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# TWILIGHT DOGS—JANGLED NERVES<sup>1</sup>

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On July 7, 1937, the sun started to dip towards the political horizon for the two most powerful strata in the Netherlands Indies—the Dutch and the “Chinese,” both foreign-born *totok* and locally born *peranakan*. On that day, Japanese generals launched a full-scale invasion of China, and within a year established control over half the country’s people and almost all its richest provinces. President Chiang Kai-shek was forced to flee to the remote interior town of Chungking, with no obvious prospects of expelling the invaders. The sky began visibly to darken two short years later. On September 1, 1939, Hitler’s armies entered Poland, and France and Britain declared war two days later. On April 9, 1940, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway. On May 10, The Netherlands was assaulted, and its military surrendered four days later, while Queen Wilhelmina and the cabinet fled to London. By the end of the month British armed forces had been withdrawn from continental Europe after crushing defeats, and on June 14 German troops marched into Paris. In April 1941, Hitler’s armies invaded Yugoslavia and Greece, and on June 22 the Fuehrer launched a vast operation against the Soviet Union. By December 5, two days before Pearl Harbor, the Wehrmacht was within twenty-five miles of Moscow.

Full twilight fell with the astonishingly successful Japanese attack on the American fleet in Hawaii, which opened the Pacific War. The US, Britain, and The Netherlands declared war on Japan, allying themselves with the beleaguered China of the bravissimo generalissimo. Nine days later, Japanese forces were in British Borneo, and beginning an attack on British Burma from bases in “friendly” Thailand. On Christmas Day, Hong Kong surrendered, and the following day the Americans were forced to declare Manila an open city, while beating a rapid retreat to the Bataan peninsula in the face of the lightning destruction of their local air force and a large-scale Japanese

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<sup>1</sup> This Finneganish text owes its inspiration to Rudolf Mrázek’s brilliant, unsettling new book, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). I would like to thank Arief Djati, Ben Abel, Mary Heidhues, and Rudolf Mrázek for their most helpful criticisms and supplementary data.

invasion of Luzon. On the Malay peninsula, Penang surrendered on December 19, and Kuala Lumpur on January 11. Japanese paratroops seized the oilfields near Palembang on February 14, the British fortress of Singapore surrendered on the 15th, Bali was taken on the 16th, and the invasion of Java began on the 28th. On March 7, the British fled Rangoon, and two days later the Netherlands Indies land army surrendered unconditionally, putting up virtually no fight. The colony was now under the rule of Japanese generals, almost none of whom knew either *bahasa* Indonesia, Dutch, Hokkien, or Mandarin.

With The Netherlands' declaration of war against Japan, the vast East Indies was formally put on a war footing. But the authorities knew very well that their military forces, small, poorly armed, and badly trained for external defense, if not for internal repression, would be no match for the Japanese when they inevitably moved into Southeast Asia. The only hope was that the big brothers, America and Britain, would hold them off—but even this hope was soon to be dashed. The situation was grave enough for the regime to make belated efforts to create a sort of “all-racial” cooperative front against the external threat. Both native Indonesians and Chinese were recruited for home defense organizations, emergency air-raid shelter services, emergency auxiliary police, and so on. And there was, in the rhetoric of the state, new talk about everyone being “*medeburgers*” or fellow-citizens of the imperiled colony. Among these institutions was the Comité tot Organisatie van Vrouwenarbeid in Mobilisatie (Covim, Committee for the Organization of Female Labor in [the Framework of War] Mobilization), which targeted women for various kinds of war-related social services. Yet even this institution was, at the branch level, organized along traditional lines, so that in the town of Malang, which is our concern here, there was a special Covim-Tionghoa for the “Chinese” community, operating under the supervision of an East Java Dutch-womaned central office.

The new emphasis on mutual respect and mutual cooperation, however, flew in the face of long-standing hierarchies and antipathies, which evidently inflamed nerves already jangled by the impending disaster. Only among the native Indonesians, and by no means universally, was there any feeling of hope. Perhaps this is why, in the incidents recorded below, they appear only once as a social group, and in the unusual role of being tickled-pink spectators. We may follow these incidents from the pages of *Sin Tit Po*, a well-respected progressive *peranakan* newspaper published in “Chinese-Malay” in Surabaya, and edited by two well-known leftwingers, Tan Ling Djie and Dr. Tjoa Sik Ien, with an unnamed associate editor in Malang itself.<sup>2</sup> The first report

<sup>2</sup> These two stalwarts have largely been erased from the history books published under the Suharto dictatorship, and deserve some brief disinterment. Tan Ling Djie was a distinguished figure in the small world of East Java's progressive *peranakan* Chinese intellectuals in the inter-war years. He was a strong supporter of the Indonesian nationalist movement for independence, and of Chinese nationalism against Western and Japanese imperialism, as well as being a local Communist of the individualistic first-generation sort. After the suppression of the Communist Party in the wake of its abortive rebellion in 1926-27, he spent five years in Moscow before returning to Indonesia. He was probably a member of the “Illegal PKI” set up fragmentarily by Muso in 1935, while publicly working as a newspaperman. During the early Revolution, he became a member of the fifteen-man Working Committee of the national legislature (October 1945), as well as of the expanded Working Committee of March 1947. He was a top leader of the broad Socialist Party led by Sutan Sjahrir and Amir Sjarifuddin till its breakup in the spring of 1948, when he sided with the majority supporting Amir. When Muso returned from Europe in August 1948, and demanded (with middling success) the merger of all serious leftwing parties into a New PKI, Tan joined Muso himself,

appeared in the edition of December 18, 1941. What follows is a combination of paraphrase and direct quotation.

