

# The Power of Translators in a Colonial Context: A Case Study of Dutch Interpreter Gustaaf Schlegel

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As Luc van Doorslaer (2018) argues, “translation is now studied as an instrument with political, cultural and/or linguistic impact” (p. 43). Furthermore, in multilingual societies “ideological interests collide and explicit or implicit power relationships develop, often as a result of the opposition between majority and minority populations” (p. 44). In this paper, I examine the power relationships of nineteenth-century European translators in Asia who were not only actively engaged in the interpretation of language and culture, but also (in)directly involved in politics. Often the choice and nature of the works and the style of translation were influenced by or had an impact on their historical context. As a case study, I investigate the output of Dutch interpreter Gustaaf Schlegel (1840–1903) who published extensively in the field of Chinese studies throughout his career. After completing his study of Chinese in the Netherlands and China, he gained work experience in the Dutch East Indies (present Indonesia), and eventually became professor of Chinese upon return in his home country. To better understand to what degree his work influenced colonial rule, in particular language policy, I will examine his major publications and translations that elucidate his interpretation of Chinese language and literature. My findings will shed light on the power of translators in a colonial context, with a special focus on their influence on language policies.

Van Doorslaer, Luc. 2018. “Turning Minorities and Majorities Upside Down.” In: *Translation and Global Spaces of Power*, pp. 39–56. Multilingual Matters.