

Language Policy in the Dutch Colony: On Sundanese in the Dutch East Indies *

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Introduction

The Sundanese people did not possess a single strong cultural and spiritual centre, as did the Javanese, in Jogjakarta and Solo.¹⁾ Traditional Sundanese society had *kabupaten* (the seat of local chief) as an administrative and cultural centre in every district. These centres, however, had never had strong influence over the whole of the Sundanese area: each authoritative power only covered a single district. This polycentrism provided a ready-made ground for a divide and rule policy for the colonizer. The foreign authority played a significant role which could integrate the whole Sundanese region: the colonial policy was quite successful. What the Dutch wanted was implemented without hostility or difficulties. Viewed from the perspective of the Colonial Government since the VOC period, the Priangan was of great importance for economic reasons, especially with regard to coffee cultivation.²⁾ Education for the people was of great significance in helping to keep the colonial administration moving, because the Government needed lower officials to intermediate between their own officials and the native Sundanese. Thanks to the great efforts of K.F. Holle,³⁾ and the afore-mentioned local conditions, the Colonial Government succeeded in imposing its language policy in the Sundanese area easily.

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- 1) I am indebted to Dr. Vincent J.H. Houben and Prof. H.M.J. Maier for reading the draft and making a number of helpful suggestions.
- 2) A more conservative economic policy was implemented in Priangan than other regions because there were few disturbances. See the following publications about the importance of Priangan for the Dutch: [Baardewijk 1986; Fasseur 1978; Knaap 1986].
- 3) Van den Berge is discussing Holle in greater detail in the first chapter of his dissertation about the involvement of Dutchmen in Sundanese language and literature [Berge 1993]. I wish to thank him for inspiring conversations and useful information.

Schooling/Schools

Language policy in the Sundanese area was formulated by a royal decree in 1848. The Governor-General prepared a special budget to establish schools for Javanese (including Sundanese), primarily intended to train indigenous officials. F.25,000 was set aside, half for a *kweekschool* (Teachers Training College) and the other half for establishing 20 *regentschaps scholen* (elementary schools) in the island of Java [AVSS 1853: 319-320]. At that time the difference between Javanese and Sundanese was not obvious to Europeans. Sundanese language was regarded as a mountain dialect of Javanese and the people were thought of as *bergjavanen* (mountainous Javanese). In September 1851, the first *kweekschool* was established in Surakarta. In this school, it was only after seven years that Sundanese began to be taught, to prepare for the *kweekschool* in Bandung which was opened in 1866 by the strong support of K.F. Holle.⁴⁾

The first elementary school (called *provinciale school*, after 1863 called *regentschapsschool*, and later *lagere school*) for the Sundanese was established in Cianjur in 1851, i.e. two years later than the first elementary school in Pati, Middle Java. At that time Cianjur was the capital of West Java. Three years later in 1854, the important government law (*Regerings-reglement art.125*) on indigenous education was enacted [AVSS 1854: 132]. The purpose of this law was, however, not an education for all children, but only for the children of the *fatsoenlijke* (decent) indigenous population. This education policy was administered till a new policy announced in 1871. In 1852 six elementary schools in West Java were established at Serang, Purwakarta, Bandung, Sumedang, Garut, Manonjaya, two years later at Cirebon and in 1863 at Ciamis, Kuningan, Majalengka and Indramayu. The number of students in these schools varied from 11 to 28. Meanwhile, the Dutch report counted 5,128 pupils in 224 Islamic schools in Priangan regencies in 1856, when only 116 pupils were attending seven Dutch schools [AVSS 1857: 12]. There were therefore more than 40 times more pupils in the Islamic schools. However, it was the intention of the Government to replace these indigenous schools.

In contrast, missionary schools were not promoted by the Government in West Java, particularly in Priangan at Holle's suggestion. He had an opinion that missionary activities should be avoided so as to avert conflict with Muslims whom he considered fanatic.

