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The Decline of the Chinese Council of Batavia

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CHAPTER 7

THE FINAL YEARS OF THE CHINESE COUNCIL OF BATAVIA

On 10 February 1930, *Majoor der Chineezzen* Khouw Kim An was honoured for his twenty-five years as a Chinese officer in the festively decorated building of the Chinese Council. A large number of Dutch and indigenous officials were present to pay their respects to the major. Resident of Batavia P. H. Willemse had prepared a speech for the major, in which he thanked him for his many years of service. The resident in particular thanked Khouw for ending the disputes between the various Chinese ethnic groups in Batavia. H. Mouw, head of the Office for Chinese Affairs, expressed his admiration for Khouw and noted that he never shirked his responsibilities even in the face of the fierce criticism he had had to endure. The *patih* of Batavia read aloud the decision to grant Khouw the Golden Star for all his services, after which the medal was pinned on Khouw's chest.

A day later, Khouw and his wife held a reception in their mansion on the Molenvliet. Hundreds of guests came to congratulate the major and his wife. Among the guests were the vice-president of the Indies Council, high-profile members of the army and civil service, directors of banks and trading companies, members of the People's Council, indigenous and Chinese dignitaries, and ordinary members of the Chinese community. Such a high turnout underlined the fact that Khouw Kim An remained very popular and well-respected, not only in the Chinese community, but also in the rest of the city.⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴⁶ *Het Nieuws Van Den Dag*, 11 and 12 February 1930.

The colonial government's decision to officially resurrect the Chinese Council of Batavia even as it allowed the Councils of Soerabaja and Semarang to fade away made the Chinese Council of Batavia the only surviving body of the Chinese officers in Southeast Asia. The fragments above show that the chairman of the Batavian Council was still very popular and that the colonial government had made the right choice in reappointing him. It seemed very promising for the future of the Chinese Council of Batavia, but in this period, situations changed quickly.

The late 1920s and 1930s were marked by the effects of the global economic depression and an important change in colonial policy—namely, the shift from a progressive ethical government to a more conservative and even repressive colonial leadership. Meanwhile the indigenous movement radicalised and turned into a nationalist movement that disregarded ideological, religious, regional, and dialectical differences among its followers. Indonesian nationalists channelled the native population to national unity and mobilised them to work together towards a common goal: independence from the Netherlands within the foreseeable future. The following questions can be asked with regard to these developments: what was the position of the Chinese community in the struggle for independence, and did the Chinese officers play any significant role in the Indonesian nationalist movement or did they have to make place for the Chinese politicians who made their appearance on the scene? And how did the Chinese Council position itself in the Chinese community after its resurrection, and did the Chinese officers regain their important role in the Chinese community?

This chapter will first analyse the social and political developments in the 1920s and 1930s in order to show in what environment the institution of Chinese officers operated after its resurrection. It will examine whether the resurrected Chinese Council still functioned as it had in the past, and whether it retained its vital position in the Chinese community or whether it was snowed under by the sociopolitical developments in this turbulent period.

7.1 The political climate in the 1920s and 1930s

In the early twentieth century the emancipation of non-Western groups in the Dutch East Indies was in full swing. Among the indigenous people, this development led to the foundation of emancipative organisations along ethnic, professional, and religious lines. The colonial government, still in its ethical phase, welcomed the establishment of indigenous cultural societies, labour unions, and youth organisations. It saw the “native awakening” as the successful culmination of its policy of introducing the native people to Western civilisation. Progressive colonial thinkers and liberal politicians were elated to see the successful results of the Ethical Policy and called for the implementation of more reforms so that the colonial state could develop in the direction of self-governance under Dutch guidance and according to Western ideas. The progressive diplomat J. P. Graaf Van Limburg Stirum, who assumed the post of governor-general in 1916, was enamoured of the thought that a new era had begun in the East. At the same time, he was under pressure from certain Dutch politicians and new indigenous community leaders who reminded him that Europe’s political problems might affect the Indies. The revolutions in Austria, Hungary, Germany, and other parts of Europe demonstrated that governments that relied on the military, censorship, restrictions on associations, and the imprisonment and banishment of political enemies could easily be overthrown by well-orchestrated revolutions. The vernacular press also pressed for more political reforms to prevent the European *toestanden* (conditions) from happening in the Indies. In addition, Van Limburg Stirum also was faced with a host of problems including severe food shortages, an outbreak of the Spanish influenza, an unruly labour force, mutinous soldiers and sailors, and growing discontent among the population. Times were stirring and the governor-general felt he had to show willingness to make far-reaching decisions towards reform.⁸⁴⁷

In two public statements by his spokesman in the newly installed *Volksraad* on 18 November and 2 December 1918, Van Limburg Stirum declared that the colonial government was

⁸⁴⁷ Van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War*, 591–98.

about to alter its course by vesting more power in the People's Council and establishing a review committee to advise the colonial government on how to reshape state-structures in the Dutch East Indies. The statements of the governor-general came to be known as the “November Promises”. Presided over by the president of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands Indies J. H. Carpentier Alting, the committee presented its proposals nearly two years later.⁸⁴⁸ Its sweeping reforms were intended to make the Dutch East Indies an independent entity of the Dutch monarchy through the transfer of administrative and legislative responsibilities from the motherland to the colony. This transfer of responsibilities called for the democratisation of central and local authority in the Indies that could be realised with the establishment of a national council and a number of local councils with co-legislative and administrative powers. Members of these councils were to be directly elected by the people. It was stated that only when the indigenous people were allowed more participation in the Indies government structure a far-reaching process of decentralisation was possible. The committee also considered that the natives should be eligible for positions in the Binnenlandsch Bestuur, even the post of governor-general. Any differentiation in race and descent had to be eliminated and competence was to be the only criterion for a government position.⁸⁴⁹ With these progressive proposals, the committee acknowledged the co-equal interests of every member of the Indies society. It seemed like the days of autocratic colonial rule in the hands of Dutch administrative officials and the native aristocratic elite were numbered and a modern and democratic colonial state was about to take over.

But appearances were deceptive, even in the Dutch East Indies. The “November Promises” of Van Limburg Stirum and the proposals of the Carpentier Alting Committee created a storm of outrage in the Netherlands. Even Dutch people in the Indies who viewed the nationalist movement with some degree of sympathy and who were not averse to greater political independence

⁸⁴⁸ Burgers, *De Garoeda en de Ooievaar*, 172–73.