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On December 16, 1941—*nine days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor*—Malang's branch of the Covim-Tionghoa held a meeting in the local HCTNH (Hua Chiao Tsing Nien Hui, Overseas Chinese Youth Association) building to discuss raising funds from the city's Chinese women (*prempoean*). At the meeting's end, Njonja (Mrs.) Spier, a Dutch woman from Covim's central office, stared at a portrait of Dr. Sun Yat-sen on the wall, then turned to Njonja Liem Siok In and asked: "Is that a picture of Chiang Kai Shek [*Apa itoe portretnja Chiang Kai Shek?*]?" *Mrs. Spier has never been in a Chinese institutional building until now. She cannot tell the difference between Sun Yat-sen, already dead for sixteen years, and China's living president. She wants to be pleasant with these upper-middle-class Chinese ladies and therefore feels she should speak to them in "Malay."* Assuming that the question was asked sympathetically, Mrs. Liem replied that it was a picture of Dr. Sun, while Generalissimo Chiang's portrait was hanging in another room. *But she must have felt the woman was a fool.*

At this point, Mrs. Spier exclaimed: "O, mijn honden heeten ook Chiang Kai Shek en Sun Yat Sen [Oh, my dogs' names are also Chiang Kai Shek and Sun Yat Sen]." *This spontaneous exclamation comes out in Dutch, the master-language. Since she cannot tell the two Chinese leaders apart, it is curious that she—or, as we shall see later, she and a friend of hers—gave their dogs these names. The spirit of wartime solidarity among the Allies? But the Pacific War was only nine days old. Were the dogs perhaps newborn puppies? Or Pekinese?* This exclamation was also heard by Dr. Tjoa Kian Bo, a lady dentist, and various other Chinese ladies (*njonja*, not *prempoean*), and evidently they too were stunned (*kemek-mek*) by it.

*Sin Tit Po* offered the following editorial comment:

Recently we heard that a Chinese journalist, learning of the incident, told Mrs. Liem that he didn't believe that a Dutch lady would dare to utter such an insult,

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Maruto Darusman, and Ngadiman on the key General Secretariat. When the Madiun affair broke out in September (without his knowledge), he was in Jogjakarta, and was quickly arrested. When the Dutch occupied Jogjakarta at the start of the "Second Military Action" in December 1948, he escaped and rejoined the guerrilla struggle. After the transfer of sovereignty, he and the veteran Communist Alimin tried to reassemble the remnants of the shattered PKI, most of whose top leaders had been executed or killed in battle in the last months of 1948. He was chairman of the PKI—the only "Chinese" ever to head a national party in Indonesia—till overthrown in 1951 by the energetic "second generation" Communists led by Aidit, Lukman, and Njoto.

Tjoa was a longstanding leftwing East Java *peranakan* intellectual, politically active since his days as a medical student in Holland. In the 1930s, he participated in Liem Koen Hian's Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (Chinese Indonesian Party), which supported the native independence movement, and he was director of one of the PTI's schools, which used native Indonesian teachers, was open to all races, and charged very low fees. During the Japanese Occupation, he lay low, but emerged as a strong Republican during the Revolution of 1945. He worked hard to bring the Chinese community in Surabaja round to a pro-Republic position, and successfully prevented the local formation of a branch of the Pao An Tui, a notoriously collaborationist Chinese "militia." In 1949, he was made a member of the official Republican delegation to the United Nations. (I am very grateful to Mary Somers Heidhues for this, and other, information.)

but she insisted on the truth of her story. If we remember that China is a member of the ABCD Alliance [Americans, Britons, Chinese, and Dutch], and the statement by the Generalissimo, that still rings in our ears, urging our countrymen living in this archipelago to help the Dutch government with all our energies and souls, then it is a tragedy that a Dutch lady from Covim purposely belittled Chiang Kai Shek. We've heard that this lady regularly rides in the car of a high-ranking military man, but even if Mrs. Spier is not the wife of such a man—*one never knew, it appears*—at the very least she is one of those who are up on international events, since it is not any common-or-garden Dutch lady who is entitled to attend Covim meetings. We hope that Malang's local PID [Political Intelligence Service—the colonial secret police] reads these words and speaks to the lady with the authority of the law, *zonder aanzien des persoon* [without respect to persons, i.e. impartially], in accord with the express wishes of the Head of State [the Governor-General] and the Commander of the Armed Forces—before this affair is brought to the attention of the Attorney-General.

On December 20, *Sin Tit Po* told its readers that the Spier affair was being widely discussed in the Chinese community of Malang. Mr. Oen Ing Hiau, head of the Air Raid Shelter group on his block, had brought the articles published on the affair to the attention of his superior, Mr. Dumas, to acquaint him with the "*mentaliteit itoe njonja Blanda* [the mentality of that Dutch lady]." The lawyer, Kwee Hok King, had gone at dawn to the local police, armed with a bundle of clippings, to demand some action. The police, however, shook their heads, saying they could do nothing without formal charges being brought.

In response to this inaction, *Sin Tit Po* quoted, in *bahasa* Indonesia, article 142 of the criminal code: "The penalties for intentionally insulting the ruling monarch or other head of state friendly with [*bersobat dengan*] the Kingdom of the Netherlands are maximally five years in prison or a fine of up to three hundred guilders." Insults of this kind were clearly violations of the criminal, not the civil, code, and as such required the police to investigate them immediately, without waiting for charges to be brought by private individuals. The editors reminded their readers of the fate of Ingo Beng Goat, editor-in-chief of the respected daily *Keng Po*, who, before war had broken out between Germany and The Netherlands, had published an attack on Hitler. Without waiting for Hitler himself to bring charges or the German Consul to intervene, the police had arrested Ingo Beng Goat for insulting a friendly head of state—*où sont les neiges d'antan?*—and the courts subsequently sent him to prison.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Liem had been summoned for an interview by the Resident of Malang himself. *Colonial Malang is still a small town, popular with pensioners, and Mrs. Liem is clearly from an elite local Chinese family—so why not talk to her personally?* Various Chinese community organizations were busy framing joint charges against Mrs. Spier with the aid of lawyer Tan Tjing Hak. *Sin Tit Po* commented that Malang's Chinese were quite "*kalm*," but were united in a firm decision to insist on appropriate action by the authorities.