In 1871, the *grondslagenbesluit onderwijs* (decree on the principles of education) was gazetted: mass education in mother tongue started in earnest. As a result the number of elementary schools in Java and Madura sharply increased,⁵⁾ especially from 1872 to 1877, when it rose by one and half times. Compared with other regions in Java, the Colonial Government established more public schools in Priangan: West Java was considered more important for economic reasons, especially the *Prianger-Stelsel* (Priangan System) and proximity

4) In 1858 Mas Angabaja was recruited as Sundanese language teacher at the *kweekschool* in Surakarta [AVSS 1859: 3]. However, Sundanese education for the training Sundanese teachers at the *kweekschool* in Bandung was started in 1861.

5) By exception, in the 1880s the number of school did not increase much.

to Batavia as the European seat. Besides the *kweekschool* and elementary school, *hoofdenschool* (chiefs school), or among the people known as *sakola menak* (noblemen's school) in Sunda area, played an important role in propagating the Sundanese language. Its graduates were expected to be higher officials who would carry out colonial policy. The *sakola menak* was established in 1878 on the initiative of the Inspector for the indigenous education, J.A. van der Chijs.

In short, the basis of the education system was established by the turn of the century. The number of schools and pupils in the Sundanese-speaking area continually increased until the end of colonial rule. However, we should bear it in mind that western education was always limited to the local elite strata, not the village people. The percentage of literacy in society was still at a low level.

Schoolbooks

The education system helped to impose recognition of the language which was considered by the Dutch as *zuiver* (pure) Sundanese. Schoolbooks played a significant role in this. They were the prime medium to impose the will of the Dutch colonial authority. The first schoolbook in Sundanese was designed by the Dutch and printed in Holland in 1849 or 1850. To the Dutch East Indies 1,490 copies of this 24-page book were sent together with Javanese and Malay school books.⁶⁾ Except for this first schoolbook, most of the Sundanese schoolbooks which were used in government schools were printed in Batavia; mostly by the government printing house, *Landsdrukkerij in Weltevreden*. Table 1 below shows the variety in the language written for the schoolbooks [*VIO* 1867: 31-37].

Table 1 The Total Number of Schoolbooks in Java by 1865

	Javanese 19	Sundanese 20	Malay 23
Reading	11	18	18
Arithmetic	4	1	2
Geography	1	0	2
Land surveying	2	0	1
Language knowledge	1	1	0

Source: [*VIO* 1867: 31-37]

The total number of schoolbooks reached 62 titles and 180,000 copies in Java by 1865. Van der Chijs said that there was *veel kaf onder het koren* (much dead wood) among these schoolbooks. Sundanese ones were better as far as contents were concerned, he said, compared

6) Javanese books for reading and arithmetic were compiled by C.F. Winter and E. Schmid. The books had 3,990 copies [*AVSS* 1853: 320-321].

to Javanese and Malay books. Javanese reading books were mostly translations of European stories by a prominent official translator, C.F. Winter. The stories in the Malay reading books were strange to the indigenous people, because they contained many Christian elements which were not suited to them according to his evaluation. Sundanese reading books were better arranged with a variety of stories which were suited to Sundanese taste (*smaak van den inlander*) [VIO 1867: 32]. There were usually 2,000 to 3,000 copies of each. However, these books were not always widely read among the pupils because of the poor distribution system and their limited economic means did not allow them to buy them for themselves.

The opinion of another government official responsible for the Javanese, J.A. Wilkens, was taken as the standard for Sundanese schoolbooks by the Government about 1852. He said that schoolbooks should be practical (*praktisch*) and moralistic (*zedelijk*) [AVSS 1853: 368]. The government promoted publication of schoolbooks and designed curricula in elementary schools based on his advice. Table 2 shows the schoolbooks used in Priangan in the initial stage of indigenous education; half of them were in Sundanese and the other half in Malay [AVSS 1859: 13-14].

