, and other unethical behaviours.¹⁵ Therefore, many endeavoured to cope with the pandemic by resorting to traditional practises rather than adhering to medical recommendations provided by healthcare professionals or governmental authorities. Some believed the only way to get rid of the disease was to perform expulsion rituals which they believed could neutralise or repel

¹³ “Penjakit Spanjol,” *Sin Po*, 31 October 1918.

¹⁴ “Moesin Penjakit,” *Sin Po*, 18 July 1918; “Boeasnja Itoe Penjakit Baroe,” *Sin Po*, 22 July 1918. For an example of the expression of *rust en orde* see Christiaan Willem Margadant, *Het Regeeringsreglement van Nederlandsch-Indie*. Vol. 1. (M. Nijhoff, 1894).

¹⁵ Colin Brown, “The Influenza Pandemic of 1918 in Indonesia,” in *Death and Disease in Southeast Asia: Explorations in Social, Medical and Demographic History*, ed. Norman G. Owen (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987): 245-46.

evil curses or spirits.¹⁶ These beliefs, according to the paper, were the result of other newspapers in the colony spreading false and inaccurate news related to the pandemic. *Sin Po*, in fact, challenged some papers such as *Tjhoen Tjhioe*, which openly argued that the influenza was a punishment from God, who “sent some angels or spirits to spread a deadly disease to the entire world to punish bad people, etc.”¹⁷

Each ethnic groups in colonial Indonesia resorted to their respective belief systems as a means of coping with the pandemic. During the initial wave, for instance, various urban centres witnessed the occurrence of *toapekong* processions held by several Chinese organisations.¹⁸ The parade was usually conducted multiple times over a period of one to two weeks. During the procession, they commonly prayed for copious rainfall as they were convinced that the lengthy drought which had afflicted the colony since the beginning of 1918 facilitated the rapid transmission of the virus via airborne dust. They were confident that the heavy rain would wash away the Spanish Flu. Paradoxically, these processions became a contributing factor to the dissemination of the virus. The large number of people who gathered on the public streets to watch the ceremony either contracted or transmitted the virus.¹⁹

The chaotic situation resulting from the Spanish Flu became an impetus for the emergence of various crimes and acts of violence. The tense atmosphere coupled with the danger of starvation and drought became the main trigger for various clashes. On 31 October 1918, an unfortunate incident called the “*Peroesoehan di Koedoes*” (Riots in

¹⁶ See especially Chapter VII “Hoaks Takhayul, dan Obat-Obatan Anti-Influenza,” in Ravando, *Perang Melawan Influenza: Pandemi Flu Spanyol di Indonesia Masa Kolonial, 1918-1919* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2020), 269-312.

¹⁷ “Hikajatnja Penjakit Influenza (I),” *Sin Po*, 18 December 1918.

¹⁸ *Toapekong*, also known as *Tua Pek Kong* or *Dabogong*, is considered to be among the pantheon of deities in the realm of Indonesian, Malaysian, and Singaporean folk spirituality. *Toapekong* is commonly recognised as the deity associated with prosperity, whose appellation directly translates to ‘Great Uncle’. *Toapekong* was widely perceived as the embodiment of the spiritual essence of Chinese pioneers, providing safeguard to those who sought his benevolent intervention. In his article, Jack Meng-Tat Chia expounded on the multifaceted nature of the cult of *toapekong*, highlighting its three distinct forms: a representative of sworn brotherhood, a Sino-Malay god, and a sinicized deity. In Indonesia, *toapekong* is occasionally used to refer broadly to representations of divine beings, and in certain regions, to temples or festivals. In the Kudus case, it was a parade performed by the Chinese in Kudus to reject bad things, like a disease. See Jack Meng-Tat Chia, “Who is Tua Pek Kong? The Cult of Grand Uncle in Malaysia and Singapore,” *Archiv Orientalni* 85, (2017): 439-60; Josh Stenberg, *Minority Stages: Sino-Indonesian Performance and Public Display* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2019), 202.

¹⁹ “Penjakit Influenza,” *Sin Po*, 2 November 1918.

Kudus) took place. The Chinese community in Kudus, Central Java, decided to carry out a traditional parade (*toapekong*) which had been held three times before, respectively on 20, 22, and 25 October 1918. The chief purpose of the ritual was to drive out the Spanish Flu, which had claimed many lives, from Kudus. When the group was parading through the city, some Bumiputera reportedly ridiculed the procession. A Chinese participant then lost control and hit the man leading to an escalated clash between Chinese participants in the procession and the non-Chinese onlookers. Because the *toapekong* group was outnumbered, they scattered. The next day, the situation worsened. Around 400 Bumiputera armed with *keris* (Indonesian dagger) and spears gathered at Kudus Mosque. This number then increased to thousands within a short time. Under the command of Haji Mohamad Hardi from Sarekat Islam, the mobs decided to attack the Chinatown of Kudus. Dozens of Chinese were killed in the riots. About 50 houses were looted and burnt to the ground. More than 2,000 Chinese, or half of the population in Kudus, fled to Semarang. The police managed to capture 75 perpetrators, including several influential Sarekat Islam leaders.²⁰ After three weeks approximately 159 people had been detained to be trialled.²¹

Sin Po's coverage of the Spanish Flu, which tended to be very descriptive and informative and directed towards helping readers navigate the Spanish Flu and related scams, suddenly became fiery after this incident in response to the perceived need to defend the Chinese community. It reported that Sarekat Islam Kudus was suspected of orchestrating and provoking the residents of Kudus to attack the Chinese.²² The paper advocated for the courts to impose harsh punishment on those guilty and demanded a strengthening of police presence to defend Chinese communities and assets from attacks

²⁰ "Kariboetan di Koedoes," *Sin Po*, 1 November 1918; 2 November 1918; 6 November 1918. See also Mayshuri, *Bakar Pecinan! Konflik Pribumi vs Cina Di Kudus Tahun 1918*. (Jakarta: CèRMIN, 2006), 89-92.

²¹ "Koedoes," *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 21 November 1918.

²² Sarekat Islam (Islamic Association) was an Indonesian socio-political organisation which was the successor to Sarekat Dagang Islam (Islamic Trade Association, SDI). SDI was founded in 1911 in Surakarta by Haji Samanhudi to protect Muslim batik merchants from Chinese competition. On 12 August 1912, however, after having been involved in anti-Chinese incidents, SDI was restricted by the Dutch colonial government. A month later, the restriction was lifted, and SDI changed its name to Sarekat Islam. Under Tjokroaminoto's leadership, SI quickly transformed into a nationalist political organisation that demanded self-government from the Dutch colonial government and acquired widespread popularity. See Remy Madinier, *Islam and Politics in Indonesia: The Masyumi Party between Democracy and Integralism* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2015), 35-36.

by hoodlums.²³ By doing so, *Sin Po* argued that the government could prove its commitment to protecting the ethnic Chinese. In order to further defend the ethnic Chinese, *Sin Po* engaged in a polemic with the SI paper *Neratja* and SI leader Semaoen.²⁴ The paper repeatedly challenged Semaoen for legitimating murder and arson in the paper *Neratja*. Writers also attacked his socialist rhetoric as a guise for taking the side of Bumiputera capital over Chinese capital calling out his overt discrimination.²⁵

In the context of the pandemic, *Sin Po* and other newspapers played an important role in disseminating information regarding herbal medicines as a more cost-effective and alternative treatment to Western medicines. In the midst of turmoil and confusion in colonial Indonesia due to the pandemic, people, particularly paupers who were unfamiliar with Western medicine, turned to traditional medicines.²⁶ Herbal medicine was also seen as an alternative for people who often experienced discrimination when they attended Dutch clinics or hospitals. Traditional medicines, however, were not without their weaknesses and were usually only effective in treating symptoms such as fever or cough. Still, these traditional medicines became a valuable alternative for many people.

In this context, *Sin Po* published information on traditional medicinal remedies that brought the sick some relief. The paper, for example, reported that the residents in various villages in West Java used a sort of pumpkin (a gourd known as *labu air* or *waluh kukuk*) to cure the Spanish Flu. The pumpkin was shredded and squeezed, and the resulting liquid was then mixed with salt. Patients had to drink it three times a day until they got better.²⁷ Various doctors and *sinshe* (Chinese traditional healer) testified to the efficacy of the ingredients, although *Sin Po*'s journalists remained unsure about the

²³ "Kariboetan di Koedoes," *Sin Po*, 6 November 1918.

²⁴ For a discussion of the Kudus Riots, see Daniel Carkner, "Racial and Economic Influences in the Malay-Language Press Coverage of the Anti-Chinese Riot in 1918 Kudus, Java," *MA Thesis*, The University of British Columbia, (September 2019); The Siauwi Giap, "Group Conflict in a Plural Society: Anti-Chinese Riots in Indonesia: The Sukabumi (1963) and Kudus (1918) Incident," *Revue Du Sudest Asiatique* 1 (1966): pp. 1-31; Kuntowidjojo, "The Indonesian Muslim Middle Class in Search of Identity, 1910-1950," in *Comparative History of India and Indonesia, Vol. I, India and Indonesia from the 1920s to the 1950s: The Origins of Planning*, ed. Leonard Blussé (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 184.

²⁵ "Kariboetan di Koedoes Dipreksa dengan Katja Neutraal," *Sin Po*, 12 November 1918; "Peroesoehan di Koedoes dan Hal-Hal jang Berhoeboeng dengan Itoe (IV)," *Sin Po*, 16 November 1918.

²⁶ For more in-depth discussion of this topic see Liesbeth Hesselink, *Healers on the Colonial Market: Native Doctors and Midwives in the Dutch East Indies*. (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011).

²⁷ Ravando, *Perang Melawan Influenza*, 305.

potion. They believed as long as the pumpkin was ripe, it was still worth trying given that all the ingredients were herbal.²⁸ This traditional treatment proved quite effective in treating a variety of mild symptoms, but not sufficient to treat severe symptoms. Until cases of the Spanish Flu vanished from Indonesia in 1920 and 1921, there was never a truly effective remedy to treat the infection.

The Spanish Flu created economic chaos in different areas of colonial Indonesia and *Sin Po* tried to advocate against economic exploitation. The newspaper for example, criticized coffin makers who decided to raise the price of coffins by more than 100 per cent. In Semarang, one medium-sized casket which usually sold for f. 250, during the pandemic skyrocketed to the price of f. 500. Coffin makers argued that the price hikes were particularly the result of the shortage of staff, so they had to employ more people and work longer hours. This situation clearly brought difficulties for the poor, especially among the Chinese community who most widely used coffins.²⁹ *Sin Po* described the situation said as follows:

Families particularly experienced hardships after the death of a father or brother who previously carried the financial burden of the household. These difficulties are enough to make the entire family suffer as they now have fewer people to work. And now because the coffin price has risen, again the situation becomes more difficult because they must spend more money to buy a coffin.³⁰

For this reason, *Sin Po* appropriated its networks and used the paper to assist the needy. *Sin Po* argued that this matter had to be resolved as swiftly as possible, or poor families would grieve more and more. It then appealed to every Song Soe (Funeral Association) in each large city to solve this problem. The paper suggested they order coffins first from trusted coffin-makers and then sell them to those who wanted and needed a fair price. Another way was to arrange an agreement with coffin-makers to not take excessive profits

²⁸ "Tida Laen dari Influenza," *Sin Po*, 9 November 1918.

²⁹ As a country with the largest Muslim population, it was recommended that the washed and shrouded deceased Muslim be buried without a coffin. The compulsory customs carried out for a deceased Muslim are bathing the body with soap and water, covering the dead in white cotton sheets, performing congregational prayers for the deceased, and a burial procession.

³⁰ "Kakoerangan Peti Mati," *Sin Po*, 2 December 1918.

from the poor.³¹ Through this advocacy, *Sin Po* hoped to reduce coffin scarcity and related profiteering.

Sin Po also tried to publicise information about scams related to the flu that would cause harm to its readers.³² Many unscrupulous people saw the Spanish Flu as an opportunity to make illicit riches. They spread false news, exploiting people's panicked actions so they could gain money. In Kedungrandu Village, Purwokerto, a person named Prawadrana disseminated fake news to entire villagers that Nji Roro Kidoel (Queen of the South Sea) had visited his house. Prawadrana said that Nji Roro Kidoel had promised to help anyone combating influenza. He told villagers who wanted to be helped that they must come to the Prawadrana's house with alms of 50 cents per person. Soon after the news spread, people flocked to his house. In one day, Prawadrana raised more than f. 40. Commenting on this fraud *Sin Po* asked in one article: "Shouldn't this kind of situation be stopped by the police?"³³ In doing so the paper began to question whose interests the government was protecting.

It took several months for the colonial government to respond to the pandemic, by which time millions had died. One of the very first actions taken was to form the *Influenza-Commissie* (Influenza Commission) on 16 November 1918 based on the initiative of the Civil Medical Service. This commission was chaired by Prof. C. D. de Langen, who did extensive research on tropical medicine, with a primary task to investigate the Spanish Flu in the Indies, starting from the causes, symptoms, areas affected, mortality rates, and how to treat it. In May 1919, by which time the pandemic was subsiding, the commission issued seven recommendations related to the future prevention of the pandemic, such as urging people to wear a mask, creating influenza medicine in the form of a tablet, and disseminating pamphlets and posters written in various languages to be placed in strategic spots.³⁴

In this context of inadequate and late government intervention, many people resorted to mysticism, which had strong cultural foundations in Indonesian society, as the

³¹ "Kakoerangan Peti Mati," *Sin Po*, 2 December 1918.

³² For further examples of the scams, see Ravando, *Perang Melawan Influenza*, particularly Chapter VII.

³³ "Perkara Tachajoel," *Sin Po*, 4 November 1918.

³⁴ *De Sumatra Post*, 10 May 1919; *Koloniaal Verslag* (1920): 64-65. See also *Mededeelingen van den Burgelijken Geneeskundigen Dienst in Nederlandsch Indie*, Deel X, (1920): 76-161.

most effective measure to combat the pandemic. The mushrooming of false news and remedies in the colony to some extent could be connected to the failure of the colonial government. It failed to educate residents about the danger of the Spanish Flu. Even worse, it was incapable of anticipating the outbreak of the virus, although Dutch consulates in Hong Kong and Singapore had already sent a warning about the potential of the disease to invade the Indies.³⁵

It is clear that the colonial government never had a grand design to combat or stop the spread of a pandemic. It was in this context that *Sin Po* tried to intervene to correct any confusion concerning the influenza pandemic. One approach was to present accurate news and data related to the Spanish Flu. In addition, *Sin Po* did not hesitate to criticize the media, including other Chinese newspapers, for repeatedly spreading hoax news. *Sin Po* called out the *toapekong* procession and similar rituals that attracted large crowds as nonsense which worsened the situation as the practices would attract a large crowd, and more people would obviously get infected. *Sin Po*'s attitude caused some backlash with some calling all figures behind the paper 'uncultured' for abandoning their ancestral traditions.

Experiences of the Spanish Flu pandemic became a severe warning for the colonial government to rethink the vital role of doctors, who had only received little attention and recognition from the public before the pandemic. In addition, the influenza pandemic also made the Chinese more aware of the importance of the health sector, which often neglected them due to their financial ability or difference in skin colour. In this period of the early 20th century, Chinese Indonesian doctors played an essential part in improving health conditions.

Sin Po, Chinese Indonesian Doctors, & Health Conditions in Batavia

The Chinese Indonesian doctors who engaged in health advocacy through *Sin Po* as part of a larger mission of the paper to modernise Chinese society, rose to prominence in the early 20th century due to the effects of changing Dutch policies. By the end of the 19th century, following the introduction of the liberal policy in colonial Indonesia, the free-

³⁵ Priyanto (eds.), *Yang Terlupakan: Sejarah Pandemi Influenza di Hindia Belanda*. (Jakarta: Departemen Sejarah FIB UI, 2009), 198.

market industry triggered a massive increase in colonial profits. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Dutch finally recognized the high rates of pauperism and poverty among the Javanese, although it was cloaked by describing the phenomena as “declining welfare”³⁶ With Queen Wilhelmina’s annual Royal Oration of 1901, the Dutch government announced a new colonial policy, the so-called “Ethical Policy”. The policy was actually the Dutch version of the British ‘white man’s burden’ or the French *la mission civilisatrice* (the civilising mission).³⁷ Rather than treating Indonesia solely as a profitable cash cow, advocates of the Ethical Policy wanted Dutch people to instead conceptualise a relationship of “God-given guardianship over the Indies”. Although the Ethical Policy was underpinned by humanitarian action through modernisation and structural reform, it was also designed to preserve Dutch economic interest in the colony and with little actual advantage to those, it deserved to benefit.³⁸

To make up for years of exploitation under the cultivation system (1830-70) the policy encouraged greater use of colonial profits in Indonesia, to ‘advance’ indigenous society through the provision of more schools and some technological modernization, agricultural reform, and economic improvement. One proposed strategy to advance the welfare of local people was to improve the healthcare system, which led to an increase in the demand for physicians, medical facilities, as did the increase in the amount of private companies seeking medical care for their employees.³⁹ Overall the Dutch then advocated that “more hospitals, more outpatient clinics, more doctors, more and better-qualified nurses were required.”⁴⁰ This provided expanded opportunities for the ethnic Chinese community which was already represented in this field.

³⁶ Jan Breman, “Colonialism and Its Racial Imprint,” *Sojourn*, vol. 35, No. 3 (November 2020): 487-88.

³⁷ E. Locher-Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State: Essays on Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies 1900-1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), 16.

³⁸ Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia c. 1300 to the Present* (Hong Kong: Macmillan Education, 1981), 143. See also J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and the Netherlands India* (Cambridge University Press, 1956), 226-30.

³⁹ Hans Pols, *Nurturing Indonesia: Medicine and Decolonisation in the Dutch East Indies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3.

⁴⁰ Liesbeth Hesselink, “The Early Years of Nursing in the Dutch East Indies, 1895-1920,” in *Colonial Caring: A History of Colonial and Post-Colonial Nursing*, ed. Helen Sweet and Sue Hawkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 148.

Following the opening of the Nederlandsch Indische Artsenschool (Netherlands Indies Doctors' School, NIAS, 1913) and the expansion of School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen (School for the Education of Indigenous Doctors, STOVIA) which became the School tot Opleiding van Indische Artsen (School for the Education of the Indies Physicians, the acronym remained STOVIA, 1913), the number of Chinese Indonesians who trained as physicians increased quite significantly.⁴¹ Due to the further expansion of colonial Indonesia as a Dutch potential market, the demand for health workers was increasing too. For the first time, both medical colleges announced that they would accept students from different ethnic groups in the colony and women. In 1927, the Geneeskundige Hoogeschool (Batavia Medical School, GH), granted degrees that were comparable to those conferred by medical schools affiliated with European universities. Subsequently, the edifices of STOVIA were handed over to the newly established medical institution. Moreover, in 1928, the School ter Opleiding van Indische Tandheelkundigen, (School for the Education of Indies Dentists, STOVIT) opened next to the NIAS.⁴²

These medical colleges, according to Hans Pols, played a key role in transforming student thinking “by fostering modern, rational, and moral identities.”⁴³ During their residential training, medical students were often exposed to a diverse range of societal factors, including cultural, social, economic, and political issues. They were consistently forced to witness the suffering endured by human beings from diverse social strata and ethnic backgrounds, and this exposure stimulated their intellectual curiosity and encouraged critical thinking. Moreover, having obtained the most advanced form of education in the colony, Chinese Indonesian doctors were able to gain access to the

⁴¹ The first medical college in the Indies was the Javanese Doctors' School (Dokter-Djawa School), founded in 1851 in Batavia. It offered a two-year curriculum, instructed in the Malay language, to train assistant physicians and vaccinators. The Dokter-Djawa School underwent a name change in 1901 and was subsequently referred to as the *School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen* (STOVIA), which translates to the School for the Education of Indigenous Doctors. Subsequent to this alteration, the appellation of Dokter-Djawa was modified to *Inlandsche arts* (and subsequently *Indische arts*), and the remuneration and prestige accorded to this cohort of medical practitioners were enhanced. See Liesbeth Hesselink, *Healers on the Colonial Market*, 60-81; Hans Pols, *Nurturing Indonesia*, 49-50.

⁴² Hans Pols, *Nurturing Indonesia*, 51.

⁴³ Hans Pols, *Nurturing Indonesia*, 70.

European sphere, giving them more opportunities to interact and cooperate with European doctors.

Besides attending medical colleges in the colony, Bumiputera and Chinese students started to go to Europe for training even before the turn of the century.⁴⁴ By the early 1920s, some of them who had just completed their study overseas, namely Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe (Amsterdam), Dr. Tjan Eng Jong (Berlin) and Dr. Tan Ping Ie (Leiden), began to engage in health activism in colonial Indonesia. By engaging themselves in global health and medicine networks, Chinese Indonesian doctors also took part in new discussions on health that transcended national and colonial boundaries, as well as the governance of medicine and the interplay between health, social circumstances, and political sensibilities. This led them to engage in new ways in debates related to politics and improve the position of the Chinese in the colony. For this purpose, they also turned to newspapers to channel their vision concerning health, and *Sin Po* became the most effective vehicle to channel their aspirations.

During this period, *Sin Po* encouraged physicians in the Indies to be more active in sharing their thoughts about modern health and to provide more scientific information to the readers. *Sin Po* allowed them to use all *Sin Po* publications, ranging from daily, weekly, and *Sin Po* special publications. The editor even allowed them to determine the length of the articles they wrote. Through its editorials and articles, the paper often stimulated Chinese Indonesian physicians to engage in medical research. *Sin Po* *Wekelijksche Editie* and *De Chineesche Revue*, two of *Sin Po*'s most prominent publications, provided greater room for physicians to publish their views even articles on other themes.⁴⁵ According to *Sin Po*, this sort of strategy was very much required, given

⁴⁴ Saki Murakami, "Call for Doctors! Uneven Medical Provision and the Modernization of State Health Care during the Decolonization of Indonesia, 1930s-1950s," in *Cars, Conduits, and Kampongs: The Modernization of the Indonesian City, 1920-1960*, ed. Freek Colombijn (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 34.

⁴⁵ During this period, *Sin Po*'s management realised that the current newspaper's format could not accommodate extensive and lengthy research. Therefore, on 7 April 1923 the board decided to launch *Sin Po* *Wekelijksche Editie* (*Sin Po* Weekly Edition) in response to this issue. *Sin Po*'s revolutionary idea did not stop there. In January 1927, the board of *Sin Po* took another significant leap by publishing *De Chineesche Revue* (*The Chinese Review*). This edition was a quarterly issue of a Dutch-language publication in magazine format, with Kwee Kek Beng serving as the editor-in-chief. With its extensive feature articles, stunning visuals, and competent columnists, both publications consciously targeted at the urban Peranakan middle-class reader, who were politically active and often imagining China. See *Sin Po Jubileum Nummer, 1910-1935*; Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Taon Sebagai Wartawan*, 41-2.

the low awareness among Chinese communities concerning hygiene. As discussed above, many still considered illnesses and epidemics the results of evil spirits or punishment from gods.⁴⁶

By 1924, six Chinese Indonesian doctors had opened private practices in Batavia, namely Dr. Lie Tjwan Ing, Dr. Lie Tjwan Kiat, Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe, Dr. Tan Eng An, Dr. Kan Teng Liang, and Dr. Ang Eng Tjoei.⁴⁷ Despite their small number, these Chinese doctors were able to significantly improve health services in colonial Indonesia. All of them shared a similar vision of trying to eliminate barriers that prevented the poor from accessing proper health services for many generations.⁴⁸ They frequently wrote articles for *Sin Po* to educate people about good hygiene, particularly Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe, who was known as the leading supporter of *Sin Po*. This period was also marked by the emergence of other Chinese doctors who shared a similar vision about social medicines, namely Dr. Yap Hong Tjoen, Dr. Sie Boen Lian (Yogyakarta), Dr. Oei Kiauw Pik (Surabaya), and Dr. Liem Ghik Djiang (Malang). Together they pioneered the establishment of a social hospital whose primary aim was to accommodate the poor in each city.

Doctors had to counter many popular misconceptions about Western medicine. Concerning childbirth, for non-European populations it was only when complications occurred that a doctor or certified midwife was called. However, often it was already too late. Women regularly blamed physicians and refused to ask for their aid in subsequent incidents. In some cases, labouring mothers spread false stories about doctors, causing others to lose faith in modern medicine.⁴⁹ J. Kwast, a civil physician in Krawang (West Java) around 1900, had heard from the village head that some *doekoen* (shaman/a traditional healer) were spreading rumours that terminally ill patients were being poisoned in hospitals to expedite their demise. False news also spread that European surgeon sometimes just started amputating the body parts of patients without obtaining

⁴⁶ “Kasehatan,” *Sin Po*, 5 January 1923.

⁴⁷ *Jubileum 25 Tahun Jang Seng Ie*. (Jakarta: Jang Seng Ie, 1951), 1.

⁴⁸ Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe, “Kasehatan dan Kadokteran,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 14 February 1931.

⁴⁹ Hesselink, *Healers on the Colonial Market*, 13-25.

their consent.⁵⁰ The situation worsened because most hospitals in the colony were managed by unreliable and incompetent staff, which tarnished the reputation of the hospitals.⁵¹ Thus, hospitals were often viewed by most Chinese and Bumiputera with a certain amount of suspicion: as ‘strange’ and ‘haunted’ places.⁵²

Most people in colonial Indonesia also considered Western medicine to be ‘unusual’, ‘violating religious principles’, and forbidden on account of *adat* (local customs and law).⁵³ Many favoured being treated at home by their families or by using traditional medicines. For acute diseases, a *doekoen* was usually summoned. However, the main factor why people refused to be treated at the hospital was because “private hospitals in Batavia did not open their doors widely to accept Asian patients, most of whom were afraid to go to the hospital.”⁵⁴

Dr. Kwa felt that the Chinese in Batavia also faced a similar problem as most of them did not really believe in the quality of Chinese doctors, despite their academic background as graduates of STOVIA, NIAS, or even famous Dutch universities. This sort of phenomenon emerged because European doctors had dominated the medical profession in the Indies for many years, leading Chinese society to regard the profession as ‘European’ or ‘Dutch’. Ang Jan Goan tried to change this perception by arguing in *Sin Po* that notwithstanding whether a doctor was Chinese or European both had qualifications based on the same medical education. In addition, Ang also posited that the Chinese doctors perhaps had more advantages because they understood the population’s mental state better than the European practitioners. Their familiarity with the nature, language, traditions and the lifestyle of the Chinese population caused them to better understand Chinese patients than the European doctors could. For Chinese patients who did not understand Dutch, seeing a Chinese doctor made them more at ease and, at the

⁵⁰ *Onderzoek naar de Mindere Welvaart der Inlandsche Bevolking op Java en Madoera: Deel IXa: Overzicht van de Uitkomsten der Gewestelijke Onderzoekingen naar de Economie van de Desa en daaruit Gemaakte Gevolgtrekkingen: I, Eigenlijk Overzicht van de Samentrekkingen der Afdeelingsverslagen (1904-6)*. (Batavia: Papyrus, 1911), 91.

⁵¹ Liesbeth Hesselink, “The Early Years of Nursing in the Dutch East Indies, 1895-1920,” 146.

⁵² L. Th. Mayer, *De Javaan als Doekoen, een Etnografische Bijdrage*. (Weltevreden: Kolff, 1918), 5.

⁵³ See L. Th. Mayer, *De Javaan als Doekoen*, 5.

⁵⁴ *Jubileum 25 Tahun Jang Seng Ie*. (Jakarta: Jang Seng Ie, 1951), 1-2.

same time, Chinese doctors were better able to convey empathy and influence their patients.⁵⁵

Dr. Kwa also encouraged Chinese newspapers in Indonesia to challenge the assumption that Chinese doctors were lower than European doctors because he believed these papers could reach all levels of society within a short time and therefore act as a tool to shift perceptions across classes. *Sin Po*, in particular, agreed to publish articles, reviews, news, and testimonies regarding health issues and welcomed all doctors to submit their articles to the paper. The strategy turned out to be effective. Slowly but surely, they were able to change a common negative attitude of patients towards Chinese doctors. During a meeting with two *Sin Po* leaders, Tjoe Bou San and Ang Jan Goan, Dr. Kwa stated: “The Chinese doctors in Batavia indeed must thank *Sin Po*,” because they observed that after *Sin Po* published many articles on the topics the number of patients who visited Chinese doctors increased dramatically.⁵⁶

Sin Po argued that the continuous promotion of awareness about health problems in colonial Indonesia was necessary because of people’s lack of knowledge about proper hygiene and poor knowledge of health. Most of them, for instance, did not understand that tuberculosis (TB) and other chronic diseases—like cholera and typhus— could easily be transmitted to infants through unboiled water. Many parents also did not understand the importance of breastfeeding and having good air circulation in the house, both of which were essential for infants. *Sin Po* also argued that the majority of dwellings in Batavia had no ventilation and were located in slums, and that this sort of environment was dangerous for children’s growth and development.⁵⁷ Furthermore, many mothers gave powdered milk to their infants but did not pay attention to the dilution ratios and how it was stored, and as a result, many infants died from milk poisoning. Fake and cheap powdered milk also circulated in the colony at the same time. This fake milk was fatal for babies as it could lead to diarrhea, dehydration and even death in some cases.⁵⁸ The

⁵⁵ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 59. See also “Djaga Kasehatan,” *Sin Po*, 14 May 1925.

⁵⁶ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 59.

⁵⁷ “Angka Tinggi dari Kamatian Baji,” *Sin Po*, 30 May 1922.

⁵⁸ “Boeang Djiwa Tionghoa Pertjoema,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 15 August 1925. See also Chiara Formichi, “The Modernity of Tradition: Women and ‘Healthy Progress’ in Late Colonial Java and Sumatra,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 56(6), Cambridge University Press, (2002): 1983–2017.

situation was made worse because the colonial government seemed to not have a health plan. Most of the policies related to health were incidental and only formulated when a severe outbreak occurred in the colony.⁵⁹ For decades, the government left health care to Christian *zending* (missions) and private companies. As a result, in many cases, chronic diseases often quickly developed into outbreaks with severe fatalities.⁶⁰

To draw public attention to discrimination in medical services, *Sin Po* frequently emphasised the high infant mortality rates (*zuigelingensterfte*) among the Chinese and Bumiputera. Based on *Sin Po*'s analyses, these mortality rates were triggered by several factors, such as poverty, hereditary diseases (especially syphilis), the difficulty for women to receive delivery assistance from doctors or certified midwives, and poor knowledge of parents about how to take care of newborns. Most families did not believe in Western medicine and instead relied on *doekoen*, indigenous healers, who used a "combination of magical and empirical knowledge."⁶¹

A report issued by the Batavia Health Service in 1917, indicated that the Chinese had the highest infant mortality rate (523 out of 1,000 infants) in comparison to Bumiputera (400 out of 1,000 infants) and the Europeans (107 out of 1,000 infants). This figure, according to *Sin Po*, reflected the poor quality of medical services and healthcare in Batavia where many Chinese resided.⁶² In his memoir, Ang Jan Goan, *Sin Po*'s director, also portrayed the dire situation by writing that he had lost several infant siblings due to severe illnesses.⁶³

⁵⁹ Bahauddin, "Dokter Jawa dan Mantri Kesehatan dalam Sejarah Kesehatan Indonesia pada Masa Kolonial." Accessed from https://www.academia.edu/4435361/Dokter_Jawa_dan_Mantri_Kesehatan_dalam_Sejarah_Kesehatan_In_donesia_pada_Masa_Kolonial, 3 August 2020.

⁶⁰ "Kematian di antara Anak-Baji," *Sin Po*, 17 December 1923.

⁶¹ There were around 17,639 *dukun* in Java and Madura in 1894, which was lower than the estimated figure of 33,000 reported by the regional administrators in a survey conducted in 1902. The survey assumed the presence of one *dukun* per village. The total population at that time was about 28.3 million, which meant an average of one *dukun* for every 850 people. See J. Bijker, *Rapport der Commissie tot Voorbereiding eener Reorganisatie van den Burgerlijken Geneeskundigen Dienst*. (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1908), 265; Hesselink, *Healers on the Colonial Market*, 16 & 276.

⁶² "Jang Seng Ie: Pridatonja Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe," *Sin Po*, 29 December 1924.

⁶³ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 1 & 61-2. See also H.F. Tillema, *Kromoblanda: Over Het Vraagstuk van 'Het Wonen' in Kromo's Groote Land*. (Den Haag: Uden Masman, 1921), 336.

In 1923, the mortality rates among Chinese infants in Batavia were six times higher compared to the European infants (36.6 per cent compared to 5.8 per cent). The situation worsened in 1924. Based on the report issued by BGD, the infant mortality rates in Batavia grew eight times higher than those of European infants (40.5 per cent compared to 5.6 per cent).⁶⁴ *Sin Po* regularly tracked the infant mortality rate in Batavia, which indicated how deplorable health conditions were among Bumiputera and ethnic Chinese in the region (See Figure 2.1).

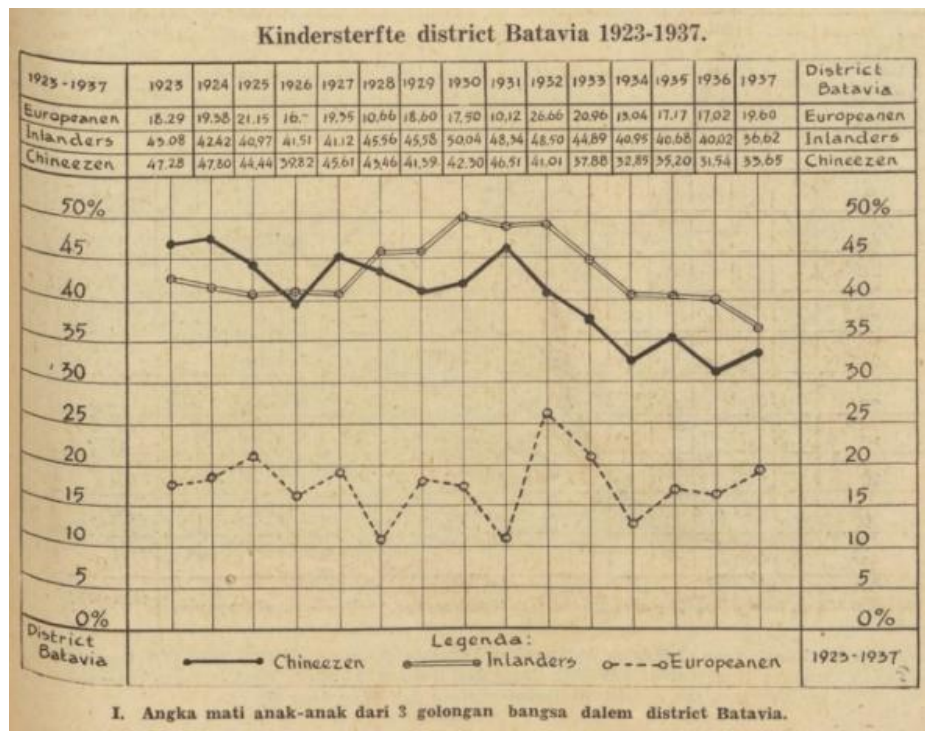


Figure 2.1. The infant mortality rate in Batavia, 1923-1937. Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 17 September 1938.

To address infant mortality *Sin Po* stressed the importance of proper parental treatment for pregnant women, which was often neglected in colonial Indonesia. Most pregnant women rarely visited a doctor or midwife for regular check-ups because they had no money to afford treatment fees. To improve the situation, some clinics and hospitals in various cities decided to provide free examination and delivery support for pregnant women. *Sin Po* particularly praised Dr. N.J.A.F. Boerma, who established a clinic located in Hospitaalweg No. 32, Batavia that aimed at giving free medical support

⁶⁴ "Boeng Djiwa Tionghoa Pertjoema," *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 15 August 1925.

to pregnant women.⁶⁵ Given the fact that one social clinic was obviously insufficient, *Sin Po* continued to report on high infant mortality rates in Batavia. In fact, the paper often referred to Batavia as ‘The City of Illness’ because nearly all varieties of diseases could easily be found in the capital.⁶⁶

To resolve these health predicaments, several Chinese philanthropists and doctors in Batavia established a health institution called Jang Seng Ie. Almost all initial activities were focused on reducing the mortality rates among pregnant women and infants by providing certified midwives, good medical equipment, and qualified doctors. In doing so, these Chinese philanthropists and doctors worked together with Dutch doctors. Together, services provided free medical consultations available for everyone, as well as a fee-based option for those who wished to pay. Following the establishment of the JSI polyclinic and hospital, their social mission expanded swiftly. *Sin Po* played a vital role in promoting JSI activities. By establishing JSI, Chinese doctors demonstrated independent action and no longer needed to fully rely on the guidance of the Dutch government.

Sin Po and the Founding of Jang Seng Ie

The founding of JSI provides some important insights into how *Sin Po* supported health activism and how the ethnic Chinese community also transitioned into functioning for a broader purpose. On 20 December 1924, Yo Heng Kam, a leading businessman who later became the first chairman of JSI, sent a letter to *Sin Po*. The letter, published in a rubric called “*Soerat Kiriman*” (A Reader’s Letter), highlighted a *Burgerlijken Geneeskundigen Dienst* report (Civil Medical Service, BGD) that mentioned the high maternal and child mortality rates among Chinese society in colonial Indonesia.⁶⁷ It explained that the JSI

⁶⁵ “*Pertoeloengan Branak*,” *Sin Po*, 31 January 1922.

⁶⁶ Until the late 19th century Dutch military personnel, merchants, and mercenaries regarded the Indies as among the most perilous regions in the world. Instances have been recorded where entire armies comprising new regiments met their demise within a span of three years from their deployment. According to Hans Pols, it was a prevalent occurrence for one-third of the European population to perish annually, leading to Batavia being widely recognised as the burial ground for Europeans. See Hans Pols, “Notes from Batavia, the Europeans’ Graveyard: The 19th Century Debate on Acclimatization in the Dutch East Indies,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 67, No. 1 (2012): 120-48; “*Betawi Kota Penjakit*,” *Sin Po*, 7 June 1922.

⁶⁷ In 1924, there were 963 European infants born in Batavia, of which 54 died or 5.6 per cent. Meanwhile, although the Chinese recorded a high birth-rate with 1,980 babies were born throughout the year, but they

was established by a group of doctors and Chinese philanthropists in Batavia to address this situation. Besides introducing JSI in the letter, Yo also stated that the mission of this health association was to reduce the high mortality rates in Batavia, particularly among Chinese and Bumiputera who were often discriminated against by Dutch doctors and hospitals.⁶⁸

After appointing members of the JSI board, the director of *Sin Po*, Ang Jan Goan, and Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe, a prominent Chinese Indonesian doctor and key founder of the JSI, rented a small house located in Mangga Besar, Batavia, which had one spacious room and four medium-sized bedrooms.⁶⁹ JSI appointed midwives and doctors used the house for their medical practices and for treating patients.⁷⁰ The JSI executives personally requested *Sin Po* to notify the public about the opening ceremony such that all people in Batavia would know about the opening and where to go if they were ill and did not have money to seek medical treatment.⁷¹ The board of JSI believed in the effectiveness of *Sin Po*, which had a circulation of up to 10,000 copies per day, as a medium for spreading news of their services. The board hoped that people in Indonesia, particularly the ethnic Chinese, would support the mission of JSI, financially and morally.⁷²

After a few months of operating in Batavia, the board of JSI began to work towards opening a polyclinic so that JSI could accommodate all people, not only mothers

also endured high mortality with 803 fatalities or 40.5 per cent. Therefore, the mortality rates among Chinese infants in Batavia was eight times higher when compared to the European. See “Boeang Djiwa Tionghoa Pertjoema,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 15 August 1925.

⁶⁸ “Soerat Kiriman,” *Sin Po*, 20 December 1924.

⁶⁹ The first board of Jang Seng Ie consisted of five Chinese Peranakans and three Dutch, namely: Yo Heng Kam (Chairman), Injo Gan Kiong (Secretary), Khoe A Fan (Treasurer), Ang Yan Goan & Yo Kim Thay (Commissaris), Dr. C.D. de Langen, Dr. N.J.A.F. Boerma, Th. Ligthart (Advisors). See Jang Seng Ie, *Perkoempoelan Jang Seng Ie: Verslag Tahoen Pertama 1925*. (Weltevreden: G. Kolff & Co., 1925), 3.

⁷⁰ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 62.

⁷¹ The official inauguration of JSI took place at Prinsenlaan No. 44, Batavia, on 28 December 1924. The opening was attended by several prominent figures, namely Major Khouw Kim An, Dr. Ch. W.F. Winckel (Inspector of BGD), Dr. Ang Eng Tjoei, Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe, Dr. Lie Tjwan Ing, Dr. Tan Eng An, J. Vermeer (Police Overseer of Batavia), Mr. A. Meyroos (Mayor of Batavia), Mohamad Halid, Phoa Keng Hek, Lieutenant Yo Kim Thay, Lie Hin Liam, and other honorary guests. See “Perkoempoelan Jang Seng Ie,” *Sin Po*, 27 December 1924.

⁷² The closeness between *Sin Po*’s editors and the board of JSI became another particular motivation behind *Sin Po*’s endless support for JSI. People even often referred *Sin Po* as the non-official mouthpiece of JSI. It was also because *Sin Po*’s director, Ang Yan Goan, was appointed as one of the initial commissioners of the association.

and children. The JSI polyclinic was officially opened on 11 May 1925. In contrast to most of the clinics in the colony, which usually only had one doctor and nurse, when it opened the JSI had seven specialist doctors (four Dutch and three Chinese) to assist the polyclinic, namely Dr. G.J. Brand (ear, nose and throat specialist), Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe (general disease), Dr. Ang Eng Tjoei (ophthalmologist), Dr. Johanna de Geus (paediatrician), Dr. Tan Eng An (skin and venereal disease), Dr. C. D. de Langen & Dr. N.J.A.F. Boerma (health consultation) (See Figure 2.2).⁷³ Despite marked distinctions in ethnicity, religious association, education background, and perhaps their political engagement, there were striking similarities across these health professionals. They shared a common perspective on modern medicine and demonstrated a strong commitment to the field of healthcare. They were confident that the adoption of Western-style training and the movements of educated specialists, such as themselves, were indispensable in advancing societal progress.

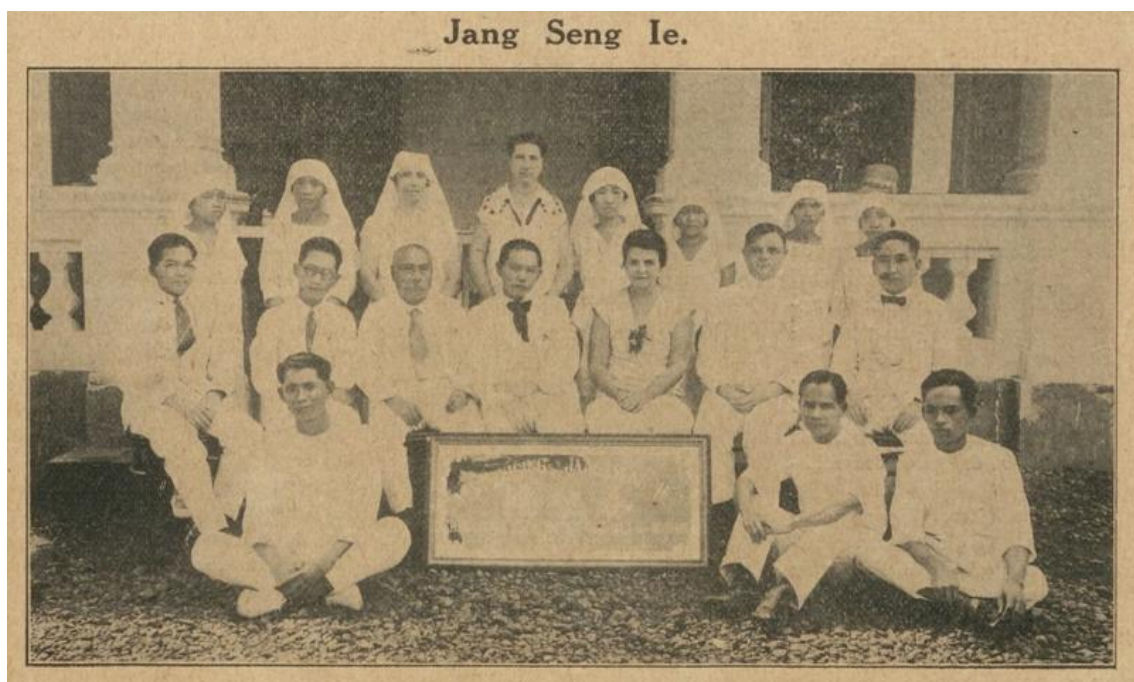


Figure 2.2. Several figures of the early JSI. Middle (left to right): Dr. Tjong Boen Kie, Dr. Kwee Oen Liam, Dr. Siahaja, Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe, Dr. de Geus, Dr. Brand, and Dr. Ang Eng Tjoei. Behind Dr. Kwa was Dr. Kwa-Lips and on her left was Zr. van der Linden and on her right was Zr. Gouw Koei Sioe. Standing next to Zr. van der Linden was Djoelaiha, JSI midwife; and sitting in front of Dr. Brand was Sumual, the clerk of JSI. Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 10 December 1927.

⁷³ Jang Seng Ie, *Perkoempoelan Jang Seng Ie: Verslag Tahoen Pertama 1925*, 6.

Within ten days after the grand opening, *Sin Po* reported that the polyclinic had already treated 137 patients from different ethnic backgrounds, consisting of 101 Chinese, 34 Bumiputera, and 2 Europeans.⁷⁴ The number of patients continued to increase significantly. Throughout the year, the polyclinic served 7,238 people, with the highest number of patients in October 1925 of 1,308 patients.⁷⁵ The number of Bumiputera patients who visited JSI was also grew every day, suggesting as *Sin Po* reported that “JSI does not look at nation or religion in assisting anyone who must be helped.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, the JSI operated far more effectively than the hospitals and the clinics of the colonial government.

A year after the polyclinic’s establishment, the management realised that the financial support offered by Chinese society was dramatically diminishing. Most of the financial backing ironically came from outside Batavia and was regarded by some as a slap in the face for the Chinese in Batavia given that the majority of JSI’s humanitarian endeavours were dedicated to Batavia’s citizens. *Sin Po* editors observed that this was related to a bad habit of ethnic Chinese in the Indies who were often eager and enthusiastic to support movements at the beginning but then lessened their support once an action commenced. *Sin Po* referred here to the example of Chinese schools (Tiong Hoa Hak Tong) in the colony. After the revolution in China, *hoakiao* began to establish Chinese schools in many countries, modelling schools in China. In colonial Indonesia, many Chinese schools were founded in the early 20th century. However, only a small number survived for more than a decade, because Chinese funders lost interest in supporting the school movement. *Sin Po* was afraid that the same fate would befall the JSI. Thus, the paper frequently wrote about this problem in its editorials, assuming many philanthropists in Batavia were not aware of the declining funding. Moreover, *Sin Po* also encouraged the poor to remind the rich to continue to support JSI.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ “Merampas Haknja jang Miskin,” *Sin Po*, 25 May 1925.

⁷⁵ Jang Seng Ie, *Vereeniging Jang Seng Ie: Verslag over het Eerste Jaar 1925*. (Weltevreden: G. Kolff & Co., 1926), 27.

⁷⁶ Jang Seng Ie, *Vereeniging Jang Seng Ie: Verslag over het Eerste Jaar 1925*, 33-34.

⁷⁷ “Jang Seng Ie,” *Sin Po*, 30 July 1926.



Figure 2.3. The polyclinic of JSI appeared on the front cover of *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*.
Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 13 December 1930.