We await a resolution of this affair, which has the potential to undermine the prestige of the Dutch themselves, since, in the present circumstances, insulting a friendly head of state is like slapping water in a bowl which then spurts up smack into one's own face [*sama djoega orang tepok aer di lojang moentjrat di moekanja sendiri*].

On December 22, *Sin Tit Po* informed its readers that in his interview with Mrs. Liem Resident Schwencke said that he had already summoned Mrs. Spier for an explanation. Mrs. Spier had told him that she didn't feel she had insulted either Dr. Sun or Chiang Kai-shek. She had given her dogs their names because she esteemed these leaders of a state allied with The Netherlands. *As of two weeks*. If she hated a particular head of state—Hitler, for example—she would never have given one of her dogs his name. Therefore, she didn't feel she had done anything wrong. To this Mrs. Liem replied that quite possibly in European circles people didn't feel insulted if an animal was given the name of a state leader, but this was not the case among the Chinese. The name of a leader ought to be treated with respect, and not used for casual purposes.

Resident Schwencke then asked Mrs. Liem whether Mrs. Spier would be welcome if she came to call at the Liem family home. *He thinks this is a trivial women's quarrel. A fatherly word to each, followed by a social visit, will settle the spat. What a good man he is!* Mrs. Liem replied that she had no personal animosity towards Mrs. Spier, but this insult involved the Chinese nation. Resident Schwencke then asked whether she was planning to resign from Covim. *This is a worry, since other elite Chinese ladies might follow suit—bad publicity for the Common Effort he has orders to promote*. She replied that she wanted to continue offering her assistance to the government and to her fellow human beings.

Even if this Mrs. Spier is a member of Covim's central directorate as well as the wife of a military doctor—that's why she could use the car of a high military officer to attend our meeting [*a sore social point, possibly Mrs. Liem herself has no car*—that is no reason for Chinese women [*kaoem prempoean Tionghoa*, not just the high-status *njonja*] to "go on strike" [*mogok*]. Helping others during wartime is a duty of honor.

The Resident seems to have been pleased with this "patriotic" response, and he went on to urge people of all nationalities to help each other and live in harmony during this time of war; besides the ABCD nations were working shoulder to shoulder to resist the enemy. Accordingly, he expressed the hope that small differences would be set aside, and big differences made small.

*Sin Tit Po* remarked that in all this conversation there was not the slightest indication that the Resident would take any further action against Mrs. Spier, as proved by the following exchange between the Resident and Mrs. Kwee Soen Tik, who had accompanied Mrs. Liem. Mrs. Kwee asked whether Mrs. Spier ought not to apologize. The Resident then replied "*Waarvoor? Zij heeft geen reden om excuses aan te bieden* [*Whatever for? She has no reason to apologize*]." *He is irritated now with these women. He has no intention of creating more hubbub by taking administrative action against*

*a fellow Dutch national over what he regards as a women's spat. Is the whole conversation with the Chinese ladies, who are clearly peranakan and certainly can speak Dutch, in the Dutch language? Or does he unconsciously switch to Dutch when he is annoyed?*

Meantime, twelve Chinese community organizations had banded together to draw up a list of charges, which they handed over to the Assistant Resident at lunchtime on December 20.

Copies of the list were sent to the Chinese Consul-General in Batavia, to the Chinese Consul in Surabaya, and to Mr. H. H. Kan (Chinese representative in the Volksraad, the colony's paper-parliament). *Sin Tit Po* offered its readers the formal Dutch version of the charges, as well as the names of the organizations involved—which included the local branch of the Kuomintang—and their signatories. A key passage in this document went as follows:

In the eyes of Chinese all over the world, and especially those settled here, the person of our Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek is too grand a figure to permit a particular individual to compare and associate his eminent dignity and personality with our [onze. *So Malang's Chinese elite has them too!*] house-pets, such as dogs. First of all, it creates an offensive mental association, and, second, it shows a gross lack of appreciation for the dignity of our great leader in China. In our view, the said Mrs. Spier has, by the expressions and comparisons used at the place and time specified above, far overstepped the bounds of all tolerable and decent comparisons and plays on words. As such, she has been guilty of the punishable offense of deliberately insulting the head of a friendly state. *The leftwing Sin Tit Po perhaps swallows hard on the "grandeur" of the general who ruthlessly slaughtered thousands of Chinese communists and other leftwingers in Shanghai in 1927, and carried out an even more brutal anti-Communist suppression campaign across China in the first half of the 1930s. It is Wartime, and besides, the newspaper has to think about retaining its subscribers.*

At the same time, the Malang Chinese Chamber of Commerce indicated that it had received letters, written in Chinese, from nine associations in Pasuruan demanding that the Chamber take firm action against Mrs. Spier—in which case it would have these organizations' full support.

*Sin Tit Po* noted with surprise [*Dengan tida terdoegah kita*] that the Spier affair had aroused great interest among the native Indonesians [*Indonesiers*]. They await impatiently every new report that *Sin Tit Po* can provide. This shows [*ternjata*] that the Chinese and Indonesian people feel they share a common fate, which is a very happy omen [*tanda jang menggirangken*]. Well, maybe. But it is much more likely that the Indonesians were highly amused by this altercation among two disliked, powerful strata, and eager to see if more fun was on the way.

Meanwhile, as early as December 20, the Dutch-language newspaper *De Malanger* had picked up on these developments and offered, inter alia, the following comments:

It is quite possible that the lady had no ill intent in calling her dogs Sun and Chiang, but the fact remains that this is quite inappropriate and very tactless [*tida tactvol* in *Sin Tit Po's* translation]. We can well understand why the Chinese community is in an uproar and feels highly insulted. Even though the lady has a prominent social position and her husband holds high office, this does not give

her the right to make stupid and insulting remarks at will. Surely a Wartime promotion in social status. The colonial military, including its doctors, was not highly regarded either by Dutch civil servants or by the plantocracy—at least in time of peace. Furthermore, our country is now at war, and Chiang Kai Shek is the head of one of our allies; we should feel very grateful for the courage of the people of China.

