‘The Screaming Injustice of Colonial Relationships’
*Tracing Chinese Anti-racist Activism in the Netherlands*

*Tom Hoogervorst* | Orcid: 0000-0001-6678-4301
KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, Leiden, The Netherlands
hoogervorst@kitlv.nl

*Melita Tarisa* | Orcid: 0000-0002-9280-684X
Independent scholar, Jakarta, Indonesia
melita.tarisa@gmail.com

**Abstract**

An insensitive poem published in 1935 sparked a wave of outrage among the Indies Chinese students in the Netherlands. Titled *The yellow peril*, it had started as an inside joke among Leiden’s Indologists, yet quickly aroused the fury of both moderates and radicals. Their anti-colonial activism flared up for months, attracting numerous allies and eventually taking hold in the Netherlands Indies. After the Indologists had apologized, the number of activists willing to push for more structural change dwindled. As such, this microhistory lays bare some broader dynamics of anti-racism. We argue that ethnic Chinese, who continue to be portrayed as an unobtrusive model minority, have a longer legacy of activism than they are usually given credit for. This is particularly relevant in the present, when Covid-induced Sinophobia, anti-Black racism, and a reassessment of the colonial past are inspiring new movements and forging new anti-racist solidarities.

**Keywords**

Chinese-Indonesian students – anti-racism – Leiden – Sarekat Peranakan Indonesia Tionghoa – Sinophobia
1 The Screaming Injustice of Colonial Relationships

Over the past years, the connected issues of racism and anti-racism have received unprecedented attention in the Dutch media. The ensuing debates and actions are likely to energize scholarship in the near future. Many would say it is about time, as the Netherlands features only incidentally in the wider literature on European anti-racist movements (Joly 1998; Fella and Ruzza 2013). Anti-racism refers to the act of rejecting racism, typically with the aim of driving social change and institutional reform. Its tactics range from civil disobedience to armed resistance (Bowser 1995; Stanley 2011; Alleyne 2017). Racism itself is a notoriously heterogenous concept, which can denote a multitude of interrelated issues: discrimination, prejudice, Othering, colourism, exclusion, police brutality, racially disproportionate incarceration rates, the belief that certain groups of people are biologically or culturally inferior, and the support of institutions that structurally favour one group over others.

Within this blind spot, there is another blind spot: the role of Asians in anti-racism movements. The present article aims to unearth a specific episode of anti-racist mobilization in the mid-1930s, spearheaded by ethnic Chinese students, while also attempting to make connections with Asian-Dutch anti-racism of more recent times. It is of a descriptive nature, which is a necessary step towards theorizing the mechanisms, collaborations, responses, and aftermaths of anti-racism in the Netherlands and the role of Chinese and other Asian-descended people in this movement. In the Dutch context, most people who self-identity or are labelled as Asian have ancestors from Indonesia, India (including via Suriname), China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, or South Korea. Their role in the anti-racist movement is not—and has never been—as leading as that of Afro-Caribbean activists or as visible as that of white antifascists, yet they have certainly not been absent from it. While Asian-Dutch people cannot meaningfully be considered a single community, they have been racialized in similar ways, co-opted as ‘model minorities’, and greeted with the same (typically food-related) slurs. This umbrella racialization created sentiments

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1 Nevertheless, there has been a long and insufficiently known tradition in the Netherlands of grassroots activism led by Black, migrant, and refugee women (Botman, Jouwe, and Wekker 2001). Beyond Europe, several noteworthy studies on anti-racist activism focus on Indigenous peoples (Davis 2010; Hooker 2020), whose dynamics are not directly applicable to the European situation.

2 This is not to deny the presence of racism within Asian communities. It has been argued that Chinese leaders in the Netherlands have historically dissociated themselves from other non-white minorities and prioritized their own communal interests (Pieke and Benton 1998: 160–1).
of solidarity that can be traced back to the 1930s. Although the protagonists of this study are predominantly Chinese men, we hope it can contribute to a conceptual framework of Asian anti-racism more broadly. The wider literature has largely remained silent on this topic, especially in the European context, leaving us with an incomplete picture of racism in the past and present.³

Asian-led anti-racism first received broad Dutch media attention in November 2013, after the popular singer Gordon caused outrage during an episode of Holland’s got talent. In his capacity of jury member, he unleashed a barrage of discriminating remarks—of the takeaway restaurant variety—to a Chinese participant in the talent show, sparking a wave of online activism. More recently, during the early phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, the carnivalesque song Voorkomen is beter dan Chinezen (Prevention is better than Chinese) caused an equal uproar. Concocted and broadcast in early February 2020 by Lex Gaarthuis, a DJ for the commercial radio station Radio 10, it contained such phrases as ‘It's all because of those stinky Chinese’ (Het komt allemaal door die stinkchinezen), ‘Don’t eat Chinese, then you'll have nothing to fear’ (Vreet geen Chinees, dan heb je niets te vrezen), and ‘No more fried rice’ (Uit de nasi).⁴ Soon afterwards, an online petition was filed against the radio station and sent to the Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal (House of Representatives of the Netherlands). It had been signed by 57 Chinese-Dutch organizations and was trending under the hashtag #ikbengeenvirus (I am not a virus). As the initiator clarified, ‘We note that Radio 10 has broadcast a very discriminating and inhumane song on 6 February 2020, which conflicts with the contents of the law [on] group insult in Article 137c of the Criminal Code.’⁵ Asian-Dutch activists have increasingly come to see such anti-racist efforts as a part of societal participation.⁶

Fluent in Dutch, social media-savvy, and instructed at school to defend their

³ There is, for example, nothing specifically on Chinese people and little on Asian people in general in the standard publication on Dutch racism (Essed and Hoving 2014). Pitcher (2009) discusses Asian anti-racism in the UK—where most people labelled as ‘Asian’ have origins from the Indian Subcontinent—and Stanley (2011), Chinese anti-racism in Canada. The potential to study history with the aim to better understand and fight contemporary racism has been described in detail by Stanley (2000) in his conceptualization of ‘anti-racist history’.

⁴ As the song was sung by a fictional character with a Rotterdam accent, uit de nasi sounded like euthanasie (euthanasia). The title of the song is itself a pun on the Dutch proverb ‘Prevention is better than cure’ (Voorkomen is beter dan genezen). Chinezen in colloquial Dutch can mean ‘Chinese [people]’ but also ‘to order/eat Chinese food’.

⁵ ‘Wij constateren dat Radio 10 op 6 februari 2020 een zeer discriminerend en inhumaan lied heeft uitgezonden, dat in strijd is met de inhoud van de wet groepsbelediging in artikel 137c van het strafrecht’; petities.nl/petitions/wij‑zijn‑geen‑virussen‑reageer‑op‑het‑discriminere nde‑lied (accessed March 2020).

⁶ Reza Kartosen-Wong, ‘Kritiek op racisme is eigenlijk heel Nederlands’, Het Parool, 13-5-2019.
opinions, they have achieved small victories unimaginable to their parents. The DJ behind the provocative song renounced his actions within days, assuring that ‘once again I want to offer my sincere apologies to the Chinese community and everyone else who was rightly angry or sad because of the sketch’. On the same day, the singer Gordon, too, conveyed his deep apologies on national television, seven years after his own controversy.

In 1935, another composition caused a comparable stir to the ill-fated coronavirus song of 2020, invoking similar tropes of Chinese pollution and peril. The poem in question appeared in the periodical of Leiden’s Indologen Vereeniging (IV, Indologists Association). At the time, the field of Indology was concerned with the languages, cultures, and social systems of the Netherlands Indies. Leiden was one of two Dutch universities that offered a programme, the other one being Utrecht (Fasseur 2003:441–53; Kuitenbrouwer 2014:123–60). As most of its students aspired to a career in the colonial administration, freshly minted Indologists were destined to hold power over Chinese and many other populations. Any signs of prejudice in their ranks was therefore a cause of worry among Chinese student activists, who—not unlike their modern-day successors—were fluent in Dutch and grew up with privileged access to education. Sadly, neither faculty offered the students much protection against everyday bigotry. Had it not been for their familiarity with Leiden academia, the following poem may well have sunken into oblivion:

The yellow peril

Moreover, it is greatly to be feared that the real Chinese, when they have become sufficiently armed and re-civilized, will transform the surface of the earth into a human stable, if we do not take sufficient precautions.

Professor Dr. A. Forel in ‘The sexual question’

Chinese, Chinese
Chinese everywhere and
Half or quarter Chinese.