Table 2 Schoolbooks Used at an Elementary School in Priangan in 1858

	Sunda	Malay
Writing	1	1
Reading	2	1
Arithmetic	1	1
Geography	0	1
Law for the Dutch East Indies	0	1

Source: [AVSS 1859: 13-14]

In the *Javasche Courant* dated 21st of July in 1855, it was announced that the Government would award a prize of 1,000 Dutch guilders for a school reading book in Javanese. Then, three years later the same award was announced for a book in Malay. However, for Sundanese reading books a complete different arrangement was decided upon. In 1861 a decree pronounced that an amount of 1,200 Dutch guilders would be granted to K.F. Holle to arrange Sundanese school reading and learning books [AVSS 1861: 208]. Besides, the Government charged Holle's intimate Sundanese friend, Moehamad Moesa, who as *hoofdpenghulu* (an Islamic leader) was an influential figure for the people, with helping him produce these books. This statement is significant because it means that Holle possessed a monopoly for the Sundanese education. Holle seems to have had complete autonomy and also spent the money at his own discretion. Certain indigenous writers such as Moesa were chosen and commissioned by him, not the Government.

Short before the decree, Holle had submitted a report about Sundanese schoolbooks to the Government. It became the guideline for compiling and publishing them after 1860 [*ibid.*:

208-216]. This report is the most important one for Sundanese language policy during the nineteenth century. In it he proposed 16 kinds of the schoolbooks with the accent on moral teaching and insisted on the importance of promoting the Sundanese language. What Holle said was becoming the government official policy. Comparing Table 2 with Table 3, it is obvious that the regional language policy as a whole changed [VIO 1865: 30].

Table 3 Schoolbooks Used at the Elementary School in Bandung in 1863

	Sunda	Malay
Writing	2	0
Reading	6	2
Moral education	3	0
Letter writing	1	0
Arithmetic	1	0
Geography	0	1
Agriculture	1	0

Source: [VIO 1865: 30]

Comparison of tables 2 and 3 clearly shows that the publication of schoolbooks was based on the advice of Holle. Many Sundanese schoolbooks were written by Holle's companion, Moesa. They drafted curricula and schoolbooks for the Sundanese as they themselves thought appropriate. Through the spread of these schoolbooks, the ideas and ideologies of the Colonial Government, especially of Holle in the Priangan case, infiltrated into the people. Holle thought that it was wise to promote Sundanese instead of Malay. His fear of Islamic fanaticism and his odd patriotism for the 'original' Sundanese culture urged him to insist on this language policy. Meanwhile the Malay language had been always taught in Sundanese schools since the introduction of the Western education. Education amounted to bilingual teachings for the pupils. Firstly, Sundanese was promoted as a mother tongue, but secondly Malay was indispensable as a *lingua franca* and a language for acquiring practical knowledge. To obtain Western or modern knowledge Malay was more useful than Sundanese: Malay was already more widely used in Dutch East Indies society. In practice a schoolbook translated in Malay could be used for all schools in all the islands. The higher the level of education became, the more Malay and the less Sundanese was used. For instance, at the kweekschool in 1866/1867 in Bandung half the reading and writing in its curriculum was Malay and even reading and writing with Arabic script was taught [Commissie [1941]]. When considering language policy, even in a Sundanese speaking area, Malay has to be taken into account.

It can be said that a new phase in the development of Sundanese schoolbooks started after 1870. After 20 years since the introduction of the Dutch education system, the effort had born fruit only in a limited sense, because the education was given only to the higher stratum. More

Sundanese began to be able to read Latin script, even to read Dutch and translate it into Sundanese. Moesa's son and daughter compiled an arithmetic book, a letter writing guide and a Dutch conversation book as well as many translations and adaptations. These reading books added variety and brought refreshment to the schoolbooks, particularly as reading material. They provided their people with more Western stories in Sundanese than in their fathers' days. However, education and schoolbooks were still under the influence of Holle and Moesa. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Sundanese language policy was dominated by this small group. Their influence only disappeared after the establishing of the Commissie voor de Inlandsche School- en Volkslectuur in 1908. Meanwhile, another interesting point can be mentioned; Dutch school teachers began to write a new kind of schoolbooks. After 1880 these schoolbooks for reading and arithmetic started to replace the old schoolbooks; they were quite modern and presented a new method of learning. They were reprinted and used up to the end of the colonial period.