Sin Po viewed the declining support as a serious matter and decided to hold a sort of essay competition called *prijsvraag* (competition) asking participants to respond to the question: “Why are the majority of Chinese people not willing to support a charity movement?” (*Apa sebab-sebabnja kabanjakan hartawan Tionghoa tida goembira dalem perkara menoendjang pendirian atawa gerakan amal?*) Each entrant was required to write an essay on this topic and submit it to *Sin Po*’s office in Asemka. The authors of the three best essays with the most convincing answers would each receive f. 30, f. 20, and f. 10.⁷⁸ Besides trying to outline various factors behind Chinese’s reluctance to donate money to a distinct charity movement, *Sin Po* also used the *prijsvraag* as a strategy to criticise the wealth community members and to encourage them to be actively involved

⁷⁸ “Prijsvraag,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 10 December 1927.

in supporting any institution or association that clearly benefited many people. In this case, *Sin Po* showed its pro-community spirit by trying to incorporate reader ideas to solve problems, particularly within Chinese society.⁷⁹

Although the JSI had significantly contributed to reducing infant mortality in Batavia, the general health condition of the Chinese population was still deplorable. Based on the mortality rate in 1928, *Sin Po* revealed that out of 1,000 people, the Chinese community in the Indies recorded a mortality rate of 43.34 people. The Bumiputera population was listed second with a mortality rate of 40.22 people, and then Europeans who registered 10.16 per 1,000 people. *Sin Po* acknowledged that the high mortality rate among the Chinese in Batavia seemed to become normalised. The paper argued that “it was the result of the lack of health knowledge and inadequate medical access among Chinese society.”⁸⁰

To stimulate and steer public opinion, *Sin Po* highlighted the arguments of European doctors and missions (*zending*) who were surprised to learn how the Chinese in the colony still had not yet established their own hospital. In their view the discrimination frequently experienced by the ethnic Chinese should have motivated them to recognise the importance of having their own hospital. A similar question was also raised by some delegates at the Fourth Pacific Science Congress (16-25 May 1929) who believed the Chinese in Indonesia must have a reliable research institute given the fact that they had been interacting with Europeans for hundreds of years. Delegates were shocked to learn that there was not a single health institution that could facilitate medical research for Chinese doctors.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Sin Po* received almost 100 articles for the competition and the three best pieces were published in *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 18 February 1928. The first winner, Lee Soen Liang, concluded there were at least five main factors which triggered the problem, namely: (1) Greed; (2) Excessive bequests from parents to their children and grandchildren; (3) *Kowkati* (selfishness); (4) Snobbish; (5) Acting dishonestly. Meanwhile, Injo Bian Hin, the third winner, also expressed a similar opinion by arguing there were many Chinese who only thought about the benefit and thus assumed social institutions JSI or THHK would not bring any benefit to them. Because if they or their relatives got sick, they would not seek any treatment in JSI because they had money to call the best doctors or nurses in the Indies to treat them. A similar problem also occurred to THHK as most of the Chinese parents favoured to send their children to Dutch schools which offered a better-quality education than any THHK schools in the Indies. See *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 18 February 1928.

⁸⁰ “Angka Kematian,” *Sin Po*, 15 February 1929.

⁸¹ “Perloenja Ada Hospitaal Tionghoa,” *Sin Po*, 27 June 1929.

Feeling ashamed, *Sin Po* wrote that if the *zending* and The Salvation Army (*Bala Keselamatan*) could establish various proper hospitals even in remote areas, the Chinese overseas (*hoakiao*) in Java should be able to do the same too. The Chinese also had population advantages compared to the Europeans, which should also have motivated them to have their own hospital. *Sin Po* explained that if a hospital still had not yet materialised, it was mainly the result of people's unwillingness, and not because they were incapable of establishing one. Articles about the plan had been published frequently in the Chinese press and the JSI management also went door-to-door to ask for people's support. But still, no matter how hard they worked, most people were sceptical and not enthusiastic about the proposal. Several wealthy Chinese who had promised to support the project did not follow through. "No wonder if the situation leads the Chinese to be a joke by other nations," wrote *Sin Po*.⁸²

Sin Po criticised wealthy Chinese who were just concerned about accumulating more money and did not care about the effort to establish a hospital, which was essential to their fellow Chinese. It also criticised the Chinese in Batavia, saying they should be ashamed of the high mortality rates in the city, particularly given the fact their financial position was far better than the Bumiputera. Although the establishment of a JSI hospital would be a solution to the problem, *Sin Po* criticised the Chinese, arguing it seemed they preferred "to see such high mortality rates rather than spending money to reverse the awful statistic."⁸³

Sin Po advised the JSI board to not depend solely on these apathetic people. The rich certainly did not feel obligated to create a social hospital to serve the underprivileged. Whenever they were ill, they could quickly obtain the best therapies at any European hospitals and, if necessary, could ask half-dozen nurses to treat them simultaneously. Faced with this context *Sin Po* instead prompted the board to focus on the lower and middle-class people. "Their contribution may be small, but little by little, it would be eventually sufficient to establish a hospital."⁸⁴

⁸² "Perloenja Ada Hospitaal Tionghoa," *Sin Po*, 27 June 1929.

⁸³ "Angka Kematian," *Sin Po*, 15 February 1929.

⁸⁴ "Perloenja Ada Hospitaal Tionghoa," *Sin Po*, 27 June 1929.

A committee called ‘Jang Seng Ie Hospitaal Fonds’ (Jang Seng Ie Hospital Foundation) was formed with the specific task of searching for donors and collect donations. The committee consisted of Dr. Ang Eng Tjoei, Lim Soen Kim, Thung Tjoen Pok, Loa Sek Hie, and Lauw Soen Bak. *Sin Po* actively assisted their project by regularly inviting all readers to support the hospital plan (See Figure 2.4).⁸⁵ The hospital ground-breaking was performed by Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe’s son, Kwa Hong Giok, on 1 October 1931. It was built on a 45,000 m² block of land and finished on 21 February 1932. The opening ceremony was carried out without a large party, as a symbol of solidarity to their fellow countrymen in China who, the committee emphasised, had experienced a series of unfortunate incidents because of the invasion of Japan.⁸⁶



Figure 2.4. An example of a call for donation for Sin Po Jang Seng Ie Hospitaalfonds. The text reads: “Ladies and Gentlemen whatever donations you can make large or small, will always be appreciated for used by the Foundation.” Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 28 May 1932.

The collaboration between *Sin Po* and JSI strengthened in the 1930s when families across various regions in colonial Indonesia were shocked by the sudden death of a

⁸⁵ “Jang Seng Ie,” *Sin Po*, 22 July 1929.

⁸⁶ Jang Seng Ie, *Vereeniging Jang Seng Ie: Jaarverslag Augustus 31 t/m Juni 1932* (Batavia: Drukkerij Kenanga, 1932), 14.

thousand infants due to seizures (*stuip*). Some of the survivors became permanently disabled and most of the victims were Chinese infants. Based on the statistics issued by JSI, at least 25% of children in Batavia died because of the disease.⁸⁷ Through its *prijsvraag*, *Sin Po* then challenged readers to share information or conduct research to discover why the disease mostly affected Chinese infants in comparison to European or Bumiputera infants. *Sin Po* decided to announce the result on 28 December 1934, together with the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of JSI and offered f. 1,000 as the main prize to the winner.⁸⁸

After conducting various laboratory experiments, two doctors from JSI, Dr. C. D. de Langen, and Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe, successfully discovered the cause of the disease. They proposed that those infants suffered from lead poisoning, derived from contaminated and unlicensed cosmetic powder applied by the mother. Almost all powders imported from China contained this substance, and many Chinese mothers favoured the powder because of the low price, and the belief it could make their skin glow.

This lead could instantly infiltrate the victim's blood through the lungs, intestines, and skin. In a short time, this poison could spread to the bones, brain, and other limbs. Symptoms of people who were poisoned varied between adults and children. Adults usually experienced severe abdominal pain, trouble urinating, and a loss of appetite. If the condition worsened, their hands, feet, and nerves would become paralysed. Next, the victims would faint, experience seizures, and eventually die. In the case of children, the signs were slightly different, characterised by a lack of blood, loss of appetite, vomiting, and stomach-ache. Within two to four weeks, the child's brain would be affected, causing the child to become weak and pale. Not long afterwards, the child would experience seizures for several days before dying.

Sin Po decided to simplify the results of their research into an article so that people realised the danger of the substance and knew how to prevent the disease. The article also mentioned how doctors had misdiagnosed the disease as syphilis and treated the patient with syphilis treatment, which obviously did not bring significant results. This

⁸⁷ "Ratjoen Timah (dari Bedak) Saban Taon Ambil Korban Beriboe Anak Orok Tionghoa jang Mati Lantaran Banpie (Stuip)," *Sin Po*, 15 December 1933.

⁸⁸ Jang Seng Ie, *Vereeniging Jang Seng Ie: Verslag dari Taon 1934, Januari-December* (Batavia: Vereeniging Jang Seng Ie, 1935), 7.

misdiagnosis, *Sin Po* argued, evidenced how the quality of scientific research in the Indies was still lagging. *Sin Po* reported how this form of poisoning had long been known in Japan, France, and the United States, but doctors in the Indies had only recently discovered the problem.⁸⁹

Dr. Ong Hok Lan, a physician and Peranakan community leader who graduated from NIAS Surabaya, supported the research results and confirmed that powder and hair dye became the main medium to spread the poison. However, he also highlighted how pipes, kitchen furniture, and bed frames, could also spread the poison because most of those items were made from lead. Japan and some other countries imposed strict regulations by banning the use of lead material to make household goods. Even though this problem had caused many casualties in China and Indonesia, both countries were slow in regulating and restricting the export-import of those products. Thus, it was not surprising that the powder from China could easily enter Indonesia.⁹⁰

Sin Po bluntly criticised the government's lack of seriousness in solving this case. Although in the beginning, the colonial government forced every product manufacturer to make public the percentage level of lead in their product, this ordinance was not strictly enforced. The Dutch colonial government had already issued a regulation in 1931, which prohibited people from selling, making, and importing unlicensed powders in the colony. Inspectors from *Dienst der Volksgezondheid* (Public Health Service) and the local authorities had the right to confiscate any item containing lead. They could also prosecute the manufacturers and importers with a three-month sentence and a maximum penalty of 300 guilders. This regulation, however, was never strictly implemented.⁹¹ Some powder products, which obviously contained a vast amount of lead, remained on the market. Thus, *Sin Po* called the law nothing more than nonsense as the colonial government did almost nothing to protect its citizens from the danger of the substance.⁹²

Through *Sin Po* also, Dr. Kwa encouraged all parents to only use licensed powder for their safety. Moreover, Dr. Kwa also used the paper to protest against the Dutch

⁸⁹ "Ratjoen Timah (dari Bedak) Saban Taon Ambil Korban Beriboe Anak Orok Tionghoa jang Mati Lantaran Banpie (Stuip)," *Sin Po*, 15 December 1933.

⁹⁰ Dr. Ong Hok Lan, "Tentang Ratjoen Timah," *Sin Po*, 20 December 1933.

⁹¹ "Ratjoen Bedak," *Sin Po*, 6 February 1934.

⁹² "Lodencephalopathie dan Perlindungan Wet Terhadap Ratjoen Timah," *Sin Po*, 20 June 1934.

colonial government for not preventing the contaminated powder from entering Indonesia. The efforts of *Sin Po* and other Chinese Peranakan newspapers to generate high publicity on the issue was indeed quite effective. Since *Sin Po* started publicising the risk in its paper, JSI and other Chinese doctors in Batavia did not find patients with similar illnesses anymore.⁹³

Both Dr. C. D. de Langen, and Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe refused to accept the competition prize and instead asked *Sin Po* to donate it to JSI. JSI used the money to conduct new research into *rachitis* (rickets), which at that time also affected many Chinese infants. JSI also decided to open a laboratory service for retailers or anybody who needed to check the chemical contents in their powder. JSI charged f. 1 for the examination, and the money was donated to 'Fonds Bahaja Bandjir di Tiongkok' (Foundation for Flood Disaster in China).⁹⁴

Prior to the 1920s, hospitals in Indonesia primarily prioritised the provision of medical care for ailments such as cholera, dysentery, and tuberculosis. However, there was a notable absence of specialised clinics dedicated to the treatment of opium addiction.⁹⁵ Therefore, because of Dr. Kwa's initiative, around 1934, JSI also began to engage in the rehabilitation of opium and morphine addicts. Dr. Kwa learned about and then used a similar method to that used by Dr. Ma Wen Chiao, a famous doctor in China who had cured many opium and morphine addicts. After hearing Dr. Kwa's plan to

⁹³ Dr. C.D. de Langen later developed further research on this issue by taking twenty Chinese powders as an example. Based on his laboratory research, twelve of them positively contained lead poison. The results were published in GTNI under the title "Loodencephalitis en Meningitis bij Kinderen op Java." In the article, Dr. de Langen presented one example of a seven-month-old infant who was contaminated by lead poison. Dr. de Langen found out that the infection occurred when the mother breastfeed the baby. It turned out that the mother had always washed her nipples using *Aqua Goulardi* (Goulard Water), which contained a large amount of lead. This water was often used as a cooling, sedative, and astringent wash for phlegmons, severe wounds, irritable ulcers, etc. See Dr. C.D. de Langen, "Loodencephalitis en Meningitis bij Kinderen op Java," *GTNI*, Deel 74, Aflevering 3, (1934): 151-58; Jonathan Pereira, *The Elements of Materia Medica and Therapeutics* Vol. I. (London, 1842), 812.

⁹⁴ Jang Seng Ie, *Vereeniging Jang Seng Ie: Verslag dari Taon 1935, Januari-December* (Batavia: Vereeniging Jang Seng Ie, 1936), 8.

⁹⁵ The first specialized and rehabilitation treatment for opium addicts was founded through close cooperation between Dutch and Chinese in Batavia, who established the *Anti-Opium Hospitaal Vereeniging* (AOHV) in 1913 based on 'Christian faith' (*Christelijk geloof*). The AOHV underwent a name change and became known as the Anti-Opium Vereeniging (AOV). The organisation's strategies were influenced by anti-opium initiatives in China and Taiwan. The official recognition of the AOV was granted through the issuance of Governor-General Decree No. 45 on 3 December 1919. See *Anti-Opium Hospitaal Vereeniging te Batavia, Eerste Jaarverslag* (1 April 1915-31 Maart 1916). (Batavia: Boekhandel Kourant, 1916), 8-16.

rehabilitate the addicts, Tan Hoe Teng, Loa Sek Hie, and Lim Tjoei Keng, who represented Chinese youth organisations, namely Shioh Ting Hui, Tsing Nien Hui, and Chung Hsioh respectively, joined Dr. Kwa as volunteers on the project.

This rehabilitation process typically required an extended period, during which doctors needed to closely monitor the patient. Hence, Dr. Kwa suggested the patients be hospitalised in JSI until they were fully cured. Doctors were to monitor a patient's recovery process accurately and make sure they did not consume more opium or morphine than the limit. Dr. Kwa argued that most of the opium patients who were rehabilitated in JSI could decrease the amount of opium they consumed from eight *mata* (one-half *mata* is equal to 193 milligrams) to only one *mata* per day. Dr. Kwa explained the difficulty of forcing people to quit the substance entirely arguing with close supervision from a doctor, it would just be a matter of time until their body became completely clean.⁹⁶ Dr Kwa wrote:

...almost all patients who seek treatment at JSI, particularly those who were treated at JSI hospital, are now able to survive the danger of opium or morphine. Meanwhile, people who seek therapy only at the clinic, specifically those who only received outpatient care, for the most part still cannot avoid the danger of these two kinds of poison.⁹⁷

At an international conference held in Nanjing in the 1930s, where Dr. Kwa was a delegate, he explained the effectiveness of the rehabilitation method. He even invited two nurses from Peking University to work temporarily at the JSI and to learn more about the technique. Dr. Kwa and Dr. Tan Kim Hong presented a similar topic at the Natural Science Congress (*Natuurwetenschappelijk Congres*) held in Batavia in October 1935. Their impeccable presentation earned many compliments from the audience. They became well renowned internationally, especially after JSI officially opened a special unit in the hospital on 1 June 1935, to treat and rehabilitate opium and morphine addicts. Both doctors were responsible for managing the division, which was open every day from

⁹⁶ Jang Seng Ie, *Vereeniging Jang Seng Ie: Verslag dari Taon 1935*, 15.

⁹⁷ Jang Seng Ie, *Vereeniging Jang Seng Ie: Verslag dari Taon 1935*, 15.

09.00 until 12.00.⁹⁸ The special unit, however, did not last long. It had to be permanently shut down due to financial problems after only a year. Meanwhile, opium continued to be a serious problem in colonial Indonesia, especially for the Chinese amongst whom addiction was the highest.

Sin Po and the Fight against Opium

One of the most problematic health issues in the colony which was frequently addressed in *Sin Po* was opium. From the onset of the paper, it regularly published articles, editorials and caricatures on the issue. *Sin Po*'s deep concern stemmed from the fact that many Chinese were trapped in a vicious cycle by becoming opium-dependent users.⁹⁹ Therefore, through its sharp and bold articles, the newspaper often criticized the colonial government for defending the government's opium factory in Salemba, Batavia. By providing ample space for anti-opium articles in the paper, *Sin Po*'s editors regularly reminded its readers about the dangers of opium and how it could instantly destroy someone's future. Various articles on anti-opium movements in other countries were published in *Sin Po*, stressing that in order to eradicate opium in Indonesia effectively then various anti-opium associations in the colony had to cooperate closely. *Sin Po* even considered opium a global issue.

The second half of the 19th century witnessed concrete advancements in the anti-opium lobby. Since the 1860s, an association of doctors, missionaries and Quakers, especially in Britain, the United States and, to a lesser extent, in Asia, started to regard opium addiction as an urgent matter. This was due to the high number of deaths, particularly among infants, caused by overdose, as well as a shift in the attitudes of addicts.¹⁰⁰ Both countries put forwards limitations on the utilisation of opium, predominantly by mandating a medical practitioner's prescription or advice for lawful

⁹⁸ Jang Seng Ie, *Vereeniging Jang Seng Ie: Verslag dari Taon 1935*, 16.

⁹⁹ A Dutch pharmaceutical team conducted an investigation in 1889 and found that a wad of opium sold for five cents in Java comprised about fifteen milligrams of morphine, while a twenty-cent opium wad contained some 60 milligrams, four times as much. James Rush calculated that opium addicts in Java on average smoked between fifteen and sixty milligrams of morphine every day. See James Rush, *Opium to Java*, 39; Abdul Wahid, "Madat Makan Orang; Opium Eats People: Opium Addiction as a Public Health Issue in Late Colonial Java, 1900–1940," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, (July 2020), 7.

¹⁰⁰ M. Booth, *Opium: A History*. (New York: 1998), 63-66 & 191-93.

consumption. In Britain, the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade (SSOT) played a role.¹⁰¹ During the turn of the century, the Straits Settlements also witnessed the emergence of the similar anti-opium movement.¹⁰²

The situation created strong momentum for an anti-opium crusade among Dutch reformists during the 1880s. The movement contributed to the replacement of Chinese-operated farms with the *opiumregie*.¹⁰³ Furthermore, several Bumiputera leaders began to raise concerns about the opium problem in Indonesia. For instance, Kartini, a leading feminist and advocate for women's emancipation in Indonesia, discussed the issue in a letter to Stella Zeehandelaar in 1899, declaring opium the "curse of the people."¹⁰⁴ By 1910, the Boedi Oetomo, a reform association comprised of priyayi leaders, initiated discussions with the colonial administration regarding a possible collaboration aimed at promoting an anti-opium education campaign.¹⁰⁵ Several initiatives were developed to utilise the resources of the government in order to restrict and ultimately eradicate opium dependency. It was made difficult for opium users to obtain a licence to consume opium; students at school were warned to avoid opium smokers; and anti-opium organisations actively propagated the dangers of the substance with government subsidies.¹⁰⁶

Criticisms of the opium problem in colonial Indonesia were frequently voiced by newspapers regardless of their political background and ideology, and since the beginning

¹⁰¹ Ooi Keat Gin, "Torn between Economics, Public Health and Chinese Nationalism: The Anti-Opium Campaign of Colonial Malaya, c.1890s–1941," in *Global Movements, Local Concerns: Medicine and Health in Southeast Asia*, eds. Laurence Monnais and Harold J. Cook (Singapore: NUS Press), 135.

¹⁰² Harumi Goto-Shibata, "Empire on the Cheap: The Control of Opium Smoking in the Straits Settlements, 1925-1939," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1, (February 2006): 62.

¹⁰³ In 1894, the Dutch colonial government introduced the *opiumregie*, a state opium monopoly system, in which the government aimed to generate as much profit as possible by becoming the sole importer, processor, and distributor of the raw opium in the Indies. It also designed a more established system of restriction over opium using and smuggling through two instruments, namely a pricing policy and a licensing system. Through the *opiumregie* policy, small local opium-farm factories were replaced with a single modern central factory in Batavia. See Abdul Wahid, "Madat Makan Orang; Opium Eats People," 7; Siddharth Chandra, "What the Numbers Really Tell Us about the Decline of the Opium Regie," *Indonesia*, No. 70 (October 2000): 101-123.

¹⁰⁴ Abdul Wahid, "Kartini's Views on Opium Problems in Java at the End of the 19th Century," *Humaniora*, vol. 33, no. 2, (June 2021): 118.

¹⁰⁵ James Rush, "Opium in Java: A Sinister Friend," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 3 (May 1985): 558.

¹⁰⁶ *Verslag Betreffende de Opium- en Zoutregie en de Zoutwinning over het Jaar 1935*, (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1936), 41-45.

of the 20th century, most Chinese newspapers in the Indies took the lead in declaring ‘war’ on opium. *Sin Po* consistently criticised the opium policy of the colonial government by giving ample coverage of the anti-opium activities, including editorial support. A similar strategy was also followed by *Perniagaan*, *Sin Po*’s old nemesis. Both parties fully realized that in order to resolve this problem they must join forces with other anti-opium associations.

The anti-opium activists in colonial Indonesia took further action to combat opium by establishing an anti-opium hospital in Mangga Dua (Jacatraweg) on 16 January 1916 to treat and rehabilitate opium addicts.¹⁰⁷ Several prominent figures agreed to run the hospital, namely D. Weenink van Loon (President), A.J. Bliet (Secretary), H.H. Tuyten (Treasurer), and U Pan Kee (Administration & *Sinshe*).¹⁰⁸

About 80 Chinese and Europeans gathered to attend the opening ceremony of the building. Some prominent Chinese figures were present, namely Ouw Yang King (Chinese Consulate-General), Captain Khouw Keng Liong, Lieutenant Lie Tjian Tjoen (Chinese Officers), and Tan Kim San (THHK Batavia). During the hospital inauguration, Dr. Weenink van Loon stated that the principal aims of this hospital were to rehabilitate as many opium users as it could and to prevent the further spread of opium in the Indies. One of the strategies was to send a formal recommendation to the colonial government to shut down and stop opium production in Salemba, Batavia. This anti-opium hospital became a symbol of collaboration and cooperation between different ethnic communities in combating opium.¹⁰⁹

Several representatives from the local press also praised the action. *Sin Po*, for instance, praised this as a necessary action and regarded it as an excellent strategy to overcome the opium problems, particularly in Batavia. The paper also acknowledged Worthington and Fisscher as the early figures who had an idea to establish the hospital. In return, the hospital board also thanked *Sin Po* and *Perniagaan* for socialising the

¹⁰⁷ This was the same anti-opium hospital in Palmerah, which had already operated since March 1915 and had rehabilitated more than 350 opium addicts. However, due to the limited space, the anti-opium association then decided to purchase a house in Mangga Dua after receiving generous support from two Batavian philanthropists, namely O. H. Khouw and Lie Hin Liam. See “Anti-Opium Hospitaal Vereeniging,” *Sin Po*, 17 January 1916.

¹⁰⁸ “Anti-Opium Hospitaal Vereeniging,” *Sin Po*, 17 January 1916.

¹⁰⁹ “Anti-Opium Hospitaal Vereeniging,” *Sin Po*, 17 January 1916.

hospital plan in their various editorials, and for successfully mobilising Chinese Indonesian donors to take part in supporting the hospital. Both newspapers played a vital role in raising people's awareness about the opium threat and the need to establish a specialised hospital to treat opium patients.¹¹⁰

The emergence of this hospital also encouraged a series of anti-opium movements in various places in Java. A series of anti-opium activities (conferences, festivals public talks, fundraising events, etc.) as well as the publications of books, journals, and pamphlets were held to promote public awareness of the baneful consequences of opium consumption, especially in Chinese society. Almost all anti-opium conferences attracted remarkable attendance and participation from all different ethnic groups, including Europeans. In March 1917, the Batavia anti-opium association held an important meeting with several notable Chinese figures located in Tiong Hoa Hak Tong building in Pasar Baru, Weltevreden. The meeting produced a petition which was signed by hundreds of Chinese in Batavia and its surroundings, requesting the government to reduce opium sales step-by-step until it was completely stopped. They believed only through this strategy the government would hear their voices.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, despite their strong efforts to eradicate the drug, in fact, opium was becoming more rampant and triggered massive problems in the colony. Opium was still not recognised as a major health problem in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the colonial government barely did anything to solve or at least address this matter. In one article, *Sin Po* revealed that the colonial government could earn up to 30 million guilders each year solely from the opium business. For this particular reason, *Sin Po* doubted if the colonial government would give up the vast profits easily and subsequently shut down its opium factory in Salemba. It was evident, according to *Sin Po*, that the government policies regarding opium regulations were weak, unclear, and did not take sides with anti-opium activists. Therefore, when the colonial government planned to equip the opium factory in Salemba with full electricity to increase production, *Sin Po* became the leading media to criticise the plan. The paper condemned the colonial government for not protecting its

¹¹⁰ "Anti-Opium Hospitaal Vereeniging," *Sin Po*, 17 January 1916.

¹¹¹ "Vergadering Anti-Opium," *Sin Po*, 28 March 1917.

subjects from opium threats.¹¹² In another article, *Sin Po* stated the opium factory only “created benefits for the colonial government which earns a massive profit from opium production. The factory only produces poison!”¹¹³ It even declared the money that the colonial government obtained from opium selling should be called as ‘*oeang haram*’ (illicit money) because those profits were gained by oppressing other people, particularly the ethnic Chinese.¹¹⁴

Sin Po argued that for the Netherlands, as a country that promoted ‘*Christelijk Beginsel*’ (Christian Principles), the existence of a government-owned opium factory in Salemba was contradictory. “This Christianity Principle is valid only if the Dutch government dares to take serious steps to eradicate opium.”¹¹⁵ The colonial government often promised to permanently shut down the opium factory. Yet, the plan was always postponed on the argument that if the factory were closed, the opium users would still find ways to purchase opium from the black market. For *Sin Po*, this argument only revealed the weakness of the government and its incapability to eradicate illicit opium circulation. The paper even suggested the Netherlands was no better than China, the country which was always mocked for its incompetence in controlling opium circulation. However, *Sin Po* argued that the actual reason behind the government’s hesitance was that opium still became the largest source of revenue for the colonial government. Therefore, *Sin Po* sarcastically suggested the Dutch government should establish a ‘Fonds Madat’ (Opium Foundation) to ask for donations from its subjects after the factory was permanently shut down, as a form of compensation. Another sarcastic option proposed by *Sin Po* was to change the opium factory to a printing press so that “the government could print as many anti-Bolshevik posters as they wanted.”¹¹⁶

Sin Po posited that the Dutch-led process to eradicate opium in Indonesia was always carried out half-heartedly. If in Europe there were hundreds of associations actively working to suppress the dangers of alcohol and illicit drugs, then in Indonesia there were only a few of anti-opium associations, such as the International Order of Good

¹¹² “Nji Loro Ireng,” *Sin Po*, 11 November 1925.

¹¹³ “Basmi Madat,” *Sin Po*, 16 June 1933.

¹¹⁴ “Oeroesan jang Berbae,” *Sin Po*, 23 February 1925.

¹¹⁵ “Madat,” *Sin Po*, 15 May 1926.

¹¹⁶ “Madat,” *Sin Po*, 15 May 1926.

Templars (Internationale Orde van Goede Tempeliers, IOGT) and JSI, that were very concerned about the opium predicament. Most Chinese demanded the government reduce opium production, but at the same time believed illicit opium would pour into the colony *en masse* as soon as the government stopped the production. *Sin Po* lambasted the Chinese for being too complacent to initiate a cohesive movement against the production and importation of opium, and instead simply hoping all the opium problems would be solved by themselves. Therefore, *Sin Po* strongly suggested the Chinese should learn about the temperance movement in Europe carefully and what could they do to improve their anti-opium campaigns.¹¹⁷

Sin Po tried to encourage all Chinese Indonesians to openly support the anti-opium movement, especially given the fact that Chinese Indonesians were the biggest victims of opium. It argued that a lack of support was the main reason why many anti-opium campaigns ended prematurely without making a significant contribution. Thus, the paper argued that “if the Chinese cannot work alone to combat opium, it would be better if they support anti-opium associations which already do many things to protect people from opium poisoning.”¹¹⁸ *Sin Po* again emphasised that the major success of an anti-opium movement was a strong collaboration between the government, the press, and other organisations that had a similar vision and mission. The paper mentioned the two anti-opium hospitals in Bandung as an example, of their exceptional contributions to suppressing the number of opium addicts in West Java. This sort of spirit, *Sin Po* argued, was what most Chinese Indonesian organisations did not have.¹¹⁹

Moreover, intense pressures from the United States, the League of Nations, and anti-opium organisations like the IOGT forced all colonialists to adopt the policy of regulating opium smoking. The Philippines became the first country in Southeast Asia to prohibit non-medical opium, and other Southeast Asian countries were encouraged to implement similar prohibitions. This triumph led to the first international conference on the drug trade in Shanghai in 1909. This created momentum for a series of opium conferences held at The Hague in 1912, 1913, and 1914. The League of Nations instituted

¹¹⁷ “Bahaja Madat,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 21 July 1928.

¹¹⁸ “Pembasmian Madat,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 4 Agustus 1928

¹¹⁹ “Basmi Madat,” *Sin Po*, 16 September 1929.

an Opium Advisory Committee in 1920, which subsequently culminated in a worldwide conference held in Geneva during the latter part of 1924 and 1925. The objective of the conference was to establish a more comprehensive and enforceable framework for the regulation of drugs on a global scale. Under League of Nations sponsorship, a similar meeting was again held in Bangkok in 1931.¹²⁰

Sin Po initially praised this international strategy and considered it a major breakthrough for opium eradication. The paper regularly published pieces on the opium conferences. When the International Opium Convention was held in Geneva in February 1925,¹²¹ *Sin Po* extensively followed the conference and published opinions on it, especially when a heated debate occurred between the British and the United States delegations.¹²²

Adopting an anti-colonial stance, *Sin Po* argued that the British delegates should be ashamed of making statements without including the voices of Indians. The paper also mentioned that Horace Gundry Alexander, a British pacifist and ornithologist who happened to be a close friend of Mahatma Gandhi, had recently revealed that the use of opium in India was extremely alarming and worrisome.¹²³ Horace's article was a response to William Brereton's book entitled *The Truth about Opium* (1882), which had been extensively used and reproduced by the British colonial government to justify their opium empire in the colony.¹²⁴ Moreover, *Sin Po* also highlighted the work of Joshua Rowntree

¹²⁰ Anne L. Foster, "Prohibition as Superiority: Policing Opium in South-East Asia, 1898-1925," *The International History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (June 2000): 261.

¹²¹ A noteworthy outcome of the convention was the ratification of the International Convention Relating to Dangerous Drugs on 19 February 1925. This convention was subsequently enforced on 25 September 1938 and recorded in the League of Nations Treaty Series on the same day. See League of Nations, *Second Opium Conference: Convention Protocol Final Act* (Geneva, 19 February 1925).

¹²² One debate took place when the US delegation proposed the British delegates to limit their opium production in India solely for medical purposes. The Americans also suggested that something needed to be done to control opium smoking in the British colonies. The British responded passive-aggressively to those critics by arguing that opium usage in India was still under control and far from dangerous, especially given the fact that the opium in India was not smoked but eaten. The method, according to the British, was less risky and in fact, could help to treat various diseases. They even mentioned that it was a rare case for someone in the British colonies to die because of an opium overdose. The British instead blamed China for the opium proliferation worldwide and accused the country of not having the intention to curb opium production. See "Bangsa Timoer dan Opium," *Sin Po*, 4 May 1925.

¹²³ H.G. Alexander, "Asia's Struggle against Opium," *The Contemporary Review*, vol. 127, (1 Jan 1925): 460-466.

¹²⁴ William H. Brereton, *The Truth about Opium* (London: 1882).

called *The Imperial Drug Trade* (1905) in which he criticised the British government for not publishing all the evidence about opium intricacies in India in its official reports.¹²⁵ Therefore, *Sin Po* sarcastically suggested the British government and William Brereton should replace the title of the book and report with “Much Less than Half the Truth about Opium.”¹²⁶

In the article, *Sin Po* praised anti-opium activists in India, particularly the Swarajsits, who consistently fought for opium eradication. Their endless anti-opium campaigns led to decreased opium consumption by 50 per cent in India until the British government in India intervened and decided to throw 44 out of 63 of the activists in prison. *Sin Po* also emphasised how the All-Indian Congress Committee had proclaimed in one of its resolutions that the use of opium was absolutely against the morals of and damaging to the health of the Hindus. Moreover, it also highlighted a telegram Gandhi had sent to Geneva before the opium convention, in which he said: “Please inform the conference committee that India wants to be dismissed from the opium trade, except for medicinal purposes.”¹²⁷

In the end, *Sin Po* concluded that the British delegates’ arguments were contradictory to the facts that happened in India. Just like the Chinese and Indonesians, the Indians also strived to limit or even end opium circulation in the country. However, Western powers became the biggest obstacle to achieving that goal. “They often politicised the League of Nations, pushing the organisation to hold various opium conventions only to justify and legitimate their opium productions, instead of limiting it,” wrote *Sin Po*.¹²⁸

Therefore, after a series of international opium conferences, *Sin Po* seemed to lose interest and began to call them ‘useless’ and ‘rotten’. *Sin Po* was fed up with the slow progress and insignificant results of those conventions. The paper even accused most of the Western countries that participated in the conference of not being willing to end their opium businesses in the colonies, thus “making their presence at the conference no more

¹²⁵ Joshua Rowntree, *The Imperial Drug Trade: A Re-Statement of the Opium Question, in the Light of Recent Evidence and New Developments in the East* (London: Methuen, 1905).

¹²⁶ “Bangsa Timoer dan Opium,” *Sin Po*, 4 May 1925.

¹²⁷ “Bangsa Timoer dan Opium,” *Sin Po*, 4 May 1925.

¹²⁸ “Bangsa Timoer dan Opium,” *Sin Po*, 4 May 1925.

than a formality.”¹²⁹ In the absence of the government’s earnest endeavours to solve this opium matter, some Dutch and Chinese physicians, missionaries, and newspapers decided to create several anti-opium organisations. These non-state institutions counteracted the half-hearted efforts of the Dutch government.¹³⁰

By the end of the 1920s, opium consumption in colonial Indonesia had declined significantly. Siddharth Chandra attributed this to two external factors, namely the rise in inflation of 1919-1922 and the Great Depression of 1929-1935.¹³¹ The Great Depression was more impactful than the work of customs or the police in stopping opium use and trade, as jobless workers and cash-poor peasants in many countries had limited spare cash to spend on opium.¹³² *Sin Po* saw this as the right moment to tighten opium restrictions. As a first step, *Sin Po* encouraged the government to regulate opium selling to a maximum of three *mata* per person. Over time, these rules could be gradually tightened until someone was no longer allowed to buy opium anymore.¹³³ Furthermore, *Sin Po* also argued that the danger of opium should be continuously echoed as public opinion until this problem subsided.¹³⁴

Sin Po also encouraged the colonial government and society to establish more *doorgangshuis* (transit houses), like the one in Tandjoeng West (Pasar Minggu, Meester Cornelis), to accommodate ex-opium addicts who had just been discharged from the hospital after rehabilitation.¹³⁵ This strategy was needed to prevent them from using opium again as well as to assist them in gradually returning to society. It also hoped this *doorgangshuis* could help ex-opium addicts in getting jobs because with work their psychological condition could slowly be restored. In short, *Sin Po* asserted that “opposition towards opium must be carried out through many ways, by propaganda, and

¹²⁹ “Oeroesan jang Berbae,” *Sin Po*, 23 February 1925.

¹³⁰ Wahid, “Madat Makan Orang; Opium Eats People,” 23-24.

¹³¹ Chandra, “What the Numbers Really Tell Us about the Decline of the Opium Regie,” 123.

¹³² Anne L. Foster, “Prohibition as Superiority: Policing Opium in South-East Asia, 1898-1925,” *The International History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (June, 2000): 271.

¹³³ “Toeroenin Harga Madat,” *Sin Po*, 20 June 1933.

¹³⁴ “Basmi Madat,” *Sin Po*, 16 June 1933.

¹³⁵ The first *doorgangshuis* was constructed by the AOV as a post-treatment initiative for opium addicts. This facility provided ex-opium users with psychological counselling, vocational training, and participation in diverse anti-opium programs. See *Warta Anti-Opium Vereeniging* 11, (Batavia: Anti-Opium Vereeniging, November 1940), 2-3.

through the treatment performed by doctors in specialised (anti-opium) hospitals, and after they are discharged from the hospital.” In addition, opium sales and licensing systems (*licentiestelsel*) needed to be limited and the associated regulations revised. *Sin Po* also added that “if everyone works together to achieve the purpose, this opium problem, which has killed too many people, can be eradicated to its roots.”¹³⁶

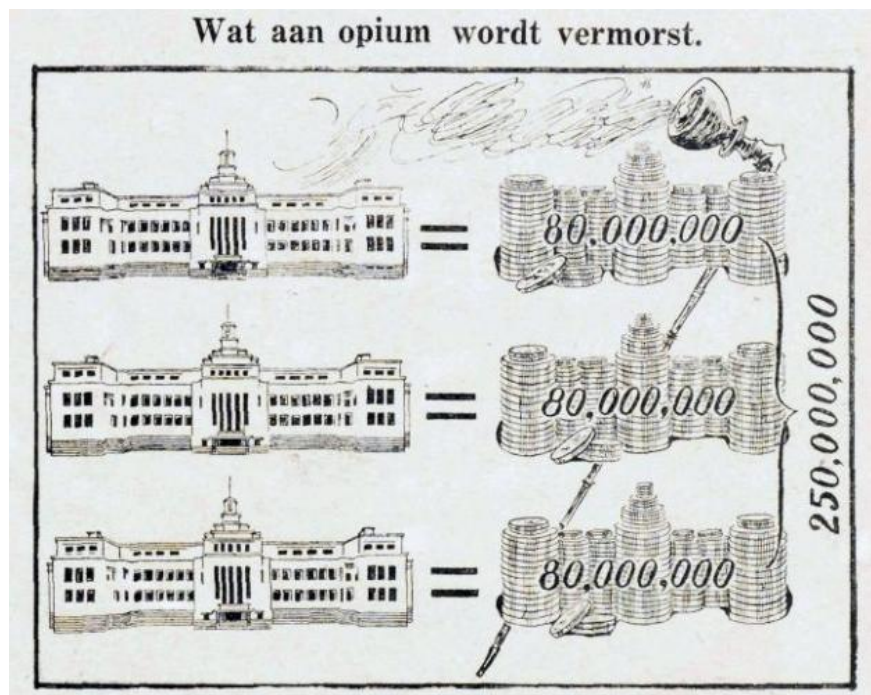


Figure 2.5. The caricature about opium in *Sin Po* entitled “Wat aan Opium wordt Vermorst” (What is Spilled on Opium). Source: *Sin Po Jubileumnummer*, 1910-1935. (Batavia: Sin Po, 1935).

Based on Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe and Dr. Tan Kim Hong’s research, in 1932, there were 59,000 opium addicts from the Indonesian groups and 41,500 from the Chinese society; thus in total, there were still more than 100,000 opium addicts in colonial Indonesia.¹³⁷ Although in absolute terms, the number of Indonesian opium users was higher than the Chinese, it should be borne in mind the total of Indonesian population at that time was around 60 million. In comparison with one million Chinese who lived in Indonesia, their usage rate was higher (1 opium user in 1,000 Indonesian and 1 opium

¹³⁶ “Pembasmian Madat dan Pengrawatan Pemadatan,” *Sin Po*, 10 December 1932.

¹³⁷ Between 1932 and 1940 around 12,490 opium addicts were hospitalized in the 36 anti-opium hospitals and clinics. These patients comprised of 10,511 Chinese, 1,899 Bumiputera (including 10 Arabs), and 72 Europeans. About 82.2 per cent of these patients were opium-addicts, whereas the remaining were classified as active morphine users. See Abdul Wahid, “Madat Makan Orang; Opium Eats People,” 18-20.

user in 30 Chinese). Furthermore, the Chinese could spend on average f. 7 for opium every year, while the Indonesian statistically only spent 10 cents. Meanwhile, the number of opium users among Europeans was only recorded as three persons because the colonial law prohibited them from obtaining licenses to buy opium. Judging from the statistic, *Sin Po* sarcastically commented that the Chinese in Indonesia should be ashamed because they could waste 25 million rupiahs on opium, but they spent no more than one million rupiahs on Chinese education. To illustrate this point *Sin Po* published an image that showed that the total amount of money that the Chinese wasted on opium in the Indies over ten years (250 million guildens) was equal to the total capital of three *Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij* (Netherlands Trading Society, NHM), which was f. 80 million each (See Figure 2.5). Therefore, *the paper* argued, the Chinese should not be perplexed why they were still lagging far behind the other nations.¹³⁸ Furthermore, it also posited that:

If the money used to buy opium and morphine could be used for other useful activities, such as enhancing Chinese living standards, perfecting Chinese education and improving various social activities, even a child could predict that within a few years, most of *hoakiau* in Indonesia will have a much better life.¹³⁹

Sin Po also asserted that Chinese organisations in Indonesia did not yet have a special division to eradicate opium, although the majority of the victims were Chinese. The battle against opium in the colony was mostly carried out by European or Indo-European organisations. As time went by, *Sin Po* felt these organisations had already lost their grip. The paper called their anti-opium efforts merely symbolic actions. Opium Week, the biggest annual anti-opium event in Indonesia, according to *Sin Po*, was “nothing more than an annual routine.” Speeches about the opium threats were often not practical enough to educate people about the danger of opium. Most of the visitors who came to the event were only interested in watching theatre performances and did not clearly understand the profound message behind the event.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ “Boewang 17 Millioen Roepiah!” *Sin Po*, 29 May 1934.

¹³⁹ “Soeal Basmi Madat,” *Sin Po*, 4 January 1935.

¹⁴⁰ “Kombali Soeal Opium,” *Sin Po*, 7 July 1936.



Figure 2.6. An Anti-opium rally in Batavia, in which 4,000 people took part to ask the colonial government to shut down the government-opium factory in Salemba. Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 8 October 1938.

Sin Po acknowledged that their grand dream would be challenging to fulfil, yet maintained it was not entirely impossible. The paper argued that India, Turkey, and Persia as the largest opium manufacturers in the world, had already made an important decision to participate actively in opium eradication. Meanwhile, the Chinese government had also begun to implement strict regulations regarding opium production and consumption, although the progress was plodding.¹⁴¹ From 1937, China applied strict rules to stamp out opium sales in the country and *Sin Po* reported that the death penalty had become a common punishment for opium addicts and opium dealers. They were even considered traitors and spies (See Figure 2.7).¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ “Basmī Madat,” *Sin Po*, 16 September 1929.

¹⁴² “Perang Madat,” *Sin Po*, 1 February 1937.

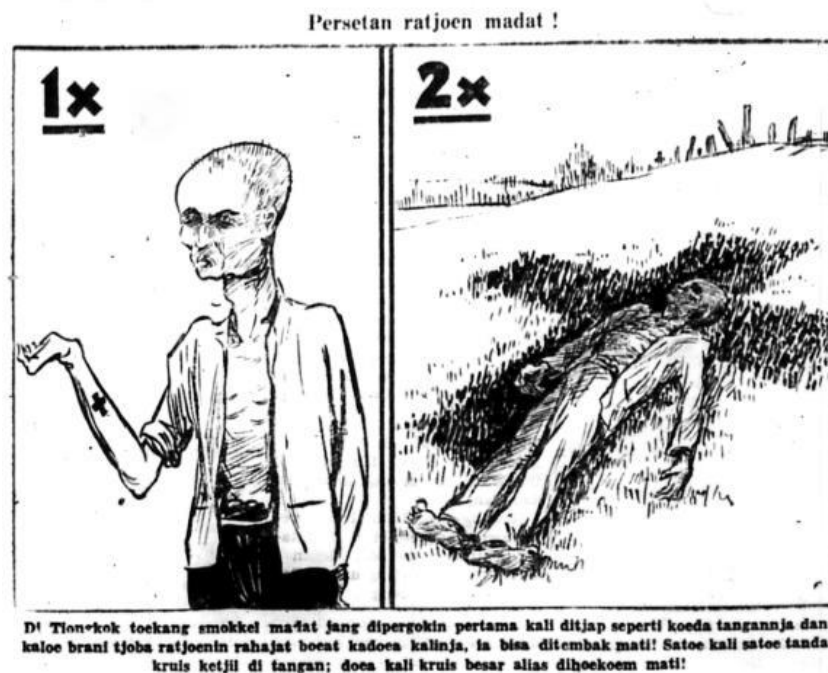


Figure 2.7. In China, opium smugglers who got caught would be marked with a cross on their hand, and if they were captured again for the second time, they would receive a massive cross, which meant the death penalty for them. *Sin Po* opined if the system was implemented in Indonesia, the colonial government could certainly suppress the opium spread in the colony.

Source: *Sin Po*, 6 March 1937.

Meanwhile, *Sin Po* and other Chinese newspapers constantly criticised and raised these opium problems in their various editorials. They were successful in shifting public opinion in the population towards the view that opium was a severe threat that had to be solved immediately. However, newspaper anti-opium campaigns halted when Japan began to occupy Indonesia in March 1942. As soon as Japan consolidated its control over Indonesia, all Chinese newspapers including *Sin Po* were banned.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how *Sin Po* was closely involved in advancing the health system, related health knowledge and therefore social welfare in colonial Indonesia, particularly in Batavia. Chinese doctors played a critical role in these developments due to their rising prominence in the colony. Most Chinese Indonesian physicians were driven by a sincere belief in the indispensable roles of medicine, technology, and science for development and prosperity. The everyday experiences of doctors and medical scholars also spurred

the advancement of their political consciousness. Medicine also invigorated Chinese Indonesian practitioners to voice their criticism of the colonial government's unequal healthcare provision and the disproportionately high pervasiveness of disease among the Chinese population. As Hans Pols has described, medicine offered "methods, styles of thinking, and biological and physiological metaphors, for evaluating colonial society and diagnosing its ills."¹⁴³

During the Spanish Flu pandemic, the paper regularly criticised the ways the Chinese in the Indies responded to the pandemic and accused them of deviating from modern health principles and promoting outdated as well as absurd Chinese traditions. It actively corrected widespread misinformation. The role of *Sin Po* editors as 'health activists' intensified with the increase in the number of Chinese doctors and other philanthropists in the Indies. They shared a similar vision to eliminate discrimination in the health sector against non-Europeans.

From the early 20th century onwards, *Sin Po* mediated and publicised debates about serious health issues in the colony, while connecting and bringing together doctors, activists and intellectuals to write and channel their ideas. The paper educated the public about the importance of health and better hygiene. It thus became a vehicle through which doctors and the paper's editors could espouse a new sense of the need for equality in health care. Ongoing discrimination in the field of health sharpened their political sensibilities and their sense of responsibility. The case of JSI included collaboration among doctors, philanthropists, and the press to provide accessible and free health services for the poor.

This collaboration between doctors and the paper strengthened when they joined forces to combat the opium threat that had ruined the lives of many Chinese in the colony. *Sin Po* utilised all features of the publication, from caricatures, editorials, and interviews to satirical jokes, to reveal the dangers of opium and other narcotics to its readers and to criticise the colonial government for its insistence on maintaining the government's opium factory in Batavia. Moreover, *Sin Po*'s various reports on anti-opium movements and conferences from different countries, especially China, promoted the struggle against opium in the colony as transnational causes united with similar movements overseas.

¹⁴³ Hans Pols, *Nurturing Indonesia*, 5.

In short, *Sin Po* played an essential role in voicing concerns, shaping public opinion, educating the public about health issues, and at the same time raising people's consciousness about the conflicting motives of the colonial government and the need for Chinese Indonesians to take action to remedy problems in the colony. The opinions and views expressed in the newspaper's editorials and articles were influential in Chinese society and able to change the mindset of Chinese people about the importance of cleanliness. They also led to initiatives to improve the professional status of Chinese Indonesian doctors.