7 ‘Ik wil nogmaals mijn oprechte excuses aanbieden aan de Chinese gemeenschap en aan alle anderen die terecht boos of verdrietig waren naar aanleiding van de sketch.’ Lex Gaarthuis over coronavirus-sketch: “Ik heb een heel grote fout gemaakt”’. www.radiofreak.nl, 10-2-2020.
8 Mark den Blanken, ‘Gordon door het stof in DWDD om foute grap: “Ik wil mijn diepe, diepe excuses aanbieden”’, Algemeen Dagblad, 10-2-2010.
9 Translation by Marshall (1931:436).
In Delft and Dordrecht,
In Leiden and Utrecht and
In Amersfoort;
They procreate
With any other species.
They push us out
To the edge of the dunes;
And we hide in holes
Like Cananefates
And infantry soldiers.
Hollanders! Germanics,
And Europeans!
Restrict them and catch them
Like rabbits and hang them
Those yellow Chinese
From Beijing and Yangzi!!

V. B.

The poem’s composer, ‘v. B.’, had managed to retain his anonymity throughout the controversy and afterwards. As can be seen from the member lists of the IV archive, only two Indologists had those initials: John van Bodegom and Jacob Herman van Bockel. John van Bodegom graduated in 1935 and was subsequently stationed in Gowa (Sulawesi). He was eventually dispatched to Dutch New Guinea, where he appears to have developed a genuine interest in the lives of the Papuans. At the peak of his career, Van Bodegom reached the rank of Resident in the city of Sorong. He returned to the Netherlands in 1962, after Dutch rule over Western New Guinea had ended under international pressure. Jacob Herman van Bockel was a freshman at the time of the controversy. He worked as an editor for the *Indologenblad* (Indologists journal), the very periodical that...
published the disputed poem. Despite his training in Indology, his degree never took him to the Indies. After graduating in 1937, Van Bockel worked as a civil servant in various towns in the Dutch province of Zuid-Holland. We have found no hard evidence linking either of these Indologists incontrovertibly to the poem, as the real author never came forward. It seems that most students suspected Van Bodegom, yet the certainty of this identification remains unclear.

The cited professor, Auguste-Henri Forel (1848–1931), was not directly connected to Leiden. This Swiss psychiatrist, sexologist, and entomologist is best known for his work on ants but was also an avowed eugenicist (Kuechenhoff 2008). Predictably, his fearmongering quote, followed by the phrase ‘catch them like rabbits and hang them’, shocked many Chinese students. Though hardly unaccustomed to casual Sinophobia, they had monitored with due concern Europe’s upsurge in fascism, colonial repression in the Indies (especially after the communist uprisings of 1926 and 1927), and the subjugation of people of colour worldwide. In the words of one activist, the insulting poem embodied ‘the screaming injustice of colonial relationships’.11 At the time, colonialism was still widely accepted in Europe as a legitimate component of state policy. Unlike today’s anti-Chinese bigotry, chiefly found in popular entertainment, commercials, and social media, the culprit in 1935 was a prestigious academic institution responsible for the improvement of colonial governance. And yet, as we hope to demonstrate, anti-racist activism and its responses display a number of remarkable continuities that deserve to be scrutinized.

In the following sections, we trace the anti-racist protests that unfolded from April to July 1935 and connect them with a number of observations on Asian-Dutch activism more broadly. The movement started in Leiden but soon reached other universities, anti-fascist organizations, Chinese diplomats, Dutch ministers, and eventually the established media of the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies. The activists drew from existing networks of solidarity, forged new ones, and ended deficient ones. While they never achieved all their objectives, they established one of Europe’s first social-justice movements led by ethnic Chinese, which for months caught the attention of newspapers, politicians, and fellow activists. In examining their activities, we draw from the May/June 1935 press reports of a radical organization called Sarekat Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia (SPTI, Chinese-Indonesian Peranakan Society), which have resurfaced digitally in the Asian Library of Leiden University.12 Consisting of a four-page summary and 49 letters, this collection provides intricate details...

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11 ‘de schreeuwende onrechtvaardigheid der koloniale verhoudingen’, see the SPTI press reports, 5/6-1935, Leiden University Library, Leiden, Digital Collections, Br F 97–266, p. ii.
12 https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/ (accessed 18-12-2018).
of an early anti-racist movement, the solidarities it fostered, and the internal struggles it generated. We have additionally drawn from the digital newspaper database Delpher, the IV’s minutes and membership data, and the 1919–1940 reports of the Centrale Inlichtingendienst (CID, Dutch Political Intelligence Service).13

2 Three Representatives of the ‘Coloured Races’

Sizeable Chinese communities settled in the Netherlands from the 1910s onwards, initially sequestered in the sailor districts of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. By the 1920s, smaller groups of Western-educated Chinese from the Netherlands Indies became a familiar sight in university cities, such as Leiden, Delft, Utrecht, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam. A number of them—though by no means the majority—had left-wing sympathies or developed these during their studies. Their activism unfolded in solidarity with (other) colonized people, with whom they frequently interacted. Yet prior to the Yellow Peril controversy, Chinese students in the Netherlands mostly remained under the radar. Despite their provenance from the Indies, they formed a community that was largely separate from the indigenous Indonesian students (Poeze 1986, 1989; Van Galen 1989; Stutje 2016). The latter were organized through the Indische Vereeniging (Indies Association), founded in 1908 as a social platform. Chinese students established the Chung Hwa Hui (CHH, Chinese Association) in 1911. They maintained friendly contacts with fellow Chinese students elsewhere in Europe (Tan 1936:22–3; Van Galen 1989:153–60). Relations with indigenous students were initially quite good as well, and the CHH and the Indies Association often participated in joint events. However, the organizations gradually drifted apart around 1922 (Poeze 1986:175–9; Van Galen 1989:124).

In 1925, the Indies Association officially renamed itself Perhimpoenan Indonesia (PI, Indonesian Association). This name change symbolized a rise among its members in anticolonial and left-wing politics. Among the PI’s most prominent members were the nationalists Mohammed Hatta (1902–1980) and Soetan Sjahrir (1909–1966), who joined in respectively 1922 and 1929. Hatta would later become Indonesia’s first vice president, whereas Sjahrir was appointed prime minister in 1945 at the tender age of 36. Before returning to

13 The Delpher database can be accessed at https://www.delpher.nl/. The IV minutes are part of the archives of the Leidsche Studenten Corps (Erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken). The CID documents can be viewed and downloaded at http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/rapportencentraleinlichtingendienst.
Indonesia in 1932, Hatta had forged contacts with other anticolonial activists, including Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969), and Lamine Senghor (1889–1927). On 10 February 1927, Hatta and Sjahrir attended the establishment of the League against Imperialism in Brussels, which was sponsored by the USSR-backed Communist International (Comintern). Hatta found another fellow-traveller in the indefatigable Surinamese activist Anton de Kom (1898–1945). The latter was the only Afro-Caribbean person to regularly attend PI meetings, including a speech in 1929 by the prominent political Islamic leader Hadji Agoes Salim (Boots and Woortman 2009:58).

The influence of the Comintern and the Communistische Partij in Nederland (CPN, Communist Party of the Netherlands) on these budding anticolonial networks worried the Dutch establishment. As a uniquely outspoken anticolonial party, the CPN’s control over the PI grew significantly by the early 1930s (Poeze 1986:257–62; 1994:lxiv). Hatta and Sjahrir saw themselves replaced with the less bourgeois, more pro-Moscow leaders Soedario Moewalladi (1907–?) and Roestam Effendi (1903–1979). In 1933, the latter represented the CPN as the first Dutch member of parliament of colour. Around this time, joint protest meetings increasingly featured ‘three representatives of the coloured races’ (drie vertegenwoordigers der gekleurde rassen), to wit, Indonesian, Chinese, and (Afro-)Surinamese. Anton de Kom and Soedario Moewalladi, for example, joined forces to condemn the Japanese incursion into Manchuria in 1932.14

Somewhat counterintuitively, the invasion of China by an imperialist power failed to unite the Chinese students. Their political voice had been fragmented for some time by conflicts between the Kuomintang—which was itself hopelessly divided—and different communist factions. The CHH responded by entering an apolitical phase, incurring the wrath of the PI and some of its own supporters (Van Galen 1989:135–7; Stutje 2015). As many CHH members supported the anti-communist brand of Chinese nationalism and were only secondarily interested in Indonesian independence, ties with the PI were eventually severed between 1931 and 1935. Meanwhile, Anton de Kom felt himself largely neglected by his Indonesian allies, who continued to marginalize Suriname in their anticolonial struggle (Boots and Woortman 2009:59–60).15

In the wake of these disappointments, the Sarekat Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia (SPTI) was established in 1932 as a radical counter-faction of the CHH. Though a relatively small organization, the SPTI was perceived as such

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14 De Tribune, 14-2-1932, p. 6; De Indische Courant, 29-2-1932, p. 5.
15 Roestam Effendi practically stood alone in publicly addressing Suriname-related issues (Poeze 1986:275).
a threat to the CHH that the latter forbade dual membership. Its most prominent members were Tjoa Sik Ien (1907–1987) and Tan Ling Djie (1904–1969), two well-known communists and vocal supporters of Indonesian independence. The former, a doctor trained in Utrecht, later represented the Indonesian Republic at the Security Council of the United Nations. The latter, a jurist trained in Leiden, fulfilled a number of political roles after returning to Indonesia in 1940. He acted as a member of the Indonesian parliament in 1946 and as secretary-general of the Indonesian Communist Party from 1949 to 1953 (Van Galen 1989:265). The SPTI outlined their objectives in a mission statement: to build a future for the Indies-born Chinese in Indonesia and to do so in collaboration with Indonesians. The association quickly started to organize political rallies—known under the euphemism of meetings (vergaderingen)—to educate more people on their ideology. They were never taken seriously by the Dutch Political Intelligence Service, who dismissed them as ‘[t]he association of communist Chinese Dutch nationals. It probably has just a few members and only comes to light in actions in collaboration with the PI.’