⁸⁴⁹ Van den Doel, *Afscheid van Indië*, 29–31.

interpreted the proposals as far too revolutionary. Dutch politicians and the press accused Van Limburg Stirum of being spineless, of succumbing to pressure exerted by the indigenous nationalists, and even of losing his mind.⁸⁵⁰

When the extremely conservative Simon de Graaff became minister of colonies in 1919, he turned down the Carpentier Alting Committee proposals instantly and submitted his own proposals for administrative reforms. These included the establishment of provincial and regency councils, which in practice would be given hardly any say. Dutch administrative officials would still hold key positions at every local administrative level. Carpentier Alting and other sympathisers of a modern and democratic colonial state were disappointed with the conservative course in Dutch colonial policy and warned that De Graaff's proposals would cause unrest among the indigenous people, who had already begun to show signs of dissatisfaction about their inferior status in colonial society. Nonetheless, the proposals were approved by the majority of the parliament.⁸⁵¹ In 1921, D. Fock was appointed as the new governor-general. He was a former minister of colonies and a declared opponent of the "November Promises" and it was no surprise that he made no effort to win the trust of the indigenous nationalist leaders. He tried to restrain their political activities by tightening control over their organisations and meetings and by expanding police surveillance. He also increased taxes and implemented a rigorous austerity policy that especially affected education and health care. The new governor-general was popular among the Dutch in the Indies, who had begun to feel that their position and safety were under threat.⁸⁵²

At the same time, ties with the indigenous upper-class (*priyayi*) and feudal rulers were also strengthened. The strong belief that there was a fundamental difference between the East and West, which could not be bridged by the association principle, led to an idiosyncratic respect for native culture in Dutch circles. The colonial administrators became more and more convinced that the

⁸⁵⁰ Van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War*, 604.

⁸⁵¹ Van den Doel, *Afscheid van Indië*, 33–34.

⁸⁵² Burgers, *De Garoeda en de Ooievaar*, 177–79.

Indies was still an agrarian country that upheld traditional values and lived under the leadership of traditional institutions. They feared that if a small group of urban nationalists introduced Western values and democratic concepts too hastily, this would disrupt society and create complete chaos. Therefore, the Dutch colonial administrators chose to fall back on the traditional *volkshoofden* (native chiefs) as a countervailing power. The *priyayi* were reinstated as leaders of the indigenous people and guardians of traditional values and institutions. Hence, the Dutch East Indies remained a colonial state autocratically ruled by paternalistic Dutch colonial administrators and native feudal chiefs.⁸⁵³

The shift in colonial policy was not so much a direct result of native emancipation per se as by the speed with it had progressed. In a very short time, a pioneering nationalist movement had emerged from the new political ambitions of the native people. A growing number of indigenous people were pursuing Western education in the Indies and the Netherlands and discovering that the great archipelago that constituted their country was ruled by a very small country, and that this country—the Netherlands—owed its own independence to a revolt and a long war against foreign oppression. They also learned about the French Revolution and the American War of Independence and how before the arrival of the Dutch colonisers great indigenous cultures had created such magnificent structures as Borobudur. They learned of powerful and prosperous indigenous kingdoms of yore such as Srivijaya and Majapahit. At the same time they became aware that colonial society was highly stratified and that the indigenous people had been deliberately placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Differentiation in legal status, limited access to the better jobs and all but no access to higher administrative positions, and other forms of discrimination and humiliation conflicted with everything they had learned at school.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 178; Van den Doel, *Afscheid van Indië*, 35–38.

⁸⁵⁴ Burgers, *De Garoeda en de Ooievaar*, 154–55.

The desire for equal rights and status led to clear-cut nationalism. For the first time the message was sent out that all native inhabitants of the archipelago were part of one Indonesian nation (*bangsa Indonesia*). The two most prominent proponents of the concept of *bangsa Indonesia* were Mohamad Hatta, chairman of the Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia (PNI Baroe), one of the leading non-cooperative nationalist parties at the time, and K. S. Soekarno, the leader of the pro-independence party Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI). Soekarno in particular was a captivating and moving speaker and as a gifted spokesperson for Indonesian independence, he managed to bring the masses under his spell. Crowds of people were drawn to the meetings at which he articulated their silent grievances. He intrigued his audiences with the idea of an independent state in which they would no longer be suppressed.⁸⁵⁵ In 1927 Soekarno managed to bring the divergent factions of the nationalist movement together into a single federation, the Permoefakatan Perhimpoean-Perhimpoean Politik Kebangsaan Indonesia (PPPKI, or Federation of Political Associations of the Indonesian Nation). Although it was a very loose organisation and a weak alliance of urban middle-class politicians, Islamic leaders, and leftist front men of the urban and rural proletariat, it was the first time that all participating modern organisations explicitly subscribed to the view that Indonesia should gain independence from the Dutch.⁸⁵⁶ With the *Soempah Pemoeda* (Youth Pledge) on 28 October 1928 the Indonesian youth followed suit.

In the meantime the Indonesian nationalist movement was out to openly confront the colonial government, which was demonstrated by the ill-fated communist uprisings of November 1926 in West Java and January 1927 in West Sumatra. Soekarno continued his anti-colonialist and pro-independence agitation in gatherings behind closed doors, but also in public meetings where he demanded independence for the Indonesian people and ridiculed the colonial authorities. When rumours of mutinous actions began to circulate at the end of 1929, Governor-General De Graeff

⁸⁵⁵ Niel, *The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite*, 228–29, 236–37.

⁸⁵⁶ J. Pluvier, *Indonesië: Kolonialisme, Onafhankelijkheid, Neo-Kolonialisme: Een Politieke Geschiedenis van 1940 tot Heden* (Nijmegen: Socialistische Uitgeverij Nijmegen (SUN), 1978), 26.

took firm action. In a series of raids throughout Java Soekarno and other key PNI leaders were rounded up. Soekarno was convicted to four years of imprisonment.

Nevertheless, Soekarno remained very popular and after his release he became the political leader of Partindo (Partai Indonesia).⁸⁵⁷ But the political climate had turned very repressive after Governor-General B. C. de Jonge took office in September 1931. De Jonge showed no sympathy for the nationalist movement and reminded the nationalists time and again that the Dutch had been in the Indies for 300 years and that they would remain in the Indies for at least another 300 years. He made it clear that Indonesian independence was taboo for the colonial government and warned that any political activity raising this issue beyond the People's Council would meet with the available means of suppression.⁸⁵⁸ This warning was put in effect in 1932 when De Jonge ordered governors and residents to take strong action against political meetings in which people were encouraged to challenge colonial policy. The police was given more power to stop and prevent inflammatory meetings and agents of the political intelligence service (*Politieke Inlichtingendienst*) were called upon to infiltrate and disrupt meetings. Especially the meetings in which Soekarno delivered speeches to a mass audience were under close scrutiny. In 1933 the colonial government decided that Soekarno posed a serious threat to colonial rule and on the first day of August that year he was arrested for the second time and subsequently banished to the island Flores. A few months later the authorities prohibited all meetings organised by Partindo and PNI Baroe, and in 1934 Hatta and other prominent nationalist leaders were arrested too and exiled to Boven-Digoel in New Guinea.⁸⁵⁹

As the non-cooperative wing of the nationalist movement was under close government surveillance, the nationalists had no other choice than to adopt a different approach to attain independence for Indonesia. In this period the People's Council became increasingly important

⁸⁵⁷ The PNI dissolved itself in 1931.