In the same period *Sin Po* was promoting new knowledge about health and criticising the colonial government's neglect of health, the paper became increasingly critical of the various discriminatory policies instituted by the Dutch colonial government. Alongside the strengthening of the Indonesian national movement to establish self-governance for its own nation, *Sin Po* repeatedly reiterated the significance of the Chinese and Indonesian cooperating more closely. The demise of Sun Yat-sen became a catalyst for this closer collaboration, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

RISING NATIONALISM AND NEW SOLIDARITIES IN A PERIOD OF CHANGE, 1914-1928

From the 1910s to the 1930s there was increased solidarity between the Chinese and Indonesians in the colony due to an increasing alignment of interests and joint opposition to the Dutch. In this chapter, I argue that during the 1920s, particularly, not only was there increased press monitoring and the emergence of political movements, but there was also an unsettling juxtaposition between the liberal notions of press freedom and the colonial concerns over the social order.¹ During this time, the notion of ‘self-government’ for Indonesians was widely debated, and *Sin Po* actively advocated for it.

From mid-1921 to mid-1923, the Dutch colonial government experienced an economic crisis that led to the closure of various businesses and a decline in wages. In addition, Dutch officials continued to seek ways to steal profit from their positions, resulting in rampant corruption across the colonial administration. On 24 March 1921, Dirk Fock succeeded Johan Paul van Limburg Stirum as Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies. Under Fock’s regime, he increased the colonists’ tax burden,² imposed a tight budget and adopted a less tolerant position towards labour and the Indonesian movement.³

This chapter begins by outlining how *Sin Po* drew the Chinese and Bumiputera (indigenous) communities together by highlighting the inequality they experienced in comparison to the Dutch, especially before the law. Through this strategy, the editors of

¹ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia*, 91.

² The Fock government increased income taxes to the point where Java and Madura residents with an average yearly income of 225 guilders paid around 10 per cent in taxes in the years that followed 1922. At a period when agricultural commodity prices were beginning to decrease, the Fock government also increased land taxes. See Robert van Niel, *The Emergence of Modern Indonesian Elite* (Dordrecht, 1984), 202.

³ After 1 October 1923, the situation for the non-European population in the Indies deteriorated. Fock’s government implemented a number of other controversial regulations, including a prohibition on involvement in political parties, organisations, as well as any political events, by anybody under the age of 18. In addition, it was also forbidden to organise a *vergadering* (assembly) in a public place without the approval of the local administration. These new legislations were all published in *Staatsblad* 453, No. 102. (17 July 1923). See “Larangan Vergadering,” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 8 October 1923.

Sin Po underlined the necessity for closer collaboration between both nations. Further to this, *Sin Po* editors increasingly supported radical Indonesian nationalists such as Mas Marco Kartodikromo who critiqued the Dutch, defending him against attacks from the Dutch and other cooperating Indonesians.

This chapter also outlines the far-reaching impacts of Sun Yat-sen's death on the ethnic Chinese and Bumiputera societies. I argue that the nationalism of Sun Yat-sen was a source of inspiration for both groups and that the remembrance of his death drew both communities closer together. The role of *Sin Po* in reporting and disseminating information about the commemoration (*Twie Too Hwee*) was essential in inspiring a sense of nationalism among the Chinese in the colony.

Sin Po and the Bumiputera

From the outset of publication in 1910, *Sin Po* consistently communicated solidarity for the Indonesian independence movement. As both Chinese and Bumiputera were victims of colonial persecution, *Sin Po* editors repeatedly emphasised the necessity for the Chinese and Bumiputera to help and support one another. The paper argued that both Bumiputera and Chinese were victims of Dutch legal discrimination, and that both groups had the same goal of eradicating the racist, discriminatory system.

To comprehend this statement, we must recall the segregation practised by the Dutch colonial government at the time, which separated each population group on the basis of ethnicity (Europeans, Foreign Orientals, and Indigenous) and even religious background (Christian and non-Christian). Although the Chinese as Foreign Orientals were in more favourable position than the Bumiputera, in regard to legal matters, they were placed under the indigenous judicial system of the Landraad (native court of justice), the lowest court in the Indies used for Bumiputera and other non-European races,⁴

⁴ The Japanese were exempt from this law after the Dutch colonial government granted them European status in 1899, a few years after the victory of Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), which marked the emergence of Japan as a major world powerhouse. See Howard Dick, "Japan's Economic Expansion in the Netherlands Indies between the First and Second World Wars," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (September 1989): 245.

because they were considered to be of “equal to the indigenous” (*gelijkgesteld met de inlanders*).⁵

In 1914, *Sin Po* had already demonstrated how unfair the legal system in the colony was for the Chinese and Bumiputera. It provided many examples of the unequal status of Indonesians and the Chinese before the law. The paper likened the differences in the justice system for Europeans versus others to ‘day’ and ‘night’ and commented that “justice in the Dutch East Indies is right, good, and fair, but these virtues and justice are only for the Europeans.”⁶

To accentuate the relative systems of justice, *Sin Po* reported that if a Chinese or Bumiputera person was accused of a crime, he or she would be prosecuted by the Landraad. Kwee Kek Beng, a prominent *Sin Po* journalist, pointed out with disdain in 1926 how the Chinese were treated differently in this court of law. A Chinese-Formosan criminal, for instance, had right to be prosecuted by the Raad van Justitie (High Court) only because he/she was a naturalised Japanese, whereas a prominent Chinese Peranakan journalist had to be tried by the Landraad only because he/she was a Dutch subject of foreign descent with a status comparable to that of the indigenous population.⁷

To further highlight the inequity that *Sin Po* saw in this system it explained to readers that under this law European offenders could enter tribunals with uncuffed hands, while a Bumiputera would have to enter the court handcuffed with a very strict escort. These escorts often punched and kicked them on their way to prison or court, and also allowed them to be humiliated on the street. The newspaper quipped that at Raad van Justitie, the judge would refer to European criminals with the polite Dutch, addressing them with ‘U’ or ‘Mijnheer’ (Sir), and in the Landraad the same judge would address the accused in a far crasser way with expressions such as “Kamoe koooraaang adjar, he?” (You [informal] are a scoundrel!) to a Chinese or Bumiputera offender. *Sin Po* further wrote that at Raad van Justitie the judge would also offer excuses for these European offenders asking: “Zouden Gij op dien avond wellicht dronken zijn geweest?” (Could you

⁵ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 37.

⁶ “Keadilan Bagi Bangsa Bumiputera,” *Sin Po*, 30 July 1914.

⁷ Kwee Kek Beng, “De Chineesch-Maleische Pers”, *Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih*, (October-November 1926), 63.

have been drunk that evening?), whereas at Landraad, for a similar crime, a Chinese or Bumiputera offenders would be charged with “*ernstige mishandeling*” (severe assault), and almost definitely sentenced to jail.⁸

Sin Po, witnessing the injustice, remarked sarcastically that they were treated this way: “Because they are *Bangsa Bumiputera*, an uncivilised nation, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that they are somewhat more civilised than the Papuans.”⁹ Through this comment *Sin Po* demonstrated the outrage they felt at unjust treatment but they also reproduced the racist colonial ideology of civilization according to which the Papuans were positioned as most ‘primitive’.

Sin Po asserted that the Dutch police only dared to take such measures against Chinese or Indonesian individuals because they realised that neither nation possessed as much political influence as the Europeans or Japanese. This was reflected in the following statement by *Sin Po*:

The Chinese can be handcuffed, kicked, and beaten within an inch of their lives; if it turns out he is innocent, he can only buy medicine to cure his wounds and bruises. Complaining? Asking for justice? They can only ask...¹⁰

Here, the paper wanted to underline that people’s legal status in colonial Indonesia was determined by their racial backgrounds and the colour of their skin. With absolute power, the *Officier van Justitie* (public prosecutor) could abuse his power arbitrarily. Moreover, in a similar criminal case involving Indonesians (or Chinese) and Europeans, the latter would often receive a lesser sentence. Hence, *Sin Po* accused the colonial authorities of employing “*doea timbangan*” (two scales) in virtually every judicial proceeding that almost invariably disadvantaged non-Europeans.¹¹

Sin Po stated that if the colonial administration did not immediately reform the system, it would be difficult for Indonesians to achieve justice. It also condemned any Indonesian personnel who collaborated in the *politierol* (police court) system for their

⁸ “Apa Sebab Tida Dibekoe?” *Sin Po West-Java Editie*, 12 July 1924.

⁹ “Keadilan Bagi Bangsa Bumiputera,” *Sin Po*, 30 July 1914.

¹⁰ “Diborgol,” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 25 January 1923.

¹¹ “Memake Doea Timbangan,” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 23 January 1923.

lack of compassion for the victims of this discriminating system.¹² The paper argued that “the *politierol* which was still applied in the Indies up until now supposedly has vanished from any court in the Indies a long time ago because it was not in accordance with the spirit of the era.”¹³ A number of criticisms raised by *Sin Po* and other newspapers turned out to be quite effective. From the end of 1914, this *politierol* legislation was eventually abolished. This did not, however, result in the elimination of all discriminatory practices against Chinese and Indonesians.

The turn of the 20th century marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Chinese Indonesian, particularly in Java. During this time, the Chinese responded with audacity to any discriminatory policy imposed upon them by the colonial government. It was also during this period that the Chinese Indonesian began to re-evaluate their position and status within the colonial society, as already explored in preceding chapters.¹⁴ At the same time a range of Bumiputera intellectual organisations emerged which would later play a significant role in the Indonesian politics, such as Boedi Oetomo (Noble Endeavour, 1908-1935), Sarekat Islam (Islamic Union, 1912-1926), and Indische Partij (Indies Party, 1912-1913). David Hill has also pointed out how since the turn of this century, the Indonesian press had been a forum for the expression of nationalist aspirations and political agitation.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the national movements of both communities were oftentimes advancing in their own directions, and this was chiefly due to the colonial social hierarchy, in which the Chinese and Indonesians were often pitted against one another.¹⁶

Even though *Sin Po* and Indonesian nationalist figures frequently disagreed on a variety of issues, they did agree that Dutch colonialism must be opposed and that

¹² The *politierol* was a record of small offences that could be penalised by the police without a formal judicial proceeding and without appeal. This magistrate law was administered by local colonial authorities without comprehensive legal procedures, and it mostly dealt with labour, movement, and public order violations. Typical punishments were fines (up to f.100, subsequently f.500), imprisonment (up to eight days), and unpaid labour (up to three months). The *politierol* was despised because it allowed police to engage in arbitrary and coercive actions. See A.D.A. de Kat Angelino, *Colonial Policy: Volume II*, (Springer, 1931), 151-52.

¹³ “Keadilan Bagi Bangsa Bumiputera,” *Sin Po*, 30 July 1914.

¹⁴ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 13.

¹⁵ David Hill, *The Press in the New Order Indonesia*, 25.

¹⁶ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 204.

Indonesia's right to self-government was indisputable. During the 1910s to 1930s, the discourse of 'self-government' for Indonesians began to be discussed extensively and Chinese newspapers and *Sin Po* continued to defend arguments for immediate self-government for the Indonesians. However, many Dutch conservatives doubted if 'self-government' would significantly enhance the quality of life of Bumiputera. Abdoel Moeis, a prominent journalist and an active member of Sarekat Islam, wrote in newspaper *Neratja* (Balance/Scales) that the unity between Bumiputera and Chinese would be an integral part of the movement of the colonised (*kaoem jang terperintah*) to pursue independence.¹⁷ Historian Harry Poeze also asserts how at various political gatherings attended by Chinese and Indonesians, the notion of collaboration between races was reportedly advanced, suggesting a new and unprecedented closeness between the communities.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the Dutch provided a range of justifications for why Indonesians were not ready for self-governance and why the Dutch needed to continue to rule over the Indonesians. In 1912, A. H. J. G. Walbeehm, a Dutch linguist who worked for the Department of Internal Affairs, stated in *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* (Colonial Magazine) that the Javanese were not yet prepared for 'self-government,' despite the fact that their land was of great value and thus provided a significant economic base. The value of this land indeed was a key reason for the influx of Europeans to Java because they helped to develop plantations and businesses where the Javanese could find employment.¹⁹ A. G. de Bruin, the former Advisor for Chinese Affairs in Deli (North Sumatera) and member of staff of the Netherlands East Indies Tax Office, argued in *De Locomotief* that due to "the backwardness of the Javanese and Bumiputera", the Indies would require European leadership for the next eighteen to nineteen centuries in order to improve their status. Meanwhile, Prof. Melchior Treub, a distinguished Dutch botanist, stated in a lecture in Surabaya that the degree of politeness among the Indies was still considerably lower than among the Germans and the Galicians. Reflecting the views of social Darwinism that all societies progressed in stages he believed that because the Dutch East Indies had not

¹⁷ "Boemipoetra dan Tionghoa," *Neratja*, 9 November 1918.

¹⁸ Harry Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politieele Overzichten van Nederlands-Indie, 1927-1928* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982), 449.

¹⁹ A.H.J.G. Walbeehm, "Persoverzicht," *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* (1912): 90-94.

experienced the Middle Ages (*Middeleeuwen*) or the Renaissance, the backwardness in the Indies remained severe. According to him, it would take the Indies another two thousand years to establish their own government.²⁰

In addition to challenging Dutch rationalisations for continuing their rule, *Sin Po* strongly supported Mas Marco Kartodikromo, a notable Indonesian journalist who worked for *Doenia Bergerak* (World in Motion) newspaper, during the heated debate against the colonial government in 1915. The government believed that his editorials in *Doenia Bergerak* were very controversial and might incite animosity towards the Dutch. Moreover, Mas Marco refused to provide the names of the authors of a series of offensive letters to the editor published in *Doenia Bergerak* (July and August 1914), including the playful pseudonym M. Juist's (M. Right) essay entitled "Oh, Javanese are very stupid".²¹ *Sin Po*, however, believed the logic of his writings was fully credible and cogent. They gave him much credence only because he was an educated (*ontwikkeling*) Bumiputera arguing his thoughts that were a reflection of his experience as a colonial subject who had been oppressed by discriminatory laws in the colony.²²

In standing behind Mas Marco, *Sin Po* also challenged the views of other papers and colonial apologists such as Soerodiprodjo (possibly an assumed name) from Banten who published an essay in the conservative paper *Nieuws van den Dag* on 27 July 1915, in which he criticised Mas Marco's writings as nothing more than a massive fraud. The author derided Mas Marco as a "journalist want to be" who did not even know how to respect and value his government. He even called the Bumiputera press in the colony immature and incapable of covering anything other than mundane topics.²³ In addition, Soerodiprodjo regarded Mas Marco's statement about the importance of staging a revolution to establish self-government as nothing but a fairy tale. In response to Indonesian nationalists whom he regarded as too ambitious in their aims to achieve independence, Soerodiprodjo urged the government to silence "the voices of those

²⁰ "Als over vele jaren, de Indiers de lange ontwikkelingsperiode zooals van de Germanen en Galliers zullen doorgemaakt hebben, wanneer Indie zijn middeleeuwen en renaissance gehad heeft, dan zal dit land misschien in staat zijn zichzelf te regeeren. Maar zoover zijn we niet."

²¹ Kees van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War*. (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), 462.

²² "Djikaloe Kaoe Soeda Pegang Itoe Timbangan Boeat Mengoetaraken Keadilanmoe, Djalankenlah Keadilan Itoe dengen Sasoenggoenja," *Sin Po*, 26 July 1915.

²³ *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 27 July 1915.

illiterate Bumiputera journalists who would be better off working as draftsmen or clerks.”²⁴

Soeriodjodjo's article infuriated many groups, including *Sin Po*. The paper defended Mas Marco by saying that, as a citizen, he had an equal right to voice his personal viewpoint, regardless of his views.²⁵ The fact that Bumiputera periodicals consistently challenged the colonial authority demonstrated that something was wrong with it. Replicating colonial ideology around the family, the paper compared the Dutch government to a father and the Bumiputera to the children.²⁶ “The abuse and exploitation of the child by the father were the roots of these incessant criticisms of the regime.” In light of the ongoing pressure and torment, *Sin Po* argued that it was only natural that the child would rebel.²⁷ Mas Marco was finally taken before a colonial court on allegations of promoting hate and humiliation against several Indies institutions. The court eventually sentenced him to nine months imprisonment at Mlaten prison.

Sin Po's criticisms of injustice in colonial Indonesia were even more fierce after the incident. The paper emphasised the necessity for close collaboration between the two nations and referred to the status of Chinese and Indonesians as Dutch subjects and subjugated nations (*bangsa-bangsa jang diprenta*) in the colony. *Sin Po* recognised that the relationship between the two groups was still far from ideal, but “as the governed nations, we are supposedly cooperating so that we can lessen our burdens.”²⁸

Sin Po argued that Indonesians and the Chinese were required to be brethren due to their centuries-long bond. It stated that by combining the Chinese capital (*kapitaal*) with the Bumiputera's soil and skills, both nations could make significant progress in the Indies. The paper also stated that the contribution of the Chinese to the growth of the economy and commerce in the colony was crucial to the expansion of the local economy. *Sin Po* provided an illustration of how the majority of Bumiputera shops in the Indies were able to function via close collaboration with Chinese merchants because the Chinese

²⁴ “Tionghoa dan Bumiputera,” *Sin Po*, 30 July 1915

²⁵ “Tionghoa dan Bumiputera,” *Sin Po*, 30 July 1915

²⁶ For further discussion on this topic, see also Frances Gouda, “The Gendered Rhetoric of Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism in Twentieth-Century Indonesia”, *Indonesia*, No. 55, (April 1993): 2.

²⁷ “Tionghoa dan Bumiputera,” *Sin Po*, 30 July 1915

²⁸ “Tionghoa dan Bumiputera,” *Sin Po*, 30 July 1915.

played crucial roles as investors, suppliers, and intermediaries (*tusschenhandel*). It claimed that this demonstrated that the Chinese and Bumiputera were mutually dependent, and the Chinese should appreciate the Bumiputera who welcomed them with open arms. *Sin Po* again emphasised that “we Asians share an inseparable tie that cannot be severed.”²⁹

The Dutch colonial government was obviously alarmed by the proximity of the two groups and the role of the press in forging united opposition to the government. It believed that the radical nationalists would use printed materials to disseminate revolutionary ideas, so it devised legislation to increase press supervision and control over what was reported. After 1914, press legislation was routinely implemented against radical nationalists and journalists, and on occasion, against Dutch journalists.³⁰ Articles 156 and 157 of the Penal Code regulating *persdelict* (press offences) and *sprekdelict* (speech offences) of the 1906 law posed significant legal obstacles for journalists in colonial Indonesia.³¹

In 1916 under the direction of Douwe Adolf Rinkes, an adjunct inspector for Native Affairs, the Bureau for Native Affairs began compiling a monthly overview of Bumiputera presses entitled *Overzicht der Inlandsche Pers* (Summary of the Native Press) and filing it as part of the Confidential Mail Report (*Geheime Mailrapport*). Press surveys of vernacular journals began consistently circulating among Dutch officials and were mandatory reading for them. Entering the 1920s, along with the escalating anti-colonial movement in colonial Indonesia, the Dutch colonial authorities tightened control over the dissemination of information. According to Nobuto Yamamoto, this was the age of press monitoring in colonial Indonesia, especially for the Chinese and Indonesian press.³²

²⁹ “Tionghoa dan Bumiputera,” *Sin Po*, 30 July 1915.

³⁰ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia*, 67 & 75

³¹ Ahmat Adam, “Radical Journalism and Press Persecution in Java, 1914-1918,” *Jebat* 20 (1992): 94.

³² Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia*, 91.

The Age of Press Monitoring

The early 1920s was not only characterised by the return of Chinese Peranakan intellectuals who had recently completed their studies in Europe, particularly in the Netherlands, but also the emergence of various Bumiputera organisations that would later play an important role in Indonesian politics. During this period, there was an increasing sense of “Indonesian” identity, symbolised by the term “*pergerakan*” (movement) which was then strengthened along with the emergence of several historical events, such as the 1928 Youth Pledge (Sumpah Pemuda).³³ Around this time, several Indonesian study clubs, for instance, began to appear in major cities. The “Indonesische Studieclub” (Indonesian Study Club) was founded in Surabaya in 1924. In addition, the “Algemeene Studieclub” (General Study Club), which first appeared in 1925 in Bandung, was also a forerunner of the Indonesian National Party, which was founded by Sukarno in 1927.³⁴

In his research, Yamamoto notes that it was common during this time for Chinese journalists to form strong relationships with Indonesian journalists. In fact, beginning in the 1920s, the Association of Journalists of Asia (Journalistenbond Azie) played a pivotal role in enabling these linkages. Kwee Hing Tjiat, for example, had affiliations with Parada Harahap, Saeroen, and Bakri Suraatmadja. Additionally, Kwee Kek Beng, in his role as the editor-in-chief of *Sin Po*, enlisted Bumiputera correspondents such as W.R. Soepratman and D. Koesoemaningrat. The convergence of these individual networks served as the basis for the establishment of a journalistic community in Indonesia.³⁵

The early 1920s, was also characterised as one of the most difficult periods for the entire population of the colony. In 1921, with Dirk Fock’s appointment as governor-general, the new conservative and authoritarian stance became official.³⁶ During Fock’s regime, a number of restrictions on the Indonesian movement were imposed, which provided ample cause for resentment. One was the inclusion of Article 161 *bis* in the

³³ Hill, *The Press in the New Order*, 26.

³⁴ Frank Dhont, *Nasionalisme Baru Intelektual Indonesia Tahun 1920-an* (Yogyakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada Press, 2005), 2.

³⁵ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia*, 252.

³⁶ Dirk Fock (1858-1941) was a knowledgeable politician. He held the position of the Dutch House of Representatives (1901-1905, 1913-1920), as well as minister of the colonies (1905-1908) and leader of the House of Representatives (1917-1920). See H.W. van den Doel, *Het Rijk van Insulinde: Opkomst en Ondergang van een Nederlandse Kolonie* (Amsterdam: Promotheus, 1996), 215-22.

Penal Code in 1923, which made Indonesian labour strikes illegal, and Articles 153 *bis* and *ter*, which limited any movement and speech that could provoke a public disturbance. Moreover, there was an expansion of the police apparatus, which played a more significant role in monitoring Indonesian movements within surveillance networks. Meanwhile, the adviser for native affairs, who had previously supplied policymakers with essential information on Indonesian affairs, began to diminish in importance. Fock's reign ushered in the "age of reaction."³⁷

As one of Fock's loyalists, Douwe Adolf Rinkes (the head of *Balai Poestaka*, a famous government publisher of vernacular literature) advised the governor-general to suppress any reactionary or revolutionary presses. He viewed them as a calamity that would threaten the *rust en orde* (peace and order) in the Indies. Rinkes proposed a regulation requiring every publisher in the Indies to deposit f. 5,000 with the colonial administration. Every violation a publication committed would result in the loss of the deposit. *Sin Po* interpreted the proposal as an effort to undermine the typically low-capital Bumiputera publications. Although the deposit was insignificant for the vast majority of Dutch publications, it was a burden for the Indonesian press, whose average capital was between f. 200 and f. 300. Therefore, *Sin Po* regarded this as one of Rinkes' strategies for limiting and eliminating the press that was critical of Dutch colonial policy. The paper warned that if the colonial government adopted the proposal, the situation in the Indies would worsen because "such an action would lead to the proliferation of underground publications that the government would be unable to regulate."³⁸

However, it should be noted that not all Dutch citizens backed Rinkes' proposal. J. E. Stokvis, a notable Dutch socialist and editor of the newspaper *De Locomotief* from 1910 to 1917, was one of them. Stokvis argued in an essay titled "Idealistisch Regeeren" (Idealistic Government) published in *Het Indische Volk* (The Indies Population) that discriminatory attitudes would only hinder the growth of the press in the Indies. "It was an awful strategy for the Bumiputera press." Although Rinkes emphasised that the restriction would apply to all media outlets in the Indies, Stokvis was concerned that the

³⁷ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia*, 107-108.

³⁸ "Inlandsch Pers dan Dr. Rinkes," *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 8 May 1923.

colonial authority would use the law to repress the Indonesian and Chinese press, which had a reputation for being critical of the colonial government.³⁹

The Dutch conservative press, in general, praised Fock for his iron-fist policies and efficient management of the public budget. They continued to exert pressure on the government to promptly adopt these regulations because they believed it would be an effective strategy for curbing the increasing influence of reactionaries in the colony. Meanwhile, for non-Europeans, the Fock administration was a catastrophe. *Sin Po* argued that there had never been a governor-general in the history of the Indies who had done so many unpleasant things as Governor-General Fock. Under his leadership, *Sin Po* believed that the Indies would return to the “djeman poerbakala” (ancient time), in which freedom of expression and access to justice were curtailed. “One word sufficed to define Fock’s reign whenever it was brought up in conversation: terrible”, wrote *Sin Po*.⁴⁰

The *Algemeen Indisch Dagblad* (AID, Indies-Wide Daily Newspaper), a Bandung-based conservative Dutch daily, infamously affirmed its support for the new restrictions. According to AID, the Indies were still in turmoil during this transitional period; as a result, colonial authorities were required to supervise and command their subordinates with an iron fist.⁴¹ *Sin Po* disapproved of AID’s viewpoint and deemed the paper too naive. It was also perplexed why so many European newspapers aspired to return to the past while they were permitted to enjoy a degree of press freedom (*persvrijheid*) in the present day.⁴²

Moreover, *Sin Po* argued that these severe regulations should be imposed on Dutch periodicals because they frequently distorted the truth in their reports. It specifically accused *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, which had been recognised for many years of insulting Chinese, Arab, and Indonesian society. “From its inception to the present day, *Het Nieuws* has been notoriously recognised as a newspaper that frequently lies, defames, and serves a powerful man.”⁴³ *Sin Po* also argued that the colonial government did little

³⁹ “Pers Boemipoetra,” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 2 May 1923.

⁴⁰ “Mamerentah dengan Melarang,” *Sin Po West-Java Editie*, 7 April 1924.

⁴¹ “Kakerasan, Kakerasan, Kakerasan Matjem Bagimana?” *Sin Po West-Java Editie*, 30 April 1924.

⁴² “Djalan Moendoer,” *Sin Po West-Java Editie*, 12 April 1924.

⁴³ “Omong Kosong,” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 27 February 1923.

to prevent verbal assaults and insults against the Chinese and Indonesian by the Dutch press. Multiple instances in colonial Indonesia demonstrated that colonial legislation often treated them unjustly. They could be punished solely on the basis of unproven suspicion or animosity. Based on this prejudice, a renowned Chinese or Indonesian journalist might be penalised more harshly than a Dutch murderer or rapist.⁴⁴

In the case of Na Tjin Hoe, a notable journalist in Surabaya, for instance, the Surabaya police abused him after he was accused of committing a *persdelict*. Meanwhile, The Kian Sing, the editor-in-chief of the *Pewarta Soerabaja* daily, was reportedly humiliated and handcuffed for a similar reason.⁴⁵ Hence, *Sin Po* quipped that it was as difficult to find a trustworthy Dutch press “as it was to find a man with three eyes.”⁴⁶

Tan Tek Ho, a journalist for *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, said that the Dutch police handled Dutch offenders with far more humanity than the imprisoned Chinese journalists. According to him, the Dutch’s behaviour was highly contradictory to the “Western notion” (*Westerse opvatting*) they had been promoting. When Tan Tek Ho visited one of Surabaya’s prisons, he saw a significant disparity in the treatment of Dutch and non-Dutch convicts. The typical non-Dutch jail cell lacked natural light and had poor air circulation, making everyone who entered feel queasy. In addition, one Dutch prisoner’s cell was often shared with three Chinese and one Indonesian inmate. Tan Tek Ho considered this discrimination to be a “national humiliation” (*nationale schande*) which he criticised: “Gentlemen, do you want outsiders to treat you the same way you treat Chinese and Bumiputera in your colony?” He also placed the blame on the *Ambtenaar voor Chineesche Zaken* (Official for Chinese Affairs), who was unable of resolving the issue. Tan Tek Ho encouraged the organization to address this discriminating issue rather than focusing on Chinese press blunders.⁴⁷

Sin Po also criticised the colonial authority for awarding honorary stars to some of the leading editors and authors who routinely insulted the Indonesians, rather than imposing severe penalties. Alibasah Winata, who later became the leader of Partai

⁴⁴ “Anti-Blanda?” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 29 September 1923.

⁴⁵ “Sebar Bibit Kabentjien,” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 17 July 1923; “Keadilan di Ini Hindia,” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 12 October 1923.

⁴⁶ “Omong Kosong,” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 27 February 1923.

⁴⁷ “Pro Justitia?” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 7 August 1923.

Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party/PKI), was sentenced to four months in prison for violating the *persdelict*, while a Dutch journalist who wrote “the Bumiputera must be raised to the height of the gallows” continued to work and spread hatred through his newspaper.⁴⁸ Therefore, *Sin Po* claimed that Dirk Fock’s severe regulations applied primarily to Indonesian and Chinese publications.

The politics of language is one aspect that was repeatedly discussed by *Sin Po*. It contended that the Dutch’s lack of Malay comprehension often contributed to a number of *persdelicts* in which *Sin Po* was regularly involved. In one article, *Sin Po* referred to the colonial authority as “*pemerintahan bengis*” (ruthless government), which was translated by a Dutch newspaper as “*wreede regering*” (tyrannical governance). According to *Sin Po*, the two expressions had different meanings, and the paper was eventually punished by the colonial authority as a result of the misunderstanding.⁴⁹ The majority of Dutch publications, according to *Sin Po*, strongly depended on A.H.L. Badings’ dictionary, which was already outdated.⁵⁰ *Algemeene Indisch Dagblad* once committed a redactional error by writing “*troesah ambil Sin Po terlalu serieux*.” *Sin Po* was unaware of the existence of the word “*serieux*” in either Malay or Dutch. However, AID still defended its ‘Malay expert’ by saying that the Malay language was truly “slippery” (*licin*) which was challenged by *Sin Po*’s editor, who cynically stated: “Indeed, it is very slippery, as the AID representative wrote *kepiting* (crab) for *oedang* (shrimp); *goblok* (fool) for *golok* (machete); and *o-ree-boom* for... *Oranje Boven*.”⁵¹ In the same article, *Sin Po* also criticised the Malay expert for the Dutch publication *Midden Java* for translating several terms incorrectly. One of them was “*pengaroeh*” (*afgeleid*/influence) to “*maroeh*” which meant *mededingster* (rival) or *plaaggeest* (mischief).⁵²

Both the Chinese Peranakan and Indonesian communities considered *Melajoe Rendah* as a form of resistance in order to maintain their dignity. According to Tom Hoogervorst, this vernacular Malay (known as *Melajoe Rendah*) was essential for Indonesia’s public sphere and for middle classes to access colonial information, to read

⁴⁸ “Dosanja Sama, Hoekoemannja Tida,” *Sin Po West-Java Editie*, 24 May 1924.

⁴⁹ “Bahasa Melajoe Boeat Bangsa Olanda,” *Sin Po*, 21 January 1925.

⁵⁰ A.H.L. Badings, *Hollandsch-Maleische en Maleisch-Hollandsche Samenspraken*. (Harderwijk, 1883).

⁵¹ “Bahasa Melajoe Boeat Bangsa Olanda,” *Sin Po*, 21 January 1925.

⁵² “Bahasa Melajoe Boeat Bangsa Olanda,” *Sin Po*, 21 January 1925.

different publications and in turn for communities to understand in order to keep up with modernity.⁵³ Illustrating this connection between language and modernity, *Sin Po* discussed how Indians had once taken great pride in their English proficiency. In the 1920s, however, Indian authorities began requiring their citizens to always use Hindi or their local dialect in formal settings. In addition, they asked Indian schools and institutions to follow suit. The majority of the Indian population began to consider English as a colonial tongue, and the status of the language progressively declined.⁵⁴

Sin Po believed that these Indian patterns were analogous to those in colonial Indonesia. People in the colony who spoke Dutch fluently felt immense pride and with these abilities, one might earn well-paying employment. Nonetheless, around the 1920s, the worldwide recession and domestic crisis caused highly coveted government positions to become increasingly scarce. Diplomas began to lose their value, which resulted in an increasing surplus of educated Chinese and Indonesians. Government agencies and private companies had difficulty employing Dutch school graduates, compelling students and graduates of Westernised institutions to devise their own employment strategies.⁵⁵ Similar to what transpired in India, the seeds of opposition began to grow stronger during this time in Indonesia, and *Sin Po* believed that intellectual unemployment was a big concern in the colony. Hence, *Sin Po* predicted that an opposition movement employing *Melajoe Rendah* as the main instrument would grow substantially in the future.⁵⁶

In the middle of the upheaval, the Dutch government devised the *Vlootwet* (Fleet Expansion Act) in 1923 under the pretence of defending the Indies against an external attack, which according to *Sin Po* like “rubbing salt into a wound, except that only the weak can feel it.”⁵⁷ The paper later found out that the warship was financed by the residents of the colony, who were already burdened with numerous taxes. It also argued that the purpose of the *Vlootwet* was to prevent the Dutch from losing control of the

⁵³ Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 153.

⁵⁴ “Prihal Bahasa,” *Sin Po*, 14 January 1925.

⁵⁵ Robert van Niel, *The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite*. (The Hague: Van Hoeve, 1960).

⁵⁶ “Prihal Bahasa,” *Sin Po*, 14 January 1925.

⁵⁷ “Soesa Ditimpa Soeker,” *Sin Po Oost-Java Editie*, 26 October 1923.

Indies, since if that were to happen, “the position of the Netherlands in international affairs would plunge from a third-class nation to a thirteenth-class one, or even below.”⁵⁸

This *Vlootwet* issue became one of the catalysts that brought together Bumiputera and the Chinese people in colonial Indonesia, particularly in Java. Together, the majority of them opposed the idea and even threatened to stage large-scale protests. For instance, in an essay entitled “Djaoehken Vlootwet” (Avoid Vlootwet) that was published in the *Hindia Baroe* (New Indies, formerly *Neratja*) newspaper, Sarekat Islam (Islamic Union) vehemently rejected the proposal. The organisation issued a declaration to all its branches, urging them to resist the idea fiercely. Meanwhile, communist opposition to the *Vlootwet* affair became the loudest.⁵⁹

The *Vlootwet* issue, according to *Sin Po*, only strengthened the anti-colonial movement. The writer Mash (pseudonym), who claimed to be an Indonesian, opined in *Sin Po* that it was actually difficult to halt the movement in the East. He remarked that despite the fact that the majority of movements were still weak and poorly planned, they had begun to demonstrate their firm political stance by continuously opposing and criticising all forms of discrimination in the East. Given that both Chinese and Indonesians were members of *Bangsa Timur* (Eastern Nations), *Sin Po* encouraged both groups to unite against this persecution.⁶⁰ “Despite their diverse languages and cultures, they maintained strong emotional and political bonds as oppressed nations.” *Sin Po* contended, therefore, that neither the Chinese nor the Indonesian movements conflicted with one another; rather, they were complimentary in a variety of ways.⁶¹

Because it benefitted the Indonesian movement, a growing number of Indonesian nationalists also began to publicly express their support and enthusiasm for Chinese political initiatives. The Chinese in the Indies readily embraced this support. They even got financial contributions from the Bumiputera. The Central office of Sarekat Islam (Islamic Union), an organisation with a history of antagonistic ties with ethnic Chinese, also provided assistance to the Chinese in the colony. As a sign of respect, dozens of

⁵⁸ “Vlootwet jang Tida Patoet,” *Sin Po*, 10 November 1924.

⁵⁹ “Vlootwet jang Tida Patoet,” *Sin Po*, 10 November 1924.

⁶⁰ “Tionghoa dengan Boemipoetra dalem Oeroesan Politiek,” *Sin Po*, 9 September 1925.

⁶¹ “Tionghoa dengan Boemipoetra dalem Oeroesan Politiek,” *Sin Po*, 9 September 1925.

Chinese representatives attended the Sarekat Islam convention in Yogyakarta. Following this attendance, a Sarekat Islam spokesman declared that the Chinese and Bumiputera should collaborate.⁶²

Moreover, Haji Agus Salim, an Indonesian nationalist and statesman, authored an essay entitled “Pers dan Kebangsaan” for *Hindia Baroe* in which he analysed the movement of *Bangsa Tionghoa* in colonial Indonesia.⁶³ Agus Salim complimented the movement for being significantly more evolved than it was a few years ago. He stated that in the preceding revolution the Chinese had only desired acknowledgement from the Dutch, they now also sought equality.⁶⁴

Despite relentless pressure and assaults from Dutch officials and the media, *Sin Po*’s criticisms of Fock’s injustice persisted. Once, the newspaper compared the actions of the Dutch government to those of the Manchu regime in early 20th-century China. Since 1901, the Manchu administration had been aware of the growing strength of the Chinese revolutionary movement. The Manchu administration had no choice but to implement significant adjustments, such as a pledge to include these revolutionaries in the parliament (similar to the Volksraad in the Indies), where they could express their desires and complaints. However, because the situation did not significantly improve, the Chinese masses began to independently engage in revolutionary activity. On 24 September 1905, a bomb detonated in Peking, wounding both Duke Tsi-tse and Shao-ying, both of whom were high-ranking Manchu officials. On 6 July 1907, En Ming, the provincial governor of Anhui, was assassinated during the Anqing revolt, which prompted the Manchu authorities to take strong measures against the revolutionaries, such as censoring the press and restricting political gatherings, similar to those implemented by the colonial authority in the Indies. However, according to *Sin Po*, this action merely stoked the flames of revolution in China, resulting in the fall of the last imperial dynasty.⁶⁵

Through this article in 1924, *Sin Po* illustrated that an absolute government would only lead to civil unrest and opposition. It highlighted the fall of the Manchu government

⁶² “Hoakiauw dan Boemipoetra,” *Sin Po*, 10 September 1925.

⁶³ *Hindia Baroe*, 10 September 1925.

⁶⁴ “Hoakiauw dan Boemipoetra,” *Sin Po*, 10 September 1925.

⁶⁵ “Satoe Katja Boeat Pamerintah Hindia,” *Sin Po West-Java Editie*, 11 April 1924.

as evidence that arbitrary constraints on Chinese revolutionaries were ineffectual in quelling the resistance movement. By stating this, *Sin Po* implied that a similar situation could have arisen in colonial Indonesia if the Dutch colonial administration had not reformed its discriminating policies.

On several occasions, *Sin Po* also lauded the communists' tenacity to improve the living conditions of their people. The paper also drew parallels to the Chinese struggle in colonial Indonesia, which, according to the paper, was only lukewarm. In May 1924, Alibasah Winata (Partai Komunis Indonesia/Indonesian Communist Party) and Bassach (Sariket Rahajat/People's Union) said that it was time for the people of the Indies to build their own government, which they referred to as "*pemerintah buat rakyat*" (government for the people). This government was solely accountable to its people and was required to listen to their desires. "And the people of the Indies have no fear about paying the price for the independence they have yearned for."⁶⁶

The intensification of nationalist and communist activities in Indonesia coincided with an increase in *persdelict* cases, from sixty-three in January 1920 to seventy-one in January 1925 and one hundred in April 1928.⁶⁷ In response to these various movements, the members of the *Volksraad* were divided.⁶⁸ Most of them were obviously concerned about the expansion of the anti-colonial movement in the colony. The Dutch reporters took advantage of the circumstances to target non-European politicians and advocated for their exclusion from the *Volksraad*. *Sin Po* vehemently rejected this, accusing these writers of possessing a poor colonial mentality since they consistently acted like colonial rulers. In the near future, the paper said, the Dutch would no longer be able to play the role of master and servant.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ "Ditokkiak," *Sin Po West-Java Editie*, 7 May 1924.

⁶⁷ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia*, 153.

⁶⁸ In December 1916, under Governor-General Van Limburg Stirum, a semi-legislative institution called *Volksraad* was founded. Through *Volksraad*, the Bumiputera were able to participate and discuss issues related to the Indies. Nevertheless, the power of this quasi-parliament was limited as it only had advisory powers. Despite the fact that a section of the council was elected, only a minority of the people possessed voting rights. See Harry J. Benda, S.L. van der Wal, *De Volksraad en de Staatkundige Ontwikkeling van Nederlandsch-Indië: Een Bronnenpublikatie. The Peoples Council and the Political Development of the Netherlands-Indies, Tweede Stuk 1927-1942* (Leiden: J.B. Wolters, 1965).

⁶⁹ "Djalan Moendoer," *Sin Po West-Java Editie*, 12 April 1924.

When a newspaper in Kali Besar, Batavia (possibly *Java Bode*) questioned the Bumiputera's representatives in the *Volksraad* about their contribution to their people, *Sin Po* did its utmost to defend them. According to the paper, they had often offered *voorstel* (proposals) to better the living conditions of their people in the Indies, but these were frequently rejected by the other members since they did not benefit the Dutch. Moreover, their representation in the *Volksraad* did not compare to that of Europeans, causing them to lose practically every vote, despite their hard efforts. On one occasion when they attempted to abolish the "Poenale Sanctie" (Penal Sanction), but it was rejected by the majority of Dutch *Volksraad* members. The rejection meant that Bumiputera and Chinese coolies in the colony would continue to suffer. *Sin Po* also criticised the Dutch press for repeatedly stating that the Bumiputera were "not yet mature" or that their intelligence was inferior to that of Europeans. It stated that the limited participation of Bumiputera in the *Volksraad* had nothing to do with their competence, and it was the system in *Volksraad* that made their voices ineffective.⁷⁰

It was in this context then of growing shared critiques of the colonial regime that news of Sun Yat-sen's death on 12 March 1925 again brought the communities together. His death was extensively reported in various political gatherings attended by Chinese Peranakan and Indonesians, and the notion of increased cooperation among various races was also vigorously promoted and encouraged.

Sin Po and Sun Yat-sen

On 12 March 1925, Sun Yat-sen drew his last breath at Peking Union Medical College Hospital, after suffering from liver cancer for many years. Chinese communities across the world, including in Toronto, Paris, Singapore, Hong Kong, and colonial Indonesia, mourned his passing. Several Chinese organisations organised "Twie Too Hwee" (Memorial Service) committees in major Indonesian cities such as Bandung, Batavia, and Surabaya to mourn his loss.⁷¹ In Batavia, for instance, about fifty Chinese organisations

⁷⁰ "Logica Djoega Reactionair," *Sin Po West-Java Editie*, 12 May 1924.

⁷¹ The "Twie Too Hwee" was commemorated in around thirty Indonesian cities, including Padang, Palembang, Serang, Cirebon, Kebumen, Magelang, Tegal, Purwodadi, Pekalongan, Bojonegoro, Sidoarjo, Blitar, Gresik, Pasuruan, Makassar, and so on.

agreed to participate. The passing of Sun Yat-sen, interestingly, was not only commemorated by the Chinese, but also by Indonesians. The Twie Too Hwee collected donations from both all sources totalling around f. 10,000.⁷²

Sin Po which had ardently followed Sun Yat-sen, devoted a weekly edition (16 May 1925) to the remembrance of his merits and legacy for Chinese people worldwide. The *Sin Po* special edition called *Twie Too Hwee-Nummer*, included Sun Yat-sen's speeches, thoughts, and reflections from Chinese and foreigners on the leader. The paper regarded Sun Yat-sen as a pivotal figure in fostering nationalism among Chinese overseas.⁷³ *Sin Po* perceived Sun's death as a crucial impetus for fostering fraternity between the Chinese and other Indonesians, which resulted in several new important initiatives.

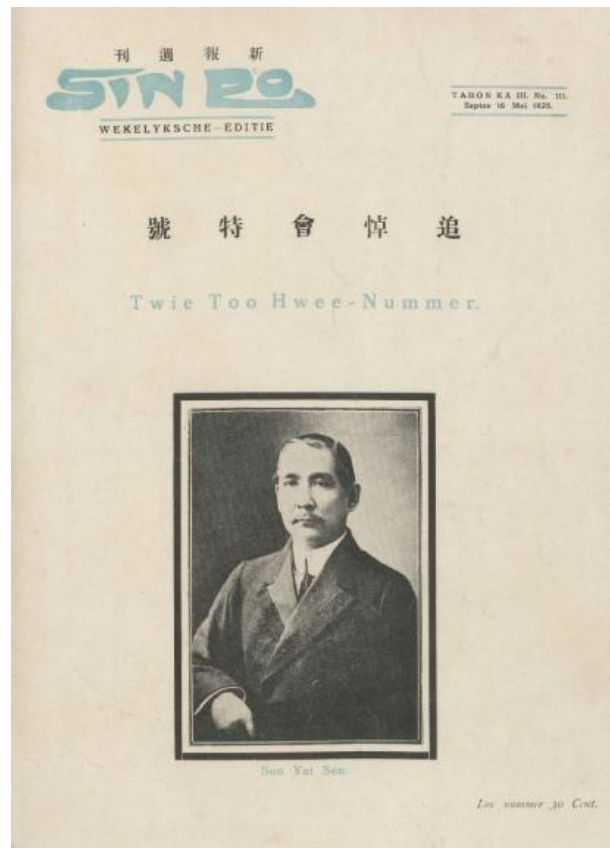


Figure 3.1. *Sin Po* “Twie Too Hwee Nummer.” Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 16 May 1925.

⁷² “Sikep Blanda,” *Sin Po*, 21 April 1925; “Twie Too Hwee di ini Hindia,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 16 May 1925.

⁷³ *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 16 May 1925.

Following the victory of Sun Yat-sen over the Qing Dynasty through the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, *Sin Po* continued to publish numerous articles regarding Sun Yat-sen's political activity. It regularly echoed Sun's lofty ambition to transform China into a strong, stable, and respected nation. The paper served as a vital conduit for emerging China to communicate Sun Yat-sen's ideas to colonial Indonesia. As the majority of Chinese in Indonesia still valued cultural connections with China, the Chinese government also intentionally encouraged this with the hope also of attracting financial contributions.⁷⁴

Although the majority of the Chinese inhabitants in the colony revered Sun Yat-Sen and regarded him as pivotal in evoking the spirit of nationalism among Chinese overseas, a few of them also rejected Sun's political philosophy. *Sin Po* was generally tolerant of varied opinions, but according to the paper, some of them had gone too far. It criticised a Chinese association in Batavia, whose name the paper refused to mention, that opted to celebrate the 'fake news' of Sun's death by drinking wine and eating noodles at a Batavia restaurant.⁷⁵ It vehemently denounced this behaviour and labelled their attitude "kasar dan menta" (rough and raw). This group was an outlier as even though some Chinese in Indonesia regarded Sun Yat-sen as a political foe, Sun was still an important figure in overthrowing the Manchu monarchy. Thus, *Sin Po* recommended sarcastically that "they should form the "Ba Mi Club" (Noodle Club) where they could eat, drink, and satisfy their egos."⁷⁶

When Sun passed away, many Chinese inhabitants of the colony mourned his passing in a graceful manner. The *Twie Too Hwee* activities, however, sparked a massive controversy between the Chinese population and the Dutch authorities. The Dutch government agreed that Sun Yat-sen's death should be commemorated with a national

⁷⁴ "Sun Yat Sen (1866-1924)," *Sin Po*, 15 May 1924.

⁷⁵ On 15 May 1924, people in colonial Indonesia were shaken by the news of Sun Yat-sen's death which was published in *Sin Po Maleische Editie*. Based on the telegram that *Sin Po* had obtained from Hong Kong and Shanghai, Sun Yat-sen died from brain fever (*hersenkoorts*). However, the next day, *Sin Po* released a clarification article, indicating the death of Sun Yat-sen was nothing more than a piece of false news. See "Sun Yat Sen 孫," *Sin Po*, 15 May 1924; "Sun Yat Sen (1866-1924)," *Sin Po*, 15 May 1924; "Sun Yat Sen Tida Mati," *Sin Po*, 16 May 1924.

⁷⁶ "Kasar dan Menta," *Sin Po*, 16 May 1924.

day of sorrow, however, it seemed reluctant to permit the Chinese and some Bumiputera to lower flags to half-mast in honour of Sun Yat-sen. The government even instructed the police to break into Chinese homes displaying a half-mast flag and force them to raise the flag to full mast.⁷⁷

Sin Po criticised the police's actions and compared the attitude of the British and the Dutch government toward this *Twie Too Hwee* ceremony. Although during his entire life, the British always treated Sun Yat-sen as a political enemy, when he died, the British colonial government in Hong Kong allowed the crowd there to use the Great Hall of Hong Kong University for the ceremony.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the Chinese People in Singapore successfully held a ceremony without any interference from the British. As a gesture of respect, the British even fired a cannon from Fort Canning at 13:00.⁷⁹

The Chinese people in many regions of Indonesia attempted to organise memorial services despite the Dutch police's threats of violence. *Sin Po* then utilised its authority to inform all its readers about the challenges faced by the *Twie Too Hwee* committee and the repressive actions carried out by the Dutch authorities. By doing so, *Sin Po* believed that the Chinese in Indonesia would unite to fight against Dutch arbitrariness.