It was common for the conservative establishment to dismiss Chinese, Indonesian, and Surinamese activists as pawns of the CPN, yet the reality was one of mutual co-optation. The activists clearly understood the larger political system in which they operated. They were quick to utilize the networks and periodicals of the international communist movement. Initially, De Tribune (The tribune)—the official newspaper of the CPN—was the only media outlet to pay attention to the activities of the SPTI, the PI, and the League against Imperialism. One of their most prominent joint actions, a public protest meeting against the Colonial Exhibition in The Hague, was exclusively covered by De Tribune. Like its counterparts elsewhere in Europe, this exhibition supplied the Dutch public with an idealized picture of life in the colony, carefully ignoring the oppression of the masses. Understandably, this made it a major target for left-wing activists. The PI and Roestam Effendi were particularly upset with the Indonesian ‘sneaks’ (onderkruipers) who participated in this event (Poeze 1988:261–2). Anton de Kom, too, presented himself as a vocal comrade of oppressed Indonesians (Op ’t Ende 2015:36–7).

16 Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, 24-2-1932, p. 1; De Indische Courant, 26-2-1932, p. 6.
17 ‘De vereeniging van communistische Chineese Nederlandse onderdanen. Zij telt vermoedelijk slechts zeer weinig leden en komt alleen aan het daglicht bij acties in samenwerking met de PI,’ see List of left-wing labour organisations, 23-3-1937, Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, Jaarbericht 1937/B, p. 80.
18 De Tribune, 31-5-1932, p. 1; Poeze 1988:228.
These anticolonial alliances frequently looked beyond Dutch Empire, in particular to China and the US. Chief among their objectives was the release of the Scottsboro Boys, nine Black American teenagers prosecuted on false rape allegations. The plight of these young victims came to epitomize the horrors of institutional white supremacy worldwide (Pennybacker 2009; Op ‘t Ende 2015). At the same time, it fuelled an enormous anti-American campaign initiated by the USSR and its affiliated communist parties worldwide. Once again, the activists and the Comintern seem to have co-opted each other. During one meeting, Anton de Kom, the Indonesian activist Tjokro, and the Chinese activist Tan Sie Ang spoke out against the predicament of the Scottsboro Boys in one breath with the Japanese military invasion of China. During another joint protest, this time against colonial terror (koloniale terreur), another triumvirate of an Indonesian, Chinese, and Surinamese activist—all anonymous—condemned the infamous Dutch prison camp of Boven Digoel, the execution of communists in Guangzhou, and the imprisonment of the outspoken Surinamese journalist Jan Cornelis Sarucco (1867–1943). In their eyes, these were clearly connected issues.

Students also built bridges to the working classes. Solidarity with communities from China stood particularly high on the agenda of Indies Chinese activists. Most of their potential allies were low-wage labourers who had previously been employed on Dutch ships and formed sizeable groups in the sailor towns of Zeedijk in Amsterdam and Katendrecht in Rotterdam. According to the Dutch Political Intelligence Service, Tjoa Sik Ien established ties with Rotterdam’s Chineesche Zeeliedenclub (Chinese Sailors Club) in 1933. This was a traditional socio-cultural association (shetuan), which, like others of its kind, strove to improve the conditions of its associated cohort of migrants while appeasing the local and Chinese government (Pieke and Benton 1998:150–4). Nevertheless, Chinese sailors were obvious collaboration partners. As they worked for lower wages than their Dutch counterparts, they were the first to suffer ‘yellow peril’ tropes from the early 1910s. Although they were somewhat disunited and lacked functional labour unions, sailors had copious

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19 Haagsche Courant, 7-6-1932, p. 14; Het Volk, 8-6-1932, p. 7; De Tribune, 10-6-1932, p. 6.
20 De Tribune, 19-3-1932, p. 3. ’Tan Sie Ang’ and ‘Tjokro’ were presumably pseudonyms, as nothing else can be found about them. Anton de Kom, likewise, entered the newspapers under the name ‘Adekom’.
21 De Tribune, 12-12-1934, p. 8; 15-12-1934, p. 8.
22 Van Heek 1936; Wubben 1986; Pieke and Benton 1998; Van Rossum 2009.
23 List of left extremists, xx-xx-1939, Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, Jaarbericht 1936/B, BVD 59/76, p. 373.
experience in organizing boycotts and strikes against labour exploitation. Their activism also assumed ideological overtones. In the summer of 1933, for example, Chinese labourers targeted the German film company Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft, whose recruitment of impoverished Chinese as figurants in a fascist film sparked a large demonstration followed by physical altercations with the Rotterdam police force.

The economic crisis of the 1930s launched many Chinese sailors into poverty. Baulking at the prospect of begging or reliance on social services, many turned to the selling of homemade peanut snacks. The so-called ‘peanut Chinese’ (pinda-Chinees) or ‘peanut guy’ (pindamannetje), whose street-vending activities quickly inspired the dehumanizing slur pinda, thus became an archetypal figure of Dutch city life. These vendors were financially assisted by various CHH members. Tan Kian Hong (1907–1998), for example, coordinated aid efforts for the Katendrecht group and the pinda-Chinezen more generally. Another fund was managed by Khouw Bian Tie (Van Galen 1989:77). The CHH also maintained friendly relations with another shetuan: the Hua Chiao Hui Kuan (Chinese Association) of Rotterdam (Tan 1936:21; Van Galen 1989:180). An investigation of the Dutch sociologist Frederik van Heek (1907–1987) into the Chinese community of Amsterdam, which in 1936 yielded the first book-length study on Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands, was another result of Indies Chinese philanthropy. Although it focused on people born in China, the initiative was spearheaded by Oey Kong Soey from Batavia (Wubben 1986:159–60).

It is within these robust, complex, yet frequently overlooked solidarity networks that we must understand Chinese activism in the Netherlands and its responses to the offensive poem. Indies Chinese students were hardly alone in their resistance against racism. They kept in regular contact with other Chinese, other Indonesians, and Afro-Surinamese people who could provide support. Yet these solidarities came with limitations. While the different groups joined forces to achieve shared objectives, they prioritized topics differently, leaving Anton de Kom, in particular, feeling neglected. Internal divisions also existed within the Chinese communities. Despite various attempts at collaboration, the considerable social (students vs. sailors), cultural (Indies-born vs. China-

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24 From the 1920s to the 1940s, transnational networks of sailors also began to organize themselves around Indonesia's struggle for independence (Goodall 2018; Alexanderson 2019).

25 De Tribune, 3-8-1933, p. 4; 5-8-1933, p. 4.

26 From the late 1940s, this persistent swearword was extended, presumably on the basis of phenotypic resemblance, to Eurasians (Indo-Europeans). True to their reputation as another model minority, many of their grandchildren have now reappropriated it as a tongue-in-cheek nickname for themselves.
born), and organizational (CHH vs. SPTI) barriers proved hard to surmount. At the end of the day, only one political party, the CPN, had been willing to meaningfully support anticolonial activism.

3 To All Chinese in Holland!

A joint meeting was held on 17 April 1935, soon after Leiden’s Chinese students caught scent of the poem. It was attended by representatives of various organizations, with the notable exception of the CHH. A joint meeting was held on 17 April 1935, soon after Leiden’s Chinese students caught scent of the poem. It was attended by representatives of various organizations, with the notable exception of the CHH. Two days later, the SPTI circulated a letter titled ‘To all Chinese in Holland’. The document cut right to the chase. After quoting the Sinophobic passage by Forel and the Indologenblad’s poetic addition, seven steps of individual and organizational action were proposed: demanding that the Indologenblad would retract the poem and apologize; suing the author for insulting and inciting hate against the Chinese; complaining to the Faculty of Indology about the mentality of its members; informing the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Colonies about these anti-Chinese sentiments and urging them to take measures; sending a petition to the States General of the Netherlands; urging the Chinese Legation to protest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and contacting the press in the Netherlands and Indonesia.

The letter received overwhelming support. Full cooperation was promised by the Aziatisch Dispuutgezelschap Amsterdam (ADA, Asian Debating Club Amsterdam), Delftse Aziatische Studenten (Asian Students Delft), and the Chineesche Studentenkring Utrecht (Chinese Student Circle Utrecht). The Economische Studieclub Kuan Chung (Kwan Chung Economic Study Club) in Rotterdam reported that it would leave the course of action to its parent organization CHH, which, as they wrote, represented all Chinese. However, the Pien Lun Hui (Debating Society), a Leiden-based club that also fell under the CHH, immediately assured that they would join the protest as an independent unit.