⁸⁵⁸ Burgers, *De Garoeda en de Ooievaar*, 218.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 224–28.

because only on this political platform it was more or less possible to declare oneself in favour of independence. Bereft of its leaders and subject to constant police harassment, Partindo dissolved itself in 1936. PNI Baroe continued to exist but withered as its leadership was sent into exile to Boven-Digoel twice. The remaining nationalists formed new parties, while other political parties merged to form new alliances. The aims were full political rights and the establishment of a democratic government system, although the ultimate goal remained independence. The parties sought to open the dialogue with the Dutch, but the colonial government continued its conservative course and even rejected moderate proposals for more autonomy, such as the Soetardjo petition.⁸⁶⁰ The calls and appeals for more autonomy, a parliamentary government, and the right of self-determination were all to no avail. With the Second World War in full swing, the Dutch announced that as long as they had ultimate responsibility for the Netherlands Indies, no political concessions would be made.⁸⁶¹ The colonial government had gone a long way since the announcement of the Ethical Policy by Queen Wilhelmina in 1901; a path that ended up in the opposite direction.

The political activities of the Indies Chinese and their role in the Indonesian nationalist movement

Even though Leo Suryadinata has analysed peranakan politics on Java very thoroughly, it remains necessary to give the political activities of the Indies Chinese another moment's thought. Since the turn of the twentieth-century Chinese emancipation in the Dutch East Indies manifested itself in the establishment of cultural societies, economic organisations and educational institutions. Political activities had not fully developed yet. The Indies Chinese were not much imbued with politics and were preoccupied with cultural revival and improving Chinese trade and education. Their limited involvement in the political sphere is revealed by very modest participation in the lower-level

⁸⁶⁰ J. Pluvier, *Zuidoost-Azië: Een Eeuw van Onvervulde Verwachtingen: Van Bonifacio tot Habibie* (Breda: De Geus, 1999), 113–18.

⁸⁶¹ Burgers, *De Garoeda en de Ooievaar*, 242.

colonial administration, but this had less to do with a lack of interest than with government restrictions imposed on non-European candidates. The number of Chinese running for municipal, regency, and provincial councils was limited by quotas, financial status, and Dutch literacy requirements. The city council was basically a European administration. Between the years 1905–29, there were 173 European members compared with 67 Indonesians, 19 Chinese, and 10 other Foreign Orientals. Indonesians held a majority in the regency councils, whereas in the provincial councils the Europeans and Indonesians shared the membership majority.⁸⁶² The restrictions imposed on Chinese candidates may have kept their interest in politics minimal.

But gradually the Indies Chinese awoke from their slumber. Cautious steps towards political awakening were first reflected in the Chinese press. In the first decade of the twentieth century Chinese-Malay newspapers were little more than advertising journals with a local character; advertisements and serial stories of translated novels predominantly filled the newspapers. Only limited space was devoted to news, which was mostly translated from Dutch newspapers. In the next decade newspapers began to cover both local and international affairs, including the Indonesian nationalist movement. In the 1920s and 1930s, the newspapers underwent further transformation and became more complete in terms of content.⁸⁶³ *Sin Po* is an example of a newspaper that developed from an idle journal to one of the most influential newsmagazines in the Dutch East Indies. Supporters of *Sin Po* were organised in the Sin Po Group and its anti-Dutch and pro-China stance has been analysed in previous chapters.

The pro-Indies group led by H. H. Kan that found a platform in the People's Council to protect Chinese group interests in the Indies established the Chung Hwa Hui (Chinese Association,

⁸⁶² Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 123–24.

⁸⁶³ Kwee, *Beknopt Overzicht der Chineesche Geschiedenis*, 199–202, 215–19; Suryadinata, *Etnis Tionghoa dan Nasionalisme Indonesia*, 36–45.

CHH) in 1928.⁸⁶⁴ The decision to found this political party stemmed from a feeling of being powerless in the People's Council. As they formed a minority in the council, the Chinese members did not feel they could achieve much and that the government ignored them. To be able to push through their proposals, they needed the backing of a strong organisation or political party.⁸⁶⁵ Another reason connected with this was the feeling that their position in colonial society was at stake. According to leading figures in the peranakan community such as Kwee Tek Hoay⁸⁶⁶, peranakan Chinese were losing ground in areas they once dominated. Automobile and bus companies, printing offices, agricultural enterprises, drinking water companies, batik factories, and rice-mills were little by little taken over by totoks, while the peranakans had to compete with the Indo-Europeans and indigenous people. Those population groups were able to handle the competition because they were backed by organisations that looked after their interests. The peranakans did not have an effective organisation that defended their interests.⁸⁶⁷

With the foundation of the first peranakan Chinese political party in the Netherlands Indies, the Indies Chinese finally made their way to the political arena. Under the presidency of H. H. Kan, the CHH strove to attain equal status with the Europeans. In order to achieve this, the party conveyed that it was important to accept the Dutch Subject Law so that the Indies Chinese could engage in local politics. Since only Dutch subjects were allowed to openly take part in political activities in the Indies, the CHH opened its membership exclusively to Indies-born Chinese (mainly peranakans). Foreign-born Chinese (mainly totoks) were only eligible for associate membership

⁸⁶⁴ The Chung Hwa Hui (CHH) originated from the Chung Hwa Hui Nederland, which was an organisation of peranakan Chinese students studying in the Netherlands. The students were dissatisfied with the inferior "Foreign Orientals" status of the Indies Chinese and strove for equality of status with the European group.

⁸⁶⁵ Setiono, *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik*, 479–80.

⁸⁶⁶ Kwee Tek Hoay was a prolific peranakan writer of novels, drama, and philosophical and religious works. He was also known as the founder of a theosophical association called Tridharma, in Batavia in 1932. See Suryadinata, *Tokoh Tionghoa and Identitas Indonesia*, 39–61.

⁸⁶⁷ Suryadinata, *Tokoh Tionghoa and Identitas Indonesia*, 48.

without voting rights.⁸⁶⁸ This approach was in flat contrast to that of the policy advocated by *Sin Po*, which insisted on the importance of keeping one's Chinese nationality because it would only be a matter of time before China would attain the stature of a world power. Once China was able to compete with the other powerful nations, it would be in a position to demand equal status for the Indies Chinese, just as the Japanese received equal status in 1899.⁸⁶⁹

The CHH found most of its supporters among Dutch-educated, middle-class peranakans, but according to Kwee Tek Hoay the party was in general not very popular among the Indies Chinese. The party published little, did not run a proper propaganda machine, and rarely held meetings with Chinese intellectuals to discuss topical matters, and when it did organise a meeting, Dutch was the official language, which kept away people who were not proficient in Dutch.⁸⁷⁰

In 1932, another peranakan political party was founded. The Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (Chinese Indonesian Party, PTI) represented the Indies Chinese who sided with the Indonesian nationalists and supported the call for a future independent Indonesian state. The most prominent founder of the party was journalist Liem Koen Hian, who believed that the destiny of the Indies Chinese was tied up with the Indonesian nationalists and maintained that the peranakan Chinese were not guests in the archipelago, but permanent residents who were part of the Indonesian nation. He therefore demanded equality of rights and obligations with the indigenous Indonesians. Although Liem aimed to reorientate the peranakan Chinese to their country of birth, he did not advocate a total assimilation into the indigenous society. Peranakans should be free to preserve their cultural and religious values, as long as they saw themselves as sons and daughters of the Indonesian nation and carried out all the obligations as *Indonesiers*. He thus challenged the strictly

⁸⁶⁸ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917–1942*, 28–43.