*Sin Tit Po*, quoting the above, in the original Dutch and in Chinese-Malay translation, expressed its pleasure at *De Malanger's* sympathetic tone, and its unwillingness to *elonin* (take sides with) someone at fault—"a position rarely taken in the Dutch press." *The War should make a difference, surely? Sin Tit Po's basic language is "Chinese-Malay," but it often tacks into Dutch, the classy language among top peranakan Malang families.*

Meantime, however, Resident Schwencke had written a letter to the editors of *Sin Tit Po* (on December 19), expressing the very different, official point of view. *Sin Tit Po* published this letter in its original form and in translation, underlining its divergence from *De Malanger*. The Resident wrote that:

Your article "Insult from a Dutch Covim Lady," wherein you expressed your feeling of offense that a Dutch lady [*dame*] named her little dog [*hondje—so perhaps it was a puppy after all?*] Sun Yat Sen, while a friend of hers called her dog Chiang Kai Shek, gives me an occasion to bring to your attention that it is out of the question that the said lady had any intention of thereby expressing feelings of contempt for the said Chinese figure. Apparently you are not aware that the Westerner has no denigrating intentions when he gives his favorite housepet the name of a great man. "The Westerner" in Dutch colonial parlance is always male and almost always racial. "The Dutch" have at least two genders, and are national. "Westerners" included the high-class peoples of Britain, France, Germany, and the United States, alongside tiny Holland, and, in law, from the beginning of the twentieth century, the modernizing, alarming Japanese. Doubtless the Japanese were now excluded from Schwencke's cultural physiognomy of the Westerner. Thus it undoubtedly happens that there are Dutch people who call their dogs—especially if they are bulldogs—Churchill. Contrariwise, they would never dream of calling their dogs Hitler or Tojo. You may therefore take my absolute word for it that the naming so sharply criticized in your pages has to Western ears nothing in the least contemptuous about it. On the contrary! In the event that you—accepting the above explication as correct—agree that you erred in accusing the said lady of insulting a Chinese statesman, I trust you are prepared to say so in the pages of your newspaper."

*Sin Tit Po*, alas, seems not to have found this typically byzantine Dutch-bureaucratic letter hilarious. However, it reported gleefully the rumor that a contributor to the *Perwarta Soerabaja*, writing under the pen-name "Tjamboek [Whip]" had mooted the suspicion that Mrs. Spier belonged to a (pro-Axis) fifth column, just at the moment when her husband served as a doctor for the military; and that Mrs. Spier, feeling herself slandered, was about to file libel charges against "Whip."

In the meantime, another kind of unpleasantness had developed in Batu, the well-known mountain resort above Malang. It appeared that on Saturday, December 20, a Mr. Ong Seng Lauw (in later reports Ong Sing Lauw), aged about fifty, originally from Bandjarmasin but now resident in Malang, had been visited by the Dutch members of

the local Landwacht (Field Security organization), including Mr. de Ruyter de Wildt, owner of the huge swimming pool in (the nearby classy resort town of) Selecta. They requested Mr. Ong to go with them to the local Batu Landwacht (LW) office. Quite unsuspecting, Mr. Ong agreed. But once there, he was scolded by the LW chief, Mr. van Temmen, said to be a retired colonial military officer, as follows: "*Kowé brani katakatain 'Blanda boesoek,' ja* [You had the nerve to talk about 'rotten Dutch,' huh]?" *He uses the demeaning Low Javanese second-person pronoun mixed with bazaar Malay. Malang was a garrison town for the colonial military, and many retired personnel settled there and in the cool resorts up the lower slopes of Mt. Ardjuna.* Mr. Ong, who had no idea what was going on, asked for an explanation, but the LW chief merely replied: "*Kowé moengkir, ja* [So you deny it, huh]?" and started beating him up. Mr. Ong fell down head over heels (*djoengkir walik*) and then, in a daze, felt himself being kicked about like a ball on a football field (*merasa gegernja ditendang seperti bola di lapangan voetbal*). At that point, he no longer had any idea how many fists rained down on him because he was seeing stars. It could be that he was beaten only by the LW chief, but others may also have joined in. After he had been satisfactorily beaten up (*ia kenjang dipoekoeli*), he was allowed to go home, still feeling he had done nothing wrong. Subsequently, it turned out the background to this affair was as follows:

It seems that some days previously, the LW had hired some *tandak*-dancers (mildly erotic female Javanese street-dancers) to perform not far from the barracks. *Colonial Malang was a quiet place, with nothing very lively going on. One can see why the bored LW people might have hired the hip-rolling dancers on a dull Saturday afternoon.* Mr. Ong's children had gone to watch, but, feeling the dancers were pretty bad, made fun of them (*djengekin*) with the yell: "*Tandak bako* [Two-cent dancers]!" One of the LW in the audience thought they had shouted "*Blanda bako* [Two-cent Dutchmen]!" and complained to his boss. *Imagine for the moment that the Chinese kids really did shout "tandak bako." They would probably have voiced tandak as tanda, in same way they voiced tidak as tida—in which case tanda bako and blanda bako would closely rhyme and could perhaps be taken for one another. (Yet tandak was a term people in all racial strata understood.) As the end of Dutch rule now loomed so close, the jangled nerves of its military men kept them alert to signs of "impudence" from subordinate social strata. Fantasies of insurrection and "treason" were gaining ground. Still, it could be that the LW got it right, and Mr. Ong and Sin Tit Po were building up defensive positions before the public. That was why Mr. Ong was summoned and blindly beaten (zonder) [without] his assailants first checking what had really happened. In this instance, the yell "bako" meant more or less "rosokan" atawa "boesoek" ("clapped out" or "rotten"). If only the trouble-making LW man had been capable of understanding this sense of the word "bako," and of distinguishing between the words "tandak" and "blanda," the incident would never have taken place.*

But there was "a second act to this drama which was even more depressing." After Mr. Ong had gone home, still in pain, his friend, the lawyer T. L. Yauw from Surabaya, came to visit. To him Mr. Ong related all that had happened.