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27 SPTI press reports, p. iii.
28 Note that it was common to refer to Leiden’s Indology programme as the ‘Faculty of Indology’, although it was not technically a faculty and officially fell under the Verenigde Faculteiten der Rechtsgeleerdheid, Letteren en Wijsbegeerte (Combined Faculties of Law, Letters, and Philosophy).
29 SPTI press reports, p. 1.
30 SPTI press reports, p. 2.
31 SPTI press reports, p. 1–2.
32 SPTI press reports, p. 2.
The Anti-Fascistisch Studentencomité (Anti-Fascist Student Committee) also conveyed their sympathy.\textsuperscript{33} After four days, the CHH was the last to reply. They thanked the SPTI for alerting them to the poem, assuring that they would take their own steps.\textsuperscript{34}

The most proactive support came from ADA. This society had a competent leader in Ong Eng Die (1910–1999), then an economy student and later a prominent Indonesian politician.\textsuperscript{35} He contacted the Indische Conferentie (Indies Conference), a prestigious academic gathering scheduled to take place from 29 April to 2 May, stating that ADA was forced to withdraw from an event that also welcomed the IV. Further collaboration was only conceivable after a retraction of the poem, an apology issued in the press, and a motion accepted by the board of the Indies Conference—also to be sent to the press—to take steps against prospective colonial administrators with anti-Chinese attitudes.\textsuperscript{36} Among the signatories of this letter, we find the CHH, the Indonesische Studieclub (Indonesian Student Club), the Nederlandse Christen Studenten Vereeniging (Dutch Christian Student Association), the Technische Aziatische Vereeniging Delft (Technical Asian Association Delft), and the Vereeniging van Indonessische Jongeren (Association of Indonesian Youths) (Fig. 1). A reply soon followed, in which the coordinator of the conference, Frederik Mari van Asbeck (1889–1968), expressed his shock about the poem and assured Ong Eng Die that he had taken steps. The IV was barred from the conference until they distanced themselves from the poem’s author. He added that the Indies Conference was not the proper body to mediate between conflicting societies.\textsuperscript{37} This neutrality argument hardly impressed Ong Eng Die, who reminded the conference of its own objectives: ‘to take into account the questions that colonial society poses to us and to try, through a mutual, free and frank exchange of views, to gain clearer insight’\textsuperscript{38} He asserted that the Indies Conference was therefore

\textsuperscript{33} SPTI press reports, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{34} SPTI press reports, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{35} In the heat of the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1949), Ong Eng Die negotiated on behalf of the Indonesian Republic during the 1947 Renville Agreement. In 1955, he became Indonesia’s minister of finance. During his student years, Ong Eng Die was initially refused CHH membership on account of his SPTI sympathies, even though he had long denied being a member, yet he eventually joined the CHH in 1938 and even became its president in 1942–1943 and 1945 (Van Galen 1989:246).
\textsuperscript{36} SPTI press reports, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{37} SPTI press reports, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{38} ‘zich rekenschap te geven van de vragen, waarvoor de koloniale maatschappij ons stelt en te trachten door onderlinge, vrije en openhartige gedachtenwisseling tot helderder inzicht te geraken’ (SPTI press reports, p. 3).
the ideal platform to intervene in a pogrom—by then, his language had turned grimmer—against the ethnicity to which many of its participants belonged.\footnote{SPTI press reports, p. 5–6.}

A conciliatory meeting held on 26 April appears to have gone awry.\footnote{SPTI press reports, p. 5–6.} An IV representative attempted to mitigate the controversy by assuring that the poem targeted \textit{pinda-Chinezen} rather than Chinese from the Indies.\footnote{SPTI press reports, p. 14.} In a succinct reply to ADA, the Indologist Frans Eugenius Ohlenroth (1909–2005)—himself of Eurasian descent and born in East Java—guaranteed that racial bigotry did not reflect his association’s mentality, nor the author’s intention. He regretted the publication of the poem and agreed to retract it in the next issue. Having

\footnote{SPTI press reports, p. 5–6.}
apologized ‘for the unpleasant impression that the poem may have made’, he expressed his trust to have cleared the IV’s name and his hope to engage in an honest, pure cooperation at the Indies Conference. The next day, Van Asbeck once again rejected Ong Eng Die’s motion. He objected furthermore to the word ‘pogrom’, especially since steps had now been taken against the poem’s (still anonymous) author. Those kinds of exaggerations, he insisted, would only harm the cause.

Neither ADA nor the SPTI took no for an answer. Having boycotted the Indies Conference, they established a nationwide Comité van Actie tot Afweer van Anti-Chinese Hetze (Action Committee of Defence against Anti-Chinese Agitation). In a circular, the committee urged the Chinese people throughout the Netherlands to sue everyone complicit in the publication of the poem; demand the seizure of all April issues of the *Indologenblad*, the retraction of the poem, and the IV’s apologies to be sent to the press; alert the Ministry of Colonies, the Ministry of Education, and the combined faculties of the Leiden University; send a petition to the House of Representatives of the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies Volksraad (People’s Council); request the Chinese Legation to contact China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and alert the press in the Netherlands and Indonesia. In addition to the signatories of the first letter, this document was signed by the Chineesche Studentengroep Den Haag (Chinese Student Group The Hague) and the Chineesche Studentengroep Leiden (Chinese Student Group Leiden). The CHH was notably absent from the list, having turned down an additional request to put aside their ideological differences with the SPTI for the sake of common Chinese interests. They also chose to participate in the Indies Conference (Van Galen 1989:126).

Slowly but steadily, the movement began to reach wider circles. The Chinese envoy was contacted with the aim to alert China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other fellow-Chinese received a letter in Chinese, containing a translation of the poem, the quote from Forel, and an invitation to join the protests (Fig. 2). The issue was also discussed in print. The *Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih*, the mouth-

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42 ‘voor de onaangenane indruk, die genoemd gedicht wellicht heeft gemaakt’ (SPTI press reports, p. 6).
43 SPTI press reports, p. 6.
44 The Volksraad was an advisory council whose members represented various ethnicities. It was established as an attempt to make colonial governance more representative, although its actual power was limited.
45 SPTI press reports, p. 7–8.
46 SPTI press reports, p. 8.
47 SPTI press reports, p. 8. Acknowledgement of receipt arrived nine days later (SPTI press reports, p. 9), yet no direct actions were taken by the Republic of China.
图2 争议的翻译
piece of Leiden’s Chinese student community, featured a three-page article by Tjan Tjoe Siem (1909–1978). Tjan, at the time a student in Indology, would later become a professor at the University of Indonesia.48 His article gives a rare glimpse into his otherwise elusive anti-racist convictions. As he fulminated, the times of the Dutch East India Company, during which the Chinese had had to accept whatever malfeasances the colonizers inflicted on them, were over, yet the threat of Nazism lurked just around the corner. The fact that members of Leiden’s academic community were allowed to publish such bigotry—‘which makes the pinda pinda catcalls of the street kids look decent’—should have made it plainly visible where the real peril was coming from (Tjan 1935:36).

A brief statement appeared in the following issue of the Indologenblad, conveying the author’s apologies for the impression his poem had apparently made in certain circles. Elsewhere in the journal, it was explained that the poem was in fact written to satirize the quote from Forel: ‘Although we had assumed that readers of a student journal would be able to understand such irony, we wholeheartedly express our sorrow for this optimism.’49 A more detailed explanation came from the 1v’s chairperson Johannes Theodorus Vermeulen (1910–1994), who, as fate had it, was writing a dissertation on anti-Chinese violence under the Dutch East India Company. In the next issue of Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih, Vermeulen stressed the fact that the 1v had apologized and assumed people would probably be tired of hearing about the poem again. Marvelling at the uproar around what was clearly an inside joke, he then rejoiced that the ‘loyal’ people had responded so understandingly. Therefore, he would no longer entertain aspersions on the Indologists’ motives, urging his readers to recognize the insignificance of the issue and the ‘Leiden character’ of his organization (Vermeulen 1935:77).