⁸⁶⁹ Suryadinata, *Tokoh Tionghoa and Identitas Indonesia*, 10.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 54.

ethnological concept of *bangsa Indonesia* maintained by the Indonesian nationalists, which included only indigenous Indonesians in the Indonesian nation.⁸⁷¹

Suryadinata has considered the question of the extent to which the Indies Chinese were involved in the Indonesian nationalist movement. Still, it is worth summarising the matter to complete the contextual framework in which the Chinese Council of Batavia operated. It is important to note that only a small number of Chinese was actively involved in Indonesian nationalist parties. Most Indies Chinese silently supported the CHH because only this party represented their interests; Chinese nationalism was too extreme and the Indonesian nationalists had made it clear that the Indies Chinese were not part of the Indonesian nation. Ideological differences also played a significant role. Not many Chinese were interested in joining the Sarekat Islam because only a few had converted to Islam and the association's origins lay in protecting indigenous commercial activities against Chinese business interests. The Indische Partij (Indies Party), the Indische Sociaal Democratische Vereeniging, (Indies Social Democratic Association) and the Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party, PKI) also failed to attract the Chinese, many of whom were traders and craftsmen who considered these parties' Marxist programs too radical.⁸⁷² But most Indies Chinese refrained from engaging in political matters because they were aware that they formed a very small and vulnerable group in Indies society. It was safer to focus on their own communal interests.

Of the three main Chinese political organisations, *Sin Po* and the PTI were closest to the Indonesian nationalists. The PTI had basically set the same goals as the Indonesian nationalists, which made them natural allies. *Sin Po* was sympathetic toward the Indonesian nationalist movement because it reasoned that the Indonesians and mainland Chinese were in the same boat; both were occupied to a greater or lesser extent by foreign powers.⁸⁷³ Solidarity was also endorsed

⁸⁷¹ Suryadinata, *Pemikiran Politik Etnis Tionghoa 1900–2002*, 87–94.

⁸⁷² Suryadinata, *Etnis Tionghoa dan Nasionalisme Indonesia*, 123–29.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*, 59–60.

by Soekarno, who wrote in his article “Indonesianism and Pan Asianism” that any defeat suffered by the imperialists, no matter in which part of the world, meant a victory for the Indonesians, and that any defeat suffered by the people under imperialist regimes meant defeat for the Indonesians.⁸⁷⁴ The CHH showed some sympathy to the Indonesian nationalist cause but could not really relate to it to the same extent as *Sin Po* and the PTI. The party was Indies-orientated and the social and economic position of its members relied on Dutch rule. *Sin Po* and the PTI, although not agreeing on the ultimate destiny of the Indies Chinese, teamed up against the CHH and labelled the party as “the enemy of the Indonesian nationalists”, “friend of the colonialists”, and “friend of the association of Chinese officers”.

Soekarno's theory about Pan-Asian Nationalism notwithstanding, most Indonesian nationalist parties—even Soekarno's PNI—did not admit the Chinese as full members. Article 4 in the party constitution stated that only native Indonesians were eligible for membership. Other Asians were only admitted as associate members.⁸⁷⁵ Soekarno saw the Chinese as fellow Asians who battled against the same type of enemy and it sufficed when the Chinese and Indonesians worked together. According to him, the moral support of a different ethnic group that looked at the Indonesian struggle for freedom more objectively was much more valuable than incorporating the Indies Chinese as *Indonesiërs*.⁸⁷⁶ Later on, Gerindo (Gerakan Rakjat Indonesia, or Indonesian People's Movement), which was founded by former Partindo members in 1937, was one of the few Indonesian nationalist parties that accepted peranakans—whether peranakan Chinese, Arabs, or Indo-Europeans—as full members. Amir Sjarifoeddin, one of the founders of Gerindo, stated that someone's nationality was not determined by blood, skin colour or the shape of one's face, but by one's life goal (*toejoean*), destiny (*nasib*), and desire (*kainginan*). People who share the same life

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁸⁷⁵ Suryadinata, “Pre-War Indonesian Nationalism and the Peranakan Chinese”, 86–88.

⁸⁷⁶ Suryadinata, *Tokoh Tionghoa and Identitas Indonesia*, 34.

goals, destiny, and desires could be termed as one nation. Upon hearing that Gerindo accepted peranakans as full members, Liem Koen Hian immediately left the PTI and joined Gerindo.⁸⁷⁷

Although most Indonesian nationalist parties placed restrictions on ethnic Chinese membership, joint efforts to organise anti-Dutch campaigns did exist, as in the soccer boycott that took place in Surabaya in 1932. The boycott was inspired by a press release of the Nederlandsch Indische Voetbal Bond (Dutch Indies Football Union, NIVB) which announced that members of the Indonesian and Foreign Oriental press were not welcome to cover the upcoming football match in May because the “coloured people” always spoke ill of the NIVB. The football match was a *Steden Wedstrijd* (a match between football teams from different cities), which were usually organised by the NIVB and its Indonesian and Chinese partners, the Persatuan Sepakraga Seluruh Indonesia (Football Union of Indonesia) and the Hwa Nan Voetbalbond (Hwa Nan Football Union). The person behind the press release was a Dutch journalist from *D'Orient*, a football weekly under the editorial leadership of A. Zimmerman, a member of the conservative Vaderlandsche Club, which sought stronger ties between the Netherlands and its colonial possessions. Led by Liem Koen Hian, the peranakan press threatened to boycott the match and all other upcoming matches. His action found wide support and forty indigenous, Arab, and Chinese political parties and sports associations organised a boycott of soccer matches in an action that Liem and the Indonesian nationalists used to convey their political ideas and condemn Dutch colonialism.⁸⁷⁸

There were also close ties between the Indonesian nationalists and the Chinese-Malay press, and several Indonesian nationalists used the Chinese newspapers to spread their ideas. They considered the Chinese press a safe platform to voice their thoughts because the Indonesian newspapers were subject to more intense government surveillance. Even though *Sin Po* stood for Chinese nationalism, it was not aloof from the Indonesian nationalist movement. It maintained

⁸⁷⁷ Suryadinata, *Etnis Tionghoa dan Nasionalisme Indonesia*, 142.

⁸⁷⁸ Bayu Aji, *Tionghoa Surabaya dalam Sepak Bola 1915-1942*, 112–14.

warm relations with Indonesian nationalists such as Soekarno and reported every important event in their struggle with the Dutch. In addition to *Sin Po*, *Keng Po*, *Sin Tit Po*, and *Pewartar Soerabaja* also provided extensive coverage of the Indonesian nationalist movement from the foundation of Boedi Oetomo, the PNI, and the PPPKI, to the day of *Soempah Pemoeda*, and of course the arrests of prominent nationalist leaders and their trials.