Printing houses which printed Sundanese books were hardly found outside Batavia in the second half of the nineteenth century. All publications were under control of the Government. These schoolbooks could impose an authorized language which was the product of the colonial policy. The establishment of the Commissie voor de Inlandsche School- en Volkslectuur meant an institutionalization of book publishing. Sundanese writers outside Holle's circle began to write books and publish them through this new institution. At the same time, control of the language became less strict: after 1910 a considerable number of local publishers appeared and produced non-official publications in Sundanese. The government censorship attempted to control these so-called 'wild' publications, but in fact, the language policy was less effective than before.

Script

The Sundanese made an earlier move to the use of Latin script than other regional languages in spite of Holle's insistence on Sundanese script. Even though Sundanese culture had a great manuscript tradition in Arabic and Sundanese scripts, Sundanese became adapted to the Latin script quite fast. After 1900 Sundanese script books were rarely printed; Arabic was hardly used in the government publications from the beginning.⁷⁾ Only in the 1860s do we find 11 books which were published in a combination of Sundanese and Latin scripts.⁸⁾ These books seemed to have been aimed at providing educational material for pupils at school and they were experimental in nature.

In fact, it was difficult for the pupils to read Sundanese in Latin script in the early years of the introduction of the European education. Sundanese and Arabic scripts were easier for them. Even Arabic script, so-called Pegon script, was easier than Sundanese script because of the

7) Arabic script books were mostly published by local publishers such as Sayyid Utman's printing house and they were often used in private (Islamic) schools.

8) They were printed in a two-page spread. The left page was in Latin script and the right was in Sundanese.

traditional schooling in Islamic school *langgar* and *pasantren*. For instance, a controller of the Banten regency protested against the education policy of the Government, in fact made by Holle. The controller said, "Nobody here can read the books in the Sundanese script, if books in Arabic script were sent to us, they would be read" [Steenbrink 1985: 10]. In peripheral regions such as Banten (where the controller lived), Karawang, Cirebon and Buitenzorg, a special arrangement was made in the curriculum with Latin and Arabic scripts and also Malay and Javanese languages, because Arabic script was still predominant and both languages were used besides Sundanese and sometimes even preferred [VIO 1867: 13]. However, Holle insisted that the Arabic script had to vanish from Sundanese education because of his fear of Islam.⁹⁾

Although Holle insisted on using Sundanese script as well as Latin, Latin script was promoted as the government choice as time went on. What could be the reason why neither Sundanese nor Arabic script was deemed suitable for printing Sundanese? A handbook *Palanggeran noeliskeun basa Soenda koe aksara Walanda* (Handbook of writing Sundanese in Dutch script) in 1912 written by Dutch and Sundanese language and education specialists provides the answers [Commissie 1912: 8-12]. It said that the Sundanese script contained sounds which were not used by Sundanese, because this script was a loan script adapted from Javanese and only high ranking people (*menak*) had been using it. Common people, however, did not. Meanwhile, Arabic script needed new letters and vowel signs on each syllable. The book concluded that using Dutch script made it easy to study Malay and Dutch as well. Added to this, it was said patriotically, "Sundanese in Dutch script is easy for other ethnic groups and foreigners who want to read Sundanese, thus, the Sundanese will be as respected as other ethnic groups when the books are well produced." Above all, from the economic point of view, the Latin script was *goedkoop* (cheap) in which to print books. This then raised the problem of how to transliterate Sundanese into *aksara Walanda*.