Neither of these half-baked apologies proved satisfactory. In a letter dated 4 May and widely covered in the Dutch press, Roestam Effendi tabled parliamentary questions and urged the minister of colonies to take action.50 The news made it to the Netherlands Indies press two days later.51 On the same day, Tjoa Sik Ien referred the Indologenblad to the public prosecutor on the

48 His elder brother Tjan Tjoe Som (1903–1969) was a professor at Leiden’s Sinology department from 1950 to 1952.
49 ‘Hoewel wij meenden te mogen veronderstellen, dat lezers van een studentenblad een dergelijke ironie konden begrijpen, betuigen wij voor dit optimisme volmondig ons leedwezen; see Indologenblad 6, supplement 1935, p. 46.
50 Kamervragen (Aanhangsel), 10-05-1935, no. 106, Handelingen der Staten-Generaal 11, Historische Parlementaire Documenten (1814–1995), Overheid.nl, 69/141/106.
51 Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, 6-5-1935, p. 2; De Indische Courant, 6-5-1935, p. 1.
basis of Section 137c and 137d (Crimes against Public Order) of the Dutch Criminal Code,\textsuperscript{52} setting an uncanny precedent to the petitioners against Radio 1\textsuperscript{o} almost a century later. Another letter landed on the desk of Leiden’s vice chancellor Willem van der Woude (1876–1974), informing him about the legal steps that had just been initiated.\textsuperscript{53} Gerard Cornelis Adrianus Oskam (1880–1952), a Dutch lawyer who had previously made some fame as a chess master, emerged as another ally. He showed himself a dedicated anti-fascist and his deep involvement with the issue seems to have extended beyond legal professionalism. Oskam (unsuccessfully) contacted the \textit{Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant} (New Rotterdam newspaper) in the hope that they would publicize the actions against the IV and the complaints sent to Leiden’s vice chancellor.\textsuperscript{54}

Further attempts at damage control soon followed. Ohlenroth issued a second apology, this time to the \textit{spti}. He expressed his regret for his belated reply to a letter sent more than two weeks ago, and for the wrong impressions the poem had conveyed. He also highlighted the apology issued by the \textit{Indologenblad}. Finally, he regretted that the \textit{spti} had contacted the press—or so he suspected—with incomplete information, giving only the satirical poem but not the contextualizing Forel quote.\textsuperscript{55} The IV’s apology was eventually picked up by some newspapers, which had ignored the initial outcry.\textsuperscript{56}

On 12 May, Hendrikus Colijn (1869–1944)—then prime minister of the Netherlands as well as minister of colonies—replied to Roestam Effendi’s letter. Colijn had earlier been employed in various capacities in the Netherlands Indies military and colonial administration, and was of a decidedly conservative bent. He conceded that the poem was hardly conducive to inter-ethnic relations in the Netherlands Indies, yet, since the \textit{Indologenblad} had apologized, considered the case closed.

As far as the student activists were concerned, however, the battle was far from over. They had shown themselves remarkably well-organized and capable of bringing the issue to broad attention. Their mobilization strategy, to reach out to as many potential allies as possible, had proven effective. They successfully pressured the IV into acknowledging that the poem had been a serious mistake, if only because it antagonized the people they repeatedly claimed to value deeply. Moreover, it quickly became clear which actors and organizations

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{spti} press reports, p. 9–10.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{spti} press reports, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{spti} press reports, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{spti} press reports, p. 3. This suspicion strikes us as unfounded, as we have not come across any evidence of the \textit{spti} quoting the poem out of context.
\textsuperscript{56} See, for instance, \textit{Haagsche Courant}, 9-5-1935, p. 10.
were willing to make long-term commitments to the cause, such as the boycott of the Indische Conferentie. Those reluctant to join the Action Committee were approached multiple times, yet eventually left alone.

4 The Suspiciously Exaggerated Pursuit of Friendly Contact

Despite having repeatedly been proclaimed as resolved, the issue had now caught on in the Netherlands Indies. Tjoa Sik Ien wrote a long letter to the Volk­sraad on 14 May. He assumed familiarity with the matter at hand and informed the council about the legal steps that had been initiated. He also stressed that the author, a nearly graduated Indologist, ought never be stationed in the Indies lest his hostility, contempt, racism (rassenhaat), and bigotry (stookzucht) towards the Chinese would cause great trouble. Tjoa concluded with the rhetorical question of whether civil servants with such convictions should ever end up in positions of power in the first place. Council member Kan Hok Hoei Sia (1881–1951) took the issue very seriously but ultimately lacked the power to push for tough sanctions. The controversy later made its way into Chinese-owned periodicals. Editors of the pro-Kuomintang newspaper Sin Po had been under the impression that the poem’s author was a Eurasian. In their view, this made matters even worse, since many Eurasian families had Chinese ancestors. They went as far as quoting the Orgaan van de Eugenetische Vereeniging in Nederlandsch-Indië (Organ of the Eugenics Association in the Netherlands Indies) to substantiate this point.

Student activists in the Netherlands likewise refused to consider the case as closed. A meeting organized in The Hague, now with Oskam as one of the speakers, was attended by representatives from several Chinese, Indonesian, and Dutch organizations. This time around, various Dutch newspapers reported on the issue, although the outwardly liberal Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Cour-

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57 SPTI press reports, p. 11–12.
58 As Netherlands Indies newspapers reported a week later, the Volksraad likewise considered the issue resolved. As the IV had already apologized, no further steps would be taken; see Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad, 21-5-1935, p. 1; Het Nieuws van den Dag, 21-5-1935, p. 3; De Indische Courant, 23-5-1935, p. 5. The IV’s apology was also published in the Indies press (De Indische Courant, 24-5-1935, p. 6).
59 It was discussed in the newspaper Kung Po, as reported in De Indische Courant (23-5-1935, p. 5). The original Kung Po article is absent in any collection known to us.
60 Sin Po Weekelijksche Editie 25, Hollansch supplement, 1935.
61 Haagse Courant, 17-5-1935, p. 17.
62 Haagse Courant, 22-5-1935, p. 17; De Tribune, 24-5-1935, p. 5; De Tijd, 25-5-1935, p. 5.
ant, Handelsblad, and Telegraaf continued to ignore it. True to their promise, the activists sent letters to the minister of colonies and the minister of education, requesting that Indologists with racist proclivities be kept away from administrative functions. The Chinese Legation had also become responsive. China’s ambassador to the Netherlands, Wensi Jin (‘Wunsz King’, 1892–1968), replied on 30 May that he was willing to receive a delegation for a small audience.

The Indologists grew increasingly anxious. Ohlenroth sent a third letter, expressing his indignant surprise at the legal proceedings initiated against the poem’s author. He was baffled by this modus operandi—the IV, after all, had already apologized—and informed ADA that they would leave the issue behind and proceed with the order of the day. ADA responded once more, repeating that they were not satisfied with the outcome, which had failed to restore their sense of nationalism and humanity.

Meanwhile, the influential Nederlandsch-Chineesche Vereeniging (Dutch-Chinese Association), which had so far remained silent on the matter, was contacted by Oskam to help generate broader media attention. Its secretary, Jim G. Drabbe (1897–1989), proved ill-disposed to provide assistance. In a tongue-in-cheek reply, he praised the sense of humour he had encountered in China and regretted that this characteristic had apparently remained uncultivated among the Chinese residing in the Netherlands.

At this point, the CHH was the only Asian student organization that remained sympathetic—or ‘loyal’, as the euphemism went—towards the Indologists. This had granted them little respect from the other groups, nor from some of their own members. Not even, as it turned out, from the IV itself. Its commissioner for administration, a certain Th. Mulder, requested a board meeting to assess their relations with the CHH. Some members had apparently proposed to invite the latter to a tennis tournament on the society’s premises, confirming the ‘good feelings in the IV towards the Chinese even after the controversial affair’. However, since the CHH had never previously been invited to the IV’s sports activities, it was eventually decided that ‘the suspiciously exaggerated pursuit of friendly contact’ would be tactless. The CHH was thus kept away
from the tennis court and the more radical organizations were not even mentioned. Blissfully unaware of their exclusion, the CHH remained reluctant to support the Action Committee. In response to a final request, they matter-of-factly announced that they would not participate.\(^\text{70}\)

On 4 June, a long reply came from the Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal (the Dutch Senate). Senator Professor David van Embden (1875–1962) condemned the poem but urged the activists to accept the IV’s apology.\(^\text{71}\) At the same time, the Gerechtshof (Court of Justice) in The Hague ignored all letters stating intent to prosecute the \textit{Indologenblad}.\(^\text{72}\) Yet despite these setbacks, the Action Committee persevered and organized another meeting on 13 June in Delft.\(^\text{73}\) A Chinese student discussed racism (\textit{rassenhaat}), spoke out in solidarity with the \textit{pinda-Chinezen}, and highlighted the need for stronger action. An Indonesian student expressed worries about the rise of fascism, including in the Netherlands, and proposed to establish an anti-imperialist people’s front. A Dutch student warned about a burgeoning local fascist organization: the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB, National Socialist Movement). Oskam clarified the legal context and predicted (correctly) that it would probably not come to a successful prosecution. He encouraged the Chinese to learn from the Jews in terms of defending themselves against bigotry. While the \textit{pinda-Chinezen} might experience an inferiority complex, he argued, there is no reason why Chinese students should have to conceal their excellence.\(^\text{74}\)