Indonesian nationalists were also inspired by *Sin Po*'s ardent advocacy of Chinese nationalism. It was this kind of spirit that Indonesian magazines and newspapers needed to effectively spread the message of nationalism and reach the ultimate goal of independence from the Dutch. When Soekarno was still a student at the *Technische Hoogeschool* in Bandoeng he already maintained close relations with leading *Sin Po* figures, including chief editor Tjou Boe San.⁸⁷⁹ Many prominent Indonesian journalists had also been apprentices at Chinese newspapers, which were in many respects more developed than the Indonesian press. Many had their own printing offices and had better managerial and financial systems in place.⁸⁸⁰ For Chinese newspapers that were sympathetic to the Indonesian struggle for independence, Indonesian journalists were indispensable, and most were involved in the nationalist movement themselves and understood better than anyone else the activities and spirit of the nationalist movement. Among the more prominent of them were D. Koesoemaningrat, Saeroen, and W. R. Soepratman—who composed *Indonesia Raya*, the national anthem of Indonesia.⁸⁸¹ The fact that the Chinese were not allowed full membership of Indonesian nationalist parties did not affect the close cooperation between the Chinese press and the nationalists. Only *Sin Tit Po*, the mouth piece of the PTI protested against the exclusion of *peranakan* Chinese from most Indonesian political parties.

⁸⁷⁹ Kwee, *Beknopt Overzicht der Chineesche Geschiedenis*, 221–22; Suryadinata, *Tokoh Tionghoa and Identitas Indonesia*, 12; Wahid, “Modal Cina dan Nasionalisme Indonesia”, 105–106.

⁸⁸⁰ Suryadinata, *Etnis Tionghoa dan Nasionalisme Indonesia*, 56–57.

⁸⁸¹ *Sin Po* was also the first newspaper to publish the text of *Indonesia Raya*.

7.2 The three political streams and their strongholds

The public land sales in Batavia not only had strengthened the position of the Chinese Council, but had left a positive mark on the integration of the peranakan Chinese in both urban and rural regions of the residency as well. The stereotype of the Chinese deriving their profits from trading activities has largely obscured their pioneering role in opening up the Ommelanden, but the development of new agricultural territories by the Chinese not only contributed to the local economy but also to interracial relations. Under the auspices of the VOC the Chinese took up market gardening and engaged in agricultural pursuits in the Ommelanden.⁸⁸² The main crop on these private lands was rice, mostly cultivated in the western (Tangerang) and eastern part (Meester-Cornelis) of the residency. Other crops included sugar, nuts, coffee, tobacco and indigo. The cultivation of these crops required intensive labour, and a large number of native labourers lived and worked on the Chinese owned land. Despite the frequent usury practices, the Chinese landlords were rather indulgent in dealing with their native tenants and both lived peacefully together.⁸⁸³ In fact, native tenants preferred Chinese landlords over the Europeans. Although the Dutch took offence at the usury practices of the Chinese landlords, they had to admit that there existed a quite friendly relationship between the Chinese landlords and their native tenants. Without lowering their debts, the Chinese landlords provided a listening ear to their tenants, frequently asked about their family's whereabouts and took notice of their complaints.⁸⁸⁴ As a result most of these Indies-born peranakans were socially absorbed into indigenous life, which made the peranakan community of Batavia quite distinctive from the peranakan communities in Semarang and Soerabaja. The colonial government's implementation of its land repurchase policy in 1910 did not have a great impact on the integration of the peranakans in the region. In Semarang and Soerabaja Chinese settlement

⁸⁸² Blussé, *Strange Company*, 84–87. More than two-thirds of the Chinese settled in the Ommelanden. See Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 201.

⁸⁸³ Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 252–56.

⁸⁸⁴ De Veer, *Particuliere Landerijen en de Openbare Veiligheid*, 44–45.

remained solidly in the city. Although there was a great deal of social interaction between the different ethnic groups and acculturation toward the European way of life on the one hand and the Indonesian on the other, the Chinese persisted in their desire to live among members of their own kind. This helped foster the densification process and tended to exclude other races from moving into the Chinese quarters. *De Chineesche Kamp* remained a clearly defined area with its distinctive spatial and physical characters.⁸⁸⁵

The fact that the *peranakan* Chinese were well integrated in virtually every corner of the residency helped reduce tension between the indigenous, Arab and Chinese communities. For this reason, the Chinese turbulences of 1912–13 did not escalate in Batavia (see chapter 4). Whereas Batavia had a mixed population of both urban and rural dwellers, the population of Soerabaja was mostly urban, which caused economic rivalry between the Chinese, indigenous and Arabs. Most *peranakans* in Batavia were also nonresistant to *totok* nationalist influences and refrained from joining *singkeh* organisations because they were unable to identify themselves with their aims. Their successful integration kept them aloof from the nationalist activities of the *singkeh* Chinese. Despite the emotional tie with their ancestral country, it was their fervent wish to stay in the Dutch East Indies. It was not surprising, therefore, that *Sin Po's* anti-Indies campaigns were all doomed to failure. Its hostile campaign against the Chinese officers also proved to be fruitless in Batavia. It was a different story in Soerabaja. Also in this case the urban character of the city and the high density of the Chinese quarters caused friction, this time between the *peranakans* and *totoks*. When the latter arrived in great numbers at the turn of the twentieth century, economic competition heated up, disturbing the peaceful lives of the former. In fact, the *totoks* even out-shined the *peranakans* in some branches of the local economy. The influential *totok* community in Soerabaja was also very successful in dismantling the power position of the Chinese officers. The unfilled vacancies and the inability to quickly overcome the riots by *totok* Chinese during the New Year festivities in 1912

⁸⁸⁵ Widodo, *Chinese Settlements in a Changing City*, 2–3 (part 3); Willmott, *The Chinese of Semarang*, 15.

demonstrated that the institution had lost its credibility in the Chinese community. The Chinese Council of Batavia managed to keep the disturbances to a minimum but owed this success also to the non-peranakan Chinese officers in the Council. The Soerabaja Council consisted only of peranakans.

While going over these conclusions, the question comes to mind whether Suryadinata's classical analysis of the three political streams of the Chinese movement in the Dutch East Indies is still sustainable. According to his analysis Batavia was *Sin Po's* bulwark, while the CHH had its main base in Semarang and the PTI in Soerabaja. Suryadinata characterises Batavia as a city heavily subjected to nationalist influences due to its close links with Singapore, the centre of Chinese nationalist activities in Southeast Asia. He also mentions that new Chinese migrants who came to Java arrived mainly through Batavia, often bringing with them the latest ideas of Chinese nationalism. It was therefore not surprising that the first Pan-Chinese organisation (THHK) in Java was formed in Batavia. He continues his argument by pointing out that pan-Chinese organisations like the Siang Hwee and Soe Po Sia were also very active in promoting the relationship between the overseas Chinese and China. As *Sin Po* was also established in Batavia and was able to stir up public opinion by carrying out its China-orientated message, he identifies the residency as its main base.⁸⁸⁶ Yet, its controversial expressions did not necessarily represent Chinese public opinion, especially not in Batavia. The fierce campaigns staged by *Sin Po* against the Chinese officers, the Dutch Subject Law and Chinese participation in the People's Council all utterly failed. Prominent peranakan Chinese accepted membership of the People's Council, the Dutch Subject Law remained enforced and the peranakan community fought hard to preserve the officer system. In general the peranakan Chinese managed to resist the nationalist influences and most peranakans even showed aversion to the *singkeh* movement.