Then, about five o'clock in the afternoon, the same LW men came back to the house and ordered Mr. Ong to present himself once again, bringing along the *Mantri-Politie*. These [Dutch] people were extremely arrogant [*sombong*] especially Mr. de Ruyter de Wildt, so that a shouting match developed between



him and Lawyer Yauw. But when Lawyer Yauw showed that he could not be treated lightly [*sembarangan*], Mr. de Wildt said he had come to arrest Mr. Ong on the charge of possessing an illegal firearm. Mr. Ong then showed the LW men both his gun and his license, so that finally these “knights” [*ridders*—Dutch for knights—says *Sin Tit Po* sarcastically] had to go off empty-handed. It is more than likely that if Mr. Yauw hadn’t happened to be visiting, Mr. Ong would have been beaten black and blue [*digeboekin mateng-biroe*], dragged off [*diglengang*] to the police station and detained there. On Monday, Messrs. Han Kang Hoen, Ong Tjing Poen, and Lawyer Yauw came to Batu to handle further developments. Meantime the [Chinese] ward-leader [*wijkmeester*] Tan Ping Tjat was informed of the matter, and he promised to take it up with the government via Volksraad-member H. H. Kan.

At Mr. Ong’s request, Lawyer Yauw “is now pursuing the case with the Resident, requesting an investigation, and the bringing of charges against the LW chief for torturing a local resident.” *Sin Tit Po* remarked that “the intent of the government in establishing the Landwacht and the Stadswacht [City Security] apparatuses was to protect the people of the country, but what happened in Batu was exactly the opposite. Even supposing an insult to the Dutch really occurred—a little hole in the *peranakan dike*?—this was no reason for the LW chief to be so quick with his fists [*begitoe enteng tangan*] and act so arbitrarily, especially as what was really involved was just some youngsters feeling dissatisfied with the street-dancers.”

On December 23, *Sin Tit Po* briefly registered its surprise at the affair, given the fact that Mr. Ong “is a highly respected man, and his son-in-law is Chinese Lieutenant [government-appointed chief of the local Chinese community] in Sampit [Borneo]. Furthermore, he has his own substantial residence [*roemah gedong*] in Batu and is well known there.” It added that, when the beating occurred, van Temmen was in civvies (*ia berpakaian sebagai orang preman*) and that the native “village-policeman” had also been beaten. At the same time, it corrected the initial account by saying that it had learned that Mr. de Ruyter de Wildt had not been involved.

That same day *Sin Tit Po* gave space to two contrasting Dutch opinions on the Spier affair. The first was an editorial comment that had appeared in the Malang-based newspaper, *De Oosthoekbode* on December 21—*Sin Tit Po* published it in the original Dutch with a translation into Sino-Malay: “The behavior of a lady whom we can and should expect to view the present grave situation in an appropriate manner is too striking [*frappant*] for us to refrain from comment.” It continued,

Evidently “fully aware” of her “untouchability” [*aantastbaarheid*] thanks to the high position her husband holds, Mrs. Spier did not deny herself the pleasure of uttering extremely offensive expressions in a circle of loyal and devoted fellow-citizens [*medeburgers*—*excellent Wartime language*—and . . . comrades-in-arms! For this “ladylike” [sic—in English] behavior we have only one adjective: Disgraceful! [*Schandelijk!*] We urge Mrs. Spier to consider immediately resigning from Covim and hiding in shame in some dark corner. There is no longer any place in the said outstanding women’s organization for a woman like this. But we

have no objection if Mrs. Spier creates her own "mini-Covim" [*Covimmetje*] according to her own taste, where without damaging our Concern [*onze Zaak*—i.e. our common peril], she can unleash her "muscular" utterances [*gespierde*—muscular, is a pun on the woman's name, as *spier* means "muscle"].

*Sin Tit Po* went on to praise *De Oosthoekbode's* editor-in-chief, H. J. P. Hoyer, as a courageous and truthful journalist who didn't hesitate to speak his mind. It noted that he had been critical of the absence of any Indonesian (*bangsa Indonesia*) minister in the Governor-General's recently formed cabinet.

The second opinion came in the form of a certain "X" writing in to *De Malanger*, to express his distress at all the misunderstandings. Claiming to be a "friend of the Chinese [*sobat orang Tionghoa*]," he insisted that one should only feel insulted if there were an intent to insult—which was clearly not the case with Mrs. Spier. The Chinese community should understand that among Europeans dogs were the most loved of pets, and the names given to them were therefore also "most loved." "If we call our dogs Beatrix (daughter of Princess Juliana), Caesar, Winston, Chiang, Sun., etc., we are praising both our dogs and the people whose names they have been given." He expressed his belief that

the misunderstanding arose for two reasons: first, the impurity [*haram*] of dogs in the eyes of Muslims; and second, the use of the word "*asoe*" [Low Javanese for "dog"] as a term of abuse by some uneducated Europeans (and perhaps Chinese too) for their colored brothers (Indonesians) [*terhadap iapoenja soedara-koelit berwarna (Indonesiers)*], if they want to add insult to insult [*extra hina'an*] by demeaning them to the level of tabooed dogs. But in the case of the lady concerned, she shouldn't be compared with the mentality of such uneducated Europeans; she had no intention of insulting anyone; she just spoke carelessly at a time when precisely people are seeking closer communication [between racial] groups.

*One has to remember that the legal category "European" included the substantial group of Eurasians who achieved that status because their father or grandfather had acknowledged them before the courts. This group's declining social, economic, and educational assets had been a concern of the colonial regime since the beginning of the century. Probably "X" had these Eurasians mainly in mind, but this is not to say that the bureaucratic and professional Dutch colonial elite did not look down on many "pure Dutch" people as parvenus and "low-class." If the War was undermining the prestige of the Dutch, it was also beginning to move the natives up: they were now "our colored brothers." Sic transit . . .*

*Sin Tit Po's* December 27 issue, published just after the fall of Hong Kong and the American declaration of Manila as an open city, contained further developments in the Spier affair, a corrected account of the Batu affair, and a new development: the Kuyk affair.