On 15 June, the activists sent a long reply to Van Embden. They appreciated his rejection of the poem but regretted his decision to consider the case closed. As they correctly pointed out, the IV’s apologies condemned neither the author nor the poem’s contents, focusing instead on the erroneous impressions it may have raised. The Indologists consistently referred to the poem’s author—whom the activists suspected to be John van Bodegom—as a student, rather than

\begin{footnotes}
\item[70] \textit{SPTI} press reports, p. 8. Incidentally, this rejection was written by the law student Tjoa Sie Hwie (1907–1979), who would later join the Indonesian parliament (Suryadinata 2015:345).
\item[71] \textit{SPTI} press reports, p. 13.
\item[72] \textit{SPTI} press reports, p. 16.
\item[73] \textit{Algemeen Handelsblad}, 14-6-1935, p. 14; \textit{Het Vaderland}, 15-6-1935, p. 1; \textit{Haagsche Courant}, 17-6-1935, p. 21.
\item[74] \textit{Delftse Courant}, 14-6-1935, p. 2. The meeting led to another motion, sent to the minister of colonies, the Dutch and Netherlands Indies press, and the Chinese envoy in The Hague, urging them once more to take action; see \textit{De Tribune}, 27-6-1935, p. 8; \textit{Delftse Courant}, 18-6-1935, p. 1.
\end{footnotes}
an aspiring civil servant destined to control some outer region of the Netherlands Indies. Equally problematic was the ‘justification’ that the poem was about *pinda-Chinezen*. To add insult to injury, the IV’s assertion that Chinese students could not understand irony reflected their condescending attitude at large. In the absence of further steps, it was feared, unrest among the Chinese would only increase, leading to more protest meetings. For the sake of public peace and order (*openbare rust en orde*), the Action Committee once again expressed hope that civil servants who disregarded entire populations could be prevented from entering positions of power.\textsuperscript{75}

Another public meeting was held on 20 June in Amsterdam, following the familiar format. A Chinese student highlighted the unsatisfactory response from the authorities. An Indonesian student connected the issue with anti-Indonesian racism in the Netherlands Indies. A Dutch student proposed to establish an anti-fascist student federation. Oskam explained the legal side of the story. The meeting was also translated into Chinese,\textsuperscript{76} indicating that the attempts to reach out to the *pinda-Chinezen* had borne fruit. One thus gets the impression that this meeting and the ones preceding it were quite successful on a grassroots level. Nevertheless, the evident power imbalance faced by the student activists proved hard to surmount. At no point could they convince more influential actors to fully join their cause, even though several individuals had expressed their moral support. In a debate that was never between equal partners, the present and future elites—chief among them the Indologists—showed themselves aloof and unwilling to commit to structural change.

5 \textbf{No Admittance for Chinese and Dogs?}

Slowly, the protest meetings lost momentum. Finances must have been a problem too. Money was raised through the sale of postcards depicting a peaceful Chinese dragon that was about to be killed.\textsuperscript{77} These cards were advertised as far as the Netherlands Indies.\textsuperscript{78} Dismissive attitudes of the Dutch authorities and a growing conviction—including within the Chinese community—that the IV’s apology was sufficient proved detrimental. Only a slinking minority among the students connected the normalization of colonial hierarchies to the rise of fas-

\textsuperscript{75} SPTI press reports, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{76} De Tribune, 25-6-1935, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{77} Unfortunately, we have not been able to find a specimen.
\textsuperscript{78} Sin Po Wekelijksche Editie 29, Hollandsch Supplement, 1935.
icism. To them, the issue at stake was the brutality of race relations, not their fragility, as the CHH and other moderates seemed to believe.\textsuperscript{79}

In the eyes of many an activist, the CHH had become the pinnacle of disappointment, especially in view of their slogan: ‘Unity among Chinese students in the Netherlands’\textsuperscript{80} The organization’s pan-Chinese responsibilities stood abandoned. Its leader, Tan Kian Hong, neglected to organize a meeting and stalled the one that eventually took place in Delft for six weeks. No CHH delegates attended the initial talks on 17 April. The activists assumed, probably correctly, that the CHH’s leaders feared for their own privileged positions. Although Tan Kian Hong had showed himself a formidable ally of the impoverished working-class Chinese in the Netherlands, he believed that anticolonial protests would imperil the situation of his supporters and especially their parents in the Indies. The SPTI and ADA, conversely, saw a much greater danger in allowing racism to fester unpunished. For them, the CHH’s inaction was proof that ‘colonial oppression has not missed its effects. These effects are expressed through a strong feeling of inferiority that many Chinese students have unfortunately not been able to overcome despite years of residence in Holland and Europe.’\textsuperscript{81}

Indigenous Indonesian students proved better allies. The PI had supported the movement from the beginning and planned to join the Action Committee.\textsuperscript{82} On 17 June, a joint meeting was co-organized in Leiden. It was chaired by Khoe Tjee Hie (1911–?), an engineer trained in Delft who represented an undercurrent within the CHH that pushed for more radical politics. Additional support came from CHH member Sie Soe Giang (1905–?), who later joined the PI in its resistance to the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands (Poeze 1986:311). Both advocated—unsuccessfully—to re-establish formal ties with the SPTI.\textsuperscript{83} Tjoa Sik Ien was the first to speak at this Leiden meeting, elaborating on the inadequacies of the IV’s apology. Even Professor Van Embden, he highlighted, had acknowledged the tastelessness of the poem. The next speaker, the Indonesian Sastro (presumably a pseudonym), compared the fate of the Chinese with...
that of the Jews in Germany. Oskam continued the discussion, elaborating on the legal and psychological sides of racism. A Dutch student named ‘De Jong’ closed the event by underlining—perhaps somewhat naively—the importance of mutual appreciation between Indonesian and Dutch nationalists.84

While the issue slowly faded from the Dutch press, it had jumped to Chinese-edited periodicals. In the *Ta Hsioh Tsa Chih* (Journal of the Intellectuals), journalist Phoa Liong An (1910–1977) explained in detail why the poem had been so hurtful. Its insults were not the biggest problem, as Chinese people were quite used to them. Worse was the way the authorities handled the situation. Prime Minister Colijn had completely neglected the possibility of discontinuing the author’s appointment, despite the obvious problem of sending out civil servants that were hostile to the people they would come to govern. But the most sinister thing, at least to Phoa, was the degree of dehumanization that oozed from the poem. It reminded him of the Netherlands Indies government, which often referred to Chinese individuals as ‘the Chinese’ rather than ‘the person’. It also brought back memories of telephone operators in the Indies, who would indifferently ask a person named Kim An ‘What’s a Kim An?’ Finally, it evoked memories of the sign ‘Chinese and Dogs no Admittance [sic!]’, which people remembered seeing in 1910s’ Shanghai (Phoa 1935:110).

Phoa Liong An hit the nail on the head. A frequent contributor to pro-Indonesian and pro-Chinese newspapers, he had been critical of Dutch colonialism for some time. As he keenly observed, comparing Chinese people to rabbits—to be restricted, caught, and hung—was part of a long tradition of colonial dehumanization. The infamous Shanghai sign formed an immensely powerful trope to epitomize white supremacy and mobilize people against it. Typically associated with the city’s Huangpu Park and cited as ‘No dogs and Chinese allowed’ (Bickers and Wasserstrom 1995), its significance was commonly denied or downplayed in Western newspapers. Some commentators asserted that the sign had been quickly removed, or that its existence was a communist hoax altogether. Others argued that there had been two separate signs placed near each other, one forbidding dogs and another forbidding Chinese.85 Yet nobody argued that the sign’s alleged contents were inaccurate, as Chinese (and dogs) were indeed banned from Shanghai’s public parks.86

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84 *Leidsch Dagblad*, 18-7-1935, p. 1. Once again, a short motion was drafted, circulated, and picked up by a number of Dutch newspapers (*Leidsch Dagblad*, 19-7-1935, p. 1; *De Tribune*, 25-7-1935, p. 3).

85 Eleanor M. Anderson, ‘Shanghai the unique: A curious and terrible city’, *The Register, Adelaide*, 24-11-1928, p. 5.

86 The Indonesian equivalent of this potent trope, *Verboden voor honden en inlanders* (No
colonial discourse abounded in comparisons of non-Europeans to animals, and for Phoa Liong An and other Chinese activists, this had clearly been the proverbial last straw.

One last rejoinder was published in the *Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih*. Its author, Tjhin Tjoeng Djie (1902?–1955), loathed the poem and the clumsy way the Indologists had dealt with the issue. Tjhin was a market economist, accountant, *Chung Hwa Hui Tsa Chih* editor, and prominent CHH member. He was outspokenly conservative, including in his refusal to use the name ‘Indonesia’ instead of the ‘Netherlands Indies’ (Van Galen 1989:45). Nevertheless, he made no efforts to defend the IV, detesting its differentiation between privileged students and low-wage labourers (*pindamannetjes*), which he pointed out resembled the hypocritical US policy towards Chinese immigrants. Yet he was equally unhappy with the SPTI’s portrayal of the poem as an incitement of violence, their smear campaign against its author, and their antipathy to Indologists in general. According to Tjhin, racism against Chinese—as even the *pindamannetjes* would testify—did not exist, at least not on the same level as racism against Jews. To continue their legal proceedings and pretend the apologies never took place was pointless and would only increase racial tensions. Van Embden’s reply proved that the Action Committee had lost all public sympathy. Nevertheless, as Tjhin conceded, Van Embden—himself of Jewish ancestry—would unlikely have been that easily satisfied had the insult been directed against his own people (Tjhin 1935:134).