⁸⁸⁶ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917–1942*, 54–57.

Semarang was far from Batavia and communications with the outside world were therefore more difficult, according to Suryadinata. It had a stable peranakan community and peranakan businessmen were rather well established in the city. Hence the peranakans of Semarang were not keen on taking part in Chinese nationalist activities. Widodo however claims that Semarang was one of the most important centres for Chinese nationalism. The city was frequently visited by delegates of the Chinese imperial regime. One special inspector for the Chinese schools in Java used Semarang as his base for future inspections. The proclamation of the Chinese Republic on 1 January 1912 also led to an outburst of joy in the city, with the Chinese celebrating the historical event with great enthusiasm.⁸⁸⁷ Suryadinata furthermore mentions that most CHH members in Semarang were employees of the Semarang based Oei Tiong Ham concern.⁸⁸⁸ The Oei Tiong Ham concern may have contributed to the strength of the CHH branch of Semarang, but this does not necessarily mean that Semarang was the centre of the Dutch East Indies orientated peranakan Chinese. The outcome of the conference held in Semarang in 1917, during which a decision was to be taken about sending delegates to the People's Council, was that the Indies Chinese were foreigners and that they should refrain from any local political involvement.⁸⁸⁹ This momentous gathering was held just eleven years before the formation of the CHH. Mona Lohanda has also shown that the leadership of the party mainly rested with peranakan Chinese from Batavia. In fact, she claims that in effect CHH leadership was shared among H. H. Kan and two prominent members of the Chinese Council of Batavia: Major Khouw Kim An and Captain Lie Tjian Tjoen.⁸⁹⁰ The fact that the CHH was a party backed by Chinese officers and supporters of the officer system does not correspond with the unpopularity of the institution in Semarang. The argument that the CHH was based in Semarang is therefore not very convincing.

⁸⁸⁷ Widodo, *Chinese Settlements in a Changing City*, 23.

⁸⁸⁸ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917–1942*, 56.

⁸⁸⁹ Widodo, *Chinese Settlements in a Changing City*, 24.

⁸⁹⁰ Lohanda, *Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 172.

Suryadinata claims that the popularity of the PTI in Soerabaja was due to the close contacts between the Indonesian nationalists and *peranakan* Chinese. Like Batavia and Semarang, Soerabaja had a stable *peranakan* community. But the striking feature of Soerabaja, Suryadinata argues, were the close ties between the Indonesian nationalists and *peranakan* Chinese and Arabs. Such intensive contacts were absent in Batavia and Semarang. He refers to the close cooperation between the Soerabaja based Chinese newspapers and the Indonesian nationalists, the meetings attended by Indonesians and *peranakans* in which common issues were discussed, and the close ties between the Indonesian Soccer Federation and *peranakan* Chinese soccer teams as proof for his argument.⁸⁹¹ In the previous paragraph it is shown that *Sin Po* also maintained warm relations with the Indonesian nationalists. The joint press efforts in Soerabaja were thus not unique. The PTI may have received much support in Soerabaja, but the party may have been popular in other parts of Java as well, especially in those regions where *peranakan* Chinese lived side by side with their indigenous neighbours. Bondan Kanumoyoso has shown that in the VOC era, Chinese entrepreneurs, agriculturists and rural labourers in the Ommelanden of Batavia interacted closely with the indigenous people. This close interaction continued after the end of the VOC hegemony.⁸⁹² In Buitenzorg, Meester-Cornelis and Tangerang in West Java, an estimated number of 30,000 Chinese farmers lived among indigenous farmers and for 90 percent these farmers had adopted an indigenous lifestyle. They maintained close social contacts with the indigenous people, many of them had indigenous spouses, they—both men and women—worked on the plantations or rice fields, and dressed and behaved like their indigenous neighbours. The only way to differentiate between them and the indigenous people was to take a peek in their homes where family altars could be found or other tokens of Chinese religious beliefs and traditions.⁸⁹³ This group of *peranakan* Chinese was reluctant to join the ultra-nationalist Chinese because of their close ties with

⁸⁹¹ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917–1942*, 56–57.

⁸⁹² Kanumoyoso, “Beyond the City Wall”, 73.

⁸⁹³ Suryadinata, *Pemikiran Politik Etnis Tionghoa 1900–2002*, 97.

the indigenous community.⁸⁹⁴ Because of their humble background it was also not likely that they would join the CHH as this party was commonly depicted as the party for rich businessmen and landowners. In light of this, Suryadinata's conclusion that support for the PTI was weak in West Java where people were heavily engaged in trade is a bit odd.

The fact that the virulent anti-Chinese outbursts mainly occurred in Central and East Java and were especially hard to overcome in Soerabaja also weakens Suryadinata's argument. The unrest in Batavia was much faster resolved and did not occur as often as in the rest of Java. Soerabaja may have had a stable *peranakan* community, but the *totok* community was very much present. How influential this *totok* community was is shown by the unpopularity of the Chinese officer system in the city. The *totoks* managed to discredit the Chinese officers to the extent that the officers were forced to surrender to the ongoing criticism. By contrast, the Chinese officer system in Batavia managed to survive all the verbal attacks and remained an authority in the Chinese community, albeit in the end it had to share power with the new community leaders.

Thus, although Suryadinata certainly has given a credible overview of *peranakan* Chinese politics on Java, his analysis of the three main political organisations and their strongholds on Java is open to question. As Lohanda has pointed out, the strength of a political party is not determined by simply looking where it was first established. One has to take into account the nature of the *peranakan* and *totok* communities, the relation between these communities, their relationship with the indigenous and Arab communities, but also the history of their establishment and Dutch local policy in these regions. Only then is one able to estimate whether a particular political organisation was successful in a certain region.⁸⁹⁵ Although the outcome of my research calls Suryadinata's analysis into question, further research is still necessary for a complete study of the distinct

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁸⁹⁵ Lohanda, *Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 174–75.

characteristics of the Chinese communities on Java. Unfortunately the scope of this dissertation does not allow me to elaborate more.

7.3 The Chinese Council after its resurrection: changes and adjustments

Although the Chinese officers were reinstated in Batavia, the Chinese Council was struggling to regain its central position in the Chinese community. In the late 1920s, the Chinese Council was experiencing serious financial difficulties because of the excessive ground tax (*verponding*) imposed on the Council's land in the period 1922–27.⁸⁹⁶ The Council was unable to cope with the exorbitant tax assessments and in August 1928 the Chinese Council still owed a staggering f 28.691,87 that had been levied on three plots of land over the period 1924–27. On 22 August 1928, the inspector of finances issued three enforcement orders to the Chinese Council for the tax arrears and imposed a fine of f 1.434,60 for the overdue tax.⁸⁹⁷ After the warrants were issued Major Khouw Kim An and the inspector of finances discussed an arrangement for paying off the debt in instalments of one thousand guilders per month and that the Council's income received from people paying off their mortgages at the end of the year—approximately six to seven thousand guilders—would be applied to the arrears as well.⁸⁹⁸

The excessive ground tax imposed on the Council's land increased the Council's total expenditures by approximately forty percent. This spectacular increase had resulted in a yearly financial deficit of ten thousand guilders and the Council was at risk of the colonial government confiscating its properties. The confiscation of the Council's properties by the tax collectors office

⁸⁹⁶ The *verponding* was in particular very high on lands that served as construction sites and as a consequence greatly increased in value. Sums of $\frac{3}{4}$ and even 1 cent per square meter per month were not exceptional. See Van der Hoek, "De Particuliere Landerijen in de Residentie Batavia", 52–53.