However, as stated previously, not all Chinese in colonial Indonesia supported Sun's political stance. Some refused to pay homage to the death of Sun for a variety of reasons. Several Chinese organisations in Surabaya, for instance, declined to lower their flags to half-mast to honour Sun Yat-sen. They feared being labelled as "kaum merah" (communist) or "Bolshevik." *Sin Po* blasted them as cowards and demanded that they change their citizenship. The paper stated:

It was frequently stated by the Chinese in the Indies that if a Chinese gave up their nationality, it would be a severe loss. However, if a Chinese person (as in Surabaya) decided to shift their citizenship and leave the Chinese community, that would not be a disadvantage, but rather a benefit.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ "Twi Too Hwee Dr. Sun," *Sin Po*, 18 April 1925.

⁷⁸ "Oeroesan Twie Too Hwee dan Fihak Blanda," *Sin Po*, 18 April 1925.

⁷⁹ "Sikep Inggris dan Blanda!" *Sin Po*, 22 April 1925.

⁸⁰ "Alpa atawa Pengetjoet," *Sin Po*, 18 March 1925.

Many Indonesian leaders, claiming to be inspired by the struggle of Sun Yat-sen, also chose to commemorate *Twie Too Hwee* together with the local Chinese. Around 300 Bumiputera and hundreds of Chinese in Surabaya, for instance, honoured Sun Yat-sen. As a symbol of their sorrow, they also wore black armbands (*rouwband*). Meanwhile in Solo, R.M. Wreksodiningrat composed a song entitled “Sun Yat-Sen Twie Too” to honour his memory. According to Agus Salim, a renowned Indonesian politician, truly understood why the vast majority of ethnic Chinese around the world revered Sun Yat-sen. Sun Yat-sen, according to him, was able to effectively lead a revolution that elevated the dignity of the Chinese nation.⁸¹ By reporting on this *Sin Po* wished to demonstrate Sun was revered at all levels of society, regardless of ethnicity.

After facing many obstacles, the local authorities in Bandung eventually permitted the *Twie Too Hwee* ceremony in the city. However, they did not allow a single speech. In Semarang, the local administration allowed for speeches during the event, but only in Chinese or Dutch.⁸² Interestingly, the Malay language was also forbidden during the ceremony in Langsar, Tegal, and Sibolga. *Sin Po* believed that the prohibition of Malay was intended to prevent Chinese Peranakan and Bumiputera from comprehending the event’s chronology and the substance of speeches, as most of them did not grasp the language.⁸³ This was likely owing to the Dutch colonial government’s fear that the Chinese communists might infiltrate the event and use it as a platform to indoctrinate the crowd.

Meanwhile, in Batavia, the *Twie Too Hwee* committee encountered even more complicated circumstances. The committee initially proposed Koningsplein (now Lapangan Monas) or Waterlooplein (now Lapangan Banteng), both of which were near the government buildings of the Netherlands Indies, as the location of the memorial service. However, due to the fact that Koningsplein was an open area, the Dutch

⁸¹ “Swara Boemipoetra tentang Pergerakan Tionghoa,” *Sin Po*, 12 September 1925.

⁸² “Twi Too Hwee Dr. Sun,” *Sin Po*, 18 April 1925.

⁸³ “Bahasa Melajoe Contrabande?” *Sin Po*, 27 April 1925.

administration in Batavia obviously declined the committee's proposal, as they considered that it might pose a threat to public order if the crowd became unruly.⁸⁴

The authority required that the event should take place within a closed building. However, *Sin Po* viewed the decision as unjust and accused the Dutch government of a lack of wisdom (*tact*) since the Dutch had previously allowed several events to be hosted there without any problem. In addition, the article asserted that other than the Koningsplein or Waterlooplein, no other location in Batavia could handle thousands of people, "unless the government was willing to lend the Governor-General's palace," quipped *Sin Po*.⁸⁵ Thus, *Sin Po* predicted that the memorial service would be attended by the vast majority of Chinese in Batavia and the surrounding area.

The colonial government anticipated that the Chinese in Batavia would exploit the memorial service to gain political momentum against the government. Additionally, Dutch intelligence suspected that Bumiputera might also attend the service.⁸⁶ There was a rumour that 10,000 Bumiputera and 10,000 Chinese would attend the event. The rumour subsequently provided a compelling reason for the Batavia authorities to deny permission for holding a *Twie Too Hwee* ceremony in an open location.⁸⁷

Sin Po's editor immediately countered the indictment. Even more, the paper challenged the government to deploy its finest troops to secure the event and arrest anyone who might disturb the ceremony. *Sin Po* stated that less than twenty or thirty Bumiputera participated in *Twie Too Hwee* celebrations in large towns like Medan, Bandung, and Cirebon; hence, the paper thought the allegation that 10,000 Bumiputera might attend the event implausible. *Sin Po* believed that the Batavian authorities were paranoid and acting

⁸⁴ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, p. 145.

⁸⁵ The *Twie Too Hwee* Batavia committee then recommended Gambir Park or Dierentuin (now Ragunan Zoo) as the replacement venue, but both were rejected for the same reason: they were also open spaces. The authorities then proposed to the *Twie Too Hwee* committee that the ceremony be held for up to a month, so it would give enough time for all Chinese in Batavia to attend the ceremony. See "Oeroesan Twie Too Hwee dan Fihak Blanda," *Sin Po*, 18 & 20 April 1925.

⁸⁶ "Twi Too Hwee Dr. Sun," *Sin Po*, 18 April 1925.

⁸⁷ "Twi Too Hwee dan Communisten," *Sin Po*, 22 April 1925.

excessively. It stated: “The Dutch government has police, the law, etc. to prohibit people from doing certain things, but it cannot prevent people from thinking and feeling.”⁸⁸

Meanwhile, the Batavian police repeatedly interrogated the *Twie Too Hwee* committee in Batavia with questions such as: (1) Did Chinese in the Indies glorify Sun Yat-Sen as the communist leader or as the founder of the Republic of China? (2) Did Chinese people respect Sun Yat-sen because he had fought the merchants in Canton?⁸⁹ Or most likely because he had succeeded in ousting the imperial system in China?⁹⁰ From the questions raised, it was evident that the Dutch colonial government considered Sun Yat-sen a threat. Sun’s leaning towards communism at the end of his life was arguably the primary cause given the Dutch government’s extreme hostility to communism.

Eventually, on 10 May 1925, the ceremony was conducted at Dierentuin, which was situated in the European neighbourhood. According to *Sin Po*, the event drew 15,000 attendees, while other sources reported just 8,000.⁹¹ The local authorities, however, prohibited the use of provocative and political words, such as ‘social revolution.’ The *Twie Too Hwee* committee was required to submit the scripts of all speeches to the police at least two days prior, and the authorities had the absolute right to censor them. In addition, the Batavian administration restricted ceremonial participation to those over the age of 18. This barred Chinese students from participating in the event, even though they had spent a lot of time rehearsing for the ceremony. On the day of the event, the police constructed a temporary bamboo fence around the venue. Several Bumiputera organisations and communities that had planned to participate in the ceremony, were expelled by the police guards. Even during a minute of silence, the Dutch police

⁸⁸ “Sikep Blanda,” *Sin Po*, 21 April 1925.

⁸⁹ The conflict between the Canton Merchants’ Volunteer Corps and the Nationalist Army occurred in late 1924 and was known as the Canton Merchants’ Corps Uprising. During their first national congress, the Nationalists endorsed new ideas, including “Unify with Russia” and “Accept Communism,” which sparked the uprising. Concerned that Sun might possibly adopt communism in Canton, the Canton merchants altered their stance toward the government. On 11 October 1924, Sun created a revolutionary army alongside Xu Zongzhi, Liao Zhongkai, Wang Jingwei, Chiang Kai-shek, Chen Youren, and Tan Pingshan. With the aid of the Soviet Union, they easily defeated the Merchant’s Corps.

⁹⁰ “Sikap jang Soeker Dimengarti,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 16 May 1925.

⁹¹ According to the report of the Chief of Police in Batavia, the absence of several peranakan leaders, especially the Chinese major Khouw Kim An, who was in Salatiga for Volksraad’s visit, was the primary reason for the ceremony’s lukewarm response. See Mona Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 145.

commanders, who were also present at the event, refused to stand up as a sign of respect.⁹² Nevertheless, the event concluded without incident.

Sin Po stated that the *Twie Too Hwee* contributed significantly to the unification of the *Bangsa Tionghoa* and *Bangsa Bumiputera* in the colony. *Sin Po* regarded the collaboration between the two nations as a sacred and unique phenomenon, as reported in the paper:

It has never happened before in the history of the Indies that the Bumiputera also expressed their sorrow on a day of grief for the Chinese. It is the first time the Bumiputera has expressed a delicate emotion that is difficult to forget... Let this be the new rope that ties these two Eastern nations in a bond that will live forever. Because Asian nations must exert tremendous effort to join and progress in unison. The more Asian Nations unite, the stronger our position will be.⁹³

In stating this, *Sin Po* believed that the death of Sun Yat-sen was potentially a turning point in the history of the two nations which had been subjugated for many centuries. Prior to 1924, the majority of Bumiputera and Chinese activities were conducted separately by the respective communities. Despite this, the passing of Sun Yat-sen made the Chinese population in colonial Indonesia increasingly aware of their vulnerable political position in the colony.⁹⁴ In one article, *Sin Po* stated: “we feel that the relationship between these two groups has never been better than it is now.”⁹⁵

After his death, Sun’s legacy and ideas remained firmly ingrained in the thinking of many Chinese people in Indonesia. Sun’s essay entitled “Chien Kuo Fang Loh,” for instance, was translated into Malay in 1939 as “Djalan ka Kamerdikah” (The Road to Independence) and became a mandatory reading for several Chinese schools and

⁹² “Taoe Adat,” *Sin Po*, 11 May 1925.

⁹³ “Twie Too Hwee di ini Hindia,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 16 May 1925.

⁹⁴ “Tionghoa dengan Boemipoetra dalem Oeroesan Politiek,” *Sin Po*, 9 September 1925.

⁹⁵ “Hoakiauw dan Boemipoetra,” *Sin Po*, 10 September 1925.

organisations in Indonesia. This book describes Sun Yat-sen's failed attempts to start a revolution in China until the eventually successful revolution on 10 October 1911.⁹⁶

In the years that followed the collaboration between Chinese and Bumiputera grew even closer, at least until the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out (see Chapter IV). During this period, *Sin Po* made a number of significant advances in terms of promoting Indonesian nationalism. This included the permanent use of the word "Indonesia" in all of its publications, the development of closer partnerships with leading figures of the Indonesian movement, such as Soekarno, and the publication of the song "Indonesia," which later became the Indonesian national anthem.

Sin Po's political stance, however, frequently landed the press in serious difficulties. The colonial authorities did not approve of *Sin Po*'s criticisms. As a cautionary measure, the government refused to place advertisements in *Sin Po*, causing its readers to miss official government announcements. This strategy was also adopted by five Dutch corporations, who refused to advertise in the paper.⁹⁷ The boycott thus impacted *Sin Po*'s budget. The paper generated only 40 per cent of its revenue from advertising, while a typical Dutch daily could earn 60 per cent from it. Despite this financial impact, *Sin Po*, remained unwavering in its political orientation and refused to suppress its political commentary. It continued to support the Indonesian independence movement and believed that language could become an important representation of resistance against the Dutch colonial authority and support for the Indonesian independence struggle.

⁹⁶ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Taon Sebagai Wartawan*, 34.

⁹⁷ These five companies were called 'De Ring' (The Circle) in the 1930s and consisted of (1) N.V. *Internationale Crediet- en Handels-Vereeniging Rotterdam* (International Credit and Trade Association Rotterdam Co. Ltd./Internatio); (2) N.V. *Nederlands Indische Maatschappij tot voortzetting der zaken Van der Linde & Teves en R.S. Stokvis & Zonen*. (The Netherlands Indies Company for the continuation of the businesses of Van der Linde & Teves and R.S. Stokvis & Sons, Co. Ltd./Lindeteves); (3) *Borneo-Sumatra Maatschappij* (Borneo-Sumatra Company/Borsumij); (4) *Jacobson & van den Berg*; (5) *Geo Wehy & Co*. See Peter Post, "Trust and Status in a Dual Regional Economy: Dutch Trading Companies in Japan's Prewar Trade with Southeast Asia," in *Commercial Networks in Modern Asia*, ed. Shinya Sugiyama (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 184.

Sin Po and “Indonesia”

The mid-1920s were distinguished by the birth of many revolutionary ideas, one of which was an attempt to promote the name ‘Indonesia’ as a replacement for the colonial term ‘Dutch East Indies.’ *Sin Po* was one of the pioneers of the Chinese press in disseminating the concept across colonial Indonesia. The discussion regarding the use of the terms ‘Indies’ or ‘Indonesia’ first appeared in *Sin Po* on 26 April 1924. At the time, *Sin Po* had just received a newsletter titled *Indonesia Merdeka* (Free Indonesia) the mouthpiece of the Rotterdam-based *Indonesische Vereeniging* (Indonesian Association). The editor of the magazine stated in the introduction why the Bumiputera preferred to refer to their home as “Indonesia.” It was believed that the term ‘Indies’ frequently caused confusion since there were two countries named ‘Hindia’ in Asia, namely ‘Hindia Inggris’ (British India) and ‘Hindia Belanda’ (Dutch East Indies). People typically used the term ‘Dutch East Indies’ to avoid confusion, however, Bumiputera activists who fought for self-governance shunned the word since politically it would only justify the Indies as a part of the Netherlands. Extending this, they pointed to how when Spain occupied the Netherlands (1556-1714), the progressive Dutch did not appreciate being referred to as “Spaansch-Nederland” (Spanish-Netherland) by the Spaniards.⁹⁸

On 6 May 1925, *Sedio Tomo*, a Javanese newspaper published in Yogyakarta, published an article encouraging Chinese journalists to stop using the word ‘Hindia Belanda’ (Dutch East Indies) and start using ‘Indonesia’ instead. *Sin Po* became one of the first Chinese Peranakan publications to respond to the article by replacing the derogatory word “*inlander*” (native) with the phrases “*warga Indonesia*” or “*bangsa Indonesia*”, both of which refer to the Indonesian people.⁹⁹

A few days before this response was printed, *Sin Po* had recommended something similar in one of its pieces. On 2 May 1925, in a rubric called “*Iseng-Iseng Hari Saptoe*” (Saturday’s Funny), *Sin Po* openly proposed the use of the word “Indonesia” or “Hindia” to replace “Hindia Belanda”.¹⁰⁰ *Sin Po* made this language change incrementally by first

⁹⁸ “Indonesia Merdika,” *Sin Po West-Java Editie*, 26 April 1924.

⁹⁹ “Djangan Seboet Hindia Blanda,” *Sin Po*, 8 May 1925.

¹⁰⁰ “Iseng-Iseng Hari Saptoe,” *Sin Po*, 2 May 1925.

removing the word “Belanda” or “Nederland” after “Hindia.”¹⁰¹ Up to 8 May 1926, *Sin Po* still used the term “Hindia” in its weekly, but from the following issue of 15 May 1926, *Sin Po* began to consistently use the word ‘Indonesia.’¹⁰²



Figure 3.2. Left: the 8 May 1926 issue of *Sin Po* Weekly, which still employed “Hindia” terminology. Right: The upcoming issue of *Sin Po* Weekly which already included the word “Indonesia” in all of its rubrics. Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 8 & 15 May 1926.

Similar editorial practises were implemented by other Indonesian publications. In 1927, journalist Parada Harahap (1899-1959) advocated for the replacement of the terms ‘Indonesia’ instead of ‘Hindia Belanda’ and ‘buitengewesten’ (outer districts) in place of ‘buitenbezittingen’ (outer possessions). Additionally, he also proposed the use of ‘Hindoestan’ rather than ‘Britsch Indie’ (British India) and ‘Voor-Indier’ (Indian) as

¹⁰¹ However, since its inception on 2 January 1925, the *Soeara Publik* (Public Voice) daily in Surabaya, which was initially managed by Phoa Tjhoen Hoay (editor-in-chief), Tio Ie Soei (editor in West Java), and Tio Lin Khing (director), had already used the term “Indies” in one of its rubrics titled “Daerahnja Hindia” (The Indies Region). This initiative was likely not as well-known as *Sin Po* due to the publication’s smaller circulation. For the record, this newspaper’s pro-Indonesian stance intensified after Liem Koen Hian served as both its director and editor-in-chief. See *Soeara Publik*, 2 January 1925 & 2 April 1925.

¹⁰² See *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 8 & 15 May 1926.

opposed to ‘*Keling*’ (Tamil).¹⁰³ According to Ang Jan Goan, since this period Indonesian newspapers also began using “Tionghoa” in place of “Cina” or “Tjina” (Chinese) and “Tiongkok” when referring to the country. Similar action spurred other Dutch media to adopt this language, which eventually gained wide adoption. After the *Sumpah Pemuda* (Youth Pledge) was announced on 28 October 1928, *Sin Po* also began using the term *Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian language) instead of *Bahasa Melajoe* (Malay Language). In its editorial, *Sedio Tomo* praised the move and wrote:

Sin Po’s dedication to our nation would bring salvation and strengthen our brotherhood with *Bangsa Tionghoa* (Chinese nation); we are grateful. We hope that other Chinese media will also cover this story.¹⁰⁴

According to *Sedio Tomo*, *Sin Po* was successful in laying a crucial foundation for resistance to colonialism, and language politics became one of the tools of that resistance. As the leading Chinese Peranakan newspaper at the time, *Sedio Tomo* was certain that it was only a matter of time before other Chinese publications would follow in the footsteps of *Sin Po*.

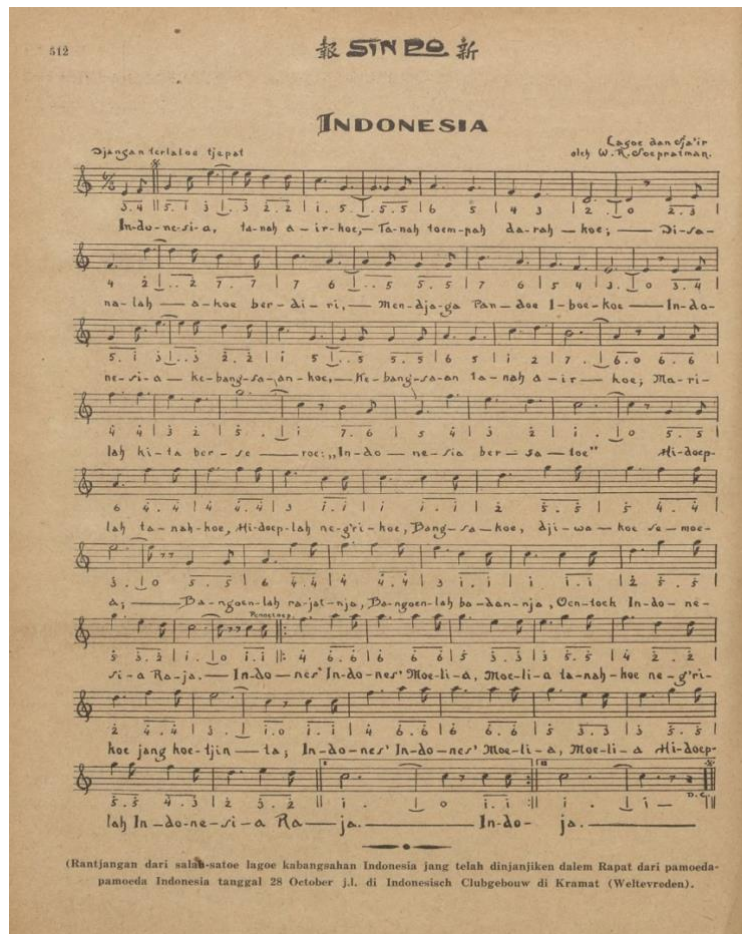
During the political upheaval and Chinese boycott, *Sin Po* again sparked another controversy by publishing the Indonesian national anthem with full lyrics and music scores in *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*.¹⁰⁵ Many *Sin Po* readers were surprised by the choice to publish the anthem since they thought that it should have been published first in an Indonesian publication. It was discovered that the anthem’s composer, Wage Rudolf Soepratman, had already pitched the concept to multiple Indonesian publications, but none of them was willing or courageous enough to print it. Hence, *Sin Po* was the first newspaper in Indonesia to print what is now recognised as the national anthem. *Sin Po*, however, was no stranger to Soepratman. He was an active city correspondent for the newspaper and had an excellent relationship with the publication. By reading his works, Chinese Peranakan readers also learnt about the Indonesian nationalist movement.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *Bintang Timoer*, 7 November 1927, in Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ “Djangan Seboet Hindia Blanda,” *Sin Po*, 8 May 1925.

¹⁰⁵ *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 10 November 1928.

¹⁰⁶ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun*, 35-36.



Sin Po had consistently voiced its support for Indonesian independence from the very beginning. For this reason, it routinely published articles by leaders of the Indonesian nationalist movement, including Soekarno, and provided space for news on the activities of the movement. In an effort to familiarise readers with the individuals who struggled for a sovereign Indonesia, the newspaper often published images of the figures.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ W.J. Cator, "Chinees of Indonesiers?" *De Chineesche Revue*, (April 1928): 89-90.



Figure 3.4. A photograph of Indonesian Nationalist Party officials appeared in one of the issues of *Sin Po Weekly*. Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 26 November 1927.

During his time as a student at *Technische Hoogeschool te Bandoeng* (Bandoeng Institute of Technology, now Institut Teknologi Bandung), Soekarno was reported to have maintained strong ties with *Sin Po* leaders such as Tan Tek Ho, Lim Soei Tjian, and Ang Ban Ih. These *Sin Po* figures even assisted Soekarno to publish and distribute his propaganda pamphlets. Ang Yan Goan, the director of *Sin Po*, also recounted how Soekarno often visited the newspaper's office in Asemka to discuss the future of Indonesian nationalist movements. For instance, when Soekarno visited the office in September 1923, he had a lengthy conversation with Tjoe Bou San. Soekarno stated that he was appreciative of Chinese nationalists who supported the Indonesian independence without ulterior motives.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ W.J. Cator, "Chinees of Indonesiers?" 89-90.

Soekarno stated that both Indonesia and China were engaged in the same struggle, namely, to get rid of imperialism from their respective lands. He concluded that the political objectives of Indonesia and China were identical. If China was still semi-colonised by imperialists, he believed that it would also be difficult for Indonesia to attain independence. Correspondingly, if Indonesia remained a Dutch colony, Chinese independence would also be weak.¹⁰⁹ On another occasion, Soekarno also met Kwee Kek Beng and asked him to serve as an intermediary so that he could meet with Thung Liang Lee, a Chinese politician who served as Wang Jingwei's personal secretary and worked as a journalist for various foreign publications, such as *The New York Times* and *The Daily News*. At the time, Soekarno desired to strengthen ties between the Bumiputera and the Chinese.¹¹⁰

Although *Sin Po* strongly advised the Chinese to assist the Indonesian nationalist movement, when it came to the question of citizenship, however, *Sin Po* contended that the Chinese in Indonesia were still Chinese subjects, despite the fact that Dutch law compelled them to be *Nederlandsch Onderdanen* (Dutch Subjects). As previously explained, Chinese Indonesians were categorised as part of the group labelled "Foreign Orientals," and thus were frequently regarded as aliens. *Sin Po* provides insight into the position that as members of *Bangsa Timur* (Eastern Nations), the Chinese desired equality with *Bangsa Barat* (Western Nations). Consequently, many Chinese realised there was no longer any purpose in being passive, and *Sin Po* urged the Chinese to collaborate with Indonesian nationalist organisations, and Bumiputera communities more broadly, in order to attain this goal. *Sin Po* postulated that a vast chasm between Bumiputera and the Chinese "may be overcome by constructing a bridge in a political direction shared by all nations."¹¹¹

Because under the slogan 'Azie boeat bangsa Azie' (Asia for Asians), *Sin Po* contended that Indonesians had a more fundamental aim: "To provide Asians ruling authority and independence in their own country."¹¹² To support its argument, *Sin Po* also

¹⁰⁹ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 166.

¹¹⁰ Kwee Kek beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun*, 35.

¹¹¹ "Indonesia Raja," *Sin Po*, 5 January 1926.

¹¹² "Bikin bangsa Azie berkwasa dan merdika dalem ia orang poenja benoea sendiri." See "Indonesia Raja," *Sin Po*, 5 January 1926.

cited Isao Iwasaki, a notable Japanese journalist, who wrote in *Peking Daily News* on 7 October 1925 that the Asian people must awaken from their long slumber and begin to unify.¹¹³ “Even if they (the Dutch press) continually shrug their shoulders, we must roll up our sleeves and determine the destiny of our own nation.”¹¹⁴ The promotion of Asian solidarity was, however, quickly fractured in the 1930s, following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the death of Sun Yat-sen served as a catalyst for the strengthening of relationships between the Chinese and Bumiputera in colonial Indonesia. Both of them utilised this momentum to fight against various Dutch discriminatory policies which had historically burdened “people of colour” (*bangsa berwarna*) This was where *Sin Po*’s involvement becomes essential. Through its critical articles, *Sin Po* repeatedly emphasised why the Chinese should support the Indonesian nationalists to fight for self-governance, and vice versa. Nevertheless, *Sin Po* still maintained its stance that Chinese subjects in colonial Indonesia must retain their identity as Chinese people.

The second decade of the 20th century not only heralded the age of press surveillance and foreshadowed an age of anti-colonial and nationalist political movements to come but was also characterised by an unsettling intermingling of Indonesian claims to their right to press freedom and colonial anxieties about social order. At the highest political level in the colony, the shift of power from Van Limburg Stirum to Dirk Fock marked the beginning of an era of press surveillance that increasingly restricted freedom of expression in colonial Indonesia. During this period, Dutch colonial officials regularly labelled Chinese and Bumiputera nationalists as communists, Bolsheviks, anarchists, or anti-Dutch as a result of the colonial government’s fear regarding the rise of communist and nationalist activities in colonial Indonesia. *Sin Po*, which had always been firm in its nationalist stance, gradually developed an affinity for the communist cause, which gathered mass support from the early 1920s in Indonesia.

¹¹³ “Azie Boeat Bangsa Azie,” *Sin Po*, 28 October 1925.

¹¹⁴ “Azie Boeat Bangsa Azie,” *Sin Po*, 28 October 1925.

After two regional failed communist uprisings in West Java and West Sumatra in 1926-27, the colonial government responded by utilising similar legal mechanisms as those discussed in this chapter, namely, arrests, imprisonment, and exile.

The onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War eventually shattered the Chinese-Bumiputera relationship. In contrast to the vast majority of Chinese in colonial Indonesia, who viewed Japan as an adversary, many Indonesian nationalists regarded Japan as a liberator who would free them from the shackles of Dutch colonialism. In the context of strong Chinese nationalism, *Sin Po* reported on the war with great sympathy for the Chinese people and adopted increasingly strong anti-Japanese sentiments as the war progressed. This reporting caused a fracture between Chinese nationalists and some Indonesian nationalists who admired Japan and indeed looked to Japan instead of China as a model of modernity.

CHAPTER IV

LOOKING TO CHINA: *SIN PO*'S REPORTAGE ON THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR, 1937-1942

On 7 July 1937, a minor skirmish between Chinese and Japanese military forces took place on the Marco Polo Bridge in the city of Wanping, located approximately thirty miles south-east of Peking. In response to the Japanese attack in northern China, the government of Chiang Kai-shek initiated a new front in the central region of the country. This involved the deployment of some of the most skilled nationalist troops to the city of Shanghai.¹ A subsequent clash led to the emergence of what was to become modern China's greatest armed conflict, often referred to as the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).²

News of this reached Indonesia immediately. On 9 July 1937, the *Sin Po* Indonesian edition published a general chronology of the developing war between China and Japan. In the section "Bentrokan Tiongkok-Japan" (China-Japan clashes), *Sin Po* reported that the two sides sustained "karoesakan besar" (significant damage).³ To provide readers with greater understanding of developments in the war, the editor of *Sin Po* published a map detailing the locations of battles between China and Japan. The paper initially only translated news from Reuters, Central News Agency, and United Press. However, as the war escalated, it decided to employ local contributors to actively report from the frontline.⁴

¹ Scholars in the Western academic community have employed different terminologies to describe the confrontation as the "North China Incident" or the "Marco Polo Bridge Incident". To the Chinese, the event was referred to as "the Double-Seventh Incident". See Rana Mitter, "Picturing Victory: The Visual Imaginary of the War of Resistance, 1937-1947," *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2008): 175; Pang Wing Seng, "The 'Double-Seventh' Incident, 1937: Singapore Chinese Response to the Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (September 1973): 269.

² Stephen Leong, "The Malayan Overseas Chinese and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, no. 2 (September 1979): 294.

³ In fact, China suffered greatly in the battle with 200 casualties compared to only eight Japanese soldiers and two commanders. See "Bentrokan Tiongkok-Japan," *Sin Po*, 9 July 1937.

⁴ "Bentrokan Tiongkok-Japan," *Sin Po*, 9 July 1937.

As the crisis in China intensified, widespread anti-Japanese sentiment among the Chinese population in Indonesia also escalated, and *Sin Po* played a part in generating this sentiment. The newspaper continued to propagate a deeply anti-Japanese view based on its observations about a string of Japanese aggressions. This dated back to Japan's Twenty-One Demands (1915), the May Fourth Movement (1919), the Jinan Incident (1928), the Manchuria invasion in 1931, and the Second Sino-Japanese War that began in 1937, all of which exacerbated Chinese bitterness towards the Japanese.⁵

From the very beginning of the Manchurian invasion, Chinese vernacular newspapers in Indonesia vehemently condemned the invasion. A range of Chinese newspapers in the colony promoted anti-Japanese sentiment and urged the Chinese in Indonesia to financially and emotionally assist their motherland.⁶ As shown in the preceding chapters, *Sin Po* was not an ordinary commercial or politically neutral newspaper. The paper was well-known for its leading role in promoting China-oriented political nationalism among Chinese Indonesians. Through its detailed coverage of the war, *Sin Po* became more popular, and it gained new momentum during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

During this period, *Sin Po*'s reportage was primarily informational, recounting among other things aspects of battles. At the same time, the paper paid attention to Japanese atrocities and what was generally framed as heroic Chinese resistance. *Sin Po* stoked patriotic sentiments and also responded to increased patriotism by trying to get people in Indonesia to assist China. In particular, the paper began to engage in fund-raising as well as staging anti-Japanese trade boycotts.⁷

This chapter illustrates how *Sin Po* responded to the Sino-Japanese War. From its earliest days that there were competing narratives over China's war with the Japanese, and *Sin Po* used the Sino-Malay language as one of the most crucial elements for influencing its audience. It could be said that the international press, especially presses attached to ethnic Chinese communities and those more sympathetic to Japan, also played

⁵ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 197.

⁶ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942*, 239.

⁷ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java*, 96-97.

key roles in determining views about the war.⁸ In this context, I seek to answer the interlocking questions how did *Sin Po* frame the war in its reportage and how did this framing influence the public's response?

This chapter argues that *Sin Po* largely followed the trends of the Chinese media in framing the war as an act of brutal aggression, often engaging in stereotyping of the Japanese, especially via cartoons and using graphic photographic images to highlight the Japanese atrocities, but at the same time also showing the might of the Chinese army. The reportage promoted a strong sense of us and them, thus in turn, cementing a sense of heightened nationalism amongst Chinese Indonesians.

Further to this, the paper played an important role in launching and promoting relief aid for China. Through first-hand reporting from China and publications from people on the ground, the paper also contributed to the formation of national identity and patriotic zeal. In this chapter, I also examine how *Sin Po* also used photographs, cartoons and visual images in reportage of the war to stir the emotions of readers.

Reporting on The Manchuria Invasion & The Sino-Japanese War: Between Criticism and Sympathy

In contemporary China, the Second Sino-Japanese War is now sometimes described as beginning with the Manchurian crisis in 1931. On 18 September 1931, 1st Lieutenant Suemori Komoto, who was stationed at the South Manchuria Railway as part of the 29th Infantry Regiment, detonated a section of the South Manchurian Railway. This occurred in close proximity to a sizable barracks that housed Chinese military personnel, located just north of Mukden. The Imperial Japanese Army used this as a pretext and blamed Chinese dissidents for the explosion and retaliated with a major assault that resulted in the annexation of Manchuria. The Japanese referred to this event by the euphemism the “Manchurian incident” to cloak their role in this provocation.⁹

⁸ See, for instance, Parks M. Coble, *China's War Reporters: The Legacy of Resistance against Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015); The Asahi Shimbun Company, *Media, Propaganda and Politics in 20th-century Japan* (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁹ Keith Schoppa, *Twentieth Century China: A History in Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 241.

Due to its abundant natural resources, Manchuria had long played an important role in the geopolitics of East Asia. The province was an essential source of raw resources for Japan prior to World War II, including coal, iron, fertile land, and various minerals. On 25 July 1927, the Japanese Premier, Baron Tanaka Giichi, delivered a confidential memorandum to the Japanese emperor explaining the country's positive stance in Manchuria and Mongolia. He argued that "in order to conquer China, we must first conquer Manchuria and Mongolia, and in order to conquer the world, China must be conquered first."¹⁰

Prior to the "Manchuria incident" there had been years of animosity between the Chinese and Japanese over their Manchuria-related interests. The Japanese repeatedly intervened militarily in Chinese Manchuria in the first decades of the 20th century in order to maintain their rights to the Southern Manchurian Railroad Zone. Meanwhile, China relied on the millions of immigrants who regularly migrated into and filled the Japanese-coveted Manchurian plains as a form of physical occupation of the territory.¹¹

From the beginning of the war, *Sin Po* was quick to react to developments and it condemned the Japanese attack on Manchuria labelling it a brutal invasion. The paper vehemently rejected the Japanese military government's rationalisation that the purpose of controlling Manchuria was to "eliminate bandits" and to "restore peace and order" along the South Manchuria Railway. *Sin Po* believed that the Japanese orchestrated the invasion in order to gain control over resource-rich Manchuria.¹²

Sin Po perceived China's surrender to Japan as a humiliation, arguing that rather than gaining sympathy from the international world, China was now regarded as a weak state. Even after the Manchuria invasion, Japan still escalated its persecution of China and tried to establish another puppet state in northern China.¹³ Following the conclusion of the war in February 1932, the Japanese established the puppet state of Manchukuo with the former Emperor of China Puyi as its head, and the paper suspected that both China

¹⁰ Herbert Hantao Wu, *Japan's Acts of Treaty Violation and Encroachment upon the Sovereign Rights of China* (Peiping: The North-Eastern Affairs Research Institute, 1932), 3.

¹¹ Donald A. Jordan, *Chinese Boycotts versus Japanese Bombs: The Failure of China's "Revolutionary Diplomacy," 1931–32* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 7.

¹² "Japan Poenja Sikep pada Tiongkok," *Sin Po*, 28 September 1931.

¹³ "Hasilnja Sifat Mengalah," *Sin Po*, 5 October 1932.

and Japan had formed an agreement in which Japan would not attack Nanjing and China would stop retaliating.¹⁴

Compared to other papers across the Chinese diaspora, *Sin Po* was very critical of the initial decisions taken by Chinese leaders. When *The Straits Times*, for example, lauded the decision of Zhang Xueliang (warlord of Manchuria) and Chiang Kai-shek not to resist the Japanese besieged in Manchuria in order to prevent the great war in the Far East from happening, *Sin Po* condemned this decision as cowardice, and the paper harshly criticised Chiang for being too lenient with Japan. According to *Sin Po*, self-defence was a natural response and a fundamental responsibility for a country facing invasion and, in their view, both Zhang and Chiang could have responded with force, but they just refused to do so.¹⁵ *Sin Po*'s statement infuriated the Chinese, both Totok and Peranakan, in several places in Indonesia. The Chinese community in Meester Cornelis, Batavia, even boycotted the newspaper for allegedly criticising Chiang Kai-shek.¹⁶ At this early stage of the war then *Sin Po* was seen by many as too critical of China.

The foundation of Manchukuo, as well as the takeover of vital positions in the region, made clear Japan's objective to cripple the Chinese economy. Japan often asserted that the foundation of Manchukuo was based on the people's will. Again, however, *Sin Po* disputed Japan's intentions arguing if this were true, Japan would not have to spend as much money suppressing various 'bandit rebellions' there. *Sin Po*, in fact, referred to the 'bandits' or 'rebels' as 'Patriots' in its articles to counter Japanese narratives.¹⁷ In doing so they tried to promote the view that the majority of Chinese there were not satisfied with the presence of Japan there.

Throughout the 1930s, the Japanese continued to seize more and more Chinese territory from their base in Manchuria. The whole northern region of the nation was eventually occupied. The Kuomintang's declared goal was to gain control of China by eliminating her internal adversaries, such as Communists and numerous warlords, before

¹⁴ "Aneh Bin Adjaib," *Sin Po*, 2 December 1932.

¹⁵ "Tiongkok Didjadi Ken Korban," *Sin Po*, 30 November 1932; "Pergoeletan di Manchurye," *Sin Po*, 8 December 1932.

¹⁶ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun Sebagai Wartawan, 1922-1947* (Batavia: Kuo, 1948), 63

¹⁷ "Pertjatoeran Doenia," *Sin Po*, 24 September 1932.

focusing on the defence of the border. This meant that the Japanese faced practically no resistance, with the exception of a few peasant uprisings that were ruthlessly crushed. Meanwhile, *Sin Po* constantly became a leading anti-Japanese newspaper by stating: “Japan had always been the enemy of China and therefore was also the enemy of the overseas Chinese.”¹⁸

On 7 July 1937, clashes erupted at Lugouqiao (Marco Polo Bridge), a crucial access route to Beijing, which sparked an eight-year war between China and Japan. This captured the interest of the world, but for as long as it lasted, it dominated the attention of newspaper readers in Indonesia. This was because of both Dutch and Indonesian interest in Japan’s actions and Chinese Indonesians’ concern about the impact of the war on China. Since the end of the 19th century, after the completion of the Dutch-Japanese Treaty on Commerce and Shipping in 1896, Japanese economic activity in colonial Indonesia had increased significantly. Following the emergence of Japan as the new industrial power, the Japanese in Indonesia were placed on an equal level with Europeans (*gelijkgesteld*) since 1899.¹⁹ In 1909, a consulate was established in Batavia, and the trade treaty of 1912 granted Japan the status of “most favoured nation.”²⁰

Chinese readers were eager to read any news that could be obtained about the war, and newspaper proprietors, including *Sin Po*, took advantage of this interest by providing the most recent and thorough information on the conflict. *Sin Po* actively monitored the war’s development and tried to convince Chinese Indonesians to support China. In one of Put On’s comic strips (14 August 1937), which will also be discussed further in this chapter, cartoonist Kho Wan Gie illustrated the people’s eagerness to follow *Sin Po*’s reportage on the developments of battles in China due to their concerns.²¹

¹⁸ See “Japan Poenja Sikep pada Tiongkok,” *Sin Po*, 28 September 1931.

¹⁹ Howard Dick, “Japan’s Economic Expansion in the Netherlands Indies between the First and Second World Wars,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (September 1989): 245.

²⁰ H.J. van Mook, *The Netherlands Indies and Japan: Their Relations, 1940-1941* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1944), 17.

²¹ *Sin Po*, 14 August 1937.



Figure 4.1. The comic strip Put On by Kho Wan Gie illustrated how difficult it was to obtain *Sin Po* since so many Chinese were eager to follow the news of the war. Source: *Sin Po*, 14 August 1937.

Further highlighting the popularity of the paper during the war, at least two full pages of *Sin Po* out of 10 to 12 total pages were devoted to news regarding the Sino-Japanese War. Kwee Kek Beng also highlighted how, during the wartime years, *Sin Po* was extremely popular due to its timely and thorough reports. On 15 August 1937, for instance, *Sin Po* even devoted a special two-page “*Lembaran Extra*” (Extra Sheet) and a special bulletin to analysing the Sino-Japanese War.²²

A week after the clashes in Lugouqiao, *Sin Po* published an article entitled “*Bentrokan di Tiongkok Oetara*” (Clashes in North China). This was the paper’s first analytical article related to the Sino-Japanese War. The article explained that the emergence of Chinese resistance was inevitable as China had been too lenient in responding to Japanese atrocities. Therefore, *Sin Po* considered the invasion of Lugouqiao as a final straw for the Chinese government. Even though China did not want to engage in war, Japan forced China to take up arms. The situation was also exacerbated by a statement by Koki Hirota, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, who said that the North China problem could not be resolved through discussion, meaning Japan had already prepared for the war.²³

On 30 July 1937, *Sin Po* featured several articles about the Sino-Japanese War with the following headlines: “Sino-Japanese War, Chinese Army Withdraws from

²² See “*Lembaran Extra*,” *Sin Po*, 15 August 1937; *Sin Po*, 31 August 1937.

²³ “*Bentrokan di Tiongkok Oetara*,” *Sin Po*, 15 July 1937.

Peiping”; “Chiang Kai-shek Advises the Chinese Not to Be Discouraged”; “Japan Threatens Foreign Countries to not Intervene”; and “Chinese Red Troops Attack Japanese Troops in Chahar”.²⁴ Through these titles, *Sin Po* attempted to portray China as a strong country that was ready to resist Japan. At the same time, through comparable headers and headlines, the publication frequently presented Japan as an invasive and aggressive state.²⁵

At the same time the promotion of an attachment to China increased as evidenced by the increasing use of the term ‘Tionghoa’ in many of *Sin Po*’s headlines to refer to the Chinese troops in battlefield, in contrast to the previously popular term ‘Tiongkok’.²⁶ Both Charles Coppel and Leo Suryadinata argue that the term ‘Tionghoa’ became prevalent in the 20th century to refer to the Chinese in Indonesia following the rise of the Pan-Chinese movement. The term replaced the derogatory term ‘Tjina’, which had been employed to refer to China and the Chinese since the 17th century.²⁷ Before the war *Sin Po* frequently used the term ‘Tionghoa’ to distinguish between Chinese in Indonesia and Chinese from the mainland. However, with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, *Sin Po* used this term more fluidly suggesting the increased closeness, emotional ties and sense of belonging shared by the Chinese in Indonesia and the Chinese in China.

News from China also became more immediate because in addition to receiving the latest news from news agencies, such as Reuters and Central News Agency, *Sin Po* also received news through its Shanghai special service (*speciale dienst*). The news

²⁴ “Perang Tiongkok-Japan, Tentara Tionghoa Moendoer dari Peiping”; “Chiang Kai-Shek Andjoerken Rahajat aken Djangan Djadi Ketjil Hati”; “Japan Antjem Negri-Negri Asing aken Djangan Toeroet Tjampoer Tangan”; “Pasoekan Merah Tionghoa Serang Laskar Japan di Chahar”. See *Sin Po*, 30 July 1937.

²⁵ See for instance “400 Djoeroe Terbang Tionghoa dengan Soeka Sendiri Bersedia Korbanken Djiwa Boeat Serang Japan dari Oedara” (400 Chinese Pilots Willing to Sacrifice Their Lives to Attack Japan from the Air); “Anem Poeloe Satoe Pesawat Terbang Japan Ditembak Djato, Sedeng Yuehpu Direboet Lagi oleh Tentara Kita” (61 Japanese Aircraft were Shot Down, while Our Men Regained Yuehpu). See *Sin Po*, 9 September 1937.

²⁶ The term “Tionghoa” (Chung-Hua in romanized Mandarin) is derived from the Hokkien (Fujian) dialect and has been used officially since the turn of the 20th century, notably with the rise of the Pan-Chinese movement, to refer to the Chinese who migrated to Indonesia during that time. For further discussion see Eddie Lembong, *Istilah “Cina”, “China” dan “Tionghoa”; Tinjauan Historis dan Masalah Penggunaannya Dewasa ini* (Jakarta: Yayasan Nabil, 2011).

²⁷ See Charles Coppel and Leo Suryadinata, “The Use of the Terms Tjina and Tionghoa in Indonesia: An Historical Survey,” in *The Chinese Minority in Indonesia: Seven Papers*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Chopmen Enterprises, 1978), 97-118.

supplied from Shanghai was typically more comprehensive and dramatic and was frequently based on conversations with eyewitnesses. This provided for emotive reporting and replicated the earlier pattern in *Sin Po* of using real-life stories to make them relatable. (See Chapter II)

Further to this *Sin Po* used inclusive language across its reporting to evoke a sense of connection between its readers and the people in China experiencing the war. For instance, *Sin Po* described how “our troops were mobilised” (*tentara kita dimobiliseer*) to Peiping following the Marco Polo Bridge. The phrase “our troops” (*tentara kita*) was used repeatedly to highlight the emotional connection *Sin Po* wished to foster between its readers and their ancestral homeland.

Projecting a sense of belief in China and in the power of Chinese nationalism *Sin Po* promoted the idea that the Chinese could be successful in resisting Japan despite Japan’s far superior arsenal. It considered China’s “spirit”, which had reached its height after years of repression, to be an important fundamental weapon in the war against Japan. Because with this spirit, a nation “*bisa lakoeken hal-hal jang tida terdoega*” (can achieve unexpected things). It understood that none of the military analysts believed China would win the war. However, the paper used the example of Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), and Japan’s emergence as a global power as examples of overcoming such odds. At that time, over 90 per cent of military experts anticipated that Russia would comfortably crush Japan. However, the outcome was precisely the contrary.²⁸ By utilising such hyperbolic language, *Sin Po* intended to instil in its readers the confidence that despite these obstacles, China would emerge victorious.

Sin Po also tried to turn the opinion of its readers against Japan and its role in the Sino-Japanese War by citing some major and influential international newspapers that were beginning to turn against Japan.²⁹ *Sin Po* reported that even the *North China Daily News*, the largest British daily in China that often took a pro-Japanese attitude, suddenly criticised Japan fiercely. The publication described the Japanese attack as a blunder that would only tarnish Japan’s reputation in the eyes of the world. *Sin Po* also showed readers that *The Morning Post*, a conservative daily newspaper published in London (1772-1937),

²⁸ “Iseng-Iseng Hari Saptoe,” *Sin Po*, 31 July 1937.

²⁹ “Pers Doenia Berlomba Tjelah Japan,” *Sin Po*, 7 August 1937.

wrote that “Japan may defeat China, but she cannot conquer her”.³⁰ It further reported that *Le Populaire*, a socialist daily periodical published in France, asserted the war in China was driven by the fear of Japan seeing an increasingly strong Nanjing and a more advanced China, and that the *Washington Post* called Japan’s invasion “playing with fire” and “inviting trouble by engaging in night manoeuvres in areas garrisoned by Chinese troops”.³¹

During the Sino-Japanese War, *Sin Po* used photographs to meticulously document the daily occurrences of total war in China: air attacks, food shortages, refugee shelters, and patriotic parades, to name a few. Images of Chinese male soldiers surfaced in the newspaper (particularly *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*) on a regular basis. They often demonstrated the vigour, resiliency, and strength of China, but also highlighted their misery. Along with the captions which accompanied them, *Sin Po* sought to create a narrative of the war’s progress and attempted to project China as a truly civilized, modern nation.

The American author and philosopher Susan Sontag views war photographs as a medium for depicting war and violence in contemporary culture. While objectivity is a fundamental characteristic of photography, Sontag contends that photographs are always created with a viewpoint. There is both a record of the actual and a person who takes the record. As a result, ethically conscientious photographers have been increasingly concerned with the exploitation of emotion (sadness, sympathy, anger) in war photography and formulaic methods of inciting emotion.³² Unquestionably, the individuals behind *Sin Po* understood how to utilise these images to influence the emotions of the readers.

Early in the war, *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie* (4 December 1937), for instance, published a comparison of two images titled “*Een scherp contrast*” (a sharp contrast), which was reprinted from *Het Volk* (Amsterdam). The first photograph depicted a Chinese mother with her child wounded as a result of the Japanese bombing, whereas the second depicted a Japanese mother with her child in a peaceful state (*onbezorgde*). Both images

³⁰ *The Morning Post*, 20 July 1937.

³¹ “Playing with Fire,” *Washington Post*, 10 July 1937.

³² Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2019).

provoked strong emotions and evoked the atrocities perpetrated against Chinese women and children.³³



Figure 4.2. A contrasting photo comparison republished by *Sin Po*. (Left): a Chinese mother clutching her infant after surviving a Japanese bombing. (Right): a serene Japanese woman pushing her toddler. Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 4 December 1937.