Tjhin Tjoeng Djie had apparently read the SPTI’s letters, from which he correctly deduced that its members harboured Marxist sympathies. If anything, he asserted, that should make them sympathetic to their fellow socialist, Henri-Auguste Forel. The support these activists received from the Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij (SDAP, Dutch Social Democratic Workers’ Party) and the CPN worried him greatly. Tjhin did not shy away from scrutinizing the SPTI’s political affiliations, which had caused fissures with the CHH long before the incident took place. Although he found the strong reactions against

dogs and natives permitted), is to our knowledge first seen in post-independence newspapers (*Sin Po*, 15-11-1951, p. 2). If an officially sanctioned sign with those precise wordings had existed in the 1930s, it would have certainly been photographed and widely published, causing a scandal in the Netherlands Indies newspapers. However, and we believe this to be crucial, the Indies press contains many alternative examples of race-based exclusion, some of which expressed through differently phrased signs.

87 In reality, the SDAP offered little attraction to anticolonial Chinese and Indonesian students. While the party theoretically supported Indonesian independence, it made few concrete efforts to achieve this goal and opposed the PI at crucial moments (Poeze 1986:213–6, 245–7, 1988:lxxi).
the poem understandable, the SPTI had made a mountain out of a molehill (or, in the original Dutch, an elephant out of a mosquito). In his view, as in that of the Dutch authorities, communists were clearly exploiting the situation for their own advantage and at the peril of race relations. Thus, only one thing remained to be done: the Indologists should be forgiven, *sans rancune*. This had become the hegemonic view even in Chinese circles. If John van Bodegom was indeed behind the poem, the worst thing he may have got out of it was a firm scolding from his colleagues, who nevertheless continued to ensure his anonymity. As he was about to leave to the Indies anyway, one might even speculate that he was not the author but did not contest this allegation in order to protect the young Van Bockel. Regardless of the poem’s true authorship, the fear of the activists came true in November 1935, when John van Bodegom was indeed appointed as a civil servant in the Netherlands Indies.

6 A Strong Disloyal Current ...

The inability of the SPTI to forge durable alliances eventually led to its demise. Whether it was a lack of funding or simply the summer break, news about meetings and legal proceedings had diminished by July 1935. Correspondence between the SPTI and its allies had also stopped abruptly, suggesting that all matters were indeed considered resolved. The earlier warnings directed at the SPTI, that the vocal and relentless nature of their activism would decrease sympathy for their cause, appear to have materialized. The CHH played an additional role in undermining the anticlonal politics of more radical Chinese students, despite having spoken out against the poem earlier. Nevertheless, several CHH members loathed their association’s compliance. For some time, the Delft faction under the leadership of Khoe Tjee Hie and Sie Soe Giang continued to host open meetings for activists.

In August 1935, the SPTI’s remaining members forged new alliances through an event that targeted both Italian and Japanese fascism. The meeting was co-organized with the PI and two newly established left-wing organizations: the Bond van Surinaamse Arbeiders in Nederland (Association of Surinamese Workers in the Netherlands) and the Comité voor Abessynië (Committee for Abyssinia). The representatives were familiar faces in their respective organ-

88 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 22-11-1935, p. 3.
89 While he had been openly sympathetic to the SPTI, Khoe nevertheless managed to run for chair of the CHH in 1937.
90 *De Tribune* (2-8-1935, pp. 1, 8). See also Poeze (1986:259, 1994:1xxv) and the list of left-wing...
izations: Jantje Telegraaf for the Association of Surinamese Workers, Tjoa Sik Ien for the SPTI, and Soedario Moewalladi for the P1.91 The latter took issue with the visit of NSB leader Anton Mussert (1894–1946) to the Indies, where he had been received with great cordiality (cf. Mark 2020:199–202). The meeting was concluded with a joint slogan: ‘Indonesia and Suriname free from Holland, now!’ (Indonesië en Suriname los van Holland, nu!) (Poeze 1986:259, 1994:44). This was an exceedingly bold statement, with Hatta and Sjahrir now being interned in Boven Digoel. Their comrade Anton de Kom, too, had directed his attention to the Ethiopian cause, attending a conference on this issue held in Paris in May 1936 (Boots and Woortman 2009:233–4). A small number of activities followed. In September 1936, at the 28th World Peace Congress in Brussels, representatives of the P1 and the SPTI signed an anti-British resolution protesting their handling of the Palestine Mandate (Poeze 1994:132). In November that year, the SPTI invited Kuomintang’s left-wing leader Hu Hanmin (1879–1936), who was on his way to France, to speak about the dangers of Japanese imperialism.92

A final remark about the controversy was made by the CHH in February 1936, when the association celebrated its 25th anniversary. Tan Kian Hong, who had been appointed chair in the last quarter of 1935, gave an extensive review of the CHH’s history and political positioning in relation to other student associations. Its long-standing dispute with the P1 was also discussed. Towards the end of his speech, Tan stressed the foolishness of the poem and the understandably strong reactions it had provoked, yet he willingly conceded that its publication was an honest mistake. He assured his audience that the CHH cared for the wellbeing of the entire Chinese community; he was prepared to assume a stronger political stance should the need arise, yet SPTI membership remained impossible (Tan 1936:20). Another solitary reference to the controversy came in 1936 from the pen of A.H. van Kampen, a left-wing anarchist about whom little information can be found. In his monograph titled Beschaving zonder masker (Unmasked civilization)—which incidentally expressed high praise for Anton de Kom’s recently published Wij slaven van Suriname (We slaves of Surinam)—he casually dismissed the IV’s apology with the words: ‘But one should not lose

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91 List of left-wing labour organisations, 1-1936, Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, Jaarbericht 1936/B, p. 74.
92 De Tribune, 12-11-1935, p. 8.
sight of the fact that this apology was extorted by outrage from various quarters, while the editors had raised no prior objections whatsoever to the tenor of this offensive doggerel, hence its unreserved acceptance.

The SPTI vanished not long afterwards, especially after Tan Ling Djie and Tjoe Sik Ien returned to Indonesia to join the nationalist Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (Chinese-Indonesian Party) (Poeze 1994:1xx). The organization was last mentioned in January 1937 by the fascist newspaper Volk en Vaderland (People and fatherland). In an article titled ‘Red poison for the Indo-Chinese: Another umbrella organization?’; the SPTI was portrayed as a ‘strong disloyal current’ (sterke deloyale strooming) of the otherwise ‘law-abiding Chinese’ (gezagsloyale Chineezen). Predictably, the CHH was praised for their pro-Dutch attitudes, making them a model minority avant la lettre. Despite the CHH’s warm congratulations to the Dutch princess Juliana on her wedding, the organization had been excluded from the celebrations (just as it had been excluded from the IV’s tennis court). As the Volk en Vaderland editor asserted, the omission of such loyal subjects was shameful, as was the refusal of other newspapers to report about it. The SPTI members, by contrast, were seen as a peril. Mostly active in Delft and Amsterdam, they attempted to pick up freshly arrived Chinese students from the train or boat to commence their indoctrination. The SPTI’s collaboration with Chinese sailors and the influence of returnees to the Indies caused yet more fascist anxiety, as did their alliances with ‘the communist MP and former Digoel internee’ Roestam Effendi and G.C.A. Oskam, ‘whose political conviction is not doubtful for us either’. How much longer, the editor asked ominously, should we indulge these Chinese youngsters ‘who enjoy hospitality here, study at our colleges, and, as a token of gratitude, on their return to the Indies, act as propagandists for a separation campaign of the Indies from the Netherlands? […] To the next riot or something worse?’

The Yellow Peril controversy thus sparked a question that is still relevant: when does a joke turn sour? Did the Chinese students indeed blow matters out of proportion, as their detractors insisted? Had they truly failed to grasp

93 Maar men verlieze niet uit het oog dat dit excuus is afgeperst door de verontwaardiging van verschillende zijden terwijl overigens de redactie tevoren tegen de strekking van de gewraakte rijmelarij toch maar geen bezwaar had, getuige het zonder meer opnemen ervan’ (Van Kampen 1936:170, 196).

94 Volk en Vaderland, 29-1-1937, p. 5.

95 ‘het communistische Kamerlid en ex-Digoel-klant; wiens politieke overtuiging ook voor ons niet twijfelachtig is’. Note that Roestam Effendi was never interned in Boven Digoel.