⁸⁹⁷ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 12 September 1928: pp. 354–55. See also the enforcement orders issued by the inspector of finances on 22 August 1928, the Kong Koan Archive, MR2B I/IX, no. VI, Leiden.

⁸⁹⁸ Letter of the inspector of finances to the chairman of the Chinese Council of Batavia, 1 September 1928, no. 2834/Inv.-, the Kong Koan Archive, MR2B I/IX, no. VI, Leiden.

would not be accompanied by the colonial government taking over the Council's responsibilities to the Chinese community. Fearing a takeover of its properties, the Chinese Council had submitted an official request to the colonial government for financial support.⁸⁹⁹

Perhaps the financial crisis arising from the tax problem was the reason why on 9 September 1927 the Chinese associations of Batavia assembled to discuss the future of the Chinese Council. The outcome of the assembly was that a request would be sent to the resident of Batavia to alter the composition of the Chinese Council. The Chinese associations wished to add several non-official members to the Council. Ideally, the number of the non-official members would equal the number of Chinese officers apart from the chairman, who would thus retain the decisive vote in the case of a tie. These non-official or private members were to be appointed by the colonial government based on the nominations of the Chinese associations and they were to assist the Chinese officers in managing the properties of the Chinese Council. It was not so much the desire to have more joint-decision making powers in the administrative affairs of the Council that led to the requested rearrangement of membership; the aim of the associations was to make the financial management of the Council's (that is, the Chinese community's) properties more public. The associations reasoned that the Council's ability to purchase the real estate that served primarily for Chinese cemeteries derived from the "grave funds" raised from the Chinese community since the time of the VOC. The same applied for the other funds held by the Council. A committee was appointed in the meeting, chaired by Tio Tek Hong, to draft the request and on 10 November 1927 it was sent to the resident of Batavia.⁹⁰⁰

The resident forwarded the committee's request to the Council, which discussed it as its meeting of 27 December 1927. It appears that the idea of admitting non-official members to the Council had already been suggested by Major Khouw Kim An ten years earlier. In July 1917 he

⁸⁹⁹ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 29 January 1929: pp. 372-73.

⁹⁰⁰ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 27 December 1927: pp. 304-305; Yo Heng Kam, "Reorganisatie van den Chineeschen Raad", *De Chineesche Revue* (July 1928): 77-81.

officially submitted a proposal to the colonial government to add four non-official members (peranakans and totoks) to the five official members of the Chinese Council. In addition he also suggested appointing two persons to form a Council committee in order to inspect the Council's account books. According to the major, most officers were very sloppy and too lazy to accurately manage and check the account books. His proposals had been rejected at the time because the colonial government was making arrangements to abolish the institution of Chinese officers. Now, the Chinese community itself was calling for the admission of non-official members to the Council. Major Khouw applauded the request and the full Council approved the measure by seven votes to one. One officer recommended that they look for non-official members among not only the peranakans, but also the totok community, as Khouw had suggested a decade before, and this, too, was approved.⁹⁰¹

The one dissenting vote had come from Captain Yo Heng Kam, who argued that an equal number of private and official members would give rise to a disproportionate balance between the formal representatives (the Chinese officers) and the represented interests (the Chinese community). He also foresaw problems when taking votes. An equal outcome of a voting—which could still be won by the officers with the chairman's vote—would sharpen the conflict between the “officials” and “non-officials”. According to Yo, the aim should be to create an organisation in which the officers functioned as trusted representatives of the Chinese community and execute its common opinion under close supervision of members of the community. He therefore proposed adding to the Council twelve to fifteen private members chosen from and by the Chinese community to form a committee that would have full control over the Council's properties in accordance with the current statutes. The officers would be responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Council and implementation of the Council's decisions. The captain argued that the Chinese Council's funds derived from the Council's properties and that these properties had been financed by the Chinese

⁹⁰¹ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 27 December 1927: pp. 304–10

community since the era of the Dutch East India Company, thus it would be reasonable to give the private members more control over the Council's affairs and in particular its properties. To dispel concern over the unbalanced ratio between the private and official members, he suggested giving the chairman of the Council the right to recommend that the resident cancel questionable decisions or decisions that violated the Council's statutes. This way the right to observe that the Council's decisions were in accordance with its spirit or statutes remained with the colonial government.⁹⁰²

Lieutenant Tan Yam Hok worried that the chairman would not be comfortable cancelling decisions, but Captain Yo replied that the chairman could only *propose* the resident to cancel questionable decisions: "If the resident agrees that the decisions in question are in violation of the Council's statutes, he will give his approval for cancellation." Lieutenant Tan In Hok objected to the chairman's right to intervene: "Captain Yo Heng Kam's proposal practically implies that we all have to do what the chairman tells us to. I strongly disagree with this! Are we not all representatives of the Chinese people?" The captain was astonished by the lieutenant's comment and replied: "I have never said anything about obeying the chairman at all times. Moreover, the Chinese people do not regard us Chinese officers as their representatives. If they did, they would have never submitted a request to add private members to the Council in the first place!"⁹⁰³ The captain claimed that the request submitted by the Chinese community was nothing more than a provisional compromise. In actual fact, ordinary Chinese wanted a formulation in which the private members would be in the majority. Fearing that the government would judge this proposal as premature and reckless, it had settled for a one-to-one ratio of official and unofficial members.⁹⁰⁴ Lieutenant Tan In Hok did not respond, but Lieutenant Lie Boen Sin suggested that the prestige of the Chinese officers would be

⁹⁰² Malay minutes, no. NM5, 27 December 1927: pp. 305–306; Yo Heng Kam, "Reorganisatie van den Chineeschen Raad", 78–79, 85–88.

⁹⁰³ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 27 December 1927: pp. 307–308.