Visual imagery became one of *Sin Po*'s distinguishing characteristics. Ang Jan Goan and Kwee Kek Beng realized the significance of visual images, which is why they decided to hire Kho Wan Gie, a prominent cartoonist renowned for his distinctive and provocative graphic style. Kho created the cartoon series based around the character “Put On” which was the first comic strip to be produced by an Indonesian cartoonist.³⁴

In addition to comic strips, cartoons or caricatures became another favourite rubric in *Sin Po*. It is unclear when the cartoon first appeared in *Sin Po* and who the creator was. However, it was very likely that Kho Wan Gie himself was the important figure behind *Sin Po*'s weekly cartoon. Before the war, Kho often utilised cartoons to highlight sources

³³ *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 4 December 1937.

³⁴ Prior to the release of *Put On*, *Sin Po* had previously published a number of comic strips with different lead characters, including *Doan Lok* (the flamboyant), *Koentoel* (the painter), *Nam Sen* (the pervert), *Ten Njoek*, and many others. However, *Put On* is the most popular and longest-running comic strip in *Sin Po* in terms of popularity. See “Put On Berulang-Tahun”, *Pantjawarda*, 16 January 1960.

of urban anxiety, such as racialism and civic responsibility.³⁵ He sharply criticised the racial politics of colonial Indonesia and displayed notable sensitivity to the plight of Chinese society. During the Sino-Japanese War, Kho's cartoons were even more critical. He demonstrated how visual metaphors could address varied themes, such as civil rights, civil relationships, and civic responsibility, and his editorial artwork on the war regularly sparked controversy.

From the beginning of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria Kho Wan Gie attacked Japan through his critical cartoons. He caricatured Japan's attacks, but he also repeatedly satirised the Chinese government, which he viewed as powerless and cowardly. On 3 October 1931, *Sin Po* published the cartoon entitled "*Japan poenja akal di Manchurye*" (Japan's Tactics in Manchuria), depicting a Japanese soldier carrying a flag while trampling Manchuria. Henry Puyi, in reference to his preferred English name, and General Zhang Zongchang, whom Kho painted on a much smaller scale, were also seen saluting the soldier, which explicitly showed their subjugation. Meanwhile, on the other side of the ocean, stood an elderly woman symbolising the League of Nations. She turned her back on Manchuria, implying that she pretended not to know what Japan was doing in that region. *Sin Po* denounced many parties in this cartoon, ranging from the *Volkenbond* (League of Nations), which appeared to turn a blind eye to the Japanese invasion, to the Chinese leaders who, instead of protecting the honour of their homeland, collaborated with the invaders.

³⁵ "Si Put On Tetap Djedjaka!" *Pantjawarna*, 1 October 1957.



Figure 4.3. “Japan poenja akal di Manchurye” (Japan’s Tactics in Manchuria). Source: *Sin Po*, 3 October 1931.

Sin Po’s criticism through cartoons was even sharper in subsequent editions. Another cartoon by Kho, which was published by *Sin Po* on 3 September 1932, depicted the disarray in Manchuria. According to Kho, while the people of Manchuria were enraged, the Chinese generals actively sought to avoid confrontation with the Japanese. The cartoon depicted Wu Peifu composing a letter to be sent to the Japanese Emperor. Then there were Chiang Kai-shek and Zhang Xueliang, who did not know whether to advance or retreat; Feng Yuxiang, who fell asleep as if he did not care about the situation of his homeland; and finally, Chen Jitang, the Commander-in-Chief of the Canton military, whom Kho considered was talking nothing but nonsense. This caricature reflects the view that after China failed to defend Manchuria, *Sin Po* had already lost all faith in Chinese leaders, although the paper was still willing to support China, financially and morally.



Figure 4.4. “Rahajat mengamoek di Mantjoeri, tapi djendraal-djendraal tjari segala matjem alesan boeat tida berk lai” (The people are raging in Manchuria, but the generals are looking for all kinds of excuses not to fight). Source: *Sin Po*, 3 September 1932.

Sin Po again critiqued the passivity of Chinese officials in Nanjing in the 15 October 1932 issue of *Sin Po*. In the edition, the Chinese patriots in Manchuria were shown as building their arsenal to confront the Japanese, while the Chinese officials in Nanking were busy copying the Lytton Commission’s report.³⁶ Through the cartoon’s title, which read “*Pakerdjahan mana lebi bergoena?*” (Which job is more meaningful?), Kho attempted to suggest to readers that what the Chinese troops did in Manchuria was actually more valuable and more concrete for China.³⁷

³⁶ “Nanking Giat...Salin Rapport Lytton, Kaoem Patriot Manchurye Giat Gosok Golok dan Bersihken Meriam,” *Sin Po*, 15 October 1932.

³⁷ The Lytton Commission, chaired by Lord Lytton, comprised four additional members, one each from the United States (Major General Frank Ross McCoy), Germany (Dr. Heinrich Schnee), Italy (Luigi Aldrovandi Marescotti), and France (General Henri Claudel) (General Henri Claudel). The Lytton Report concluded the occupation of Manchuria by Japan was deemed unlawful and the report recommended that the territory be returned to China. It also contended that recognition of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo ought not to be granted, and instead, suggested the establishment of Manchurian autonomy under Chinese jurisdiction. The report was endorsed by the General Assembly of the League of Nations,



Figure 4.5. “Nanking giat...salin rapport Lytton, kaoem Patriot Manchurye giat gosok golok dan bersiken meriam! ‘Pakerdjahan’ mana lebih bergoena?” (Nanking is busy copying the Lytton Report, while the Manchurian Patriots are busy polishing the machetes and cleaning the cannons! Which job is more meaningful?). Source: *Sin Po*, 15 October 1932.

In his cartoons, Kho repeatedly depicted the Japanese troops as dwarfs, referring to the small size and poverty of resources of the Japanese archipelago. In addition to this, Japan was frequently portrayed by Kho as a violent aggressor, and Japanese men were drawn with ugly faces. He often emphasised the savagery of the Japanese by comparing them to tentacled octopuses that sought to control the world. In contrast, China was frequently depicted with creatures associated with courage and benevolence, such as dragons and tigers. On 8 October 1932, for example, Kho published a cartoon entitled “*Siapa Toenggang Naga, Soesa Toeroen dengan Selamat*” (Whoever rides a dragon would be difficult to land safely). In the cartoon, Kho illustrated Manchuria as the tail of a dragon upon which Japan was riding, while the entire large dragon represented China. Kho also displayed Puyi with his neck bound to the foot of the man symbolising Japan, showing

leading to Japan’s withdrawal from the organisation. See “Five Wise Westerners,” *Time Magazine*, 10 October 1932.

that he was entirely under Japanese domination. However, both Japan and Puyi appeared unable of controlling the dragon's tail, indicating that China would strive to give utmost resistance to Japan and all of its allies.



Figure 4.6. “Siapa toenggang naga, soesa toeroen dengan slamet. Naga Tiongkok biar matanja masi merem, boekan tjatjing” (Whoever rides a dragon, it will be difficult for him to get down safely. Even though the eyes of this Chinese dragon are still closed, it is not a worm). Source: *Sin Po*, 8 October 1932.

When the Sino-Japanese War escalated in July 1937, Kho often referred to China using similar animal analogies. He compared the Japanese aggression to someone riding a tiger, citing the Chinese proverbs, “Chi hu nan hsia” or “whoever rides a tiger, will find it hard to get off.” Japan’s position, according to *Sin Po*, was exactly like that; they were not able to dismount or withdraw from the war, but at the same time riding the tiger was very dangerous.³⁸

³⁸ “Pepata Tionghoa,” *Sin Po*, 14 August 1937.



Figure 4.7. A cartoon by Kho Wan Gie, titled “Pepata Tionghoa” (Chinese proverb), depicted Japan riding a tiger. Source: *Sin Po*, 14 August 1937.

Through his visual images, Kho tried to rally the people in Indonesia to join in the struggle against the Japanese. Kho’s motivation stemmed from a desire for national revival, a sense of personal duty towards the nation, and indignation towards the foreign subjugation of Chinese society and culture. He used cartoons and comic strips to summon up bitter, ironic, and even sardonic attitudes to the war. In addition to steering emotions through the use of visual images, *Sin Po* also called for direct action in response to the war.

Sin Po and War Relief

As early as 1931, when Japan launched its first invasion on Manchuria, many Chinese organisations in Indonesia started protesting Japanese aggression and organising campaigns to attract Indonesian as well as European support for their ancestral country. *Sin Po* opened a fundraising account for China under the name “Sin Po Red Cross Funds,”

an account that had previously been used to collect donations for victims of the Yangtze-Huai floods.³⁹

Throughout its coverage of the war, there are some interesting trends in how *Sin Po* represented men, women, and children. The paper particularly highlighted the contribution of Chinese Indonesian women to fund-raising movements as demonstrating women's civic agency.⁴⁰ They organised commodity sales at numerous key locations in Indonesian cities, with the revenues going to the relief fund. Drama or stage presentations with modest entrance charges were also initiated to supplement direct donations. By emphasising the role of Chinese women, *Sin Po* celebrated the fact that Chinese women were also supporting the Chinese in the war.



Figure 4.8. The female students from *Tiong Hoa Hak Tong* Parakan gathered funds for the Chinese Red Cross. Source: *Sin Po* *Wekelijksche Editie*, 2 April 1932.

³⁹ The 1931 China floods occurred from June to August 1931 in China, impacting major towns such as Wuhan, Nanjing, and others, and culminating on 25 August 1931 with a dike breach around Lake Gaoyou. Estimations of fatalities vary greatly. A field study chaired by John Lossing Buck of the University of Nanking revealed about 150,000 individuals had drowned during the first 100 days of the flood, which constituted less than a fourth of all deaths. See *Report of the National Flood Relief Commission, 1931-1932* (Shanghai, 1933), 150.

⁴⁰ For a similar discussion see Karen J. Leong and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "Filling the Rice Bowls of China: Staging Humanitarian Relief during the Sino-Japanese War," in *Chinese Americans and the Politics of Race and Culture*, eds. Sucheng Chan and Madeline Y. Hsu (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 147-48.

Images relating to Chinese women appearing in *Sin Po* changed through the course of the war consistent with patterns in mainland China. Louise Edwards has traced how in the pre-war period Chinese women were depicted as symbols of beauty and serenity.⁴¹ In the same period *Sin Po* frequently depicted Chinese women as mothers and symbols of family life and domesticity. Yet after the war depictions of women became increasingly masculine and focused on their public roles. *Sin Po* demonstrated how women could support the military endeavour and the nation's uniformed males in a variety of roles, including as female military auxiliaries, nurses, ambulance drivers, and factory labourers. This transition to more masculine images is seen in the various photo captions that *Sin Po* used, such as “*Kaloe prampoean toekar djaroem dengan bajonet*” (When women exchange needles for bayonets), “*Boekan senapan kajoe*” (Not a wooden gun), “*Toeker kipas dapoer dengan bajonet*” (Replace the kitchen fan with a bayonet).⁴² The image below, for example, illustrates particularly sharply how women's war efforts could be labelled as masculine.



Figure 4.9. A group of female volunteers from Feng Yung University joined the 19th army after travelling from Mukden to Shanghai. *Sin Po* wrote that these students were recognised for their patriotism not only in words but also through actions. Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 14 May 1932.

⁴¹ Louise Edwards, “Drawing Sexual Violence in Wartime China: Anti-Japanese Propaganda Cartoons” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 72, no. 3 (August 2013): 569.

⁴² See *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 12 December 1931, 14 May 1932, 17 October 1936, respectively.

By curating and eventually publishing these more masculine photographs of women, *Sin Po* intended to demonstrate to its readers that the war against Japan involved Chinese patriots from all levels of society, including Chinese women. In addition, by employing this powerful picture, it also attempted to inspire the Chinese community in Indonesia, particularly the Chinese men, to get more involved in supporting China, because it was suggested ‘even’ Chinese women were taking up arms.

Apart from highlighting the essential role of Chinese women, *Sin Po* also emphasised how youngsters of Chinese descent in Indonesia, for instance, actively displayed their civic engagement by dressing as nurses and boy scouts in fundraising parades. Many of them also strived to support China by selling food, and goods, or providing services; the profits of which would later be donated to China. They usually went from one place to another place carrying a piggy bank (*celengan*) that read “Sin Po Roode Kruis Fonds.” It meant that all the donations that people contributed through the piggy bank would be sent to China via *Sin Po*. Thus, the paper encouraged more civic engagement in society. These movements occurred in nearly every area of Indonesia, particularly in Java and Sumatra, where most of the Chinese Indonesians resided.

Sin Po played a significant role in bringing attention to the sacrifices people were making in and for China. *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie* routinely published photographs, usually with powerful captions, such as “*Bekerdja goena negri*” (Working for the motherland), “*Jang besar korbanken djiwa, jang ketjil korbanken tjelengan!*” (Grownups sacrifice their souls, while children sacrifice their piggy banks), or “*Korbanken tjelengan boeat Tiongkok*” (Sacrificing piggy banks for China), to collect donations.⁴³

⁴³ See *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 5 March 1932, 4 September 1937, 11 September 1937, 18 September 1937, respectively.

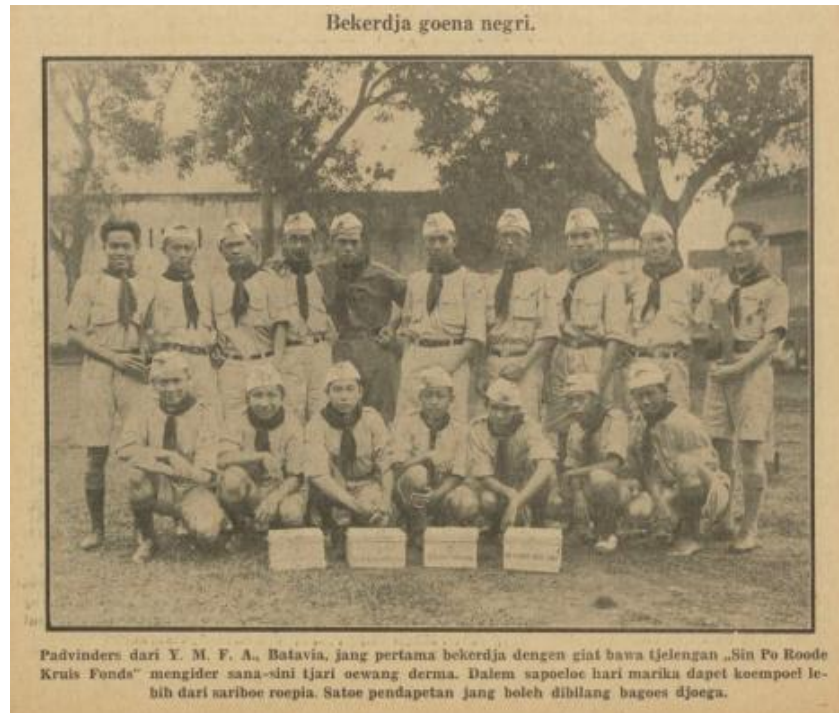


Figure 4.10a. The YMFA Batavia boy scout who raised funds for China. The entire amount was then donated via the Sin Po Roode Kruis Funds. Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 5 March 1932.



Figure 4.10b. Four daughters of The Tok Kiong from Kutoarjo who sold their mother's pastries. The whole sale's proceeds were then donated to China. Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 18 September 1937.

As the sense of patriotism became stronger day by day, so did their attempts in raising money for war relief. After the Double-Seven incident broke out, Chinese overseas began collecting donations and remitting them to China.⁴⁴ One of the largest sources was from the Chinese population in Indonesia, and *Sin Po* was instrumental in collecting these funds. Initially, the Siang Hwee association in Batavia established the Overseas Chinese Committee to Contribute to Chinese Charities (Comite Hoakiauwn Penoendjang Gerakan Amal di Tiongkok). This association consisted of six people, including Ang Jan Goan. Around the same time, *Sin Po* also began raising funds to address the war victims in China. The two charity organisations eventually merged for efficiency reasons and to demonstrate public unity among the Peranakan.⁴⁵

By 2 August 1937, when the political situation became even more urgent, “Sin Po Fonds Amal Tiongkok” (Sin Po Chinese Charity Funds) was established in Batavia to coordinate the fund-raising efforts throughout Indonesia. The funds were sent to assist the government of China in fighting the Japanese.⁴⁶ In one edition, *Sin Po* wrote:

In connection with China, which is in danger of war, which of course causes human misery for our brothers and sisters in our ancestral lands. These Funds are open for national as well as humanitarian purposes. A truly charitable cause.⁴⁷

Sin Po’s articles and images showcased the diverse range of Chinese individuals who made contributions to the relief fund. While significant sums came from wealthy merchants, the man-in-the-street (i.e., hawkers, labourers, rickshaw riders, etc.) also donated. Even though their donations were frequently just tiny sums, these initiatives raised awareness of China in Indonesian regions that did not have many Chinese inhabitants and, more broadly, demonstrated the reception of discourses about the need

⁴⁴ The Chinese immigrants maintained a close tie with their ancestral homeland. Indonesia contributed 5.8 per cent of the colony’s ‘Foreign Asiatic’ earnings, or over 25 million guilders, in the form of remittances. See Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942*, 206.

⁴⁵ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 120.

⁴⁶ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Taon Sebagai Wartawan*, 69.

⁴⁷ “Sin Po Fonds Amal Tiongkok,” *Sin Po*, 7 August 1937.

for all to contribute that had been circulated by the newspaper. All earnings were donated to *Sin Po* before being transferred to humanitarian organisations in Shanghai.⁴⁸

Both editions of *Sin Po*, Indonesian and Chinese, provided a complete list of contributors' names. Donations were not limited in amount, which implied that people from all layers of society could support the campaign. Usually, the list of contributors was so lengthy that *Sin Po* needed to include an additional page to accommodate their names. Meanwhile, almost every *Sin Po* employee contributed between five and ten per cent of their monthly salary to the committee.⁴⁹

Even though this relief fund was open to all ethnic groups, the majority of contributors were Chinese. This fact demonstrated that the dire situation in China did not compel all Indonesian nationalists to support China. Many Indonesians in the 1930s were hesitant to assist China both emotionally and financially due to ideas about racial and cultural distinctions. However, *Sin Po* attempted to demonstrate to the public that the effort to support China was backed by community leaders from all ethnic groups, including Indonesians, Arabs, and Moors.

Sin Po, for instance, mentioned an Indonesian named Soeleman from Sindanglaut, Cirebon, who had continuously donated f. 2.50 each month to Sin Po Chinese Red Cross since the beginning of the Shanghai War in 1932. Even though his monthly salary was barely f. 40 and he had nine dependents, Soeleman continued to make this contribution periodically until the end of the Sino-Japanese War.⁵⁰ *Sin Po* also featured a photograph of Katjoeng, an Indonesian *gado-gado* (Indonesian salad with peanut sauce) seller from Temanggung, Central Java, who contributed some money to the Sin Po Chinese Red Cross.⁵¹ They also profiled Kyai Aliredjo (also from Temanggung), who personally brought a contribution of funds to the nearest Sin Po branch office.⁵²

Sin Po did make strategic choices about which photographs it displayed and captioned in its publication. The inclusion of images of low-income Indonesians was

⁴⁸ "Soerat Terboeka," *Sin Po*, 25 June 1938.

⁴⁹ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 121.

⁵⁰ *Sin Po*, 30 August 1937.

⁵¹ "Indonesiers Toeroet Toendjang Fonds Amal Tiongkok," *Sin Po*, 18 September 1937.

⁵² "Sympathie pada Fonds Amal Tiongkok," *Sin Po*, 18 September 1937.

intended to persuade other prominent Indonesian nationalists to support China's struggle, considering that the majority of them sided with Japan rather than China as the oppressed nation. By demonstrating this information to the public, *Sin Po* also wanted to emphasise that support for China came not only come from the Chinese community.



Figure 4.11. Several Indonesian figures and Moors whose accounts and photographs were published by *Sin Po*. Source: *Sin Po*, 18 September 1937, 30 August 1937, and 18 September 1937, respectively.

Sin Po regularly emphasised that people could support China by volunteering in addition to financial contributions. Hence, it prominently featured Chinese Indonesians who volunteered to defend their motherland from the Japanese. In one edition, for instance, *Sin Po* published a letter from Han Twan Khing, a Chinese from Malang who enlisted in the Chinese army to fight the Japanese. The paper published a letter Han sent home to his parents from Shanghai in 1937 along with a photograph of Han dressed in a Chinese army uniform. Han indicated in the letter that a far larger conflict between China and Japan would almost certainly occur and the war would determine whether China would be 'SOEBOER' (Fertile) or 'MOESNA' (Destroyed).⁵³ Through this image, the paper promoted the view that it was his responsibility as a Chinese to protect his motherland.

⁵³ "Baba Djoega Toeroet Perang," *Sin Po*, 16 September 1937; "Sala Satoe Pamoeda Tionghoa dari Java jang Djadi Soldadoe di Tiongkok," *Sin Po*, 16 September 1937.



Figure 4.12. The portrait of Han Twan Khing. Source: *Sin Po*, 16 September 1937.

In another publication, *Sin Po* also featured the story of Liem Kian Hie, a Chinese Indonesian from Surabaya who volunteered to fight the Japanese during his study in China. In a letter to his father (Liem Bian Tjhiang) which *Sin Po* later published in the 20 September 1937 edition, Liem stated that conflict with Japan seemed unavoidable. He was willing to sacrifice his life for his nation, claiming that “dying on the battlefield is far more meaningful and noble than living without a country.” As well as volunteering to fight, Liem and some of his colleagues founded an association called ‘The Shanghai Overseas Chinese Youth Resistance Support Association’. *Sin Po* managed to interview Liem’s parents, and on that occasion, they stated that by defending their ancestral land, Liem had succeeded in elevating the status of their family.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ “Lagi Satoe Pamoeda dari Java jang Bersedia Mati Boeat Negri,” *Sin Po*, 20 September 1937.

Through the patriotic tales of Han Twan Khing and Liem Kian Hie, *Sin Po* argued how patriotism often drove these Chinese overseas to abandon their careers and families in tranquil Indonesia in favour of a war-torn China. Their objective was to defend China against the Japanese invasion. Although many were born in Indonesia, their intense loyalty to China was mostly due to the Chinese education they received. Their nationalist feelings were fuelled further by *Sin Po*'s war tales and their sorrowful realisation that their motherland was a defenceless victim of Japanese invasion. They were particularly outraged by reports of Japanese atrocities committed against civilians in their homeland. Consequently, even though many had never visited China, many were willing to fight for the Chinese government.

Such feelings of loyalty were also conveyed and strengthened by other textual and visual forms of communication in the newspaper. In the comic strip created by Kho Wan Gie, *Sin Po* promoted the idea of the civic obligation of Chinese Indonesians to assist China. In the 31 July 1937 edition, Kho Wan Gie described Put On as a young man who aspired to be an aviator in order to aid China in its fight against the Japanese invasion. Put On was apprehended in his dream, but before he was shot dead, he had time to hurl blows at the Japanese soldiers.⁵⁵ Through this comic strip, Kho depicted Put On's dream to defend China, which was actually the desire of many Chinese overseas in Indonesia at that time. This graphic was filled with patriotism, which emphasises that despite their lack of advanced weapons the Chinese troops would fight until the last drop of blood.



Figure 4.13. Kho Wan Gie's cartoon about Put On who aspired to be an aviator to aid China in its fight against the Japanese invasion. Source: *Sin Po*, 31 July 1937.

⁵⁵ *Sin Po*, 31 July 1937.

Kho believed that his cartoons would help boost military morale when read on both the front lines and behind the lines. In the issue of 7 August 1937, he depicted Put On giving an oration in front of dozens at a meeting. Put On fiercely called for all of them not to remain silent, watching the thousands of *tongpauw* (compatriots) who were suffering because of the war. Put On called for them to stand up for China because “if China fell, they too would fall.”⁵⁶ Through this comic strip, Kho argued that the Chinese were a connected community. He wanted to highlight the civic responsibility of the Chinese in Indonesia to support China, both morally and financially.



Figure 4.14. In one of his cartoons, Kho depicted Put On delivering an impassioned speech in front of Chinese compatriots (*tongpauw*), urging them to support China’s cause. Source: *Sin Po*, 7 August 1937.

In another comic strip, Kho showed Put On and his colleagues going door-to-door to collect donations for Chinese Charity Funds from wealthy Chinese merchants. However, the rich merchants turned them away for a variety of reasons, and some even tried to avoid seeing them. The comic strip concluded with a panel describing how Put On and his companion stopped for a break of mung bean porridge. They later discovered that the entire profits from the mung bean sales would be donated by the hawker to the Sin Po Chinese Charity Funds.⁵⁷

In this comic strip, Kho criticised more elite members of the Chinese community in Indonesia for only supporting China half-heartedly. Although the individual contributions of many Chinese were small, cumulatively, they far exceeded the amounts

⁵⁶ *Sin Po*, 7 August 1937.

⁵⁷ *Sin Po*, 18 September 1937.

donated by the rich. As a result of his dissatisfaction with the outcome of the fundraising campaign in Indonesia, Kwee wrote satirically in his famous rubric “Djamblang Kotjok” that instead of shedding tears every 18 September to mourn the conquest of Manchuria, the Chinese in Indonesia should donate more money to China through the Sin Po Chinese Charity Funds. Further, he wrote, “Do not open your mouth; instead, open your wallet!”⁵⁸



Figure 4.15. Put On and his colleagues went door-to-door to collect donations for Chinese Charity Funds from wealthy Chinese merchants. Source: *Sin Po*, 18 September 1937.

Relief for the war also included direct medical relief. Recognising the necessity for healthcare personnel in China, *Sin Po* allocated a portion of the relief fund towards the establishment of a highly competent medical corps. In October 1937, Dr. Kwa Tjoan Sioe, the founder of Jang Seng Ie Hospital, established an ambulance committee to aid China. He assembled physicians, nurses, medicines, and drivers to help China in its struggle against Japan. As the crisis worsened in March 1938, China solicited aid and support from its Chinese communities overseas, including students, technicians, and other professionals in science, industry, agriculture, and mining, through the Committee for Overseas Affairs.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ “Djamblang Kotjok,” *Sin Po*, 15 September 1937.

⁵⁹ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 164.



Figure 4.16. An image of the donated ambulance to the Chinese Red Cross. *Sin Po* distributed this image so that donors could see how their donations were utilised. Source: *Sin Po*, 6 November 1937.

As of 31 May 1938, the committee had received donations worth f. 1,187,526.83. In addition to quinine and other essential medicines, a total of f. 1,053,389.80 was provided to the Chinese Red Cross. While about f. 100,744.08 was contributed to funding an ambulance mission to China.⁶⁰ Within four years, the paper was able to collect f. 1,715,854.⁶¹

⁶⁰ "Warta Komite Hoakiauwo Penondjangan Gerakan Amal di Tiongkok, Batavia," *Sin Po*, 6 June 1938.

⁶¹ "Fonds Amal Tiongkok Empat Taon Setengah," *Weekblad Sin Po Speciaal Nummer*, 13 February 1942; Leo Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java*, 105.

Table 4.1. <i>Nanyang Overseas Chinese Contributions, November 1938 - December 1940</i>					
Country	Chinese Currency	Percentage of Total	Other Currency	Estimated Chinese Population	
Malaya	30,459,164	48.71	S\$ 8,202,672	2,149,520	
Philippines	9,218,562	14.74	P 680,267	100,000	
Dutch East Indies	14,046,665	22.47	G 2,485,107	1,500,000	
Thailand	3,200,000	5.12	S\$ 2,000	2,400,000	
Burma	4,351,530	6.96	K 882,719	300,000	
British Borneo	1,243,143	1.99	S\$ 324,448	800,000	
TOTAL	64,083,124	100.00		7,629,520	
Source: Stephen Leong, "The Malayan Overseas Chinese and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941," <i>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies</i> , Vol. 10, No. 2 (September 1979), 308 & 310.					

From the table above, we can see that from November 1938 to December 1940, the Chinese population in colonial Indonesia was able to contribute about 2.5 million guilders, almost all of which was channelled via the Sin Po Chinese Charity Funds. This amount ranked only second in Southeast Asia, after Malaya. Considering that the Chinese population in colonial Indonesia at the time was around 1.5 million (an increase of approximately 300,000 since the 1930 Census, see Table 4.2), this figure was certainly rather high. This accomplishment could not be dissociated from *Sin Po*'s capacity to effectively utilise all its platforms to solicit reader donations. In addition, *Sin Po* consistently campaigned for a boycott of Japanese goods in its various articles, which culminated in the Sino-Japanese War.

Table 4.2. Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, 1930s			
Country	Year	Number	% of Population
British Malaya	1937	2,108,000	41.2
British North Borneo (including Brunei)	1931	53,000	17.5
Burma	1931	194,000	1.3
French Indochina	---	450,000	2.0
Netherlands East Indies	1930	1,233,000	2.0
Philippine Islands	---	750,000	4.7
Sarawak	---	100,000	16.7
Thailand	---	2,000,000	13.8
Reproduced from Leonard Unger, "The Chinese in Southeast Asia," <i>Geographical Review</i> , vol. 34, no. 2 (April 1944):199.			

Sin Po and the Boycott of Japanese Products

Alongside raising significant funds for China, Chinese Indonesians also decided to reinstate earlier boycotts against Japanese products as another way of weakening Japan. *Sin Po* played a key role in these efforts. The paper engaged regularly in the boycott campaigns and was successful in getting people to engage much to the chagrin of the colonial government well as the Japanese authorities.

The first boycott of Japanese goods in China began in 1915 as a consequence of popular outrage over Japan's Twenty-One Demands, with which China was obliged to comply. Another boycott of Japanese goods occurred in 1919 following the May Fourth Movement, which students and intellectuals enthusiastically supported. At that time, the local chambers of commerce decided to cut economic relations with Japan, labourers refused to work in industries supported by Japan, shoppers refused to purchase Japanese products, and students rallied to penalise anybody caught selling, buying, or using

Japanese goods.⁶² The Jinan Incident of 1928 sparked a third boycott, and this time it was the Kuomintang government that urged the citizens to stop any commercial transactions with Japan.⁶³ Therefore, it could be argued that anti-Japanese demonstrations in China would henceforth always be accompanied by product boycotts, in which *Sin Po* was actively involved.

However, despite the fact that *Sin Po* called for a boycott as early as 1915, it was not until years later that the paper ran into trouble for making a similar call. On 9 June 1923, *Sin Po* published an article about the boycott of Japanese goods in its weekly edition, which later drew *persdelict* (press offence) charges from the colonial authorities. In the article, *Sin Po* criticised the Chinese boycott in Indonesia, on the basis that it was half-hearted or, in *Sin Po*'s language, only “*soemanget lima minuut*” (a five-minute spirit). Dutch newspapers condemned the boycott as they deemed it inappropriate for two foreign nations to “*saling tjakar dalem roemahnja si toean roemah*” (claw each other in the host's house). *Sin Po* understood that neither the colonial government nor the Dutch press was pleased with the boycott movement due to the close ties between Japan and the Netherlands. It stressed, however, that: “Japan is not China's friend...it doesn't matter if the rest of the world is friendly to Japan; if Japan insults China, it hurts all Chinese people, not only those who live in China!”⁶⁴ *Sin Po* issued an even stronger call for a boycott a week later in its special edition “*Tionggok-Japan Nummer*” (China-Japan Number).⁶⁵

⁶² Joseph T. Chen, “The May Fourth Movement Redefined,” *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1970): 64-65.

⁶³ Donald A. Jordan, *Chinese Boycotts versus Japanese Bombs: The Failure of China's “Revolutionary Diplomacy,” 1931-32* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

⁶⁴ “Japan boekan Tionggok poenja sobat...tiada perdoeliken apa Japan ada sobatnja sadoenia; kaloe Japan hinaken Tionggok, ia hinaken bangsa Tionghoa dan bangsa Tionghoa boekan tjoema orang-orang Tionghoa jang tinggal di Tionggok sadja!” See “Gerakan Boycot,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 9 June 1923.

⁶⁵ “Boycott Japan, Boycott Japan, Biarlah Satoe Kali Diartiken dengan Soenggoe Apa Itoe jang Dinamakan Boycott Japan!” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 16 June 1923.

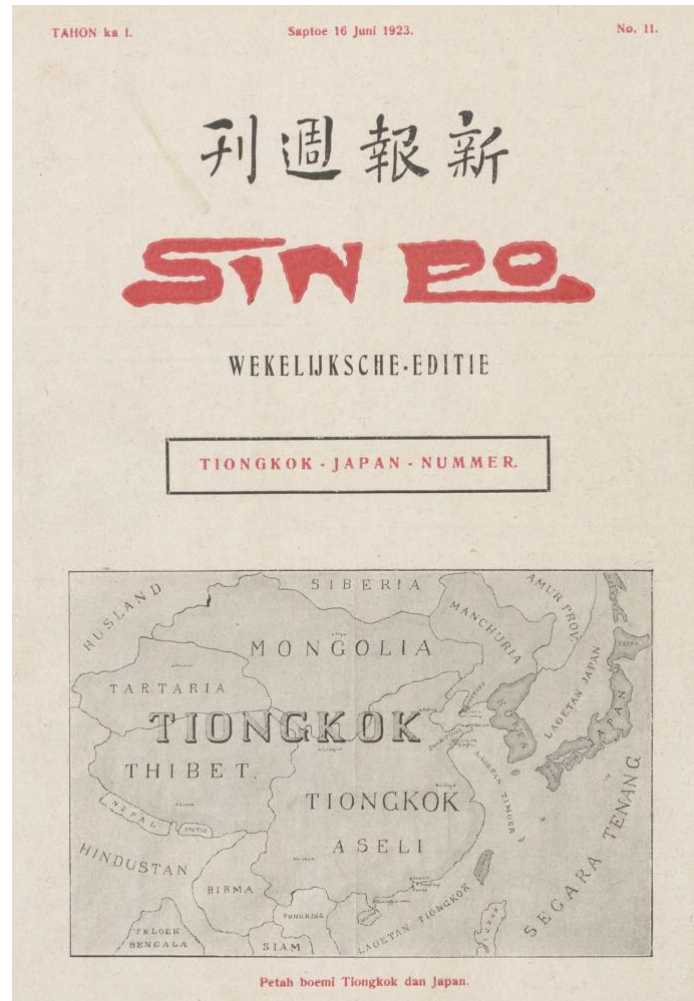


Figure 4.17. The front page of *Sin Po*'s special edition, "Tiongkok-Japan Nummer" (China-Japan Number), which contained several articles about boycotting Japanese products. Source: *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 16 June 1923.

These articles attracted the attention of the general prosecutor, who accused *Sin Po* of circulating articles that incited hatred (*haatzai artikelen*). The Dutch authority specifically regarded Kwee Kek Beng's article entitled "Gerakan Boycot" (The Boycott Movement) in *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie* (9 June 1923) as an incitement to violently oppose the Dutch government. Both Kwee Kek Beng (chief editor) and Ang Jan Goan (director) were found guilty of violating press offences (*persdelict*) and were sentenced to one year in jail and an f. 200 fine.⁶⁶ In spite of these convictions, *Sin Po* continued to publish editorials with anti-Japan and anti-Western undertones, which peaked in the

⁶⁶ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon*, 16-18.

1930s. It even refused to accept Japanese advertisements from late 1927, and subsequently, other Sino-Malay periodicals followed suit.⁶⁷

From the beginning of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria on 18 September 1931, *Sin Po* declared the need for another boycott movement in Indonesia. According to Kwee Kek Beng, the editor-in-chief, the Japanese attack on Manchuria was not just political in character but also economic, given the region's natural resources and the existence of China's first automobile manufacturer. Japan viewed the advancement of Chinese industry in Manchuria as a significant danger to the growth of Japanese industry. Therefore, Kwee argued that the involvement of people from all ethnic groups in boycotts to damage Japan financially would be invaluable.⁶⁸

According to the Indies Census of 1930, there were 7,195 Japanese in the colony, 2,310 of them settled in East Java. By 1938 the Office for East-Asian Affairs counted 6,597 Japanese residing in the Dutch East Indies, and 2,246 of them settled in East Java, where Surabaya became the centre of Japanese business.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, in 1930, there were 171,979 Chinese engaged in commerce, as compared with 2,061 Japanese. In 1936, there were about 600 Japanese shops in the whole of Indonesia, of which some 400 were in Java.⁷⁰

During the early phase of the economic boycott, there was a display of patriotic sentiment among many grassroots Chinese in Indonesia, who refrained from engaging with Japanese-owned service and business establishments. They severed all direct and indirect ties with the Japanese: (a) no trading, selling, or purchasing of Japanese goods; (b) no transactions with Japanese banks: deposits should be withdrawn, and no new loans made; (c) no agreements with Japanese ships for the transportation of goods, and no Japanese goods should be stored in warehouses. Historian Mona Lohanda argues that individuals who continued to sell Japanese products were subject to harassment and

⁶⁷ See Harry Poeze (ed.), *Politiek-Politieele Overzichten, Vol. I* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982), 104 & 314.

⁶⁸ "Djamblang Kotjok," *Sin Po*, 26 September 1931.

⁶⁹ Peter Post, "Japan and the Integration of the Netherlands East Indies into the World Economy, 1868-1942", *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs* 27/2: 143; See also Ken'ichi Goto, *Returning to Asia: Japan-Indonesia Relations, 1930s-1942* (Tokyo: Ryukei Shosha, 1997), 222.

⁷⁰ Shimizu Hiroshi, "Evolution of the Japanese commercial community in the Netherlands Indies in the Pre-war Period (From Karayuki-san to Sōgō Shōsha)," *Japan Forum*, vol. 3, no. 1, (April 1991): 49.

physical assault. Their stores were painted black and smeared with faeces; they received threatening letters written with poison pens; some were injured in savage attacks; others had their ears cut off.⁷¹

In September 1937, a series of boycott resolutions were implemented against vital Japanese exports, including but not limited to bicycles, paint, textiles, and other cotton-piece goods. Strong economic and social pressure was exerted on importers and distributors of Japanese goods to sever their ties with Japanese suppliers. Boycott declarations of the Chinese merchant community in Indonesia continued unabated for the rest of 1937. Nearly all Japanese imported goods were boycotted, including glasses, oil, steel, electrical goods, machinery, chemicals, and many more.⁷²

Nevertheless, despite their tremendous support for China's cause, neither Peranakan nor Totok merchants joined the boycott voluntarily. According to Kwee Hing Tjiat, a former editor of *Sin Po*, the boycott against Japanese goods was futile since the Chinese in Java were mostly trade brokers and not consumers or purchasers.⁷³ Hence, they were economically dependent on commerce, and the boycott movement could not be initiated without threats or intimidation. Kwee also argued that the Chinese unwillingness to join the boycott was motivated by self-interest since the majority of Indonesian buyers were interested in purchasing Japanese items due to the good quality and cheap price. No Chinese trader would risk losing both the products and the customers. Moreover, they also believed such a move would only create a conflict with the Indonesian nationalist movement, which turned out to be true.⁷⁴

Sin Po believed that cooperation and support from the majority of Indonesian consumers was essential for the success of the boycott action. Nonetheless, despite Chinese bitterness towards the Japanese, many Indonesian nationalists turned out to be pro-Japanese, and this created fragile relationships between these two groups which were greatly strained in the mid-1930s.⁷⁵ This general attitude of the Indonesian nationalists

⁷¹ *Semarang Yit Po*, 14 May 1923, in Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 159-60.

⁷² Siauw Giok Tjhan, *Lima Jaman: Perwujudan Integrasi Wajar*, 61.

⁷³ Kwee Hing Tjiat, *Doea Kapala Batoe* (Berlin, 1921), 26-27.

⁷⁴ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 126.

⁷⁵ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 197.

toward the Sino-Japanese War was clearly outlined in the writing of Soetan Sjahrir, who would become the Indonesian first Prime Minister (1945-1947). When Sjahrir was exiled to Banda, he stated that rather than showing solidarity with the Chinese, the weaker side in the Sino-Japanese confrontation, the Indonesians should side with Japan.⁷⁶

For the Indonesian people, the Chinese boycott was actually a godsend since it gave them leverage in the colonial economy. First, because of their low purchasing power, the Indonesians would continue to purchase cheap Japanese goods, whether or not there was a boycott. Second, the Chinese boycott of Japanese products might open the path for the establishment of the Indonesian industry. Third, the Chinese boycott would also allow the Indonesians to develop their own trading class.⁷⁷

Naturally, not everyone in Indonesia backed the Japanese invasion of China. *Sin Po* wrote about how ‘Persbureau Indonesia’ (Persindo) in Amsterdam attacked Hatta, Sjahrir and several other Indonesian nationalist figures for sympathising and siding with Japan. The paper even accused Hatta of being a “*hoofdagent van Japan in Indonesia*” (Japan’s Chief Agent in Indonesia).⁷⁸ Among the majority of pro-Japan organisations in the colony, perhaps only the Gerindo (*Gerakan Rakyat Indonesia* or Indonesian People’s Movement), established in May 1937, expressed its support for the Chinese in Indonesia.⁷⁹ As noted above, *Sin Po* also sought to profile more everyday non-Chinese people in the colony who supported China.

In the view of the colonial authorities, Chinese merchants were ostensibly compelled to make donations since they charged a tiny percentage on the sale of specific commodities and subsequently submitted the proceeds to Chinese Charity Funds. It was evident that the contribution was indirectly paid for by the consumers: a small number of European purchasers, but for the most part, indigenous Indonesians were disadvantaged

⁷⁶ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloeh Lima Tahun Sebagai Wartawan*. 68.

⁷⁷ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 161-62.

⁷⁸ “Het Trotskisme in Indonesië en Japansche Knechten,” *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, 28 May 1938.

⁷⁹ Leo Suryadinata, “Pre-War Indonesian Nationalism and the Peranakan Chinese,” *Indonesia*, no. 11 (April 1971): 92.

by this mechanism of collecting funds. Such illegal charges were subsequently forbidden the colonial government.⁸⁰

Although the Dutch suspicions were justified, they remained unaddressed until the late 1930s, when the Chinese fund-raising for China's liberation became more vigorous. Based on the research done by the Kantoor voor Chineesche Zaken (Office for Chinese Affairs), Chinese dealers added roughly 1-2.5 cents to the retail price of the majority of everyday essentials, including fuel, rice, milk, cigarettes, sugar, and salt. Additionally, if the proprietor was Chinese, an extra charge might also be added to film and other entertainment tickets. These additional charges might have been slightly higher in smaller towns because this was planned and administered through Chinese trading syndicates.⁸¹

Despite the admonitions of colonial authorities, Chinese leaders in Indonesia persisted in promoting an anti-Japanese boycott, which proved challenging to suppress. However, compared to neighbouring countries like Malaya or the Philippines, which were well ahead in terms of raising funds, the Chinese in Indonesia faced obstructions due to the adoption of repressive policies toward the Chinese nationalistic groups from the Dutch colonial government. Fearing that this Chinese boycott campaign would disrupt public order and peace in the colony, the colonial authorities took repressive measures. Those classed as non-resident provocateurs were deported, and the newspapers that incited boycotts and stirred anti-Japanese sentiment were censored, curtailed, or banned. Perpetrators of defamatory actions were prosecuted in line with article 335 of the *Wetboek van de Strafrecht* (Dutch Criminal Code).⁸²

Even though *Sin Po* was able to attract thousands of donors, the final results were not totally satisfying for its leadership. Only in areas where Chinese Totok predominated, such as West Borneo and Jambi in Sumatra, did the boycott have a significant impact. The considerably less effective boycott was somewhat the result of coercive actions taken by colonial authorities and partially the result of economic self-interest on the part of the

⁸⁰ "Verslag van den Dienst der Oost-Aziatische Zaken over den Jaren 1937 en 1938," *Binnenlands-Bestuur*, no. 140, 132, in Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 165.

⁸¹ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 57.

⁸² Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 161.

Chinese. For these people, they considered a boycott of Japanese goods would only be detrimental to them.⁸³ The Dutch concern regarding anti-Japanese sentiment in the colony, evidenced in their response to the boycotts, escalated further and led to the implementation of further press censorship.

Sin Po and Persbreidel (Press Restriction)

From the Dutch perspective, the Sino-Japanese War was just one of many catastrophic international developments in the 1930s which harmed their interests. Other events and developments included the Great Depression, which reached Indonesia in 1930; the Japanese invasion of China, starting with Manchuria in 1931; Hitler's ascension to power in Germany in 1933; Japan's coup attempts in February 1936 and the intensified military intervention; the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and Italy's annexation of Ethiopia in 1936.⁸⁴ As a result of these international developments and domestic reasons, such as rising nationalism in Indonesia, the right to free speech and freedom of association were severely curtailed, and in the 1930s, Indonesia became a 'police-state.'⁸⁵

In this decade the Dutch introduced a new law called the *persbreidelordonnantie* or the press curbing ordinance. Unlike the *persdelict* (press offence) law, which was implemented at the local level, the *persbreidel* was exercised at the national level.⁸⁶ While the *persdelict* usually targeted individual reporters and required a district-level trial, the *persbreidel* depended on administrative cooperation from the district level up to the governor-general, and this administrative judgement applied to newspaper companies rather than individual journalists.⁸⁷

⁸³ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 161.

⁸⁴ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942*, 205.

⁸⁵ Rudolf Mrazek, *Sjhrir: Politics and Exile in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1994), 155.

⁸⁶ Until 1934, the governor-general made the ultimate decision in the matter of *persbreidel*, although the Council of the Netherlands Indies was supposed to give the last push. Following 1935, it was up to the prosecutor general to choose which publications should be temporarily suspended by *persbreidel*. See Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942*, 179.

⁸⁷ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942*, 179.

According to Nobuto Yamamoto, the primary purpose of the legislation was to impair the operations of a newspaper and inflict financial loss on the publisher. If a newspaper ceased publication for a week or so, it would not only lose readers but also commercial partners, notably Europeans who would avoid associating with any politically controversial publications. Due to nationalistic and religious political agitation in Batavia and West Sumatra, the Indies government concentrated its focus largely on these two regions during the first part of the 1930s.⁸⁸

In the latter part of the 1930s, Chinese publications became the most prevalent target for *persbreidel*. Both Chinese and Chinese-Malay language publications were targeted. These newspapers were charged with *persbreidel* for two main reasons: (1) articles deemed insulting to the colonial authorities and (2) anti-Japanese articles. After 1936, the anti-Japanese articles were the only reason for the temporary suspension of Chinese-owned publications.⁸⁹

Because *Sin Po* continued to expose Japanese brutality, Ang Jan Goan and Kwee Kek Beng often clashed with the Dutch colonial authorities. *Sin Po*'s articles which were particularly critical of Japan were seen by the Dutch authorities as detrimental to the relationship between Japan and the Netherlands. Ang believed that the decision of the Dutch colonial authority to maintain a neutral attitude was motivated by a desire to protect the Netherlands.⁹⁰ Infuriated by *Sin Po*'s scathing articles on Japan, the Japanese Consulate in Batavia repeatedly urged the Dutch colonial authority to take firm action against the newspaper. Therefore, the colonial government subsequently adopted strict measures against *Sin Po*, from a severe warning to a temporary suspension. The problem was that the Dutch authority refused to point out which *Sin Po* articles were problematic.⁹¹

Despite the Dutch government's neutrality in the Sino-Japanese War, Dutch popular opinion in the colony demonstrated support for the Chinese cause. The Japanese Consul-General in Batavia stated that the Dutch press, such as *Java Bode*, *De Locomotief*, and *Het Nieuws van de Dag*, blatantly exhibited their pro-Chinese attitude and, at the

⁸⁸ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942*, 184 & 195.

⁸⁹ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942*, 193.

⁹⁰ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 128.