In preparation for its regular business meeting, the local Kuomintang association had prepared a questionnaire for its members on the desirability of continuing support for a night school (for Mandarin), and in accordance with regulations sent a copy of

the questionnaire to the PID political police. They were quite startled when a European (Dutch) PID agent showed up to ask whether the Mrs. Spier affair would be mentioned in the questionnaire. After the Kuomintang leaders hastened to say that they were not going to raise (*oesik-oesik*) this issue, they were allowed to hold the planned meeting. Added *Sin Tit Po* sarcastically: "From this small example, one can see that the affair has the full attention of the Police and the local administration."

On the Batu affair, the editors were now able to provide a new report. At about 7:30 in the evening of December 19, the local native policeman (*kebajan*), whose house lay not far from that of Mr. Ong Sing Lauw, came to tell the latter that a pile of trash was burning in the yard behind his residence. Although the yard was not part of Mr. Ong's property, it was burning close enough for him to decide to douse the fire—which he then learned had been started by "one of his maids." *A substantial man, even if from Bandjarmasin.* Thanking the *kebajan* for the warning, he set off with pails of water.

About noon the next day, December 20, a *tandak-show*, hired by the *kampung* people, started to perform—to the rear of Mr. Ong's house, and thus not opposite the Landwacht's barracks. *If this version is correct, it was bored natives rather than bored LW people who hired the dancers.* Some of Mr. Ong's young relatives (but not his children) were in the audience. Mr. Ong himself had been feeling unwell and was then asleep.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, three Dutch LW men showed up at Mr. Ong's house. Among them was Mr. van den Berg, "who is actually a close neighbor, since his house is just behind Mr. Ong's. But in the two years they have been neighbors they have never exchanged a word." *Peacetime racial heaven.* After Mr. Ong went with the men to the barracks, he noticed there were many LW people there. At this point Mr. van Temmen, retired colonel and LW commander for Batu, who was dressed in civvies, barked at Mr. Ong (*in a coarse melange of Low Javanese and Malay*): "Kowé bitjara apa [What've you got to say for yourself]?" Very flustered, Mr. Ong asked what this was all about. To which van Temmen replied: "Kowé katakatain Blanda bako, Blanda tida poenja doeit. Kowé tida oesah moengkir, disini ada saksi kebajan! [You used the (insulting) words *Blanda bako*, No-Money Dutchman! Don't try to deny it, the *kebajan* here was a witness]." *Poor Europeans were always a problem for the colonial ruling class. All the more so as the approaching Japanese threatened all Dutch people with the prospect of becoming penniless.* But the *kebajan*, who had also been summoned, now said he had never heard Mr. Ong use such language. Taken aback, Mr. van Temmen turned to speak in Dutch with Mr. van den Berg, who was evidently the one who brought the complaint. They spoke about the *tandak-show* and "*blanda-bako*." Mr. Ong then promised he would investigate the matter at home and find out who had used the offensive words, but he was given no opportunity to do so. Mr. van Temmen grabbed Mr. Ong by the shirt and slapped him in the face, screaming "*Brani! Brani!* [Impudence! Impudence!]" From the rear, Mr. Ong was then rabbit-punched in the nape of his neck by another LW Dutchman, and he fell to the ground in a daze. He then felt himself being kicked several times, and when he finally stood on his feet, the Dutchmen shouted at him: "Go home! Go home! Watch out, one more piece of impudence, and you're dead [*kowé mati*]." In great pain, Mr. Ong then went home.

That evening, the lawyer, T. L. Yauw, arrived from Surabaya to look after Mr. Ong's case. Meanwhile, Mr. Ong had investigated who had used the expression

"*blanda bako*," and it turned out that one of his young relatives had shouted "*tandak bako* [i.e. worthless, rotten dancers]."

In the midst of all this, the three LW showed up at the house again, along with Mr. de Ruyter de Wildt, and the *kebajan/mantri politie*. First they demanded to see Mr. Ong's "*ongdji*" (residence permit) because there was concern that he might be a Formosan. *Formosa had become a Japanese colony after Tokyo's victory in the 1895 Sino-Japanese War. Hence even a Chinese Formosan was now open to suspicion.* Mr. Ong showed them his permit. He was then asked whether he had a firearms license; he showed them he was licensed to own a revolver and a rifle. But his residence permit was taken away by the *mantri politie* to the office of the Assistant Wedono (District Officer), and only returned thanks to a furious Lawyer Yauw, who followed the *mantri* when he left.

*Sin Tit Po* then threw further light on the behavior of the Dutchmen by remarking that Mr. van den Berg was angry with Mr. Ong because of a quarrel between his *njai* and Mr. Ong's young relatives. *Sex and status now rear their ugly heads. Up until the last part of the nineteenth century, bachelor Dutchmen, and even married men who could not bring their wives to the colony, habitually took native women as live-in housekeepers and bed-partners. In the twentieth century, with the arrival of large numbers of Dutch women, the practice was increasingly frowned upon in the upper echelons of colonial society. We may guess that Mr. van den Berg was more or less a nobody—his njai, his residence behind Mr. Ong's, and his need to run to the LW for support indicate this. In any case, the social position of the njai was a sensitive issue. In the eyes of many natives, she was little better than a prostitute, and white women would usually have nothing to do with her. If she felt herself injured, her only recourse was her "man," who could easily feel himself belittled through her. If Dutch society looked down on his njai, that was one thing; but for a bunch of impudent young peranakan Chinese to do the same was quite another. But Sin Tit Po's account unintentionally opens a wider hole in the official peranakan dike. If Mr. Ong's young relatives were quarreling with their neighbor's njai, "Blanda bako" was the perfect insult for the "low-grade" van den Berg menage.*

So he was merely waiting for the right opportunity to hurt Mr. Ong or get him in real trouble (*bikin tjilaka*). To start with, he tried to accuse Mr. Ong of using the abusive words "*blanda bako*," and to make this convincing he "linked the insult with the spreading of the bonfire, which, he claimed, Mr. Ong had insolently refused to extinguish [*jang katanja toean Ong membangkang boeat bikin padem*]." *Insolence, nerves, insolence.* When the *kebajan's* warning was ignored, he came by and asked Mr. van den Berg to scold Mr. Ong. When the Dutchman did so, Mr. Ong did not merely disobey, but uttered the words "*blanda-bako*," or No-Money Dutch. All of this was reported then to Mr. van Temmen.