96 ‘die hier gastvrijheid genieten, aan onze Hoogeschoolen studeeren en als blijk van erkenning bij hun terugkeer in Indië als propagandisten optreden voor een afscheidings-actie van Indië van Nederland […] tot een volgend oproer of nog iets ergers?’
the irony of the poem? Had it been written with ill intent, and how much does intent matter in the face of societal consequences? The IV’s defence pivoted around proclaimed innocence rather than critical self-evaluation, relegating any further discontent to the realm of the bizarre. They had issued a ‘nonpo-logy’ eight decades before the term was coined. Only the CHH’s critique—that the poem was ill-conceived, of inferior quality, insensitive, and regrettable—was deemed acceptable to the IV. This soft approach undoubtedly qualified the CHH as an organization formed of reasonable people with whom one could deal, especially since they had made no efforts to publicize the author’s name. The SPTI, by contrast, was dismissed as a fringe organization whose arguments were beneath notice. Their unwillingness to engage with the IV on the latter’s terms, their refusal to give them the benefit of the doubt, their insistence to speak on behalf of the entire Chinese community, and their frequent comparisons of Dutch institutions to Nazis had certainly made it easy to bar them from polite conversation. Divisions between the CHH and the SPTI, too, hampered firm action, so that the Chinese student activists ultimately failed to disrupt the colonial status quo at a structural level. Nevertheless, some of the most radical activists—along with an even greater number of moderates—obtained prominent careers upon returning to Indonesia and resuming their political activities there. Ultimately, their actions as students bore fruit in postcolonial times, when they found themselves reunited in parliamentary assemblies and political debates. This time around, their mission was a shared one: to advance the development of the Indonesian Republic.

7 Concluding Remarks

The early student activism highlighted in this article challenges persistent stereotypes of Chinese migrants as politically indifferent and loyal to the status quo. We hope therefore to have contributed to a growing academic interest in the nature of racism—in this case directed against Asians—in the Netherlands, the structures that continue to make it sustainable, and concrete examples of activism mobilized as a result. It is crucial, particularly amidst today’s Covid-induced Sinophobia, to understand the specific ways in which racism manifests itself against different groups of people. For those constructed as Chinese, the enduring fear of invasion and the resultant tropes of economic domination, pollution, and infection dovetails with more general dynamics of phenotypical difference, cultural otherness, and power imbalance. For other groups, such as Black people, Muslims, Jews, or Roma, the variables and anxieties that come into play are partly different.
Despite our attempts to outline a number of features of Asian-Dutch anti-racism, we realize that history never precisely repeats itself, rendering crude comparisons between the past and present historiographically suspect. The Internet has made contemporary activism less costly, time-consuming, and geographically restrained, yet it has also generated an incessant deluge of information, reducing humanity’s attention span to an unprecedented minimum. The world’s power structures have also shifted, although a respectable argument can be made that what is now called ‘white privilege’ has deep roots in colonial oppression. At best, we believe present-day anti-racism shows a degree of historical continuity. Recurring patterns reveal themselves in the way allies are mobilized, solidarities are forged, and internal struggles are waged. Apologies, too, remain highly informative in their omissions. Few come with guarantees to help erase the mindset that necessitated them in the first place. Rather, they often perpetuate—inadvertently or otherwise—the normalization of racialized power hierarchies by shifting the focus to innocent intentions, or alleged cultural differences in tolerable humour. Nevertheless, even though the majority of apologies did (and do) not lead to any real change, they send a clear message: bigotry comes with consequences. Continuity is also found in the observation that only the least radical factions of a movement receive credits for being ‘reasonable’. The CHH provides an obvious example. Its members were given the feeling that they mattered, yet they were never truly taken seriously (except by fascists).

In the first week of June 2020, the Asian-Dutch activists who had pressed legal charges against the radio station received a letter from the Openbaar Ministerie (Dutch Public Prosecution Service). While agreeing that the coronavirus song was insulting and offensive, the case was dismissed on legal grounds. Rather than wilfully wanting to hurt the Chinese, Lex Gaarthuis had intended to satirize society’s absurd responses to the Covid-19 outbreak. He had also apologized. The petition filed against him gained almost 58,000 signatures and more than 3,000 reports of discrimination, yet the authorities once again considered the case closed.97 Meanwhile, the attention of Dutch anti-racists had shifted to the brutal murder of George Floyd in the US, the international Black Lives Matter movement, and the (so far unsuccessful) removal of monuments glorifying the colonial past. These interrelated phenomena also drew support from Asian activists. While today’s anti-racist alliances are undeniably born out of solidarity, their 1930s’ precedents remain subject to different interpretations, including about the extent to which they were controlled by the Comintern. At the very least, the fact that SPTI members were closer to the PI and Anton de

97 Hui-Hui Pan and Vincent Yeers, ‘Weer krijgen Nederlandse Aziaten het gevoel dat zij niet worden gehoord’, de Volkskrant, 8-6-2020.
Kom than to their fellow Indies Chinese reveals that their activism had outgrown communalism. Although we have not (yet?) found unambiguous statements from Chinese activists—in the Netherlands or the Indies—condemning the oppression of, say, Black people worldwide, these early solidarities certainly deserve further attention and a place in the genealogy of anti-racism in the Netherlands.

In the interest of academically fruitful generalizations, we believe a comparison between the 1935 and 2020 instances of Asian-Dutch anti-racism would resemble the juxtaposition in Table 1.

Despite the IV’s assurance to pulp all April numbers of 1935, we encountered one version of the bound *Indologenblad* volumes in which the poem had not been removed. One can almost visualize a librarian’s decision to safeguard it for posterity. Similarly, the SPTT’s press releases of May to September 1935 cannot be found at the International Institute of Social History (IISG)—the most logical place to search for them—yet mysteriously surfaced at Leiden’s Digital Asia Library. This document presumably belonged to the library of the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (KIT, Royal Tropical Institute), which was forced to give up its collections in 2014. Thus, a stack of letters that the academic establishment would rather have seen forgotten—it was, after all, time to move on—ended up back in Leiden, the very cradle of the controversy. Their preservation against the odds enabled us to add a small chapter to the story of Asian-Dutch anti-racism, taking stock of how (little) things have changed. In the repetitive structures of normalized bigotry, anti-racist mobilization, social pressure, damage control, apologies (of a sort), dismissals, invalidation strategies, internal disagreements, and insistence to move on without wanting to commit to structural change, we find salutary lessons and ongoing relevance.

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| Variable                        | 1935                                                                 | 2023<sup>a</sup>                                                                 |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| background of activists        | ethnic Chinese from the Netherlands Indies; all university-educated; fluent in Dutch | Dutch people of (East) Asian background; typically highly educated; fluent in Dutch         |
| common allies                  | ‘indigenous’ Indonesians; Surinamese; left-leaning Dutch progressives | Dutch people of Asian, other migrant, or non-migrant backgrounds                            |
| common expressions of racism  | name-calling in the streets; dehumanization in the media; comparison to animals | name-calling in the streets; dehumanization in the media; culinary stereotypes; homogenization of all Asians |
| direct causes of racism        | racial otherness; tropes of invasion (yellow peril)                   | racial otherness; tropes of infection (Covid-19)                                            |
| ethnic positioning of the activists | Chinese                                                                  | generic Asian                                                                               |
| gender of the activists        | almost exclusively men                                                 | all genders, with a slight majority of women                                               |
| language of internal communication | Dutch (sporadically translated into Chinese)                           | Dutch (sporadically translated into English and/or Chinese)                                 |
| main target modes of outreach | a prestigious academic institution written or typed letters; public meetings | a popular radio station online media; mobilization through hashtags                          |
| nature of public participation | opinion pieces in mainstream media; organizing of, and participating in, public meetings | opinion pieces in mainstream and online media; creating support networks in the social media |
| political conviction of the activists | generally sympathetic towards communism                                 | generally left-of-centre                                                                      |
| response of the activists      | highlighting the racial slurs and racist motives behind the poem; mobilizing a pan-Chinese movement; forging alliances with other groups; initiating legal steps | highlighting the racial slurs and racist motives behind the song; starting an online petition; initiating legal steps |
| response of the mainstream media | coverage after three weeks                                             | coverage within a week                                                                        |
| response of the target         | justification of the poem as satire; accusing the activists of oversensitivity; issuing a modicum of internal sanctions; offering an apology after two weeks; expressing the expectation that matters are now resolved | stressing the humoristic intentions of the song; assuring that there was no ill intent; offering an apology within a week |
| role of Chinese migrant associations (shetuan) | supportive, but not agenda-setting; individual activists may belong to one or more associations | supportive, but not agenda-setting; individual activists may belong to one or more associations |
| social conditions              | direct colonialism; race-based laws; rise of fascism                   | legacies of colonial thinking; novel manifestations of racism                               |

<sup>a</sup> We base these insights on our personal acquaintance with a number of Asian-Dutch activists, articles in Dutch newspapers, and social media observations.
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