⁹¹ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 128.

same time, did not refrain from sarcastic remarks towards Japan and the Japanese.⁹² Elsbeth Locher-Scholten argues that neutrality was just a deliberate attempt to keep the colony's populations in the shadows, which resulted in a restricted supply of news regarding Japan.⁹³

Dutch responses toward the Sino-Japanese War were varied. Some strived to reassure the Japanese by addressing them as “friends for 300 years.” Many also worried that the Manchuria invasion might encourage Japan to conquer other territories, including Indonesia. The Dutch government, however, immediately declared its neutrality and instructed Chinese journalists in Indonesia, the majority of whom were anti-Japanese, to write articles about Japan with caution. The Japanese consulate in the Dutch East Indies closely surveilled the circulation of anti-Japanese information in Indonesia, with *Sin Po* being the most heavily monitored periodical.⁹⁴

Petrus Hendrikus Willemse, the Resident of Batavia, repeatedly warned *Sin Po* about the consequences of *Sin Po*'s anti-Japanese articles. Kwee Kek Beng recalled his summons by Willemse as follows: “with his eyes bulging as if about to fall out and banging on the table, he shouted that he was furious because he regarded *Sin Po*'s articles on Japan as far too harsh.”⁹⁵ Willemse was undoubtedly concerned that the paper's anti-Japanese publications might incite Japanese animosity in the future. However, *Sin Po* remained firm in its stance. Its condemnation of the Japanese onslaught became even more strident, resulting in its journalists and editors being frequently summoned to a local Politieke Inlichtingen Dienst office (The Intelligence Bureau/PID) for questioning.⁹⁶

In 1936 alone, the Dutch banned four Chinese newspapers for inciting animosity; one of which was *Sin Po*. In November 1936, the Indonesian edition of *Sin Po* was banned

⁹² Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 166.

⁹³ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, “European Images of Japan and Indonesian Nationalism before 1942”, in *The Indonesian Revolution: Papers of the Conference held in Utrecht*, ed. J. van Goor (Utrecht: Utrechtse Historische Cahiers, 1986), 23.

⁹⁴ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Taon Sebagai Wartawan*, 62-63.

⁹⁵ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Taon Sebagai Wartawan*, 62-63.

⁹⁶ *Politieke Inlichtingen Dienst* (The Intelligence Bureau/PID) was founded in 1919 and had since developed into a powerful government instrument for the repression of radical activities against governments. It was a government agency with local offices that employed a number of spies and informants. See Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia*, 135; Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Taon Sebagai Wartawan*, 62-63.

from publication for eight days after it published a series of anti-Japanese articles that the colonial government felt would endanger friendly relationships between the Netherlands and Japan.⁹⁷ In May 1939, *Sin Po Chineesche Editie* was also prohibited for eight days for a similar reason. During these bans, the individuals behind the *Sin Po Chineesche Editie* took advantage of this opportunity to collect even more money for China. At the time, *Sin Po* was able to generate donations of up to f. 1,000,000 for Chinese Charity Funds.⁹⁸

Sin Po Chineesche Editie was banned again for up to two weeks in mid-1941 without warning. This was a major blow for *Sin Po*, especially because the war in China and Europe was nearing its conclusion. Given that there were only four Chinese publications in Indonesia at the time (one in Medan and three in Batavia), most Chinese people, particularly the Totok, were clueless about the latest developments in their homeland.⁹⁹

Ang finally reached an agreement with the paper *Keng Po* to publish *Sin Po Chineesche Editie* as a *Keng Po* supplement until the case was closed. Although *Sin Po* and *Keng Po* frequently disagreed on matters regarding ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, this time they shared the same common enemy: Japan. *Keng Po* even agreed to deliver the edition to *Sin Po* subscribers. However, Ang tried to be more strategic by avoiding writing any articles that might offend the Japanese.¹⁰⁰

Kwee Kek Beng and Ang Jan Goan were fully aware that *Sin Po* posed a threat to the Dutch government. As a result, they announced the *Kung Yen* (Public Declaration) in December 1936, which served as a backup newspaper if *Sin Po* was forced to close by authorities. This newspaper consisted of four pages and was published every Saturday, with Lin Siang Han serving as the director as well as the editor-in-chief. The format of *Kung Yen* was almost identical to *Sin Po* and the rubric called “Tjap Tjay” was the favourite section. This rubric was definitely inspired by Kwee Kek Beng’s “Djamblang Kotjok”. Although the anti-Japanese pieces in *Kung Yen* were far harsher than those in

⁹⁷ “*Sin Po Tidak Boleh Terbit 8 Hari*,” *Sin Po*, 10 November 1936.

⁹⁸ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Taon Sebagai Wartawan*, 70.

⁹⁹ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 129.

¹⁰⁰ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 130.

Sin Po, the Dutch authorities, surprisingly, never shut down *Kung Yen*'s publication. Possibly because the paper was considered to be far less influential than *Sin Po*.¹⁰¹



Figure 4.18. The front page of *Kung Yen* (Public Declaration) which was issued in December 1936 and served as a backup newspaper if *Sin Po* was forced to close by the authority. Source: *Kung Yen*, 2 September 1939.

Ang and Kwee also came up with the idea to devote more of the paper to portions of translated articles from foreign newspapers, hoping that the colonial authority would be more lenient with this kind of strategy. However, *Sin Po* kept receiving warnings from

¹⁰¹ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Taon Sebagai Wartawan*, 69-70.

the colonial government. Finally, Ang and Kwee found out that many punishments imposed on *Sin Po* were due to protests from the Japanese Consulate General, which pressured the Dutch to punish *Sin Po* harshly.¹⁰²

Despite their small overall population, the Chinese community in Indonesia had a powerful voice. The repeated criticism, insults, and demands to boycott Japanese products infuriated the Japanese authorities. Consequently, between December 1938 and April 1940, *persbreidel* were issued fourteen times, twelve of which were against Chinese-owned newspapers, including *Sin Po*.¹⁰³

The Japanese Invasion and False Hope

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 marked a turning point in the Dutch government's neutrality. The Netherlands finally declared war on Japan. The Dutch then requested that the Chinese community in Indonesia gather funds to purchase an aeroplane and support the Prince Bernhard Fund. Ang Yan Goan thought that the Dutch had allied with China; therefore, *Sin Po* was obligated to aid the resistance.¹⁰⁴

Governor-General Tjarda van Starkenborgh Stachouwer's declaration of war on Japan in a radio address shortly after the bombing convinced the Chinese that Japan posed a real threat to the colony and because of their fears about what the Japanese had done to the mainland Chinese they joined the Dutch in defending the colony.¹⁰⁵ *Sin Po* played a significant role in mobilising the Chinese to support the new phase of the war against Japan. After this Dutch declaration, *Sin Po*'s anti-Japanese position became even more strident. Each headline featured various caricatures of the Japanese and headlines depicted defeats of Japan on a regular basis. The Dutch and Allied soldiers, who *Sin Po* had previously been portrayed as invaders and oppressors, were suddenly portrayed more

¹⁰² Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 128.

¹⁰³ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942*, 242.

¹⁰⁴ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 132.

¹⁰⁵ Didi Kwartanada, "Competition, Patriotism and Collaboration: The Chinese Businessmen of Yogyakarta between the 1930s and 1945," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, (2002): 270.

positively as heroes and liberators.¹⁰⁶ This was due to the fact that they now shared a common enemy: Japan.



Figure 4.19. The greetings to General Sir Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief India and Commander of the ABDA (American-British-Dutch-Australian), as published in *Sin Po*. According to the advertisements, the Dutch East Indies welcomed him like an old friend and was prepared to support him in all his endeavours. Wavell, however, was powerless to prevent the Japanese from seizing Malaya and Indonesia in 1942. Source: *Sin Po*, 17 January 1942.

While *Sin Po* was fully aware that the Dutch capacity to defend Japanese attacks was weak *Sin Po* and other media in Indonesia strove to convince the public that the situation in Indonesia remained under control. The paper frequently reported that the Japanese assaults on parts of Indonesia such as Java and Ambon had only resulted in

¹⁰⁶ See for instances “Poedjian Tinggi Boeat Soemanget Blanda di Pacific,” *Sin Po*, 3 January 1942; “15,000 Djepang Mampoes dan Loeka di Depan Kota Changsa,” *Sin Po*, 4 January 1942; “Pendekar-Pendekar Australie,” *Sin Po*, 5 January 1942; “3,000 Djepang Mampoes dan Loeka di Kiangsi Oetara,” *Sin Po*, 20 January 1942.

minor incursions.¹⁰⁷ Near the end of February 1942, the situation in Indonesia grew more tense. *Sin Po* published a plethora of government notices ranging from evacuation news releases to self-defence instructions. Yet the paper remained positive about Indonesia's future as symbolised by the expression "*dum spiro, spero*" (while I breath, I hope) which suggests optimism in the face of misfortune. *Sin Po* believed that the Japanese would be incapable of establishing complete authority over Java. Additionally, they believed, powerful nations such as China, the Soviet Union, and the United States would not just stand by and allow Japan to act arbitrarily.¹⁰⁸ However, just one day later, *Sin Po*'s board of directors announced the indefinite suspension of the *Sin Po* Chinese and Indonesian editions. Indicating the imminent sense of threat, they stated that *Sin Po* would continue publication only after relocating to a more secure location.¹⁰⁹



Figure 4.20. According to one of *Sin Po*'s cartoons, the turn of the year 1942 was hellish due to an invasion of evil aggressors, namely Italy, Germany, and Japan. Source: *Sin Po*, 2 January 1942.

¹⁰⁷ See for examples: "Itoe Serangan Moesoe pada Ambon" (The Enemy Attack on Ambon), *Sin Po*, 9 January 1942; "Soeda Pasti Japan aken Kalah, Kata Ho Ying Chin" (It's certain that Japan will lose, says Ho Ying Chin), *Sin Po*, 5 January 1942; "Kamenangan-Kamenangan Terlebih Djaoe dari Tentara Tionghoa" (Further Victories of the Chinese Army), *Sin Po*, 11 January 1942.

¹⁰⁸ "Keadaan Sekarang," *Sin Po*, 2 March 1942.

¹⁰⁹ "Pembrian Taoe," *Sin Po*, 3 March 1942.

When it became evident that Batavia would fall to the Japanese, Kwee Kek Beng convened a meeting with Tan Po Goan, Thio Tong Hay, and Ang Jan Goan to ascertain their attitudes towards Japan and to determine what to do with the paper. They were optimistic, citing the Jayabaya prophecy, that Japan would only govern Indonesia for a short period.¹¹⁰ Kwee believed that if he pretended to work with Japan, he could continue *Sin Po*'s operations at least until Japan departed Indonesia.¹¹¹

Therefore, *Sin Po*'s editors devised a plan to relaunch the newspaper in Bandung as the situation in Batavia had deteriorated. Ang Jan Goan intended to publish two editions of *Sin Po* concurrently, one in Chinese and another in Indonesian, with Go Tiauw Goan and Ang himself serving as editors. To carry out the plan, they surreptitiously moved some of *Sin Po*'s printing equipment to Tee Soei Kim's home in Palmerah, Batavia, before he relocated to Bandung. After the internal meeting concluded, Ang and Go decided to meet with the Mayor of Bandung to seek permission for the plan. However, their request was denied. Ang and Go soon realised that Dutch forces in Bandung were powerless to resist the Japanese invasion. The plan to restart the publication in Bandung was ultimately cancelled, and both Ang and Go returned to Batavia.¹¹²

The Arrests of Sin Po Editors and the Worsening Position of the Chinese

On 5 March 1942, Batavia was captured without resistance. Meanwhile, the Dutch soldiers began abandoning their army quarters in Batavia. They were spotted lugging enormous suitcases along Batavia's main thoroughfares as they exited the town.¹¹³ When

¹¹⁰ According to an abridged set of stanzas contained within a Jayabaya prophecy, the Javanese would be governed by whites for three centuries, followed by a period of rule by "yellow dwarves" for the lifespan of a maize plant. This would continue until the return of the Ratu Adil, whose name must comprise at least one syllable of the Javanese Noto Negoro. Jayabaya stated that these yellow dwarves would only remain for a single crop cycle (equivalent to 3.5 months, or 3.5 years of Japanese rule), after which Java would be liberated from foreign rule. See Slamet Muljana, *Runtuhnya Kerajaan Hindu-Jawa dan Timbulnya Negara-Negara Islam di Nusantara*. (Yogyakarta: LKIS, 2005).

¹¹¹ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon Sebagi Wartawan*, 76.

¹¹² Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon Sebagi Wartawan*, 73-74.

¹¹³ Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 133.

the 16th Army reached Bandung Fortress, which housed the Allied Forces' main divisions, the government of the Dutch East Indies quickly surrendered.¹¹⁴

Following the Japanese invasion of Batavia, the *Sin Po* office was seized.¹¹⁵ The leading *Sin Po* figures such as Ang Jan Goan, Nio Joe Lan, Lie Tek Ho, and several others were arrested for their work with the paper and allegedly inciting anti-Japanese sentiment.¹¹⁶ The majority of Chinese journalists who had been outspoken in their opposition to the Japanese invasion of China were also imprisoned.¹¹⁷ Japan even threatened to abduct the spouses of *Sin Po*'s employees and force them to be 'comfort women' (*jugun ianfu*).¹¹⁸ Meanwhile, Kwee Kek Beng, one of *Sin Po*'s most critical and influential figures, evaded arrest by fleeing to Selabintana, West Java.¹¹⁹

The Japanese occupation placed many Chinese in a difficult position. As elucidated earlier in this chapter, many Chinese had been engaged in strongly anti-Japanese activities from the early 20th century onwards.¹²⁰ Rumours leaked in the press and on the radio that Japan would retaliate harshly against Chinese individuals perceived as pro-Kuomintang and anti-Japanese.¹²¹

At the beginning of the occupation all Chinese schools were closed, and some were converted into *kenpeitai* (Military Police) headquarters; press publications were

¹¹⁴ Japan's principal objective in conquering Indonesia was to seize economic resources for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Japan, like the Dutch colonial state, intended to purchase raw materials from Indonesia and export produced goods. Japan regarded Indonesia as the most significant occupied area in the south due to its strategic location and abundance of natural resources, particularly oil. See Twang Peck Yang, *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia and the Transition to Independence, 1940-1950*. (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1998), 71 & 78.

¹¹⁵ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon Sebagai Wartawan*, 77.

¹¹⁶ Several others were Bee Giau Tjoen, *Sin Po*'s journalist; Cabin Yoe, *Sin Po*'s translator; Ling Ying Chen, *Sin Po*'s Chinese edition's editor; Tan Po Goan, *Sin Po*'s journalist; Ang Jan Goan, *Sin Po*'s director; Fang Ting Hsun, *Sin Po*'s Chinese edition's editor-in-chief; Tan Tek Ho, *Sin Po*'s Indonesian edition's journalist; Tan Ping Tjiat, former editor of *Sin Po* East Java edition; Go Tiau Goan, *Sin Po*'s deputy editor-in-chief who was arrested in Kediri and subsequently interned in Ngawi, East Java.

¹¹⁷ Among them were Khoe Woen Sioe (*Keng Po*), Tan Hian Lay (*Star Magazine*), The Ping Oen (*Pewarta Soerabaia*), Ng Sim Kie (*Thien Sung Yit Po*). See Nio Joe Lan, *Dalem Tawanan Jepang*. (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2008).

¹¹⁸ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon Sebagai Wartawan*, 77.

¹¹⁹ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon Sebagai Wartawan*, 79-80.

¹²⁰ Tjamboek Berdoeri [Kwee Thiam Tjing], *Indonesia dalem Api dan Bara*. (Jakarta: Elkasa, 2004), 233.

¹²¹ Nio Joe Lan, *Dalem Tawanan Jepang*. (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2008), 4.

prohibited; and the majority of Chinese land was forcibly seized. Listening to foreign radio was considered a significant offence and those who broke these rules faced severe punishment, such as having chopsticks pierced through both ears.¹²² Civilians were recruited to fill semi-military positions such as *heiho* (soldiers helpers), *seinendan* (youth corps), *keibodan*, and *jibakutai* (suicide units).¹²³ Despite their diverse geographical origins, social classes, political orientations, and religious beliefs, the Japanese military administration grouped and centralised all Chinese in Indonesia under an organisation called *kakyo sokai* (Overseas Chinese General Association).¹²⁴

The Chinese were not only targeted by the Japanese in this early phase of the occupation but also by other Indonesians. When news of the Dutch colonial government's capitulation to the Dai Nippon Army spread, tremendous anarchy ensued. Sensing the collapse or cessation of colonial authority, *pemuda* (youth) began plundering businesses, abandoned offices, European residences, and public infrastructures in villages and small towns.¹²⁵ Equally unsettling was the surge of violence and theft that swept across rural areas and eventually into the cities. Many Chinese were targeted in rampant looting and robbery. This *rampok* (pillage, banditry) began in mid-February 1942, when many regions became progressively deserted of Dutch and the Indonesian elite leadership who served the colonial state, the *pangreh pradja* (literally: the rulers of the realm).¹²⁶

In most cases, robbers began plundering one or two Chinese houses in an area. When no authorities showed up and no resistance was encountered, the entire population of the town or village joined in the raiding. Moreover, with no social controls in place, people also committed murder and rape.¹²⁷ Tangerang and Bekasi in West Java were hardest hit by anti-Chinese violence. There were also instances of forced circumcisions in Tangerang and Bekasi, as well as in South Sumatra, reportedly an attempt to convert

¹²² "Djambalang Kotjok," *Sin Po*, 14 November 1945.

¹²³ Twang Peck Yang, *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia*, 74.

¹²⁴ Tsuda Koji, *Kung Yung Pao, The Only Daily Newspaper for the Ethnic Chinese in Java during Japanese Occupation: An Overview*. (Taipei: TBMC, 2020), 5.

¹²⁵ William Frederick, *Visions of Heat: The Making of the Indonesian Revolution*. (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989), 87.

¹²⁶ Frederick, *Visions of Heat*, 87.

¹²⁷ Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 472.

Chinese people to Islam.¹²⁸ A similar situation also occurred in Pekalongan, where the attack was spearheaded by brigand or *rampok* bands.¹²⁹ The Chinese suffered significant losses during the early weeks of the new era—losses roughly estimated at around \$ 100 million.¹³⁰ Similar patterns of violence, however, persisted even after the Japanese surrender. In Tangerang, for instance, about 1,000 Chinese were massacred in 1946 not only due to their Chinese appearance, but also due to their non-Muslim identity. This topic will be elaborated upon in the Chapter V.

Controlling the News

The Japanese military administration tried to manipulate the news that people in Indonesia received.¹³¹ At the beginning of the occupation, all Dutch and Chinese periodicals were closed because they were deemed by the Japanese to be “enemy newspapers.” The Japanese military treated most *Sin Po* editors and journalists as “enemy nationals” and seized all their property. *Sin Po*’s operations were momentarily halted. Most of its journalists were imprisoned, while several were forced to flee and conceal their identities.¹³²

Throughout the occupation, Japan portrayed itself to the people of Indonesia as victorious, heroic, and capable of righteous and wise rule. By contrast, Japan’s adversaries were all portrayed as evil, helpless, and eternal losers. According to Kwee Kek Beng, the fundamental objective of this strategy was to shape public opinion in order to rally the masses to support Japan in the Greater East Asian War.¹³³

¹²⁸ East Java also experienced a similar problem. According to Adrian Vickers, Muslims affiliated with the conservative Nadhatul Ulama organisation perform forced circumcisions on Chinese. See Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 91; Twang Peck Yang, *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia*, 73.

¹²⁹ Twang Peck Yang, *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia*, 74.

¹³⁰ Twang Peck Yang, *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia*, 71.

¹³¹ See A. Latief, *Pers di Indonesia di Zaman Pendudukan Jepang* (Surabaya: Karya Anda, 1980).

¹³² Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun Sebagai Wartawan*, 83.

¹³³ The “Greater East Asian War” was the terminology used by Japan to describe the Pacific Theatre of the Second World War, in reference to the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere it championed. See Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun Sebagai Wartawan*, 83-84.

As part of the effort of to control information, Indonesian-language newspapers were reorganised into city-based publications. Newspaper production was restricted to the five major cities of Jakarta (*Asia Raya*), Bandung (*Tjahaja*), Yogyakarta (*Sinar Matahari*), Semarang (*Sinar Baroe*), and Surabaya (*Soeara Asia*) in order to consolidate printing facilities and improve censorship efficiency. This facilitated Japanese control over the press, reducing the range of dissident ideas, and providing more effective propaganda channels.¹³⁴ As a result, all newspapers published in cities other than the ones listed above had to cease publication.¹³⁵

Among the various Malay-language ethnic Chinese newspapers in Jakarta, only *Hong Po* was permitted to continue publication following the onset of the Japanese military occupation. Meanwhile, Japan exploited *Sin Po*'s office space and equipment to produce *Sin Sin Po* (the New Sin Po), a two-sheet four-page Chinese language daily newspaper, on 10 March 1942. The publication, however, survived less than a month before being rebranded as *Kung Yung Pao* (meaning 'Coprosperity Newspaper').¹³⁶

Under the Japanese military government, *Kung Yung Pao* became the sole daily newspaper published for the ethnic Chinese community in Java. The Chinese version was launched on 26 March 1942, while the Indonesian edition was launched in September 1942, following the acquisition of *Hong Po*. The Japanese exploited *Kung Yung Pao* as a propaganda publication in order to rally ethnic Chinese in Indonesia to support Japan's war. Apart from embracing Japan's 'New Order' in Java, *Kung Yung Pao* urged the Chinese community in China to embrace the collaborationist Wang Ching-wei administration and forsake Chiang Kai-shek.¹³⁷

Therefore, during the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia, state-controlled publishing supplanted the popular print market. The print culture that colonial-era

¹³⁴ Peter Post, *The Encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 35.

¹³⁵ Tsuda Koji, *Kung Yung Pao*, 25.

¹³⁶ *Sin Sin Po* was published for three weeks until its fourteenth issue, however the next issue was abruptly renamed *Kung Yung Pao* without prior notification in the publication. See Tsuda Koji, *Kung Yung Pao*, 26.

¹³⁷ Prior to the occupation, hardly any Chinese supported Wang Ching-wei's puppet government in Nanking. The majority of Chinese supported the KMT and its commander Chiang Kai-shek, whose administration in the inland of Chongqing was recognised by the Dutch government. See Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 472.

journalists and writers had enjoyed, despite periods of increased scrutiny, had vanished.¹³⁸ Instead, the Japanese establish the groundwork for the future climate of print culture in Indonesia by consolidating the kaleidoscope of small printing houses to ensure a relative homogeneity of politics and expression in alignment with their military control. This new print culture environment was one in which neither ethnic nor local popular literature would have a place to survive.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated *Sin Po*'s strategies in reporting the the Sino-Japanese War. Compared to the past eras of nationalist actions (e.g., the 1919 May Fourth Incident, the 1928 Tsinan Affair, and the 1931 Mukden Incident), the expressions of Chinese nationalism during the Sino-Japanese War were by far the strongest and most influential. They represented the pinnacle of Chinese Indonesian patriotism, and *Sin Po* had a significant part in stoking this sentiment. Through the use of visual images (photographs, cartoons, and comic strips) and strong language, the paper primed Chinese Indonesian audiences to see and respond to the anguish of the Chinese people. *Sin Po* utilised these visual narratives to condemn the invasion of Japan, criticise the inaction of the Chinese government, and generate humanitarian aid for China. *Sin Po*'s strategy included emphasising the importance of women, children, and non-Chinese societies in the fund-raising campaign. Furthermore, it also regularly highlighted the contributions of the poor as an example to shame the wealthy Chinese who were unwilling to contribute.

When Japan invaded China, Kho Wan Gie discovered that he had a one-of-a-kind and powerful weapon in the form of a brush capable of generating powerful graphic images. As an illustrator, Kho frequently used animal-like imagery with related cultural symbolism in his work. His cartoons became a highly effective medium for critiquing society's past, present, and future in the desperate context of the war. These images drew attention to life's ironies and challenged the status quo. They became an integral component of Kho's means of communicating with his reader. In addition, they also enable the reader to explore other points of view and confront uncomfortable truths.

¹³⁸ Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901-1942*, 264.

The financial support provided by Chinese Indonesians through *Sin Po*, in the shape of voluntary contributions, bond subscriptions, and remittances to their families, helped to facilitate China to fund its war efforts against Japan. When economic inflation in China began to escalate since 1939, the Chinese Indonesians also provided monetary contributions to prevent the Chinese Government from facing bankruptcy. In short, by using all available platforms, *Sin Po* was able to effectively mobilise the Chinese people in colonial Indonesia to aid China financially and morally.

The Japanese military control (1942-1945) of the Indies represented one of the lowest times in *Sin Po*'s history. Numerous *Sin Po* journalists and authors who had been outspoken critics of Japan's invasion of China were detained, tortured, and intimidated, while others were compelled to comply with the new regimes. *Sin Po* had to cease publication for three and a half years, during which time its office was repurposed to print the Japanese propaganda newspaper, *Kung Yung Pao*. The board of *Sin Po* was able to revive the newspaper a few months after Japan's surrender. The situation for the Chinese people following the proclamation of Indonesian independence was however unfavourable. The period of Indonesian War of Independence (1945-1949) became a pivotal moment in the formulation of Indonesian nationalist attitudes towards the Chinese. *Sin Po*'s enthusiasm for Indonesian independence gradually receded and transitioned into animosity as thousands of Chinese people were slaughtered by pro-Republican militias.

CHAPTER V

GIVING VOICE TO THE VOICELESS: *SIN PO* AND THE CHINESE MASSACRES DURING THE INDONESIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1945-1949

The three-and-a-half years of the Japanese occupation were a significant turning point for the Chinese in Indonesia. Tjamboek Berdoeri (Kwee Thiam Tjing) referred to this period as “*zaman gendeng-gendengan*” (the crazy era), when the Japanese military authority pursued and oppressed many Chinese.¹ Two days after the Japanese capitulated on 15 August 1945, Soekarno and Mohammad Hatta announced the proclamation of Indonesian independence and the formation of the Republic of Indonesia.² Soon afterwards there was a power vacuum, and based on the terms of the capitulation, the Japanese were required to preserve law and order in Indonesia until the Allied Forces under Lord Louis Mountbatten could take control.³

The Indonesian War of Independence (1945-49), also known as the Indonesian national revolution, is often remembered as a moment of unified struggle in Indonesian history, but it was also the darkest period for minority groups, particularly Indo-Europeans and Chinese. According to historian Sartono Kartodirdjo, the crisis of the war and high levels of political tension at the beginning of this period contributed to the emergence of countless frictions and divisions between groups. At the same time, the new Indonesian state, due to various shortcomings, was unable to assure the safety of its people, and this inability resulted in minority groups being made frequent scapegoats and targets of the economic and political crisis.⁴

¹ Tjamboek Berdoeri [Kwee Thiam Tjing], *Indonesia dalem Api dan Bara* (Jakarta: Elkasa, 2004), 261.

² See Oey Hong Lee, *War and Diplomacy in Indonesia, 1945-50* (Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland, 1981), 11 & 22.

³ Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 97.

⁴ Sartono Kartodirdjo, “Wajah Revolusi Indonesia Dipandang dari Perspektivisme Struktural,” *Prisma*, Vol. X, No. 8, (August 1981), 3.

During this period the old order collapsed in several Indonesian regions, and this led to a volatile situation including violence against a range of groups in the colony.⁵ The ‘native administrative elites’ were overthrown in violent attacks in Tangerang and the *Tiga Daerah* (Three Regions: Brebes, Pemalang, Tegal).⁶ Between December 1945 and April 1946, local mobs ousted and massacred the traditional princelings and aristocrats of North Sumatra and Aceh. In other regions, Eurasians, Menadonese and Ambonese, thought to be sympathetic to Dutch’s return, were targeted in vicious attacks by pro Republican forces in a period known as *bersiap* or *bersiap tijd* (literally the ‘alert time’ but more accurately the ‘time of danger’).⁷

Mary Somers Heidhues describes the situation in many cities in Java and Sumatra as being a “stateless societies”, where *pemuda* (youth groups; irregular fighters), together with paramilitary commanders from the Japanese period or criminal gangsters frequently assaulted almost anyone accused of being pro-Dutch or *mata-mata moesoeh* (enemy spies).⁸ In this context, violence against the Chinese was rife. These attacks intensified also around the two so-called ‘police actions’ of the Dutch. In this period the editors of *Sin Po* managed to revive the paper and they later played a crucial role in reporting on this violence and advocating for greater protection of Chinese Indonesians by both the newly established Republic and the Dutch.

Through an analysis of *Sin Po* and the many crises faced by the Chinese community they reported on, this chapter examines how the Indonesian War of Independence disrupted the foundations of Chinese society in Indonesia. The chapter draws on *Sin Po*’s reportage, to evaluate the impact of the war on Chinese society. It

⁵ Robert Cribb describes the months of 1945-46 as the so-called *jaman bersiap* (the ‘get-ready period), when the Allied soldiers were still too few to maintain order and the Dutch troops had not yet returned in force. Cribb described a ‘brief genocide’ of more than 5,000 Eurasians perpetrated by independent militias known as *Badan Perdjoangan* (Struggle Organizations). See Robert Cribb, “The Brief Genocide of Eurasians in Indonesia, 1945/46,” in *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. A. Dirk Moses (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 424-439.

⁶ See Ravando, “Now is the Time to Kill All Chinese: Social Revolution and the Massacre of Chinese in Tangerang, 1945-1946,” *MA Thesis*, (Leiden University, 2014); Anton Lucas, *One Soul, One Struggle: Region and Revolution in Indonesia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991).

⁷ Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1979).

⁸ Mary Somers Heidhues, “Anti-Chinese Violence in Java during the Indonesian Revolution, 1945-49,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 14:3-4, (2012), 384.

examines how *Sin Po* wrote about the attacks and advocated for the community. In essence, *Sin Po* strived to raise alarm about violence against Chinese communities and indeed sought to prevent its continuation. This chapter provides the first detailed analysis of Chinese newspaper reporting on this violence and related advocacy efforts, thus contributing to a more complex understanding of this key and much memorialised period of Indonesian history. It also offers news insights into the details of some of these attacks.

As the largest and most prominent Chinese newspaper at that time, *Sin Po*'s reportage provides a critical counter perspective on how the war was portrayed in the Dutch and Republican press.⁹ No other Chinese paper matched *Sin Po*'s influence in terms of circulation. Together with other Peranakan media such as *Keng Po* (as well as its *Star Weekly*), and *Sin Min*, *Sin Po* played a crucial role in voicing Chinese suffering, which was often silenced especially by the Republican newspapers. In this chapter, I identify a shift in *Sin Po* from more tenuous reporting on this violence from 1945 until early 1946 to open condemnation and calls for justice, notably after the Tangerang massacre of June 1946. In particular, I chart how the paper began to use testimonies from survivors to generate empathy and report from Chinese advocacy organisations such as the Chung Hua Tsung Hui (CHTH, Chinese General Association) and Jang Seng Ie Red Cross.¹⁰

Through this analysis, this chapter argues how *Sin Po* provided a voice to the voiceless, particularly in the context of the atrocities committed against the Chinese people in Java and Sumatra. Alongside Indonesian nationalist publications that tended to corner the Chinese by labelling them as Dutch collaborators and spies, *Sin Po* was able to present an alternative viewpoint by articulating the victim's perspective.

⁹ See, for instance, Muhammad Yuanda Zara, "Voluntary Participation, State Involvement: Indonesian Propaganda in the Struggle for Maintaining Independence, 1945-1949," *PhD Thesis*, (University of Amsterdam, 2016).

¹⁰ *Chung Hua Tsung Hui (Zhonghua Zonghui)* was an umbrella organization for other Chinese community groups. It was founded on 15 October 1945 in Jakarta and embraced the spirit that all Chinese in Indonesia would consolidate under a single banner. See Mary Somers Heidhues, "Citizenship and Identity: Ethnic Chinese and the Indonesian Revolution," in Jennifer W. Cushman & Wang Gungwu (eds.), *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese since World War II* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1988), 123.

The Rebirth of Sin Po

The declaration of Indonesia's independence on 17 August 1945, which was followed by the Battle of Surabaya (27 October - 20 November 1945), marked the beginning of the Indonesian War of Independence against NICA (Netherlands Indies Civil Administration) and later the Dutch, which lasted until the Dutch officially recognised Indonesia's independence in 1949.¹¹ The declaration of independence and the subsequent power vacuum emboldened some to employ various methods, such as bricks, stones, sharpened bamboo stakes, even poisonous snakes, in order to oppose the resurgence of colonialism.¹² Various factions, including Republican troops, *pemuda* groups, Islamic militias, and communist militias, each devised their own strategies. However, the plans were frequently lacking in coordination, and these factions occasionally engaged in conflicts with each other in order to establish the trajectory of a sovereign Indonesia.¹³ These groups, who resisted military discipline, frequently attacked the Chinese and anybody who was perceived to be close to the Dutch.¹⁴ They demonised and persecuted the ethnic Chinese – the typical motive was probably financial gain by means of stealing goods – making Chinese in the cities and those in the outskirts vulnerable.¹⁵ Compared particularly to the 1930s as discussed in Chapter IV, ethnic relationships between the Chinese and the Indonesians deteriorated rapidly during this period, with frequent attacks on the Chinese.

Remco Raben argued that there were several possible reasons behind the demonising of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. They were considered as literal puppets in colonial hands, as profiteers from colonisers, as capitalists, and as non-Muslims. However, their most distinguishing feature was that they were racial and political

¹¹ Frances Gouda, *American Visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia: US Foreign Policy and Indonesian Nationalism, 1920-1949* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), 36.

¹² Gouda, *American Visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia*, 38-69.

¹³ Bart Luttikhuis & A. Dirk Moses, "Mass Violence and the End of the Dutch Colonial Empire in Indonesia," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 14:3-4, (2012): 266.

¹⁴ George Kahin, "The Chinese in Indonesia," *Far Eastern Survey*, vol. 15, no. 21, (23 October 1946), 326.

¹⁵ Twang Peck Yang, *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia*, 155.

outsiders. These overlapping stereotypes made them extremely prone to marginalisation and the revolution provided another pretext for bloodshed.¹⁶



Map 5.1. The Republic of Indonesia provinces, 1945-1950. Robert Cribb, *Historical Atlas of Indonesia* (NIAS Press, 2000). Map Number: 5.05.

Despite the formation of a Republican government, the declaration of independence was not recognised by all. The Dutch authorities immediately undermined Indonesian independence by calling it ‘made in Japan’ and accusing all the people behind it of being Japanese collaborators and war criminals. Dutch propaganda further strengthened hostility towards the pro-Republican supporters by explicitly using criminalising and demonising labels, such as ‘extremists’, ‘bandits’, ‘Japanese collaborators’, or ‘terrorists’, whereas the Dutch government always showed itself as ‘bringers of order and peace’.¹⁷

On 25 October 1945, in the midst of an agitated atmosphere in Batavia, *Sin Po* returned to publishing after 3.5 years of closure. Amidst a paper and ink shortage, the paper was again published in a daily form after reclaiming its printing offices. Ang Jan Goan and Kwee Kek Beng, were trusted again to manage its operations. Together with

¹⁶ Remco Raben, “Anti-Chinese Violence in the Indonesian Revolution,” Draft Paper, *Konferensi Dekolonisasi dan Posisi Etnis Tionghoa Indonesia 1930-an s/d 1960-an*, (Padang, 18-21 June 2006), 11.

¹⁷ Remy Limpach, “Business as Usual: Dutch Mass Violence in the Indonesian War of Independence 1945-49,” in *Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence: The Dutch Empire in Indonesia*, ed. A. Dirk Moses & Bart Luttikhuis (London: Routledge, 2014), 83 & 86.

the Indonesian edition, *Sin Po*'s editors decided to republish the *Sin Po* Chinese Edition.¹⁸ The newspaper restarted with the original capital of only f 80,000 (about \$30,400), and for many years *Sin Po* was only issued in four pages as a consequence of the limited personnel and funding. Kwee and Ang managed most of *Sin Po*'s activities without a *hoofdredacteur* (chief editor). Meanwhile, a *commissie redactie* (editorial committee) administered both *Sin Po*'s Indonesian and Chinese publications. Due to acute shortages of food, clothing, and basic utensils during the war, *Sin Po* also could not raise its employees' salaries. However, compared to other Chinese newspapers in Indonesia, *Sin Po* journalists' salaries were still the highest.¹⁹

The public, especially the Chinese in Indonesia, welcomed the rebirth of *Sin Po* excitedly. They felt that the newspaper appeared at the right time when people desperately needed information, particularly after the proclamation of independence. According to Kwee Kek Beng, the first edition of *Sin Po* almost sold out, despite its lower quality than the previous versions of *Sin Po*. Due to its popularity, several of *Sin Po*'s agents even had to reject new subscriptions. One reader is reported to have said: "The news in *Sin Po* is complete, especially regarding the situation in Java. *Sin Po*'s page layout is also elegant and beautiful, making all readers thrilled to read the paper page by page."²⁰

During these challenging conditions, *Sin Po* could not accommodate subscriptions due to operational predicaments. People could only purchase the paper from the nearest news agency. In the beginning of the war, *Sin Po* was only distributed in Batavia because of the transportation challenges. Given the problematic situation, the board of the paper suggested its readers lend their *Sin Po* newspapers to others after reading it.²¹ Therefore, the actual number of *Sin Po* readers was likely several times the circulation figures as this newspaper was shared and passed from hand-to-hand. To meet the supply of paper and ink, *Sin Po* had no option but to acquire these supplies on the black market.²² As was the

¹⁸ In 1948, *Sin Po* also published a weekly, *Pantjawarna*, to replace *Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie*, which had been dissolved in March 1942, following the Japanese occupation. *Pantjawarna*'s concept and style were similar to its predecessor, and due to the popularity, *Pantjawarna* was able to survive until 1965.

¹⁹ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun Sebagai Wartawan*, 107.

²⁰ See "Djamblang Kotjok," *Sin Po*, 26 October 1945; "Sin Po di Soekaboemi," *Sin Po*, 30 October 1945; "Sin Po Banjak Disoeka," *Sin Po*, 9 January 1947.

²¹ *Sin Po*, 28 January 1946.

²² Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, 165.

case with popular newspapers at that time, *Sin Po* was hoarded. People realised *Sin Po*'s value and began to sell the paper for double or even more. In several regions, *Sin Po* often became the target of theft. According to one report, dozens of *Sin Po*'s copies regularly went missing before being distributed.²³

In the beginning, *Sin Po* cautiously reported news about the War of Independence from Republican and Dutch perspectives. Even though *Sin Po* had declared its neutrality in the war, editor Ang Jan Goan claimed that *Sin Po*'s sympathy for Indonesian independence was still the same even during the Revolution. Ang said this action certainly had severe consequences; one of them was to force NICA to implement tight supervision of *Sin Po*.²⁴

In the first edition of *Sin Po*, Kwee Kek Beng, in his satirical *Djamblang Kotjok* rubric, called the Allied victory over Japan the ACHIR (final) victory. Kwee explained that ACHIR was an acronym for (A)merika, C(hina), H(olland) (the Netherlands), (I)nggris (England), and (R)ussia. Kwee's statement, as already predicted by some people, sparked anger from a handful of Indonesian readers who argued that Holland was not involved in the victory. People's resentment towards the Dutch was still great. Kwee admitted after the article was published, *Sin Po* received numerous threats via telephone or letters sent to the newspaper's office in Asemka No. 28-30, Batavia. Many Indonesians also protested against the use of the word 'extremist', which *Sin Po* often applied in its editorials to criticise Indonesians who committed acts of violence. This was most likely because it was the same term used by the Dutch to describe and delegitimise pro-Republican forces. The Republican Attorney General, Mr. Kasman Singodimedjo, even threatened to take firm action against the publication if it insisted on using the word. The editors decided to play it safe by not publishing any news that could

²³ "Tikoes-Tikoes Soerat Kabar," *Sin Po*, 12 April 1949.

²⁴ Hubertus Johannes van Mook occupied NICA's highest command, with Raden Abdul Kadir Widjoatmodjo assisted him. In January 1946, NICA's name was changed to Allied Military Administration-Civil Affairs Branch (AMACAB) under the leadership of N.L.W. van Straaten before changing again into *Tijdelijke Bestuursdienst* (Temporary Administrative Service), following the British withdrawal from Indonesia. However, the name of NICA was still used in Borneo, Celebes, and Maluku. See Ang Yan Goan, *Memoar Ang Yan Goan*, p. 166; George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952); "Tida Ada Lagi NICA, Diganti oleh AMACAB," *Sin Po*, 13 November 1945.

trigger provocation from the pro-Republican supporters. However, many *Sin Po* readers considered the paper to have lost its sharpness and critical attitude.²⁵

Despite this perception that *Sin Po* had softened its rhetoric, many individuals still regarded *Sin Po* as a reputable news source. One CIA document mentioned *Sin Po* as “the oldest, largest, most prosperous, best edited, and most highly esteemed Chinese publication in Indonesia” during the war.²⁶ In early 1949, the total circulation for *Sin Po*’s Chinese edition and the Indonesian edition was 30,523 daily. With a circulation of over 15,000 dailies, the Chinese language edition was the most widely read Chinese language newspaper in Batavia and had considerable influence in Chinese circles. Many Chinese and Indonesian residents read *Sin Po* to follow the latest developments in China, following the explosion of a full-scale political and military conflict between the *Kuomintang* (Chinese Nationalist Party) and *Kungchantang* (Chinese Communist Parties).²⁷

The Battle of Surabaya and the Bandung Sea of Fire Episode

In October 1945, the British expanded the territory under their control from Batavia, establishing a foothold in Bandung (West Java) and taking Surabaya in a ferocious battle lasting from 19–26 November 1945, after British Military Commander, A. W. S. Mallaby was killed by Republican troops in a shootout.²⁸ On 10 November 1945, the British troops began a fierce punitive strike through the city against groups the British referred to as ‘extremists’, meaning radical youth who supported independence. The impetuous Soetomo, better known as Bung Tomo (Brother/Comrade Tomo), utilised the local radio

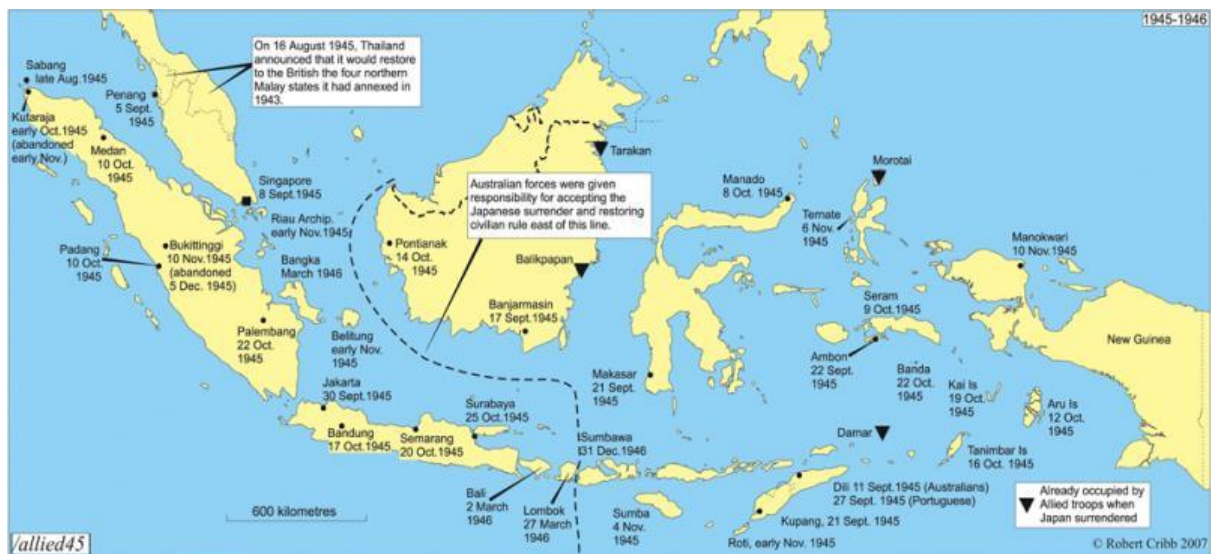
²⁵ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun Sebagai Wartawan*, 95.

²⁶ By 1948, *Sin Po* was considered one of the most spectacularly profitable enterprises of post-war Batavia. Originally capitalized at f 80,000 (about \$30,400), *Sin Po* stock in 1948 was valued at f 800,000 (\$304,000) and its shares were well over f 500,000 per year (\$190,000). The paper itself was valued at about one million guilders (\$380,000 in 1948). See “Indonesian Newspapers,” *General CIA Records*, CIA-RDP79T01049A000200020010-3, Publication Date: 27 April 1950, Document Release Date: 4 January 2000.

²⁷ Taomo Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution: China, Indonesia, and the Cold War*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 44.

²⁸ “Generaal Mallaby Diboenoe: Ir. Soekarno Maoe Disoroe Tanggoeng Djawab,” *Sin Po*, 31 October 1945; “Binasanja Mallaby di Soerabaja,” *Sin Po*, 1 November 1945; “Binasanja Mallaby: Keterangan Lebih Djaoe,” *Sin Po*, 3 November 1945.

to encourage an atmosphere of radical revolutionary spirit throughout the city. Surabaya became the location of significant fighting against the British troops attempting to retake Java and thereby a national symbol of resistance. Civilian casualties were high, partly from Allied shelling and bombardments, but notably also from the Indonesian strategy of burning whole city districts (the scorched-earth policy) when they withdrew. The targets of the Republican scorched-earth policy were factories, mills, official and private offices, and significant buildings. As Victor Purcell observed most of these privately-owned large buildings belonged to the Chinese.²⁹



Map 5.2. Allied re-occupation of Indonesia, August 1945 – March 1946. Robert Cribb, *Historical Atlas of Indonesia* (NIAS Press, 2000). Map Number: 5.06.

Sin Po followed the battle closely and even sent reporters to observe areas in Surabaya directly. One of its reporters went together with the *Kuomintang* delegates and San Min Chu I Youth Corps (both from Batavia).³⁰ From careful observation, *Sin Po* managed to obtain first-hand information that its competitors either did not source or ignored. The paper was able to glean a better picture of atrocities against the Chinese and the losses this community suffered in Surabaya.

Sin Po reported how the Allied attacks flattened the Chinese quarters in Surabaya, namely Pasar Kembang, Tamarindelaan (now Pandegiling), and Keputran. Based on *Sin*

²⁹ Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 476.

³⁰ “Koendjoengan pada Medan Pertempoeran Soerabaja (I),” *Sin Po*, 3 December 1945.

Po's interviews with several eyewitnesses, many Chinese did not have time to escape and were burned to death. The situation was not much different in Pengampon and Pasar Turi, where the Chinese houses and shops were completely destroyed. Three-quarters of Kapasari had turned to ashes. The Chinese were also forced to abandon the area of Jagalan. *Sin Po* suspected that more than 1,100 Chinese were killed, and 4,000 others were injured from aerial bombings.³¹ Material losses were too significant and could not be calculated. *Sin Po* also pointed out repeated cases of robbery and the rape of Chinese women by Gurkha, the Nepalese soldiers enlisted into the British Army and assigned to the British 5th Infantry Division, which occurred before and during the incident.³² This reportage was written in a tone that indicated to the readers that the Allies were perpetrating horrific atrocities against the defenceless Chinese.



Figure 5.1. A drawing of Gurkha troops during the Battle of Surabaya, 1945. Source: PIC Drawer 33 #R10725, Tony Rafty Collection, National Library of Australia.
<https://nla.gov.au/tarkine/nla.obj-135850714>

³¹ The Battle of Surabaya resulted in a significant disparity in the number of casualties between the opposing sides. Specifically, the 49th Indian Infantry Brigade suffered a minimum of 427 fatalities out of a total of 4,000 troops, while the Indonesian side experienced an estimated 6,000 deaths. See Muhammad Yuanda Zara, "'Trust Me, this News is Indeed True': Representations of Violence in Indonesian Newspapers during the Indonesian Revolution, 1945-48," in *Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence: The Dutch Empire in Indonesia*, ed. A. Dirk Moses & Bart Luttikhuis (London: Routledge, 2014), 224.

³² For more on this topic see Heather Goodall, *Beyond borders: Indians, Australians and the Indonesian Revolution, 1939 to 1950* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

In his memoir, Kwee Kek Beng accused the Allied forces and civil authorities of incompetence in preventing the scorched-earth tactics and of not investigating the atrocities perpetrated by its own bands. Meanwhile, *Sin Po* criticised the Allied military for not punishing their soldiers and “not giving protection and always showed carelessness and hesitation”.³³ Instead, mass violence like that which occurred in Surabaya was more or less tolerated and criticism muted. In another article *Sin Po* quipped that the Allies were the forces of “Zijne Impotentie” (His Impotence) rather than of “Zijne Excellentie” (His Excellency) and accused the Allied government of being “Made in Japan” because it failed to protect the Chinese people and in fact made them targets.³⁴ In line with *Sin Po*’s statement, historian Remy Limpach stated that when it came to technical violence, such as bombardments and shelling, military justice seemed chronically ‘blind’.³⁵

The Indonesian army and militias used similar scorched-earth tactics during a bloody battle between Indonesian forces and NICA in March 1946 in Bandung, West Java.³⁶ The strategy was purportedly to prevent NICA troops from acquiring strategic buildings, but it disproportionately affected the Chinese, and the scorched earth policy was also accompanied by severe anti-Chinese violence. The southern half of the city (Bandung Selatan), including 600 houses occupied by local Chinese, was completely burned down. The Republic of China’s Consul General publicly denounced the Indonesian troops for carrying out “a deliberate attack on the Chinese.”³⁷ The incident was later known as the *Bandung Lautan Api* (Bandung Sea of Fire), which is today rarely discussed in scholarly literature in terms of deliberate targeting of the ethnic Chinese.³⁸

³³ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahun Sebagai Wartawan*, 96.