But when the *kebajan* was interrogated, he insisted that he had never asked Mr. van den Berg for help in admonishing Mr. Ong because, right after his own warning, Mr. Ong had immediately put the fire out.

Mr. Ong is now pressing two charges: the first against Mr. van Temmen for physical abuse, and the second against Mr. van den Berg, for twisting the truth, making out that Mr. Ong fully deserved to be beaten up for refusing to follow the *kebajan's* orders. In other words, Mr. Ong believes he was slandered (*difitenah*) by Mr. van den Berg. The Assistant District Officer, once fully apprised of what really happened,

reported the matter to the Assistant Resident, before Lawyer Yauw managed to file any formal complaint.

Apparently the District Officer also feels annoyed (*penasaran*) about this incident, which should never have happened, and was the result of malice—i.e. the inappropriate exploitation of the LW's power (*machtsmisbruik*) to torture (*aniaja*) someone personally disliked.

It appears that on December 18, a Mrs. Kuyk, also a leading figure in the Malang Covim, had come to the shop of Mr. Phoa Ping Kok, opposite the clubhouse of the Hing Chung Hua (China Revives), to buy cut-up pieces of gunny sacking to make sandbags. She discussed prices and lengths with Mr. Phoa's son and finally purchased ten small gunny-strips at eight cents apiece for a total of eighty cents, telling the son to send the sandbags over to her house on Wilhelmina Street. The son later hired a Madurese coolie to bring over, not ten, but twenty, bags so that the lady could pick out the ones she thought most suitable. When the coolie got to the house, however, the lady kicked the bags over and over, shouting that they were all rotten. Without making any fuss, the coolie took all the bags back. But not long afterwards Mrs. Kuyk arrived in her car at Mr. Phoa's shop and violently abused his son, for, she claimed, selling rotted sacks, etc., etc.

The son tried to explain to her that the gunny strips were not patchwork, but some of them were stitched together from two end-pieces of a larger strip. In order to avoid further trouble, he simply said that if the lady did not want to buy, then that would be no problem. But he went on to add that he did not sell his bags and large sacks only to civilians. The military and the police regularly bought from him, not just a few, but hundreds of items, and they never grumbled at the quality (*tida ada jang mengomel pandjang-pendek*).

Mrs. Kuyk got more and more angry and repeatedly shouted: "*Kowé Tjina! Kowé Tjina!* [You Chink! You Chink!]." Fearing his son would soon lose his temper, Mr. Phoa tried to mediate. But the furious Dutch woman then showered Mr. Phoa himself with abuse, shouting: "*Kowé Tjina poeter-poeter! Kowé Tjina Penipoe!* [You sneaky Chink! You cheating Chink!]"

Hearing the word *penipoe*, Mr. Phoa shot back: "Lady, there are also Dutch people who are *badjingan* [crooks? bastards?]" *It is striking that Mr. Phoa seems to have no trouble with the word Tjina, which Sin Tit Po never uses in its reporting. A possible explanation is that while Tjina was and is a derogatory word in Malay-Indonesian, the Javanese language equivalent Tjino is usually neutral. This, in turn, suggests that the shopkeeper's family belonged to the peranakan lower-middle class of East Java, whose language was heavily penetrated by Low Javanese. Badjingan, from badjing (squirrel), stretches out from a core meaning of "thief" or "rogue" to "crook," "bastard," perhaps even "swine."*

Mrs. Kuyk left the shop in a fury and filed charges against Mr. Phoa for insulting the entire Dutch nation by saying: "*Blanda ada badjingan nommer satoe!* [The Dutch are the No. 1 Crooks/Bastards]." *Who is lying? Sin Tit Po, perhaps with an eye on its PID*

readers, makes it look as if Mrs. Kuyk has twisted Mr. Phoa's irrefutable statement that some Dutch are crooks/bastards into an outrageous (Wartime!) slur against the entire Dutch people. Maybe so. But the syntax and choice of words in "Blanda ada badjingan nommer satoe" are tellingly Sino-Malay and unlikely to have been invented by the military doctor's wife. If Mr. Phoa was sufficiently enraged by La Kuyk's loutish behavior, he probably said exactly these words. After the event, he had all the advantage of the two witnesses present: his loyal son, and the lady-from-Wilhelmina-Street's native driver, who would have enjoyed nothing more than having his disagreeable employer, and the Dutch in general, roundly abused—unless, as we shall see, it was making a poker-faced denial to the authorities that any such racial abuse had occurred. Sly Sin Tit Po has the fun of printing the full anti-Dutch slur while piously putting it in La Kuyk's dishonest, self-serving mouth. Wartime injured innocence, no less. The police quickly arrived and asked Mr. Phoa for his version of what had happened. Mrs. Kuyk's driver, brought in as a witness, declared he had not heard Mr. Phoa denigrate the Dutch as a people. Now Mr. Phoa has filed countercharges against Mrs. Kuyk for yelling "Tjina Penipoe," with several witnesses present.

Said Sin Tit Po:

We have heard that Mrs. Kuyk will face charges on January 5, whereas her charges against Mr. Phoa have had to be withdrawn for lack of witness confirmation. Malang people who have been following this matter are shaking their heads, since it is impossible that Mrs. Kuyk is not aware of the Spier affair. She deliberately made a scene, with the upshot that she now has to face the law. Actually, Mr. Phoa was ready to let the matter rest, but when Mrs. Kuyk followed up her insults by filing charges against him, he had to file countercharges. We await the verdict of the District Court Judge in this case.