Transliteration and Spelling

The Dutch devised a system of transliteration from Sundanese and Arabic to Latin script. The attempt was made in accordance with the government language policy and stemmed from the necessity for the bible translation. In the process of the transliteration the characteristic vowel "eu" was always matter for debate. The discussion about this vowel gives an indication about the development of the spelling system.

In 1862, Holle already suggested using Latin script in certain cases, in spite of his strong preference of using Sundanese script, and also proposed an orthography. He pointed out the difference in sound between the so-called long pepet *eu* and short pepet *e*. A 'spelling dispute' between Holle and a missionary of the Nederlands Zending Vereniging, G.J. Grashuis, who became a lecturer in Sundanese in Leiden, ensued. In 1871 the Colonial Government

9) In spite of Holle's insistence, Arabic script was used at the same time for Malay language education even at the secondary education.

adopted Holle's transliteration of Sundanese. This was made on the basis of the spelling method created by the talented translator W.H. Engelmann, who was sent to the Dutch East Indies by the Nederlands Bijbel Genootschap [Holle 1871: 94]. Two years later a missionary of the Nederlands Zending Vereniging, S. Coolsma, published a manual of Sundanese using the authorized transliteration. The preface reveals how strong Holle's influence was on the Colonial Government at that time and the strained relation between Holle and missionaries. It says:

Hoogst aangenaam was voor mij het gunstig advies, door den Heer K.F. Holle, Adviseur honorair voor Inlandsche Zaken, over mijne handleiding uitgebracht aan de Ned. Ind. Regeering, hetwelk tengevolge had tegemoetkoming van de zijde der Regeering in de kosten der uitgave, - door mij bij dezen dankbaar erkend. Die ondersteuning legde mij de verplichting op mijne transcriptie van 't Soendaneesch, voor zooveel dit boekske aangaat, in overeenstemming te brengen met het systeem door de Regeering aangenomen. [Coolsma 1873]

[What gave me the greatest pleasure was the positive advice concerning my handbook that was submitted to the Government of the Dutch East Indies by Mr. K.F. Holle, Stipendiary Adviser on Indigenous Affairs, which resulted in the fact that the Government granted a subsidy for the cost of the publication, for which I am most grateful. That support has obliged me, as far as this booklet is concerned, to use my transliteration of Sundanese in accordance with the system adopted by the Government.]

In the 1870s and 1880s this orthography gained ground and found a secure foothold. In 1912, the Commissie voor de Volkslectuur (after 1917 also called Balai Poestaka) published the above-mentioned handbook for their Sundanese publications. After a while, in 1918 a Dutch government decree concerning *inlandsche talen* (indigenous languages) was issued. Eventually the Sundanese orthography was officially proclaimed [[Commissie 1918]].

In conclusion, some observations should be added. Language policy is a matter of choice: firstly the choice of a language, then the choice of its script and its spelling. The Dutch Colonial Government tried to implement its language policy in West Java, where they had many options. The Government made the decision that the local language in each region should be taught at school, e.g., Sundanese in West Java. However, as time went by and the level of education rose, Malay and Dutch were taught as well. Gradually the composition of the society was reflected in the overlapping pyramid of language. The top of the pyramid was Dutch, the second layer was Malay and the lowest one was Sundanese. This language pyramid roughly corresponded to the hierarchy of the colonial administration and it worked effectively. Viewed from a colonial perspective, it may be said that its Sundanese language policy succeeded. Meanwhile, thanks to their colonial language policy, the Dutch unintentionally provided the tools for 'modern' literature. These tools were script, spelling and printing technique and were initially engineered

for publishing schoolbooks, out of which 'modern' Sundanese literature started to develop.

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Bibliography

Abbreviations:

AVSS: *Algemeen Verslag van den Staat van het Schoolwezen in Nederlandsch-Indie*

VIO: *Verslag van het Inlandsch Onderwijs in Nederlandsch-Indie*

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