³⁴ “Semangkin Banjak Korban Tionghoa,” *Sin Po*, 13 November 1945.

³⁵ Limpach, “Business as Usual,” 81.

³⁶ In 1945 Bandung had about 437,000 inhabitants, 40,000 of them Chinese and 380,000 Indonesian.

³⁷ Taomo Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution*, 18.

³⁸ See for instances Hadi Kusnan, *Bandung Lautan Api* (Bandung: Dinas Sejarah Angkatan Darat, 2016); Djajusman, *Bandung Lautan Api: Suatu Episode dari Perjuangan Kemerdekaan* (Bandung: Angkasa, 1986); Djen Amar, *Bandung Lautan Api* (Bandung: Dhiwantara, 1963).

Sin Po played a crucial role by reporting on and indeed revealing various atrocities committed by *pemuda* towards ethnic Chinese, particularly in South Bandung. The paper argued that no party was more disadvantaged by the scorched-earth policy than the ethnic Chinese, because the tactic resulted in the systematic plundering of Chinese possessions in areas that were abandoned by the Dutch forces. As many as 18,000 Chinese in South Bandung fled to the North to seek refuge, while some others went to Batavia. *Sin Po* reported that the situation got worse on 15 February 1946 after the circulation of propaganda by a militia that all Chinese residents in Bandung were enemies and their belongings could be robbed.³⁹

The Bandung Sea of Fire episode, according to *Sin Po*, caused tremendous losses for the Chinese population in South and East Bandung. For 500 meters along Jalan Sumedang, Chinese shops, warehouses and houses were completely flattened.⁴⁰ Several hundred Chinese in Bandung were killed on suspicion of being spies or trading with the enemy.⁴¹ *Sin Po* also criticised the actions of *pemuda*, who freed prisoners from Banceuy Prison and contributed to the various disturbances in Bandung.⁴²

Entering 1946, the situation became worse and most Chinese in Indonesia lived in fear and uncertainty. The popular revolutionary slogan of ‘Freedom and Death’ could mean death for the Chinese. In January 1946, the Republican government was no longer able to maintain control over Batavia and subsequently opted to relocate the capital to Yogyakarta, which remained the capital of independent Indonesia until the end of the war.⁴³ The Republican and the Allied Forces respectively controlled different territories of Indonesia, with the Chinese population living in both areas. Following the penetration of the Dutch soldiers in larger numbers in this year, *Sin Po* argued that the situation in Java and Sumatra worsened. The issuance of new money by NICA also made hostility

³⁹ “Kagentingan di Bandoeng,” *Sin Po*, 8 February 1946.

⁴⁰ “Pendoedoean Bandoeng Selatan Soeda Selesah Dilakoecken: Karoegian Sanget Besar Dari Pendoedoeck Tionghoa,” *Sin Po*, 27 March 1946.

⁴¹ John R. W. Smail, *Bandung in the Early Revolution, 1945-1946: A Study in the Social History of the Indonesian Revolution* (Ithaca/New York: Cornell University Press, 1964), 185-188; See also Twang Peck Yang, *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia*, 155.

⁴² “Pemboeian Bantjeuj Oetoeih Tapi Kosong,” *Sin Po*, 27 March 1946.

⁴³ Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 99; Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 208.

toward the Chinese stronger in many places. Chinese people who were caught using NICA money were considered Dutch collaborators or ‘Andjing NICA’ (NICA’s dogs). The Chinese were in a deplorable position. They were suspected by the Indonesians of exhibiting pro-Dutch sympathies, while the Dutch suspected them of harbouring pro-Indonesian inclinations. They received barbarous treatment on both sides, particularly from pro-Republican militias.⁴⁴

During the first months of the revolution, many Chinese had no choice but to seek protection from the Allied government. Many Chinese perhaps anticipated the Allied forces would re-establish control immediately, just like the Japanese Army had done at the beginning of its occupation in March 1942.⁴⁵ Many of them, pragmatically, also fled to Allied-occupied territories, abandoning their homes and business on the outskirts of towns and cities. The decision, however, further aggravated ethnic tensions. The local *pemuda* considered this decision treason and began launching massive attacks on the Chinese.⁴⁶

In this political climate of friction between Chinese people and Republican militias, *Sin Po* laid some blame at the hands of the Chinese. In Medan, for instance, *Sin Po* pointed out how Chinese officials created a massive controversy after they refused to hoist the Indonesian flag alongside the Chinese flag. This incident quickly sparked outrage and suspicion among the Republicans. *Sin Po* criticised this action, arguing that minor controversies could trigger a conflict that would harm the Chinese, especially during the war atmosphere.⁴⁷ By stating this, *Sin Po* warned the Chinese not to create controversy that would anger the pro-Republican supporters.

According to *Sin Po*, the Chinese who lived in both Republican and Allied territories faced difficulties that needed to be negotiated carefully. Many Dutch soldiers also treated the Chinese population arbitrarily. *Sin Po* was afraid that this situation in the Republican areas could be explosive. *Sin Po* openly praised the Republican government’s effort to remove the boundaries between the two ethnic groups. However, it was afraid if

⁴⁴ Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 474.

⁴⁵ Twang Peck Yang, *The Chinese Business Elite in Indonesia*, 157,

⁴⁶ “Hoakiauw di Sumatra,” *Sin Po*, 22 April 1946.

⁴⁷ “Hoakiauw di Sumatra,” *Sin Po*, 22 April 1946.

violence against the Chinese continued the Chinese's sympathy for Indonesian independence would turn to antipathy. The paper also criticised the Chinese, who only pursued money and did not think about others. It argued that Chinese profiteers, for example, would only perpetuate negative stereotypes against the Chinese population.⁴⁸

Into the Fray: Reporting on the Tangerang Persecutions

Sin Po continued to report on the ongoing targeting of the ethnic Chinese during the revolution, especially in the cases of brutal violence in Tangerang and Palembang. When most Republican newspapers accused the Chinese of being on the wrong side during these incidents, *Sin Po* strived to provide a different view by highlighting the victims' opinions. The paper, for instance, posited that the Tangerang massacre was very "violent and barbaric" because the killings orchestrated by Laskar Rakyat (People's Militia) were utterly indiscriminate.⁴⁹ For several weeks, the Tangerang massacre dominated the newspaper's headlines.⁵⁰ The paper tried to convey the Chinese people's misery and point of view to the public, while the Republican newspapers continued to deny the involvement of Republican militias and blamed the Chinese instead for provoking the atrocities in Tangerang.⁵¹

The Tangerang massacre began on 28 May 1946 when several Muslim groups, together with Laskar Rakyat (People's Force), *jawara* (gangs of bandits), and Tangerang locals, decided to carry out a 'Perang Sabil' (Holy War) in response to the Allied Forces' ultimatum which mandated anyone who resided near the Cisadane River to relocate at

⁴⁸ "Aneka Warna dari Seblah Dalem," *Sin Po*, 30 October 1946.

⁴⁹ "Perteloengan di Sa'at jang Betoel," *Sin Po*, 8 June 1946.

⁵⁰ Some of the headlines were "Perampokan, Pembakaran dan Penjoelikan Dilakoeken Djoega di Tjisaoek dan Bilangannja," *Sin Po*, 8 June 1946; "400 Prampoean, Anak-Anak, Baji dan Nene-Nene Soeda Disediaken Boeat Dibakar Idoep-Idoep," *Sin Po*, 10 June 1946; "Mait-Mati di Dalem Soemoer dan di Djalan," *Sin Po* 10 June 1946; "Boekan Orang Tionghoa jang Toeroenken Bendera Merah Poeti di Tangerang," *Sin Po*, 15 June 1946.

⁵¹ Pro-Republican newspaper, *Merdeka*, reported that the tragedy in Tangerang was triggered by the Chinese themselves, who assisted the Dutch soldiers, removed the Indonesian flag, and replaced it with the Dutch flag. Rosihan Anwar, the *Merdeka* reporter, even called the Chinese in Tangerang capitalist-bourgeois, who often abused poor peasants and took their daughters. In fact, most of the Tangerang Chinese at that time worked as farmers. They lived modestly and often could no longer be identified as Chinese due to years of intermarriage with the locals. See *Merdeka*, 6, 7 & 13 June 1946; Rosihan Anwar, *Kisah-Kisah Zaman Revolusi* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1975).

least two kilometres to the west by 17 May 1946, before they occupied the territory.⁵² Most of the Chinese favoured remaining in Tangerang for various reasons, primarily economic. The chief of *Chung Hua Tsung Hui* (CHTH) Tangerang, Tjoa Boen Lie, repudiated the evacuation plan on behalf of the Chinese society in Tangerang because he was afraid of a potential recurrence of a similar atrocities in March 1942, when extremist groups had looted Chinese-own possessions. Unfortunately for the Chinese, this action was interpreted by Indonesians as a decision to align with the Dutch.⁵³ The situation was further aggravated by rumours that the Chinese in Tangerang who opted to stay were siding with the Dutch. Some Republican informants even asserted that there were alleged sightings of Chinese soldiers among the Dutch troops that were advancing, and that they had tortured Indonesian residents around Tangerang.⁵⁴

Following the occupation of Tangerang by Allied forces, *Sin Po* reported that on the evening of 2 June 1946, Laskar Rakyat launched an attack on the Chinese community in West Tangerang. They were armed with a variety of weapons including bamboo spears, rifles, carbines, and Japanese swords. Furthermore, they proceeded to engage in acts of pillaging and arson, which included the immolation of residents within their own dwellings.⁵⁵ *Sin Po* also revealed that the violence against the ethnic Chinese in Tangerang was frequently gendered. Men were forcibly circumcised, and women and girls were raped. In other cases, people were forced to convert or follow Islamic practices. For instance, in Curug and Balaraja (both located in Tangerang), Chinese men were taken to a mosque to undergo forced circumcision ritual in the presence of an ulama. For women, they were bathed and had their hair trimmed as a symbolic gesture of their adoption of the faith. Married couples were also required to remarry in front of a *penghulu* (a village headman) in order to demonstrate their conversion to Islam.⁵⁶ In this instance, Chinese people were categorised as “triple-minorities.” They were portrayed as colonial

⁵² *Algemene Secretarie en de Daarbij Gedeponeerde Archieven (1942-1950)*. Inv. Nr. 5521.

⁵³ Herwin Sumarda, “Tangerang 1945-46: Pemerintahan dan Rakyat,” *Undergraduate Thesis*, Fakultas Sastra Universitas Indonesia, Depok, (1969), 119.

⁵⁴ *The Voice of Free Indonesia*, 8 June 1946; *Merdeka*, 6, 7, and 11 January 1946.

⁵⁵ *Star Weekly*, 9 June 1946.

⁵⁶ Sumarda, “Tangerang 1945-46,” 123-24.

puppets, capitalists or profiteers and non-Muslims. They were never regarded as *asli* (genuine) or “authentic Indonesians.”

While Republican newspapers, such as *Merdeka*, *Soeloeh Merdeka* and *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, made inflammatory allegations that accused the Chinese of conspiring with NICA to torture Indonesian residents around Tangerang, *Sin Po* did its best to counter the narrative. *Sin Po* managed to include the accounts of survivors, making the readers sympathise with the victims of the tragedy. The paper consistently obtained additional information from the interviewees and skilfully used this information in the news, which contributed to the emotiveness and thoroughness of *Sin Po*’s reports. This investigative style interview became one of *Sin Po*’s strengths.

Sin Po, for example, did an interview with Oen Kim On, the only refugee who escaped the Chinese massacre in Parahu Village and its surroundings. All other Chinese residents in the area had been killed by Laskar Rakyat, including 22 of his relatives. Although the interview process was not easy, through it *Sin Po* could glean information from Oen about the gruesome massacre. It turned out that a local villager named Saloen had played a role in gathering all Chinese residents in Parahu Village before transporting them to Serang to be executed.⁵⁷

Despite the chaotic situation in Tangerang, *Sin Po* also reported that several Indonesians did their best to defend the Chinese in their village. The newspaper illustrated the story of Haji Satian and Djerin, the former Indonesian police officers in Curug who later became the Republican officials in Bojong Nangka, Tangerang. During the riots, Haji Satian took the initiative to meet the Tentara Republik Indonesia (TRI, Republic of Indonesia Army) in Serang, who later instructed them “to defend and to protect all the Chinese at all costs”. When the rioters from Cibogo entered Bojong Nangka to kill the Chinese, Haji Satian did not hesitate to kill the invading *pemuda*. By reporting on this case, *Sin Po* wanted to show readers that they could not generalise that all Republicans were extremists. There were still those who risked their reputation and lives to protect the Chinese people.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ “Pengalamannja Toean Oen Kim On di Sakiternja Noraka di Desa Prahoe,” *Sin Po*, 21 November 1946.

⁵⁸ “Pendoedoek Tionghoa Pakoeadji, Tjibogo, Kelapa Doea dan Bodjong Nangka Katoeloengan,” *Sin Po*, 24 August 1946.

Based on the official report obtained by Jang Seng Ie Red Cross in Batavia,⁵⁹ which was also quoted by *Sin Po*, about 653 Chinese were killed in the vicinity of Tangerang. This figure also includes 36 women and 36 children. An estimated 1,269 Chinese residences were set ablaze, with an additional 236 homes left in ruins. As a result, roughly 25,000 people sought refuge in Batavia after fleeing from the outskirt areas of Tangerang.⁶⁰ *Star Weekly*, a weekly magazine published by *Keng Po* and founded by Auwjong Peng Koen, also documented the devastation in Tangerang. The report indicated that at least of 40 to 50 kampung were severely damaged, with 1,200 residences being pillaged and demolished. Additionally, 700 Chinese were killed, including 200 women and children, and 200 others being unaccounted for. The monetary losses incurred were estimated to exceed 7 million rupiahs, which were in the form of Japanese notes.⁶¹ According to *The Singapore Free Press*, the reported number of casualties in Tangerang was even higher, reaching 1,800, inclusive 385 women and 291 children.⁶² Meanwhile demonstrating a tendency to downplay violence against the ethnic Chinese, the Indonesian Information Minister, Mohammad Natsir, reported that ‘only’ 100 Chinese residences were set ablaze by Indonesians, while 140 Chinese lost their lives, 40 were unaccounted for and 2,000 were placed “under the protective custody of the Republican Army.”⁶³

For *Sin Po*, the Tangerang massacre became a turning point in terms of Chinese tolerance concerning atrocities directed at this community. The massacre not only trampled on the pride of the ethnic Chinese, but it made them lose hope for Indonesia. *Sin Po* editors had until this point tried not to publish any news that would hinder the

⁵⁹ Jang Seng Ie Red Cross (Batavia) was one of the Jang Seng Ie Hospital divisions established to carry out the humanitarian mission. JSI Red Cross became the only institution authorized by the Republican administration to enter the Republican territory during the Revolution. The JSI Red Cross also became an intermediary between the Dutch and the Republicans to alleviate the problems that affected the Chinese residents in Indonesia. See Ravando, “Jang Seng Ie: The First Modern Chinese Health Institution in Indonesia,” (Forthcoming)

⁶⁰ *Memorandum Outlining Acts of Violence and Inhumanity Perpetrated by Indonesian Bands on Innocent Chinese Before and After the Dutch Police Action was Enforced on July 21, 1947* (Jakarta: Zhonghua Zong Hui, 1947), 5-6.

⁶¹ *Star Weekly*, 16 June 1946.

⁶² “Stop this Slaughter: Appeal by Chinese,” *The Singapore Free Press*, 16 August 1947.

⁶³ “Natsir Talks on the Massacre,” *The Straits Times*, 14 June 1946; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 June 1946.

Republican cause. But after Tangerang, they wrote they would now “write at least ten times louder and sharper than any news that *Sin Po* had written before.”⁶⁴

Kwee Kek Beng, in his *Djamblang Kotjok* rubric, called the Tangerang massacre a hundred times worse than the murder of Mallaby in Surabaya. He wrote: “There was no war in Tangerang; the Chinese were only waiting to die, just like the Jewish who were executed (*diperjahoediken*) by Hitler.”⁶⁵ Hence, Kwee encouraged the Chinese in Tangerang to emulate the actions of those in Kebon Baru area (also in Tangerang) who had defended themselves by fighting to the death. “Because if we do not fight, we will also be chopped to death.” Thus, it would be better for men to fight as best as they can. By doing so, at least they could also drag some villains into the afterlife.”⁶⁶ This was indeed a dramatic shift from the earlier tone of placing some blame at the hands of the Chinese and suggesting they not inflame the situation.

Why were the Chinese targeted? Charles Coppel asserts that many Indonesians would claim that the majority of Chinese did not support the Indonesian cause, despite the fact that a number of Chinese actively supported the new Republic.⁶⁷ However, it is true that the vast majority of Chinese communities and organisations chose to remain neutral during the war. They were particularly concerned with protecting their own group's interests. In most places, however, neutrality was not always an effective strategy. During that period of turmoil, there was no middle ground; there were only two options: pro-Dutch or pro-Republic. This situation, according to Coppel, placed them ‘between the hammer and the anvil’, as they were unable to choose between the Indonesians and the Dutch.⁶⁸ Their dubious allegiance was frequently used by Republican militias to accuse them of being Dutch agents and to rationalise various kinds of violent acts committed against them.

Soon after the Tangerang massacre, President Soekarno and Prime Minister Soetan Sjahrir, issued an official apology on behalf of the Indonesian people and

⁶⁴ “Abis Preksa Djangan Abis,” *Sin Po*, 8 June 1946.

⁶⁵ “Djamblang Kotjok,” *Sin Po*, 8 June 1946

⁶⁶ “Djamblang Kotjok,” *Sin Po*, 8 June 1946.

⁶⁷ Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 25; See also Didi Kwartanada, “Dari Ibu Liem sampai John Lie: Sumbangsih Tionghoa di Masa Revolusi Kemerdekaan,” *Nabil Forum*, no 3, (Juli 2011): 48-57.

⁶⁸ Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 25.

promised to increase protection for those they referred to as ‘foreign residents’. Sjahrir acknowledged his inability to handle the situations. He also tried to distance himself from the perpetrators responsible for the massacre by saying they were “under nobody’s control” and were just “pure gangsters with no motive other than a thirst for blood.”⁶⁹. Meanwhile, Mohammad Natsir (Minister of Information of Indonesia) blamed both the Dutch and the Chinese, accusing the Chinese of being armed by the Dutch to torture the Tangerang civilians.⁷⁰

Sin Po denied those accusations and argued how the Indonesian authorities and press seemed to repeatedly find excuses to justify the massacre and to not sympathise with the victims, and instead to blame them. The situation was also exacerbated by the reluctance of the Republican government to bring the perpetrators to account.⁷¹ *Sin Po* urged the Republican and the Allied governments to punish those who were guilty as severely as possible, although the paper was pessimistic this would happen. Its editors further argued, “if a crime or criminals are not punished, it is the same as encouraging people to repeat their crimes.”⁷²

Towards the end of 1946, the violence against the Chinese population in Java and Sumatra was worsening. The Chinese massacre in Tangerang was just the beginning of a series of horrifying atrocities against the Chinese in other places. On 17 September 1946, a clash occurred between the Chinese and the Indonesian Navy in Bagan Siapi-API, one of the world’s largest fishing ports on the Sumatran coast (in the present-day province of Riau). About 1,000 pro-Republican militia members broke into the town and targeted strategic buildings, the city centre and the harbour. The Chinese became the primary victim after they refused to give up their weapons. They argued that they needed the weaponry to protect their fishing boats from pirate assaults. The Republican forces did not accept this justification and fighting ensued. Though the Chinese fought back, they were outgunned and disorganised. More than 200 Chinese were killed in this firefight.⁷³

⁶⁹ “Dutch Failed to Stop Massacre,” *The Straits Times*, 7 June 1946.

⁷⁰ *The Straits Times*, 14 June 1946; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 June 1946.

⁷¹ “Dari Iketan CHTH ka Iketan Tionghoa-Indonesia,” *Sin Po*, 8 March 1947.

⁷² “Abis Preksa Djangan Abis,” *Sin Po*, 8 June 1946.

⁷³ See “Serangan pada Bagan Siapi-API,” *Sin Po*, 30 September 1946.

Meanwhile, almost at the same time in Yogyakarta, Vice President Hatta delivered a speech in front of 500 Chinese and Indonesian representatives at the Chinese Indonesian collaborative conference held on 17-18 September 1946. Hatta revealed his analysis of the roots of violence between Indonesian and the Chinese. He argued that since the beginning of Dutch colonialism, the Chinese were often used as colonial tools. Hatta accused most Chinese of “having a foot in two boats” (*indjek doea praoe*), arguing that this sort of attitude created hatred among the Indonesian population.⁷⁴ *Sin Po* openly criticised the speech and accused Hatta of blindly supporting all Republicans just as he had supported the Japanese while letting the ethnic Chinese suffer. During the Japanese occupation, Hatta and other Republican officials swore to live and support Japan, while most Chinese nationalists were interned in Bukit Duri and Cimahi.⁷⁵

Hatta’s statement certainly disappointed many Chinese groups, and to reduce the discontent, the Republican government chose Tan Po Goan as State Minister (2 October 1946 – 3 July 1947). Tan was assigned to handle all matters related to the Chinese in Indonesia. *Sin Po* welcomed the appointment although most Chinese considered it futile. The paper argued that Tan’s position would not revive the thousands of Chinese whom the Republican militia had killed during the Revolution. However, *Sin Po* tried to reassure them by saying that with Tan’s appointment, at least the Chinese population had a new hope to guarantee Chinese residents’ protection in the interior.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, *Sin Po*’s optimistic hopes were immediately dashed after Tan Po Goan, *Sin Po*’s former editor, delivered his first speech at the Sin Ming Hui, Batavia. *Sin Po* reported that Tan said: “there are still many Chinese people who want to go back under the colonial rule”. Although *Sin Po* completely understood Tan’s purpose: to persuade all Chinese to love the Republic they accused Tan of not being strategic and not having “public awareness”. *Sin Po* also wrote: “If only Tan had delivered the speech in Sriwedari Park, Solo, known as the territory of the Republican Chinese, Tan’s speech would have been successful.” Tan, instead, delivered his speech in front of Chinese from multiple backgrounds, and many of whom had suffered from torments during the Revolution.

⁷⁴ “Rabalah Toelang Iga Sendiri,” *Sin Po*, 25 September 1946.

⁷⁵ “Rabalah Toelang Iga Sendiri,” *Sin Po*, 25 September 1946.

⁷⁶ “Mantri Tan Po Goan,” *Sin Po*, 7 October 1946.

Tan's speech made *Sin Po* lose faith in the then-current Republican cabinet. *Sin Po* contended that the Republican government was not making a genuine effort to improve Indonesian and Chinese relations.⁷⁷

A few months after the Bagan Siapi-API massacre, the entire Chinese population in Indonesia was shocked when five Chinese were slaughtered in Palembang, Sumatra, during the battle between Dutch and Republic soldiers, on 28 December 1946. Similar to the atrocities committed against Chinese in Surabaya, Bandung, and Tangerang, these victims became additional targets for pro-Republican militias after they were accused of being Dutch spies.⁷⁸ The combination of a strong sense of nationalism and difficult political situation made the spying issue highly sensitive for both Chinese and Indonesians.

More intense fighting eventually broke out on 1 January 1947 after Dutch planes bombarded Republican-controlled areas in Palembang. *Sin Po* called this clash the most violent so far because it involved all types of heavy machinery and involved air, sea and land troops from both sides (navy, army and air force).⁷⁹ In another editorial *Sin Po* wrote that whenever there was a clash between the Dutch and Indonesians, the ethnic Chinese came off worst. The paper highlighted the Palembang incident, where the Chinese had already proclaimed their neutrality but still suffered the most.⁸⁰

Based on *Sin Po*'s reportage, more than 200 houses owned by the Chinese were razed to the ground by the irregular Republican units. They abused the chaotic situation to loot and kidnap the Chinese. The CHTH Palembang, with several Chinese Consulate representatives, established two refugee barracks to accommodate 2,800 Chinese refugees.⁸¹ Meanwhile, based on the investigation of the Republican Police in Palembang 'only' 106 Chinese were killed, 219 were injured, and 140 were missing. This number was far less than the findings from the Chinese Consulate General in Batavia. The Chinese Consulate reported that as many as 150 Chinese were killed in Palembang, 500 were

⁷⁷ "Katjele," *Sin Po*, 15 October 1946.

⁷⁸ "Peristiwa Palembang," *Sin Po*, 24 January 1947.

⁷⁹ "Peristiwa Palembang," *Sin Po*, 24 January 1947.

⁸⁰ "Actie Militair dan Bangsa Tionghoa," *Sin Po*, 21 July 1947.

⁸¹ "Karoesanan Hoakiau di Palembang," *Sin Po*, 16 January 1947.

injured, and 800 were left homeless. *Algemeen Nieuws en Telegraaf Agentschap* (ANETA, General News and Telegraph Agency), a Dutch news agency, meanwhile reported that 250 Chinese died, 600 were missing, and 900 had lost their home.⁸² The position of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia worsened after the Palembang tragedy. The Dutch government used the Republican's ill-treatment of the ethnic Chinese as an additional excuse to launch aggressive military strikes on Java and Sumatra in violation of the Linggardjati Agreement. In this precarious situation, the majority of them began to rely solely on assistance from their ancestral country, China, for their survival.

Calling Out to China for Help

In January 1946, the Chinese Consul-General Tsiang Chia-tung (Jiang Jiatong) arrived in Batavia. The Nanjing Government also instated seven consulates throughout Indonesia in the following years.⁸³ Tsiang became a liaison between Nanking, the Dutch and the Republican government to protect the Chinese in Indonesia. After the Tangerang massacre, Tsiang encouraged the Chinese press in Indonesia to continue their duty by showing the world the actual conditions faced by the Chinese in Indonesia.⁸⁴

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, Wang Shih-chieh (Wang Shijie), directly cabled Tsiang Chia-tung on 7 June 1946 after the Tangerang massacre. He instructed Tsiang to launch an official protest against the Republic. Wang also published a commentary in *Sin Po* on behalf of the Nanjing government that revealed China's concern with overseas Chinese: "...about the massacre in Tangerang, the whole nation [of China] is considerably concerned. The Chinese government gives great attention to it." Wang also emphasised three crucial factors for the Indonesian government to consider: (1) Punish all those responsible for the massacre; (2) Make up for all Chinese losses in terms of lives lost and property lost; (3) Ensure Chinese security in Indonesia.⁸⁵

⁸² See "Zones Keamanan Boeat Hoakiau: Djiwa dan Milik Moesti Dilindoengken," *Sin Po*, 20 January 1947.

⁸³ Consulates were in Batavia, Medan, Palembang, Surabaya, Ujung Pandang (Makassar), Pontianak and Pangkal Pinang. See David Mozingo, *Chinese Policy toward Indonesia, 1949-1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 88.

⁸⁴ "Harian Journalist Tionghoa," *Sin Po*, 2 September 1946.

⁸⁵ *Sin Po*, 10 June 1946.

Moreover, in a telegram to the Republican Government and the CHTH Batavia dated 5 June 1946, which was transmitted from Nanjing, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek also urged the Indonesian government to take responsibility for the massacre:

In addition, a telegram from Nanjing dated 5 June 1946 was also sent by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek to the Republican Government and the CHTH Batavia, urging the Indonesian authorities to admit responsibility for the massacre:

We are, of course, a strong nation, and the lives and properties of a strong nation should be protected by the country. Hence, when anything happens elsewhere, which causes insecurity and losses to the lives and properties of the overseas Chinese, our government authorities should pay full attention to it and, if necessary, bring the problem before the UN. In case we fail to obtain any solution, we should take decisive action.⁸⁶

By quoting Chiang's statement, *Sin Po* sought to assure readers not to lose hope and that they continued to believe China would assist Chinese communities in Indonesia. Furthermore, *Sin Po* also tried to encourage the Chinese to maintain their bonds with China and not lose their status as Chinese nationals.

Sin Po used the historic ties between the paper and the community within which it was embedded to call for help from the Chinese government. Its editors appealed that the Tangerang massacre should have served as a warning to the Chinese government that Chinese security was dependent on China. The Republican and Allied governments' incapacity and lack of will to protect the Chinese they argued should motivate China's intervention in these matters.⁸⁷ On 19 August 1946, Ho Fe Sheng, Head of the Information Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, stated the following, which was quoted by *Sin Po*:

The Chinese government can no longer tolerate the insolence (*kakoerang-adjaran*) committed against the Chinese population in Indonesia, and the Chinese

⁸⁶ *Nankuang Batavia*, no. 7, 16 June 1946, as quoted in Ravando, "Now is the Time to Kill All Chinese," 93.

⁸⁷ "Djangan Lepas Karahajatan Tiongkok," *Sin Po*, 13 August 1946.

government also warned the Dutch government about its responsibility to protect the Chinese who live across the sea.⁸⁸

The Chinese government later decided to send Li Ti Tsun (Li Dichung, a.k.a. T.T. Li) as a Special Ambassador to Indonesia to investigate and compile a report about violence against the Chinese, and *Sin Po*'s everyday report on Chinese atrocities became an indispensable source for him. The report was later used as a reference for aiding and improving Chinese lives.⁸⁹ Accompanied by Ang Jan Goan, Li Ti Tsun visited various Indonesian regions and met Republican and Chinese leaders there. Li particularly was shocked to hear about the Palembang tragedy, considering the relationship between the Chinese and Indonesians had always been harmonious in this area. For Li the Palembang tragedy served as a warning, that there must be many places where the position of the Chinese was extremely deplorable because of the threats they faced.⁹⁰ Although the Chinese consuls attempted to influence both the Republican and Dutch sides, they were ineffective. Generally, the Chinese were left on their own.

Nevertheless, it seems that pressure from the Chinese government had some effects on the Republicans at the elite level by at least causing leaders to comment on the violence. After Soekarno and Sjahrir issued an apology in relation to the Tangerang massacre, Soekarno apologised once again to all Chinese victims in Bagan Siapi-API and Palembang during the CHTH Conference (8-11 March 1947) in Solo, Central Java. He called the killings a stain on the Indonesian nation.⁹¹ Although the Republican government did its best to gain Chinese support, it was unable to prevent the ensuing anti-Chinese violence, which alienated many Chinese who would have otherwise supported the new Republic.⁹²

⁸⁸ "Pembrian Inget dari Pamerintah Tiongkok," *Sin Po*, 27 August 1946.

⁸⁹ "Soerat Hiboeran pada Hoakiau dari Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek," *Sin Po*, 18 October 1946.

⁹⁰ "Peristiwa Palembang," *Sin Po*, 24 January 1947.

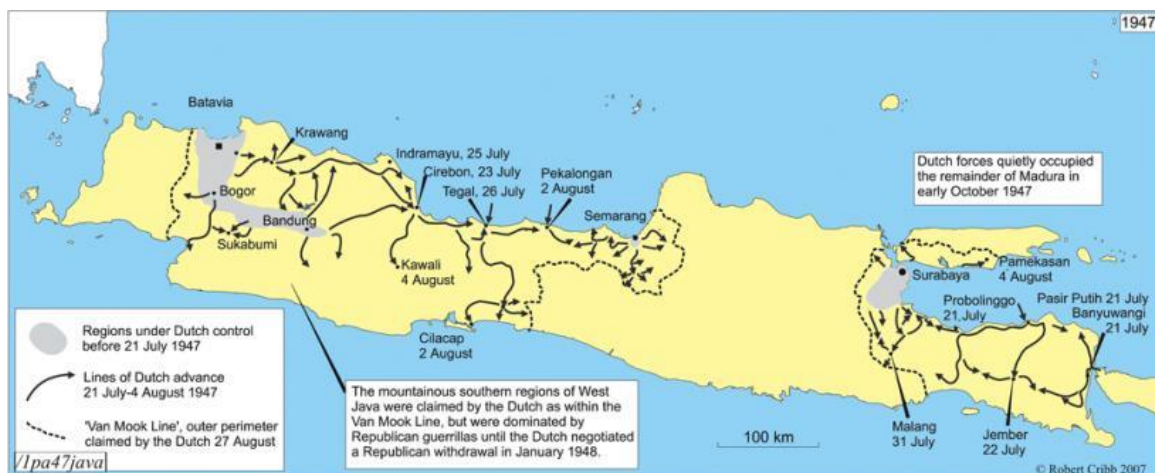
⁹¹ *Soeloeh Ra'jat*, 11 & 13 March 1947.

⁹² Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 25.

Continuing Persecution and the Failures of the Republican Government

Sin Po continued to track the persecution of the ethnic Chinese as the revolution progressed. From March 1946, the Dutch had been gradually replacing British power in Indonesia. The SEAC (South East Asia Command) was officially abolished on 30 November 1946, and the British military withdrawal from Indonesia was complete. The Dutch controlled the once British-held territories.⁹³

On Sunday, 20 July 1947, at 23.00, the Dutch military launched a major military invasion called *Operatie Product* (Operation Product) on the Republican areas. The purpose of the attack was to seize and destroy all Republican buildings to regain command of areas with natural resources in Java and Sumatra. One day after, the Dutch army and marines began to enter Republican territory. The Dutch government also used this military action as an excuse to corner the Republic in the eyes of the world for abandoning the Chinese and failing to suppress the influence of the Indonesian Communist Party. This operation later resulted in the Dutch reducing Republican-controlled areas to smaller territories of Java and Sumatra. The Dutch euphemistically called their action a *Politie Actie* (Police Action), whereas in Indonesia, it was known as *Agresi Militer Belanda* (Dutch Military Aggression) or *Clash I*.⁹⁴



Map 5.3. First Dutch 'Police Action' on Java, July-August 1947. Robert Cribb, *Historical Atlas of Indonesia* (NIAS Press, 2000). Map Number: 5.13.

⁹³ Oey Hong Lee, *War and Diplomacy in Indonesia*, 145.

⁹⁴ Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, 27.

Soon after the Dutch forces entered Republican territories, the Republican forces and militias carried out scorched-earth tactics. The objective was to hamper the advance of Dutch military troops and demolish everything that might benefit the Dutch government, thus implying the destruction of factories, mills, or rubber plantations. From their past experience in Surabaya, Bandung, Tangerang, Palembang, and other places, the Chinese population knew that whenever the Dutch pushed into the Republican interior, Chinese safety would be threatened.⁹⁵ *Sin Po* called the scorched-earth tactics nothing more than burning and destroying Chinese property, which was usually accompanied by plundering, arson, and Chinese's extortion.⁹⁶

In an editorial entitled 'Perang!' (War!) *Sin Po* lamented this fresh outbreak of war stating it did not care which side would win. It criticised both parties for prioritising battle as a solution and not using their common sense. *Sin Po* argued that the war would bring an additional burden to the Republican government, which did not have sufficient military power and influence. The Republican leaders such as Soekarno and Sjahrir were undoubtedly aware of the limitations of their military power but had little choice. Moreover, *Sin Po* argued that the war would only spark further violence, and only the strongest side would win. There would be no justice in the war, and the newspaper declared it 'a terrible decision'.⁹⁷

Sin Po also continued to monitor the statements of Republican leaders. The Indonesian Minister of Minority Affairs, Siauw Giok Tjhan, through the Republican radio in Yogyakarta, demanded all Republicans protect Chinese people's property and lives, particularly in the Republican areas. Siauw told Chinese people living in the interior to cooperate with the Indonesians as closely as possible. Most Chinese in Indonesia had long been regarded as *economische profiteurs* (economic profiteers) who were accused as the leading cause of the Indonesians' poverty and economic misery. Therefore, Siauw ordered both parties to work together to eradicate such a stereotype. He also urged the Chinese to be involved in Republican organisations, such as the Red Cross, the security corps, and many more. By carrying out this cooperation closely, Siauw was confident that

⁹⁵ *Memorandum Outlining Acts of Violence and Inhumanity*, 10.

⁹⁶ "Merdeka!" *Sin Po*, 29 July 1947.

⁹⁷ "Perang," *Sin Po*, 21 July 1947.

it could create the seeds of harmony between both parties.⁹⁸ *Sin Po* praised Siauw's speech and even called him the title 'the man of honour'. Even though he spoke on behalf of the Indonesian government, he did not approach the Chinese population with threats and coercion. *Sin Po* believed that the Chinese in the Republican interior could synergise with the Indonesians and look after each other.⁹⁹

On different occasions, however, *Sin Po* reacted harshly to Siauw Giok Tjhan when they felt his speeches did not make the situation in Indonesia better for the Chinese. *Sin Po* urged Siauw to be more responsible for the safety of the Chinese in the Republican territory. Although *Sin Po* understood Siauw's power and influence were not great, it argued: "no one can prohibit him from giving official statements to condemn all those atrocities". Furthermore, *Sin Po* also advised Siauw "to demand the Republican government protect the Chinese people's lives and assets in a more efficient strategy".¹⁰⁰ The newspaper felt that the current protection methods applied by the Republic had not proven effective at all. Moreover, it also reminded Siauw that his actions would determine the Chinese people's view of him:

We will see if minister Siauw Giok Tjhan is a true leader or just a puppet of the extremists, who have no other purpose other than witnessing the extinction of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.¹⁰¹

Sin Po's concerns turned out to be warranted. Siauw proved to be powerless to prevent atrocities against the Chinese in Java and Sumatra. The newspaper reacted angrily in its various editorials, condemning the inhuman acts carried out by the Republican militias, particularly the Laskar Rakyat and Hizbullah (Army of God). The editors stated that the paper did not want to hinder the Republic's image through its reporting, yet *Sin Po* could not just stay silent while thousands of Chinese were tortured and massacred, just like "an animal ready for slaughter."¹⁰²

⁹⁸ "Kewadajiban Bangsa Tionghoa di Pedaleman," *Sin Po*, 23 July 1947.

⁹⁹ "Kewadajiban Bangsa Tionghoa di Pedaleman," *Sin Po*, 23 July 1947.

¹⁰⁰ "Tjatetan Kilat," *Sin Po*, 31 July 1947.

¹⁰¹ "Tjatetan Kilat," *Sin Po*, 31 July 1947.

¹⁰² "Nota Repoeblik pada Tiongkok," *Sin Po*, 23 August 1947.

Sin Po argued that the paper had supported Indonesian independence since the first inception of the paper in 1910. As a result of this position, *Sin Po*'s enemies had often accused the men behind the publication of being "Republican bootlickers" and "traitors to the Chinese nation".¹⁰³ Despite all those criticisms, *Sin Po* emphasised that it had remained firm with its stance. It often highlighted China and Indonesia's position as fellow colonised nations (see Chapter III) and argued there was not a single reason for the Chinese to hinder Indonesia's independence. Nevertheless, if this independence ended with the destruction of the Chinese people, *Sin Po* would vigorously oppose that.¹⁰⁴

Although *Sin Po* praised the Indonesian struggle to achieve independence and described independence as a lofty ideal, the paper argued that it was not accompanied by a noble and honourable way of fighting.¹⁰⁵ In *Sin Po*'s opinion, independence should bind people to obey the rules and the laws of the country, and not treat people's lives as similar to cockroaches that could be destroyed at any time.¹⁰⁶ In his memoir, Kwee Kek Beng even quipped the Indonesian revolution as a 'gun king movement' (*gerakan ratu bedil*) instead of a 'just king movement' (*gerakan ratu adil*).¹⁰⁷

As a result of these ongoing atrocities in Indonesia, sympathy and support from the Chinese for Indonesian independence slowly faded. The Republican government proved to be unsuccessful in protecting and ensuring the safety of the Chinese people.¹⁰⁸ Violence against the Chinese became proof that the Chinese were considered no more than 'goat-class citizens.' Therefore, *Sin Po* also tried to defend the Chinese who had sought help from the Dutch.

¹⁰³ "Tjatetan Kilat," *Sin Po*, 6 August 1947.

¹⁰⁴ "Tjatetan Kilat," *Sin Po*, 6 August 1947.

¹⁰⁵ "Tjatetan Kilat," *Sin Po*, 4 August 1947.

¹⁰⁶ "Kamerdikahan," *Sin Po*, 22 August 1947.

¹⁰⁷ *Ratu Adil* is a messianic figure in Indonesian folklore, particularly in Javanese literature, who usually appeared during a time of turmoil, injustice, or great danger. It was believed that *Ratu Adil* would establish universal peace and justice under a noble ruler. In Indonesian history, this belief was highly beneficial to most early nationalist leaders, such as Diponegoro, Tjokroaminoto or Soekarno. See Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Ratu Adil* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1984); Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Messianisme dan Millenarisme dalam Sedjarah Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Fakultas Sastra dan Kebudayaan UGM, 1971); "Djamblang Kotjok," *Sin Po*, 25 September 1946.

¹⁰⁸ "Tjatetan Kilat," *Sin Po*, 31 July 1947.

Suppose the Republicans force us to choose between salvation (*kaslametan*) under Dutch colonial protection or destruction (*kamoesnahan*) under the Republic's sovereign and eternal government. In that case, there is no other way for us, either secretly or frankly, other than to stand behind the Dutch colonial imperialists.¹⁰⁹

For the next few months after the Dutch invasion, *Sin Po* published articles and editorials related to the war. In them *Sin Po* repeatedly highlighted the recurring patterns of violence that the Chinese population suffered. Some of these patterns usually began with the Indonesian army and government officials' instructions to round up Chinese people in one place. The pro-Republican militias, such as Laskar Rakyat and Hizbullah, often continued the action with blind assaults, robbery, and arson. In many areas, *pemuda* also kidnapped the Chinese based on the accusation they were NICA spies or Dutch collaborators. All those reports became the source of information for Kwee Kek Beng and several other prominent Chinese to compile a memorandum outlining the crimes and violence committed by the Republicans against the Chinese.¹¹⁰

On 23 July 1947, *Sin Po* reported that several Chinese people in Malang, East Java, were gathered in a warehouse when the Indonesian army threw grenades at them. Meanwhile, in Purwokerto, Central Java, several hundred Chinese were assembled in the house of a local village head when grenades were thrown. In Jatitujuh, West Java, *Sin Po* accused Republican soldiers from Cikampek of attacking the Chinese village, with a village head and lower-ranking officials commanded them. In Tegal, Central Java, *Sin Po* reported that eleven Chinese were killed, and five Chinese-owned houses were robbed.¹¹¹ Republican troops also blackmailed the Chinese in the area under gunpoint. Those who did not give them money were taken to the army officer and then handed over to the Indonesian masses on the allegation that "this Chinese is an enemy spy".¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ "Tjatetan Kilat," *Sin Po*, 31 July 1947.

¹¹⁰ *Memorandum Outlining Acts of Violence and Inhumanity Perpetrated by Indonesian Bands on Innocent Chinese Before and After the Dutch Police Action was Enforced on July 21, 1947* (Jakarta: Zhonghua Zong Hui, 1947).

¹¹¹ "Bisa Dapet Katerangan Tentang Hoakiau di Bebrapa Tempat," *Sin Po*, 31 July 1947.

¹¹² "Nota Repoeblik pada Tiongkok," *Sin Po*, 23 August 1947.

One of the regions where the Chinese population experienced the worst violence during the First Dutch Military Aggression was Bumiayu, Central Java. On 23 July 1947, the Dutch military occupied Bumiayu without significant resistance from the Indonesian army. The Chinese in Bumiayu were rejoicing and welcomed the Dutch army willingly because they thought the militias would not have an opportunity to impose the scorched-earth policy. This joy, however, only lasted for a few hours as the Dutch army advanced to Purwokerto. Worried about the possible turmoil in Bumiayu, the CHTH Bumiayu then sent their representatives to ask for help from CHTH Tegal. However, not long after their departure, the Hizbullah and *pemuda* raided Chinese homes. They also brought more than 2,000 Chinese residents to Sirampok, about eight kilometres from Bumiayu. Several Chinese were murdered during the evacuation process, namely Tan Siang Bie, Oey Kim Ek and Tjia Eng Ham.¹¹³

Sin Po also obtained information from Chu Chang-tung (Zhu Zhangtong), the Chinese Consulate representative, that the entire village of Bumiayu, including the Chinese quarters was burned down, and around 1,600 Chinese in Bumiayu were interned by the Hizbullah.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, in Linggapura, Bumiayu, Kwee Kek Beng wrote about the spread of pamphlets in the area, urging the Indonesians to ransack Chinese houses only. The militias also circulated propaganda around Bumiayu which read, “China has ended, the Dutch went bankrupt, and the Indonesians survived” and “Chungking is crying, the Dutch become beggars and Indonesians play with their moustaches”.¹¹⁵ Kwee Kek Beng argued that this propaganda was often announced by Japan through various radio broadcasts in Java in 1944.¹¹⁶

Sin Po blamed the Dutch for what happened in Bumiayu by saying it was 100 per cent the Dutch’s responsibility to protect the Chinese. *Sin Po* added that the victims would have survived “if the Dutch paid a little attention to the fate of minorities [Chinese in Bumiayu] during this police action.” The nursery criticised the Dutch for intentionally vacating Bumiayu without any purpose to save the Chinese. Furthermore, the pro-

¹¹³ “Boemijoe Mendjadi Boemiangoes,” *Sin Po*, 21 August 1947.

¹¹⁴ “Boemijoe Dibakar: Hoakiau Diinterneer,” *Sin Po*, 6 August 1947.

¹¹⁵ “Tjina kiamat, Blanda melarat, ra’jat slamat” & “Chungking lagi nangis, Blanda djadi pengemis, Indonesia poeter-poeter koemis”. See Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon Sebagai Wartawan*, 110.

¹¹⁶ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon Sebagai Wartawan*, 110.

Republican Chinese also accused the Dutch of deliberately allowing the Chinese to be persecuted and massacred. With the chaotic situation, the Dutch would have a solid reason to continue their police action and gradually remove Soekarno and his regime from power.¹¹⁷ In his memoir, Kwee also asserted that various incidents against the ethnic Chinese in Bumiayu and other regions could have been prevented if the Dutch soldiers promptly penetrated those areas and remained there until everything was completely under control. In fact, the Dutch appeared to deliberately sacrifice the Chinese to tarnish the image of the Republican government in the international world.¹¹⁸

This series of atrocities prompted Kwee Kek Beng, Ang Jan Goan, and several other prominent Chinese to take firm action. They decided to establish the *Memorandum Commissie Chung Hua Tsung Hui Batavia* (Memorandum Commission of the Federation of Chinese Associations of Batavia) with the primary task to compile a report which described various atrocities perpetrated by Indonesian militias on innocent Chinese, particularly in Java.¹¹⁹ Kwee Kek Beng argued that the committee admittedly compiled the *Memorandum* to show the world the series of atrocities and humiliations experienced by most Chinese in Indonesia before and during the First Dutch Military Aggression. This *Memorandum* was later sent to the United Nations Security Council and the Chinese government as the primary material to investigate actions and solutions to Chinese Indonesian problems.¹²⁰

Sin Po predicted this diplomatic manoeuvring would generate vehement objections from the Republican supporters. *Merdeka* newspaper, for instance, accused those behind the strategy of obstructing Indonesian independence. Even though *Sin Po* realised this strategy was detrimental to the Republic they argued it was a customary attitude for a nation that was “continually oppressed and mistreated” to appeal. *Sin Po* even argued that the protest was triggered by the Republicans themselves, who seemed

¹¹⁷ “Boemiajoe,” *Sin Po*, 20 September 1947.

¹¹⁸ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon Sebagai Wartawan*, 111.

¹¹⁹ Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon Sebagai Wartawan*, 109.

¹²⁰ The report is consisted of 31 pages and is written in English. See Kwee Kek Beng, *Doea Poeloe Lima Tahon Sebagai Wartawan*, 111.

to have no intention of fixing the situation in their own territory, thus creating a disastrous situation for the Chinese.¹²¹

This idea to document atrocities, ironically, was originally proposed by the *Merdeka* newspaper, which had advised the Republican government to compile a report on violence against ethnic Chinese in Surabaya and then disseminate the information all over the country. *Sin Po* welcomed *Merdeka*'s proposal and encouraged the Chinese to do the same on their own. Because according to Kwee Kek Beng: "The worst ink is still much stronger than the best memory".¹²² *Merdeka* certainly did not expect that *Sin Po* and several other Chinese figures would take up this proposal and use it to criticise the Republic and other Indonesian nationalists.

Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that not all Chinese supported the CHTH *Memorandum*. Tjoa Sik Ien, the former president of Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (PTI) Surabaya branch and the proprietor of *Sin Tit Po* newspaper, expressed to Victor Purcell, a historian and sinologist in Malaya, his disagreement with the CHTH *Memorandum*. Tjoa asserted that the *Memorandum* twisted or misinterpreted evidence about the killings. He argued the Indonesians harboured no hostile intention against the Chinese. During normal times, the Chinese lived harmoniously in the Republican zone without fear. He argued it was only during Dutch military aggression that they suffered. The Dutch had amplified the disputes between the Indonesian and the Chinese for their own purposes. Tjoa claimed that the Dutch affection for the Chinese was not genuine.¹²³

Based on *Sin Po*'s rough calculations, at least 6,000 Chinese forcibly disappeared, and more than 200 others were killed during the two weeks of the Dutch Military Aggression.¹²⁴ This data was most likely utilised by the committee of the CHTH *Memorandum* which ultimately concluded that between 21 July and 21 August 1947, about 293 Chinese were killed and over 6,000 went missing. Reports received up to mid-September showed that 912 houses and factories had been burned.¹²⁵ Hubertus van Mook,

¹²¹ "Tjatetan Kilat," *Sin Po*, 18 November 1947.

¹²² "Djamblang Kotjok," *Sin Po*, 22 December 1945

¹²³ Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 476.

¹²⁴ "Hoakiauw jang Ilang," *Sin Po*, 6 September 1947.

¹²⁵ Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 476.

Lieutenant Governor-General of the Netherlands, eventually announced the end of Dutch 'Police Action' against the Republic on 4 August 1947.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, various atrocities against the Chinese still occurred in many areas in Java and Sumatra. The number of victims continued to increase and was likely not recorded in the *Memorandum*. Even so, *Sin Po* continued to update the number of victims almost every day, both in the usual newspaper coverage and its editorials.

The series of massacres of the Chinese in Tangerang, Bagan Siapi-API, and Palembang, which intensified alongside other violent actions during and after the First Dutch Military Aggression, forced the Chinese in Indonesia to rethink their safety again. The Chinese Consul General's efforts to establish various safe zones for the Chinese since 6 December 1946 were unsuccessful, meaning the Chinese could no longer place their lives in the hands of the Dutch or the Republic. The situation in Java and Sumatra worsened every day such that this inspired the Chinese to establish their own military group called Pao An Tui (PAT, Peace Preservation Corps), of which *Sin Po* became one of the main supporters.¹²⁷

The two masterminds behind PAT were Loa Sek Hie (Chairman) and Oey Kim Sen (Deputy Chairman). Several prominent *Sin Po* figures, including Kwee Kek Beng and Ang Jan Goan, were also part of the committees and openly advocated for PAT on many occasions. Ang hoped that the PAT's fate would be different from *Yi Yung Thoan* (Brigade of Courage), founded more than 20 years prior to support China, which had failed miserably.¹²⁸ *Sin Po* considered the PAT's formation a crucial strategy carried out at the right time, chiefly when the Chinese in Indonesia badly needed help. *Sin Po* emerged as a vital mouthpiece of PAT, in which it repeatedly highlighted PAT's value for the Chinese society in Java. In one of its editorials, *Sin Po* wrote:

Needless to say, Pao An Tui desperately needs money for its operational costs in order to protect the safety and lives of the Chinese. We require large sums of

¹²⁶ "Tjatetan Kilat," *Sin Po*, 4 August 1947.

¹²⁷ The PAT was already founded in December 1946 in Medan, before the Dutch returned to Medan to reinstall their authority and take over the military rule from the British troops. The PAT evolved into a full-blown military organization that presented extraordinary military bravery in confronting the Republican militias that abused to harm the Chinese. Anne van der Veer, "The Pao An Tui in Medan: A Chinese Security Force in Dutch Occupied Indonesia, 1945-1948," *MA Thesis*, Utrecht University, (2013), 3.

¹²⁸ "Pao An Tui," *Sin Po*, 8 September 1947.

money for our work. Therefore, Pao An Tui has no other way but to urge the Chinese to support the Pao An Tui Foundation.¹²⁹

From the inception of the PAT in Batavia, the Republican government had already shown disapproval of PAT's establishment in the Republican areas, such as Solo and Yogyakarta. The Republicans favoured instead the use of unarmed Chinese police, which *Sin Po* opposed. The paper claimed it would be futile if the police corps were involved in a battle with the well-armed extremists, stating: "the Police without a weapon is similar to an empty cheque". Besides, Oey Kim San realized that many Republicans thought the PAT would only become an obstacle for the Indonesians. However, in Oey's interview with *Sin Po*, Oey said that the PAT would benefit both the Chinese and the Indonesians.¹³⁰

Sin Po also realized that not all Chinese groups agreed with the formation of PAT. The Chinese in Surabaya, for instance, openly stated their objection to the establishment of PAT or other Chinese militias. They were afraid it might hinder Indonesian independence and create friction between the Chinese and Indonesians.¹³¹ The CHTH Surabaya's spokespeople even proposed the Chinese find other solutions rather than forming the PAT. Yet this drew harsh criticism from *Sin Po*. The paper argued that the Chinese in Surabaya were more afraid of the PAT than of the crimes experienced by the Chinese society, such as arson, robbery, and murder.¹³² *Sin Po* quipped them only like "to bootlick and beg sympathy from the Indonesians" and accused them of being the S(ervants) O(f) S(oetomo), who did not care whether the Chinese in Indonesia were roasted or slaughtered.¹³³

The tension gradually lessened after Tsiang Chia Tung decided to meet the Indonesian Prime Minister, Amir Sjarifoeddin, in Batavia in December 1947 to discuss the plan to establish the PAT in Republican territories. Amir, in principle, accepted the

¹²⁹ "Pao An Tui," *Sin Po*, 29 August 1947.

¹³⁰ "Interview tentang Pao An Tui," *Sin Po*, 28 October 1947.

¹³¹ Besides, there were also Madiun residents who rejected the formation of PAT in their areas and relied solely on the Republican government's relief. See "Obat-obatan Boeat Repoeblik," *Sin Po*, 28 August 1947.

¹³² "Tjipratan Kalam," *Sin Po*, 21 August 1947.

¹³³ "S(ervants) O(f) S(oetomo)," *Sin Po*, 23 August 1947.

idea and even promised Tsiang to supply PAT with weapons.¹³⁴ However, other Republican officials considered the idea as *voorbarig* (premature) because no agreement had been made between Amir and Tsiang.¹³⁵ On another occasion, Tsiang also tried to convince Tjoa Sik Ien of the plan, but Tjoa still did not agree with the PAT's establishment in the Republican zones. He insisted the Republican government could still ensure the Chinese inhabitants' safety in its territory.¹³⁶ *Sin Po* did not want to be complacent with Amir's promise and believed many other Republicans would obstruct the plan. Regardless, *Sin Po* praised Amir's diplomatic strategy because it formed a sort of semi-official acknowledgement from the Republican government that the PAT "is not anti-Republic and would not disturb nor hinder the Indonesian independence." Moreover, *Sin Po* regarded Amir's statement as a significant blow to many Republican Chinese officials who opposed the PAT. *Sin Po* hoped Amir's declaration could also lessen all terrible news about PAT that perpetually positioned the organization as a pro-Dutch.¹³⁷

The presence of PAT, despite creating lots of controversy in the relationship between Chinese and Republicans, had a substantial impact on assuring the safety of Chinese people in certain areas. However, due to their limited number of members and weapons, PAT found it challenging to protect all Chinese, especially those living in rural areas. Consequently, when the Second Dutch Military Aggression erupted in mid-December 1948, thousands of Chinese people became victims once again.

The Second Dutch Military Aggression

As already mentioned above, the situation in Indonesia did not improve after the end of the First Dutch Military Aggression. Between April and June 1948, the United Nations again pressed the Dutch administration to negotiate with the Republic, for both parties to stop violating the ceasefire and to resolve conflicts over plantations and market product commodities in the custody of Republican and irregular insurgency movements. A deadlock occurred, paving the way for the 'Operatie Kraai' (Operation Crow) on 19

¹³⁴ "Pao An Tui di Daerah Repoeblik," *Sin Po*, 3 January 1948.

¹³⁵ "Pembentoekan Pao An Tui di Repoeblik," *Sin Po*, 10 January 1948.

¹³⁶ "Soeal Pembentoekan Pao An Tui di Daerah Repoebik," *Sin Po*, 16 December 1947.

¹³⁷ "Tjatetan Kilat," *Sin Po*, 7 January 1948.

December 1948, which lasted until 15 January 1949. The Dutch successfully seized the city of Yogyakarta. In just under two weeks, all significant Republican-held towns in Java and Sumatra were in Dutch hands. Meanwhile, Soekarno, Hatta, and six other Republican ministers were captured by Dutch soldiers and exiled to Bangka Island, Sumatra. The Republican troops, however, refused to capitulate and proceeded to wage a guerrilla war under the leadership of General Soedirman.

Several weeks before the Second Dutch Military Aggression outbreak, *Sin Po* had already predicted that the Netherlands and Indonesia's failed negotiations in Kaliurang, Yogyakarta, would trigger another crisis. The newspaper used the First Dutch Military Aggression example to explain how deadlock and crisis could lead to a fierce war. Even though the Dutch always said that their police actions were intended to eliminate criminals and restore tranquillity and order in Java and Sumatra, *Sin Po* still considered the war an invasive military action. If another battle were to break out again, it predicted that the Chinese would be victimized again.¹³⁸

Sin Po suspected that the scorched-earth tactics would be inevitable. Sure enough, Harjono, the head of *Sentral Organisasi Buruh Republik Indonesia* (SOBSI, Central All-Indonesian Workers Organization), instructed all workers to carry out the most significant scorched-earth politics ever in Indonesia to prevent the Dutch from taking control of strategic buildings. Harjono believed this strategy would lead to extended economic disorder.¹³⁹

The Dutch eventually decided to proceed with an attack backed by more than 10,000 troops in Republican areas. Without significant resistance from the Indonesian soldiers, the Dutch occupied Yogyakarta, Solo, Parakan, Secang, Wonosobo, Magelang and Cepu in an instant.¹⁴⁰ Until 25 December 1948, the Dutch successfully controlled key former territories of the Republic. In Banten, for instance, which long had been known as the basis of the Republican supporters with ease the Dutch occupied Serang, Jasinga, Pandeglang, Rangkasbitung and Anyer. Meanwhile, in Central Java, the Republican soldiers and militias lost Blora, Sragen, Tawangmangu, Magelang, Solo and Wonogiri.

¹³⁸ "Kandasnja Pembijtjarahan," *Sin Po*, 9 December 1948.

¹³⁹ "Boemi Angoes," *Sin Po*, 10 January 1948.

¹⁴⁰ "Solo, Tjepoe dan Laen-Laen Djato," *Sin Po*, 22 December 1948.

In East Java, the Dutch quickly took Magetan, Ngawi, Madiun, Kediri and the neighboring districts. In Sumatra, the Dutch successfully occupied Kotapinang, Payakumbuh, Sidikalang, Sibolga and Toba. In total, the Dutch only lost 19 soldiers, and 43 were injured.¹⁴¹



Map 5.4. Second 'Police Action' and its aftermath, 1948-1949. Robert Cribb, *Historical Atlas of Indonesia* (NIAS Press, 2000). Map Number: 5.19.

Again, the ethnic Chinese fell victim to targeted violence and *Sin Po* quickly reported on such incidents. The first news about the atrocities appeared in *Sin Po* on 29 December 1948. *Sin Po*'s correspondent from Yogyakarta reported about the massacre of the Chinese in Sukoharjo, Central Java. The motives behind the assaults were similar to the attacks during the First Dutch Military Aggression. The Chinese were accused of assisting the Dutch, of being Dutch spies, or simply traitors. Those accusations then became the justification for arresting, detaining, plundering, and even killing them.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ "Semoea Kota Penting Repoeblik Soeda Djato!" *Sin Po*, 26 December 1948.

¹⁴² "Hoakiau di Soekahardjo Diboeno," *Sin Po*, 29 December 1948.

The fall of Yogyakarta as the capital of the Republic of Indonesia ignited a series of atrocities in urban areas and on the outskirts of Yogyakarta. *Sin Po* reported how armed gangs were caught in the act of ransacking and burning down Chinese houses in Gondomanan, which quickly spread to Sosrowijayan, Kemetiran, Jogonegaran, Gandekan, and Pajeksan.¹⁴³ The scorched earth action was followed by a series of massacres in multiple districts in Yogyakarta. The identities of several victims were recorded, such as The Soo Hwa from Wonosari, who was slain alongside two other Chinese in Cepor Village, which is close to Kalasan. Similarly, five Chinese people in Prambanan were murdered by armed gangs. *Sin Po* also recorded the identities of five Chinese whose fate is uncertain: Liem Khing Liem (Ngampilan), Sie Tjing Hian, Liem Ing Sing (Wirobrajan), Lie Gee Oe, and his son (Pathuk). It is highly likely that they too were killed.

One day later, *Sin Po* again received news about massacres in Yogyakarta, such as in the areas of Tempel, Wates, Sentul, Brosot, Bantul (among others). All Chinese there were forced to flee after their belongings had been looted. The situation became more severe after the Dutch captured several Republican officials and ministers; thus, neither party could be asked to take responsibility for the slaughter. *Sin Po* described the situation as a “return to the *kenpeitai* era”, emphasising the gripping sense of threat the Chinese felt as akin to the threat of violence under the Japanese (see Chapter IV). Several propaganda slogans like “the Dutch are gone, the Chinese are wretched” (*Landa loengo, Tjina tjiloko*) and “the Dutch retreat, the Chinese are destroyed” (*Landa moendoer, Tjina hantjoer*), made the atmosphere increasingly tense. *Sin Po* also explained how the extremists often threw Chinese carcasses into various wells. They also often threw human waste at their houses.¹⁴⁴

One of the regions where the Chinese population experienced the worst atrocities during the Second Dutch Military Aggression was Nganjuk, East Java. *Sin Po* reported how on 25 December 1948, at 13.00, 98 Chinese in Wirojayeng were assembled by the Republican soldiers in one place. Men aged 15 to 50 years were interned at the chief village. On 31 December 1948, they were brought to Karangseneh Village before being

¹⁴³ “Kegelisahan Dalem Masjarakat Tionghoa Memoentjak,” *Sin Po*, 21 October 1949.

¹⁴⁴ “Wonogiri dan Patjitan,” *Sin Po*, 21 October 1949.

taken to Ngujung. Subsequently, they were taken to Rejoso and were gathered in a forest in Jetis, along with other Chinese refugees from Nganjuk, Gondang, Lengkong, Berbek, and Rejoso. Eight hundred refugees were placed in a school building by the Hizbullah militia. The building was locked and set on fire while the Hizbullah was waiting outside with the machine gun ready. *Sin Po* wrote only five people survived the massacre.¹⁴⁵

Sin Po also reported that on 21 December 1948, about 70 Chinese residents in Sapuran (Wonosobo) were taken by Indonesian soldiers to Bakalan Village, Banyumudal. Not long afterwards, news appeared that 15 Chinese from Kerteg, which is located 10 kilometres from Wonosobo City, had fled to Sapuran. One survivor told *Sin Po* that as many as 700 Chinese in Kerteg were brought to Kalijajar Village by “irresponsible elements”. It was later identified that the perpetrators were Hizbullah and Masyumi, who had also executed the chairman of CHTH Wonosobo, Oey Tjie Hiang.¹⁴⁶ All Chinese houses in Kerteg were subsequently robbed and burned by Hizbullah. About 200 men were asked to line up before being shot one by one. Only 15 people managed to escape to Sapuran before meeting a Siliwangi soldier, who later escorted them safely to Wonosobo. However, some other refugees had the terrible fate of meeting Masyumi and Hizbullah, who robbed their belongings. About 18 Chinese men were kidnapped, and their safety was unclear.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ “Pemboenoechan Besar-Besaran di Redjoso,” *Sin Po*, 25 January 1949.

¹⁴⁶ “Pendoedoek Tionghoa di Kertek Diboenoech!” *Sin Po*, 11 January 1949.

¹⁴⁷ “Nasibnja Pendoedoek Tionghoa di Sapoeran,” *Sin Po*, 9 February 1949.

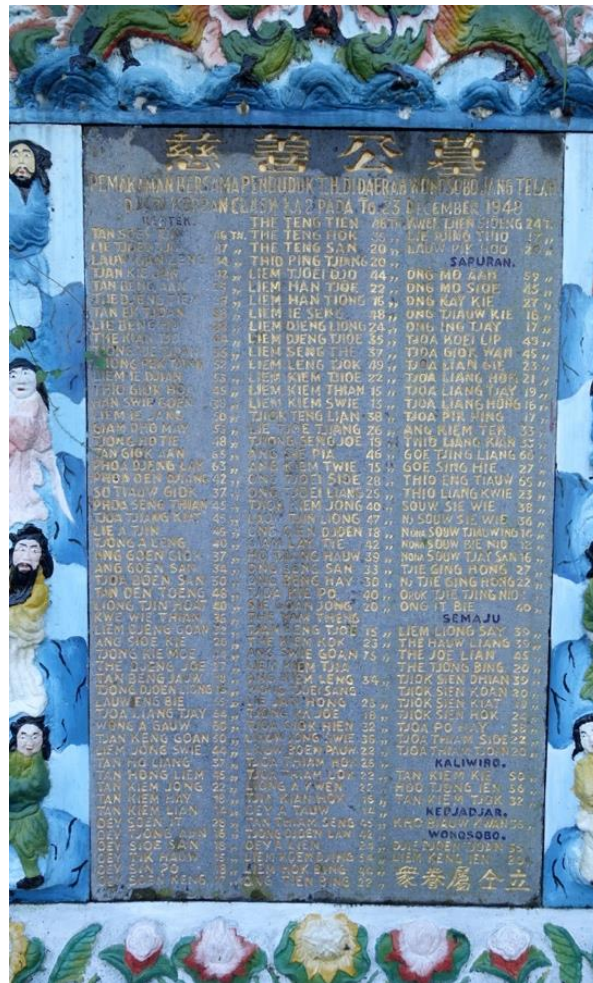


Figure 5.2. Inscribed tombstones from the Chinese mass grave in Bojong Village, Wonosobo, with the names and ages of the victims at the time of their execution. As shown on this tombstone, the youngest victim was a 1-year-old baby named Tjie Tjing Nio who was executed in Sapuran alongside his parents. Source: Photo Collection of Ravando.

On 31 December 1948, the Dutch announced the end of military action in Java. However, the Dutch army was still carrying out clean-up operations “to act against disturbing elements who either individually or collectively endangered public security or interfered with or prevented the supply of food and other essential commodities to the suffering population.”¹⁴⁸ In Sumatra, the Dutch continued military actions in Pekanbaru,

¹⁴⁸ In Sumatra this invasion ended on 5 January 1949. See “Actie Dibrentiken di Sumatra,” *Sin Po*, 5 January 1949.

Sawahlunto and Jambi. Meanwhile, the arrival of the Dutch troops in Telukbetung was greeted graciously by the residents there.¹⁴⁹

Sin Po argued that the Dutch Military Aggression should have created momentum for the Chinese, notably those who lived in the interior, to be more aware of their vulnerable position and strategic in how to respond to it. What should be regretted by the Chinese, according to *Sin Po*, was the Military Aggression's impact, which turned out to be much worse for the Chinese than the previous aggression. "There is no point crying over spilled milk", wrote *Sin Po*.¹⁵⁰

These aforementioned anti-Chinese atrocities represent only several incidents in a long series of cases of anti-Chinese violence all over Indonesia, in which both the Dutch and the Indonesian Republic failed to protect the lives of the Chinese population. This narrative of violence provided by *Sin Po* demonstrates the precarious position of the Chinese at that time. As Jemma Purdey has argued, the Chinese often became an ideal target during times of political unrest as they have frequently been regarded as 'elite-collaborators,' 'a defenceless community,' and in some instances 'infidels.'¹⁵¹ Various violent incidents that struck them during the two main Dutch offensives in July 1947 and December 1948, and even earlier, typically began with this labelling.

Based on the CHTH Yogyakarta report, which *Sin Po* also quoted, about 1,025 Chinese were executed, 115 were injured and 9,050 missing. More than 31,497 of them also had to seek shelter in other areas. *Sin Po* emphasized that this was still preliminary data, and the actual figures were likely much higher.¹⁵² Nevertheless, there is no official record for the total number of casualties of the violence, but it could be as many as several thousand. Most of them were the victims of both small-scale terrorism and extrajudicial killings, rather than the victims of the war itself.

After the end of the Second Dutch Military Aggression, the situation in various regions of Indonesia progressively improved. Nonetheless, the trauma of violence that the Chinese population had endured in previous years was still very fresh. In the

¹⁴⁹ "Acties Militair di Djawa Berachir," *Sin Po*, 3 January 1949.

¹⁵⁰ "Hoakiauw di Daerah Pendoedoekan Baroe," *Sin Po*, 12 February 1949.

¹⁵¹ Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia*, 24-25.

¹⁵² "Hoakiauw di Daerah Pendoedoekan Baroe," *Sin Po*, 12 February 1949.

meantime, *Sin Po* continued to report on political developments in Indonesia and the current condition of the Chinese population, with a particular emphasis on Chinese refugees.

While this chapter has utilised *Sin Po* to reconstruct Chinese experiences during the Indonesian War of Independence and to evaluate the paper as a prominent medium of activism in recording and condemning such violence, it should also be noted that *Sin Po* eventually expressed full support for Indonesian independence. Support for the republic certainly waned due to a series of anti-Chinese atrocities of 1945 and 1949, but by December 1949, it was evident from *Sin Po*'s articles and editorials that the newspaper's stance towards the government of the Republic of Indonesia had significantly softened. *Sin Po* recognised the outcomes of the Dutch-Indonesian Round Table Conference (*Konferensi Meja Bundar*) as an important milestone in the nation's transition from a colonised to a fully independent and sovereign state.¹⁵³ Tom Hoogervorst notes for example that until late 1949, the board of *Sin Po* steadfastly adhered to their own spelling, despite the fact that many advertisers had already adopted the 1947 Republican Spelling System.¹⁵⁴ *Sin Po* officially adopted the Republican orthography without notice on 10 December 1949, making it one of the last printed media outlets to do so. By adopting this official spelling system, *Sin Po* indirectly acknowledged and supported Indonesia as a sovereign nation.¹⁵⁵

The new government of the Republic of Indonesia, however, never attempted to fully resolve the hostility between the two ethnic groups. Most of the perpetrators of anti-Chinese violence were never brought to justice. The enmity between the two ethnic groups persisted and some would say it also became a ticking time bomb because more violence and repression against ethnic Chinese continued in the 1950s and 1960s. In these

¹⁵³ "Menjambut RIS", *Sin Po*, 26 December 1949.

¹⁵⁴ The Republican Spelling System (*edjaan Republik*) was the orthography used for Indonesian between 17 March 1947 and 1972. This orthography was also known as the Soewandi Spelling System (*edjaan Soewandi*) after the Minister of Education of Indonesia at the time, Soewandi. This spelling system replaced the Van Ophuijsen Spelling System, which had been in effect since 1901. In this system, the digraph <oe> was to be written as <u> and the two distinct sounds previously spelled as <e> and <é> were merged into a single <e>. See Tom Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 70-76.

¹⁵⁵ Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*, 75-76.

decades *Sin Po* continued to play a pivotal role in giving a voice for those who were voiceless.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how *Sin Po* navigated a period of crisis for the Indonesian Chinese, the Indonesian War of Independence (1945-49). *Sin Po* played a vital role in articulating the systematic murders, plundering, and torturing of ethnic Chinese during and after the two major Dutch offensives in July 1947 and December 1948. It can be argued that the violence against the Chinese during this period was the climax of Chinese problems that extended back to the period of Dutch colonialism and worsened during the Japanese occupation.

Sin Po posited how the labelling and construction of ethnic Chinese as aliens or outsiders, indirectly offered legitimacy for their persecution. The paper also argued that the violence against the Chinese was systematic, premeditated and tolerated. Although the main Republican leaders seldom incited anti-Chinese emotions and sometimes publicly denounced these atrocities, they neither took serious measures to prevent violence nor to prosecute the culprits.

In an atmosphere of war that polarised many newspapers at that time, *Sin Po*'s narrative was able to give a voice to the victims. These voices have generally been silenced or marginalised in the traditional Indonesian historiography. The paper consistently raised concerns regarding Chinese safety in Indonesia and chastised both the Dutch and Republican authorities for failing to protect Chinese lives and properties. Knowing the consequences, *Sin Po* revealed how the majority of large-scale violence in Java and Sumatra involved pro-Indonesian groups, mainly the *pemuda* and paramilitary organisations (such as Laskar Rakyat and Hizbullah). The Chinese minority, according to *Sin Po*, was largely left to its own devices during this period, with little international pressure on the government to stop extortion and murder.

Under these circumstances, the fate of a significant number of Chinese depended on the intervention from Chinese government, and this chapter has demonstrated how *Sin Po* acted as an indirect intermediary between the victims and the Chinese government. The reports of violence against ethnic Chinese published by *Sin Po* became an

indispensable reference for the Chinese consulate, which acted as the liaison between the Chinese, Dutch, and Republican authorities, to determine the appropriate course of action. Moreover, through the lens of *Sin Po*, this chapter has revealed that this period was not only marked by discrimination, but also by the failure of the governing authorities to protect vulnerable minority groups. Further to this there was complete impunity for those who perpetrated the violence and as whole these violent atrocities have also been swept under the carpet alongside more glorified modes of remembrance of the revolution.

CONCLUSION

On 27 December 1949, coinciding with the official end of the war following the Dutch-Indonesian Round Table Conference (*Konferensi Meja Bundar*), *Sin Po* published a special edition entitled “Indonesia Merdeka” (Free/Independent Indonesia). In the edition, *Sin Po* invited all the readers to move forward and support the new Republic. Yet the paper also recognised that the Chinese problem in Indonesia was far from resolved. The issue of Chinese refugees, as well as the exhumation and reburial of Chinese persons who had been murdered, had to be settled urgently. *Sin Po* was actively involved in each of these activities. Moreover, *Sin Po* expressed expectations that the newly appointed cabinet would act more decisively against intruders and criminals who often committed atrocities against minority groups. The paper also demanded that anyone responsible for crimes against the Chinese people during the war should be punished severely.¹



Figure 6.1. The masthead of *Sin Po*'s special issue, “Indonesia Merdeka”. Source: *Sin Po*, 27 December 1949.

A few days prior *Sin Po* had expressed optimism regarding the new leadership of the “Republik Indonesia Serikat” (Republic of the United States of Indonesia, RIS). The election of Sukarno as president or what they called “the first man of the RIS” was welcomed. Soekarno was very appealing to *Sin Po* because in the minds of the editors he had always desired that the Indonesian nation “become a friend of other nations and RIS a friend of all countries,” which was very important for the paper in terms of the close

¹ See *Sin Po*, 27 December 1949.

connections they hoped to see going forward with China.² *Sin Po* editors also expressed optimism regarding the newly constituted RIS Cabinet whose members they regarded as “quite representative and well-liked among the general populace.”³

Sin Po’s support, however, was conditional. The newspaper pleaded with the new Indonesian government to safeguard the lives and property of minority groups, particularly the ethnic Chinese. *Sin Po* noted that the Indonesian government would face a difficult task in convincing ethnic Chinese that similar atrocities to those committed during the war would not occur again in the future. The paper posited that the lingering unease among ethnic minorities stemmed from a series of traumatic incidents they had endured in recent years. In the early stages of the war, as explained in the previous chapter, Soekarno exerted every effort to ensure the protection and safety of ethnic minorities. However, the contrary occurred; the Chinese were subjected to years of terror and dread.⁴ In an appeal for greater protection the editors argued that Sukarno’s reputation would be tarnished in the eyes of the international community if the government was unable to guarantee the safety of its citizens. Furthermore, the newspaper emphasised that Soekarno’s government would fall if corruption, dishonesty, and lack of wisdom were not addressed.⁵

Sin Po remained the primary mouthpiece of the Chinese Indonesian community after the war. The paper gained influence in various regions of Indonesia, with more than 70 per cent of *Sin Po* being distributed outside of Jakarta in 1955.⁶ The paper remained one of the largest Chinese newspapers in Indonesia in 1955, with a total circulation of 63,500 copies across all editions.⁷

² “President RIS Pertama,” *Sin Po*, 19 December 1949.

³ “Kabinet Mulai Bekerja,” *Sin Po*, 23 December 1949.

⁴ “President Suruh Penduduk Bertenang,” *Sin Po*, 15 December 1949.

⁵ “Kasih Lihat Kartu Terbuka,” *Sin Po*, 13 December 1949.

⁶ About 26 per cent of the circulation of the Indonesian edition of *Sin Po* was distributed in Jakarta and 76 per cent outside the city. Meanwhile, the distribution of the Chinese edition of *Sin Po* was recorded at 30 per cent in Jakarta and 70 per cent outside Jakarta. This contrasts with *Keng Po*, another influential Chinese Indonesian newspaper in Indonesia, which had 53 per cent of its distribution in Jakarta and 47 per cent outside the city in 1955. See *Almanak Pers Indonesia*. (Jakarta: Jajasan Lembaga Pers dan Pendapat Umum, 1955), 183.

⁷ Detailed information is as follows: 1. *Sin Po* daily Indonesian edition (25,000 copies); 2. *Sin Po* daily Chinese edition (21,000 copies); 3. *Pantjawarna* (10,000 copies); and 4. *Sin Po* mid-monthly Chinese

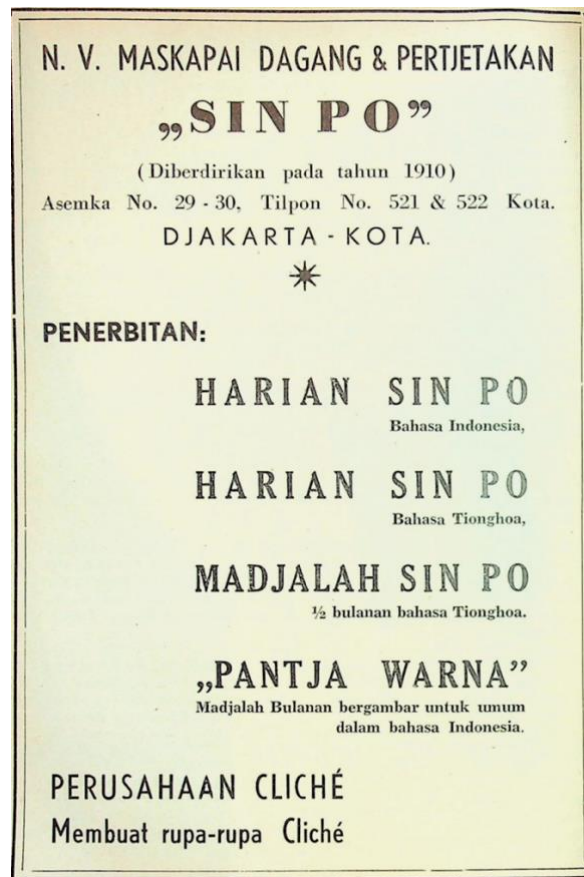


Figure 6.2. Several publications of *Sin Po* in 1955. Source: *Almanak Pers Indonesia*, p. 224.

Sin Po's Final Chapter and its Increasing Loss of Independence

The paper continued to be strongly affected by developments in China. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949, Chinese Indonesian newspapers became polarised between pro-Beijing and pro-Taiwan factions. *Sin Po* belonged to the former group, while other newspapers, such as *Thien Sung Yit Po* (Jakarta), *Sin Po's* major rival, *The Free Press* (Jakarta), and *Kuang Po* (Semarang), represented the anti-Communist Kuomintang faction. The various political orientations of these newspapers frequently resulted in verbal polemics. *Sin Po* reported primarily on the construction of 'the new China' (*Tionggok Baru*) and Chinese societies in Indonesia

magazine (7,500 copies). Compare them with *Merdeka* (daily and weekly; 35,000-45,000 copies), *Thien Sung Yit Po* (15,000 copies), *Pedoman* (daily and weekly; 60,000 copies), *Kedaulatan Rakjat* (Yogyakarta; 10,000 copies) in 1955. See *Almanak Pers Indonesia*, 220, 223, 243.

during this period.⁸ The paper still firmly identified itself as a *hoakiao* (sojourner) newspaper and urged the local Chinese to unite in support of the new China. Through its connotative linguistic and visual images organised in specific patterns and structures, *Sin Po* offered its readership an image of their imagined homeland, which the majority of ethnic Chinese in colonial Indonesia had never visited.

From the 1960's the publication was subjected to increased pressure to promote both assimilationist positions and to more closely follow Sukarnoist politics. On 30 January 1960, the appellation "Sin Po," which had been in use since 1910, was officially changed to "Pantjawarta". It is not clear why the editors made this change, but it was likely a consequence of a policy implemented by Soekarno during the Guided Democracy Period (1959-1965), requiring Chinese newspapers to hire more 'indigenous' (Bumiputera/Indonesian) staff and adopt Indonesian titles.⁹ In the first issue of *Pantjawarta*, there was only a brief announcement regarding the name change, which stated, "As of January 30, 1960, our newspaper, the national daily "Sin Po," has been renamed to "PANTJAWARTA." Hope all readers will understand."¹⁰ However, as a result of a severe anti-Chinese crisis in Indonesia from 1959 to 1960, *Pantjawarta* was forced to cease publication on 1 November 1960. This was the result of Presidential Regulation 10, which prohibited foreign retailers in rural areas and forced them to transfer their enterprises to Indonesian nationals by 1 January 1960 or relocate to urban areas. The consequence was a widespread exodus of Chinese residents and countless clashes between Chinese and non-Chinese inhabitants, which led to physical violence.¹¹

⁸ Beginning on 7 November 1951, for instance, *Sin Po* periodically published articles by Barioen A.S. entitled "Menjaksikan Keadaan Tiongkok Baru dengan Mata Sendiri" (Witnessing the Situation of the New China with My Own Eyes) It presumably lasted until 29 December 1951, with a total of 39 articles.

⁹ Leo Suryadinata, *The Chinese Minority in Indonesia: Seven Papers* (Singapore: Chopmen Enterprises, 1978), 136.

¹⁰ *Pantjawarta*, 30 January 1960.

¹¹ In 1959, Rachmat Mijomiser, Indonesian Minister of Trade, signed Presidential Regulation 10 of 1959, which banned foreign retailers in rural regions and ordered them to transfer their businesses to Indonesian nationals by 1 January 1960 or relocate to urban regions. President Soekarno himself authorised this instruction. Even though the regulation stated that only "foreign citizens" needed to carry out the business relocation and closure, the legislation impacted a large number of Chinese nationals and Chinese Indonesians. The law resulted in a massive exodus of Chinese Indonesians back to China and several deaths in West Java as a consequence of an anti-Chinese riot in Cibadak. At least 300,000 ethnic Chinese were forcibly evicted from their homes, and by January 1960, 83,793 Chinese-owned enterprises in rural areas were shut down and seized by other Indonesians. Beijing began calling ethnic Chinese in Indonesia to return



Figure 6.3. An advertisement in the first issue of *Pantjawarta* explained the renaming of *Sin Po* to *Pantjawarta*. Source: *Pantjawarta*, 30 January 1960.

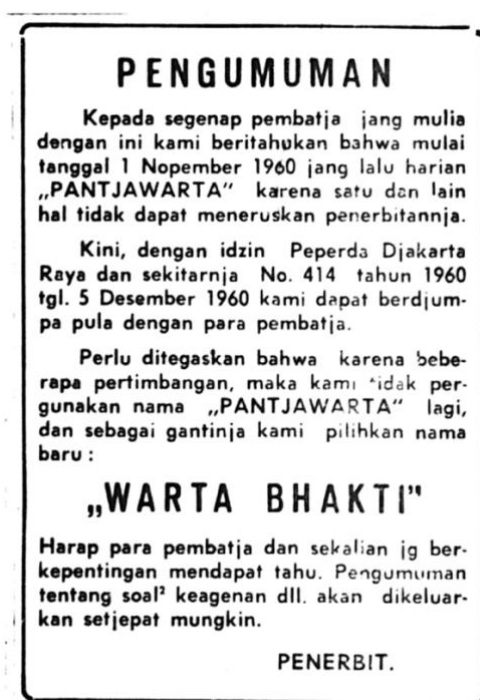


Figure 6.4. An advertisement in the first issue of *Warta Bhakti* described the renaming of *Pantjawarta* to *Warta Bhakti*. Source: *Warta Bhakti*, 5 December 1960.

On 8 December 1960, *Pantjawarta* was reissued under the new name given by Soekarno: *Warta Bhakti*, which literally translates to “loyal newspaper.”¹² The

to China in December 1959, and by the summer of 1960, approximately 60,000 ethnic Chinese had fled the country. For further information see Taomo Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution*, especially Chapter 6.

¹² Kwa Sien Biau, a former editor-in-chief of *Sin Po* and *Pantjawarna*, was appointed as the paper’s chairman, while Agoes Soetikno and Karim Daeng Patombong (Karim D.P.) served as editors-in-chief (penanggungjawab redaksi) in the editorial board.

independence and identity of the newspaper was further altered with the name change. The paper shifted from advocating Chinese nationalism and encouraging a Chinese identity to advocating for Indonesian nationalism and embracing Indonesian nationality. Numerous Chinese had become Indonesian citizens by this time.¹³ The masthead of the newspaper changed to reflect the required shift to embrace Soekarnoist thought by prominently displaying that the publication was “*berhaluan Manipol/Usdek*” (Manipol/Usdek oriented).¹⁴



Figure 6.5. The inaugural issue of the daily *Warta Bhakti*. Source: *Warta Bhakti*, 8 December 1960.

¹³ Zhuo Hui Li, *Yinhua xianqu renwu guanghui suiyue* [The role of the Chinese in Indonesia's struggle for independence]. (Jakarta, Indonesia: Liantong Shuju Chubanshe [Mandarin Book Store], 2003), 43.

¹⁴ Manipol/Usdek refer to the Political Manifesto of the Republic of Indonesia and to the five essential points of that Manifesto which consisted of five main principles: the Constitution of 1945 (*Undang-undang Dasar 1945*), Indonesian Socialism (*Sosialisme Indonesia*), Guided Democracy (*Demokrasi terpimpin*), Guided Economy (*Ekonomi terpimpin*), and Indonesian identity (*Kepribadian Indonesia*).

Warta Bhakti propagated Soekarno's political ideas and supported the assimilationist ethnic policy of BAPERKI (*Badan Permusjawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia*, Indonesian Citizens Consultative Body), an influential 1954-formed left-wing social-political organisation with the objective of safeguarding Chinese Indonesian citizens. This new newspaper demonstrated its devotion to Soekarno by publishing his speeches and thoughts almost daily on the front page. Furthermore, the newspaper actively participated in Indonesian national politics on behalf of leftist and anti-imperialist causes. For instance, in 1963 it declared its total support for Soekarno's confrontational policy towards the newly created nation of Malaysia. *Warta Bhakti* remained quite popular, and a 1964 United States Government report estimated its circulation in July of that year to be 45,000 copies.¹⁵

The army eventually closed the paper, however, due to its leftist political orientation. By 1965, conservative elements of the Indonesian Army were concerned that left-leaning periodicals such as *Harian Rakjat* and *Warta Bhakti* were dominating Indonesia media. *Warta Bhakti* was accused of having ties to the 30 September Movement, the movement that kidnapped and killed the army leadership on 30 September 1965, and was consequently ordered to close by the Indonesian army.¹⁶

Some of *Warta Bhakti*'s editors, including Djoni Sitompul, became political prisoners. The editor-in-chief of the paper, Karim Daeng Patombong (Karim D. P.), was replaced as the president of the *Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia* (PWI, Indonesian: Indonesian Journalists' Association) by a brigadier general of the armed forces, and the former paper's director, Ang Jan Goan, emigrated to Canada in 1968.¹⁷ After 1966, the new government of Suharto outlawed all Chinese Indonesian newspapers, except for one controlled by the Indonesian military, namely *Harian Indonesia* or *Yindunixiya Ribao*.¹⁸ This period marked the end of the paper's fifty-year contributions to nation-building to the creation of an engaged civil society and to the development of the Indonesian press.

¹⁵ *Area Handbook for Indonesia* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), 242.

¹⁶ Benny G. Setiono, *Tionghoa Dalam Pusaran Politik* (Jakarta: TransMedia, 2008), 424.

¹⁷ John Roosa, *Buried Histories: The Anticommunist Massacres of 1965-1966 in Indonesia* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2022), xii, 47-53.

¹⁸ See Andreas Pandiangan, "Chinese Press after the New Order: Caught between the Continuity of Idealism and the Logic of the Market," *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 4, Issue 3, (2003), 412.

Thesis Contributions Revisited

This thesis has enhanced our understanding of the historical foundation, motivation, and limitations of Sino-Malay journalism in modern Indonesia through a close analysis of *Sin Po*. I have argued that from 1910 onwards, *Sin Po* consistently provided a venue for Chinese Peranakans to debate key issues and negotiate their unique position in colonial and post-colonial society. It influenced the news and perspectives of its readers by employing an anti-colonial framework, for instance, for comprehending evolving events in China and the colony. Taking full advantage of a period of an increasing nationalism among Chinese and Bumiputera, I have illustrated how the paper was able to connect various social institutions and organisations within and outside the colony to create a stronger sense of Chinese nationalism. The paper also kept readers up to date on evolving events in China and colony. As this thesis has demonstrated, *Sin Po* engaged in a sophisticated way with a host of social and political issues: race and racism across colonial society, the appeal of Chinese and at times also Indonesian nationalism, the need for civic and social equality, and the civic duty of Chinese to help others.

Sin Po not only became the primary source of news and informed opinion in the microcosm of Indonesian politics, but it also provided a public forum for the expression of Chinese Indonesian opinion, particularly through the *kaoem moeda Tionghoa* (Chinese youth). The “New Newspaper” successfully introduced something ‘new’ to the Indonesian press, which was previously dominated by Dutch or Sino-Malay elite publications. I have argued that the emergence of *Sin Po* in 1910 marked not only the beginning of modern Chinese journalism in Batavia, but also the beginning of modern journalism in Indonesia. By “modern journalism,” I refer to *Sin Po*’s capability to present “journalistic truth” that emphasised reliable accounts and further investigation, thereby breaking with the common practice of hearsay reportage in colonial Indonesia; *Sin Po*’s ability to serve as a forum for public discourse and criticism was another essential feature. Further to this *Sin Po* served as a watchdog calling out unjust authority and gave the voiceless a voice. Nevertheless, from 1960 to 1965 when *Sin Po* changed its name to *Warta Bhakti*, the role of *Sin Po* as a watchdog of government policy and actions diminished significantly.

This thesis has also shown how the men behind *Sin Po* strategically utilised the power of the newspaper as both a news source and a forum for criticism to influence and appeal to various communities in colonial Indonesia. By reading *Sin Po* critically, this thesis has illustrated how *Sin Po*'s journalists and editors regarded their own society and the world around them, as well as how they consciously organised and presented information to the public, and filtered or ignored other information which was considered not "newsworthy". During its fifty-five years of operation, the board of *Sin Po* published several editions of newspapers and journals in Indonesian, Chinese, and Dutch. Some were successful, but many were unable to progress and were compelled to close. This experimentation with different forms of publication indicates how adaptive the editors were and their advanced efforts to try to satisfy market demands. Yet, the paper was far more than mere businesses; it was a shaper of ideas, even of nations.

This thesis has also drawn increased attention to the links between China and Indonesia in the first half of the 20th through a close analysis of how the paper wrote about events and ideas from China. In Chapter I, for example, I have demonstrated how the paper reported on the 1911 Xinhai Revolution and the founding of the Republic of China in 1912, which increased the Chinese socio-political connection to China and cemented a China-oriented political culture in the colony. I have also shown how *Sin Po* played a crucially important part in encouraging intellectual awakening among Chinese Indonesians in this period reflecting on the model this revolution provided for how to end imperial or colonial authority and establish a new national political order. These insights highlight the transnational nature of print culture, politics, and identities. Following those events, manifestations and denunciations of colonial racism were a recurring topic of discussion in *Sin Po*. It called out racism and inequality in the justice system, employment and education.

One of the forms of discriminations repeatedly highlighted by *Sin Po* in the paper was inequalities in the field of healthcare. In the 1920s, along with the emergence of new physicians from the Chinese community, *Sin Po* editors and journalists began to actively collaborate with them and used the paper to engage in "health activism." As discussed in Chapter II, during this period *Sin Po* served as a platform for the dissemination and promotion of new medical knowledge as well as the development of new awareness about health and social welfare issues. I argued that *Sin Po* played a key part in expressing

concerns, influencing public opinion, educating the public about issues related to health, and simultaneously enhancing people's awareness of the conflicting motives of the colonial government and the necessity for Chinese Indonesians to take action to resolve issues in the colony. In short, the paper had a major role in allowing the Chinese to successfully reach across barriers to form a greater sense of community and group consciousness.

Furthermore, by the 1920s and 1930s, *Sin Po* had developed new forms of political radicalism that incorporated anti-colonialism, while also articulating a strong sense of racial solidarity within Indonesia and with Chinese people in other parts of the world. As shown in Chapter III, *Sin Po* stressed the need for closer cooperation between the Chinese and Bumiputera to confront various Dutch discriminatory practices that had historically afflicted "people of colour" (*bangsa berwarna*). Through its critical articles, *Sin Po* repeatedly emphasised why the Chinese should support the Indonesian nationalists in their fight for independence, arguing that, as fellow Asian nations, their struggles for independence were intertwined, or in *Sin Po*'s urgings: "*Azie boeat bangsa Azie*" (Asia for Asians) and "*Bikin bangsa Azie berkwasa dan merdika dalem ia orang poenja benoea sendiri*" (To provide Asians ruling authority and independence in their own countries). This chapter also demonstrated how the death of Sun Yat-sen, a leading Chinese nationalist admired by many in Indonesia, on 12 March 1925 provided the impetus for the strengthening of the relationship between the two communities.

With the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, however, relationships between the two groups began to deteriorate. Instead of siding with the Chinese, the weaker side, many Indonesian nationalists chose to support Japan. As Chapter IV has shown, *Sin Po*'s articles played a crucial role in fostering a sense of loyalty to the new Republic of China during this period. In fact, they contributed to the development of perceptions of China as a unified and strong nation. This chapter has also demonstrated how *Sin Po* also introduced elements that did not require a high level of literacy but were equally essential in nurturing a strong Chineseness: political cartoons and comic strips created by Kho Wan Gie, as well as photographs. Through these visual images, I argued that *Sin Po* promoted the idea of the civic obligation of Chinese Indonesians to assist China. The very strong pro-China sentiment expressed in the paper however caused fractures between some Indonesian nationalists and the Dutch. In short, by using all

available platforms, *Sin Po* was able to effectively mobilise the Chinese people in colonial Indonesia to aid China financially and morally.

The Japanese occupation and the Indonesian War of Independence utterly devastated the foundations of Chinese society in Indonesia. This thesis has offered one of the most detailed analyses of how the independence war and violence against the Chinese were reported in *Sin Po*. The paper played a crucial role in navigating this period of crisis for the Chinese Indonesian as they faced attacks from Republicans and Allied Forces, particularly in relation to scorched earth policies. In response to such attacks, *Sin Po* shifted from more tenuous reporting on this violence to open condemnation and calls for justice. The paper started using survivor accounts to elicit sympathy and also tried to involve the Chinese government. Through the analysis in Chapter V, I have shown how *Sin Po* provided a voice to the voiceless, particularly in the context of the atrocities committed against the Chinese people in Java and Sumatra. The paper was able to translate the atrocities into narratives and articulate victims' perspectives alongside many Indonesian nationalist publications that tended to label the Chinese unsympathetically as Dutch collaborators and spies. In this chapter, I also demonstrated the significant role of *Sin Po* in reconstructing and disseminating representations of violence to the wider audiences. In conclusion, *Sin Po* was a very unique paper that stood out for its brave stance on many issues which involved challenging the Dutch, Japanese, and Indonesian nationalist leaders and militias as well as members of its own community at times.

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