\* \* \*

Perhaps as a result of all this hoo-ha, Mrs. P. Spier-Wester finally sent a polite letter to the Malang Chamber of Commerce (Tiong Hwa Siang Hwee) on January 2, 1942. *Sin Tit Po* published both the original text in Dutch, and an Indonesian translation. It went thus:

Respected Gentlemen, I would be most glad to reiterate to you the assurance I have already given Mrs. Liem that I never meant to offend or be unpleasant to the Chinese Community through its great Leaders. On the contrary, I have the greatest respect and admiration for Dr. Sun Yat Sen and General Chiang Kai Tjek ["sic," writes *Sin Tit Po*]. It grieves me more than I can say that such a misunderstanding has arisen from my doing. With assurance of my deep respect

...

*Sin Tit Po*, however, was not appeased. It noted that the lady had not apologized or taken any steps to insure the insult would not be repeated, for example by changing the dogs' names. She had even misspelled the Generalissimo's name in her ignorance! The Malang Siang Hwee replied to the lady curtly, saying that the general unhappiness was not limited to the twelve Malang organizations, but was coming from other places, such as Bondowoso and Tulungagung. This being the case, the Chamber could not

regard itself as the representative of the whole Chinese community, and, on its own, accept or not accept her letter as settling the matter. Meantime, inquiries by the Kuomintang branch at the Assistant Resident's office regarding the current status of the twelve organizations' charges against Mrs. Spier had received no answer.

On January 6, *Sin Tit Po* told its readers that the Malang Kuomintang had received a letter from the Chinese Consul in Surabaya, to the effect that he was concerned about the Spier affair and had forwarded a copy of the twelve organizations' charges to the Governor of East Java.

There was slightly better news on the "Kuyk front." The local court had heard from both Mrs. Kuyk and Mr. Phoa. Since Mrs. Kuyk had no witnesses for her charges, while Mr. Phoa had several for his, the judge gave the lady a stern warning and fined her Fl. 2.50 (two guilders and fifty cents). But Mr. Phoa was fined the same amount for denigrating the Dutch by saying "Lady, there are also Dutch people who are Crooks/Bastards." *One cannot doubt for a minute that, in private, the esteemed judge would have agreed with the obvious truth that "there are indeed some Dutch who are crooks/bastards," perhaps including some of his legal colleagues. In peacetime he might even have sided with Mr. Phoa. But under emergency conditions, even the truth could set back official efforts to engender harmonious medewerking among the colony's beleaguered medeburgers.* *Sin Tit Po* expressed its astonishment at this "evenhandedness" and warned its readers to bear the judgment in mind in the future so as to avoid the unpleasant fate of Mr. Phoa.

January 14 was the last time these affairs were reported on in *Sin Tit Po*. Kuala Lumpur had just fallen; Japanese aircraft had already heavily bombed Tarakan and Balikpapan; and the noose was tightening around British Singapore. It was plain that a Japanese military assault on Java was only weeks away. *Sin Tit Po* told its readers that it had highly reliable information that Resident Schwencke had received a postcard on which was pasted a clipping of one of *Keng Po's* "Sambel Goreng" corner-columns (*podjok*). The writer had sarcastically said that the people of Malang were so impressed with the cleverness of their Resident that some had started naming their dogs Schwencketje (Dear Little Schwencke). The Resident had, however, decided not to react, to prevent the affair from dragging on. *This is the one instance where insolence goes unpunished. But the Resident was trapped by his own rhetoric: if it was fine for Mrs. Spier to call her dog Sun Yat-sen, how could he object to the use of his own name for other dogs?* Furthermore, in his efforts to end the affair peacefully and harmoniously, he had asked a prominent Malang Chinese property-owner to sound out local community opinion. The businessman could only report that people felt that Mrs. Spier's letter was unsatisfactory, since it contained no clear-cut apology and only expressed regret that the Chinese community had misunderstood what she had said. Schwencke said he believed that the letter was, in fact, an apology. *Nice footwork: we will recall that he had earlier told Mrs. Tjoa that Mrs. Spier had no need to apologize for anything.* But if the local Chinese did not see it as such, there was nothing he could do but forward the Spier letter to the Governor of East Java. The Resident further insisted that he was not anti-Chinese—but no one had said publicly that he was. *Nerves!*—and declared that in the event that the Japanese penetrated Malang, he would protect the Chinese exactly as he would protect all other national groups. *Bravo. But he must have known that this 'protection' would be an equal nullity for all groups.*

*Sin Tit Po* closed by saying that, in response to a request from the prominent Malang businessman, it had suggested that Mrs. Spier settle the matter by publishing in all the main Malay and Chinese-language Chinese newspapers a statement which: 1) asked the forgiveness of the Chinese people; 2) promised to change the names of the dogs; and 3) further promised not to repeat language offensive to Chinese feelings. The editors went on to say that the air could have been cleared long since if only Mrs. Spier had not been so obstinate (*berkepala batoe*) in sending an evasive letter—no letter at all would have been better! The Chinese want people to realize the “mentality” of certain Dutch people, who have no sense of how to behave in the present grave situation in which understanding between all groups is so important. From this point on, the newspaper said not a word more about Mrs. Spier, Mr. Ong, or Mrs. Kuyk.

On March 9—seven weeks later—Japanese troops occupied Malang without meeting any resistance, even from retired Colonel van Temmen. *Night, moonless and without stars. We know that, in stages over the next months, the Dutch in Malang—probably including both Mrs. Spier and Mrs. Kuyk, as well as Messrs. Schwencke, van den Berg, and van Temmen—were taken off, with their most important portable belongings, including cash, to harsh internment camps, where their guards were mainly natives. Those who survived the three and a half years of the Japanese military occupation surely ended up, by August 1945, as genuine “blanda bako.”*

*What remains completely unknown, alas, is the fate of dear little “Sun Yat Sen” and “Chiang Kai Tjek [sic].”*