⁹⁰⁴ Yo Heng Kam, "Reorganisatie van den Chineeschen Raad", 86.

harmd by the inclusion of private members to the Council, but Yo argued that it was the other way around: the Chinese officers were losing prestige within the community because the Council remained a “conservative institution of concealed mystery”. Democratisation of the Council would allow the community more access to the Council and its affairs and thus open the door for closer cooperation. The disclosure of the Council's affairs and close cooperation with the Chinese community would eventually restore the prestige the officers had lost. Yet, Captain Yo Heng Kam's efforts to convince his colleagues were to no avail: his motion was declined by seven votes against one.⁹⁰⁵

One year later, at the Council meeting of 20 December 1928, Major Khouw announced that by *Gouvernementsbesluit* of 2 November 1928, no. 25, the governor-general had acceded to the community's request to admit non-official members to the Chinese Council. The colonial government apparently realised that it was necessary to grant the Chinese citizens of Batavia some sort of co-management, so they would continue to support the institution of Chinese officers. According to the decree, six private members would be added to the six official members (the chairman not included). The major also informed the Council members that he had already instructed the neighbourhood chiefs to circulate a letter in their wards notifying residents of their right to nominate candidates for private membership in the Chinese Council. In the meantime, seven Chinese associations had already sent their nominees to the Chinese Council, which duly passed on a formal list of nominees to the resident.⁹⁰⁶ Then in a special meeting on 29 January 1929, the resident of Batavia officially inaugurated six new members.⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰⁵ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 27 December 1927: pp. 308–10; Yo Heng Kam, “Reorganisatie van den Chineeschen Raad”, 84.

⁹⁰⁶ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 20 December 1928: pp. 365–66.

⁹⁰⁷ *Gouvernementsbesluit* of 7 January 1929, no. C65/1/1. The members were Tan Pia Teng; Lauw Pin San, alias Lauw A Hin; Nio Peng Long; Ie Tjoen Lim; Tjoeng Tjoe Sioe; and Lie Shan Ming.

The resident explained that the appointment of these new members was based almost entirely on the recommendations and wishes of the Chinese associations. It was the fervent wish of the Chinese associations to find representatives from each significant ethnic (Chinese) settlement in Batavia, including the totok community.⁹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, he clarified that the right of appointment or removal remained exclusively reserved for the government or its representatives (technically, the governor of West Java made the appointments). The government was not obligated to base its appointments solely on nominations of the Chinese associations. Granting the Chinese associations the right to nominate candidates for the Chinese Council would violate their statutes and make them semi-official institutions, which these associations were not intended to be. Therefore, the governor of West Java appointed these non-official members based on his own good judgement, although he took into account the recommendations of the Chinese associations. The resident then urged that the Council's statutes, as determined by Residentsbesluit of 20 August 1907, no. 15548/36, be made consistent with the current arrangement of membership as soon as possible.⁹⁰⁹ He also briefly addressed the financial problems of the Council and suggested that the Council members, while awaiting the government's response for their request for financial help, consider introducing an effective austerity policy, without losing sight of the Council's principal aims.⁹¹⁰

As part of the new policy of putting the Council's affairs before the public, the Chinese Council sent a report of the inaugural meeting of January 1929 to the press, including a copy of the

⁹⁰⁸ The fact that the governor of West Java had taken account of this wish can be proven by newly appointed member Lie Shan Ming who asked Major Khouw Kim An to repeat in short the speech of the resident as he did not understand any Dutch and was still not proficient enough in the Malay language. See Malay minutes, no. NM5, 29 January 1929: pp. 378–79. In the meeting of 4 May 1931, it was announced that private members Tan Pia Teng and Ie Tjoen Lim had resigned because the former went back to China and the latter moved to another place. Tan Pia Teng's return to China also shows that members of the totok community served as private members. These gentlemen were replaced by Chang Cheng Liong and Ong Kek Tjoe. See Malay minutes, no. NM6, 4 May 1931: pp. 74–75.

⁹⁰⁹ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 29 January 1929: pp. 368–81.

⁹¹⁰ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 29 January 1929: pp. 372–73.

resident's speech. The news that the Chinese Council was labouring under great financial difficulties came as a real bombshell. *Sin Po* reproached the Council and accused the officers of improper management. *Sin Po* wrote that according to an unnamed source the Chinese Council only received an income of three thousand guilders each month, while the ground tax levied over its land was no less than thirteen thousand guilders, which implied that the value of the Council's land was at least one million guilders. How was it possible, *Sin Po* wrote, that the Council received only three thousand guilders each month from over one million guilders worth of land? "Based on these numbers", *Sin Po* wrote, "the Chinese Council can serve as a perfect example for everyone or every company that wishes for instant . . . bankruptcy". The newspaper also ridiculed the Council's request for financial support to the colonial government: "This is really beyond ludicrous: the tax officer under government employment imposes a tax so extraordinary high—causing the Chinese Council to be as good as dead financially, and to help the Chinese Council out of its financial despair, the Council is asking the colonial government for support—the same government that is imposing the excessively high ground tax!"⁹¹¹ The *Sin Po* article caused much commotion among the Chinese officers. In the first official Council meeting with the private members, Major Khouw Kim An explained that the yearly deficit of ten thousand guilders was caused by nothing else than the excessively high ground tax imposed on the Council's land between the years 1922–27. The reason why the ground tax was so high had to do with the houses built on the land, especially in Goenoeng Sahari and Djati. The chairman said that the Council actually had the right to recover part of the ground tax from the homeowners, but because the tax assessment had come out too late the Council had lost this right.⁹¹² Since the late tax assessment was not the Council's mistake, the Council had submitted a request for financial support from the government. The chairman also explained that the Council's main function was to aid the underprivileged in the Chinese

⁹¹¹ *Sin Po*, 1 February 1929.

⁹¹² On certain private lands the landlord was entitled to recoup the ground tax which he owed to the government from the leasehold tenants. See Van der Hoek, "De Particuliere Landerijen in de Residentie Batavia", 52.

community. The Council provided tuition fees for poor children enrolled at the THHK schools, subsidised a number of other schools, gave financial aid to poor elderly women without families, and provided coffins for poor deceased people. The large expenditures of the Chinese Council were certainly not cases of mismanagement. One of the private members then suggested inviting the press to come to the Council meetings. Hoping that this might stop the media's presumptuousness the other members agreed. Major Khouw said to welcome the press at the Council meetings and did not object to any criticism as long as it was constructive. He hoped that *Sin Po* in particular would stop its premature and bold reports about the Chinese Council.⁹¹³

In the Council meeting of February 1929, it was decided to invite the press to the monthly board meetings. A few days before each meeting the Chinese Council handed out a list of topics to be discussed, and it was then up to the newspapers to decide whether they would send their representatives to the meetings. By inviting the press to the monthly meetings, the democratisation of the Chinese Council was complete and its affairs became more transparent and accessible to the public.⁹¹⁴

The appointment of private members to the Chinese Council was to ensure a close cooperation with the Chinese officers for the good of the Chinese community, but initially the cooperation between the official and private members went a little bit uneasy. At the request of the private members the monthly board meetings were set on Tuesday at seven p.m.⁹¹⁵ So far the Council members had never convened on a specific day because the Chinese officers were usually available at any time. Within a year, this decision was overturned because it turned out that many of the private members were often absent and it was decided to conduct the monthly board meetings again on any day of the week.⁹¹⁶ The frequent absence of some private members in the beginning

⁹¹³ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 2 February 1929: pp. 382–88, and 9 March 1929: p. 399.

⁹¹⁴ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 2 February 1929: pp. 382–88.

⁹¹⁵ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 20 August 1929: pp. 454–55.

⁹¹⁶ Malay minutes, no. NM6, 20 May 1930: p. 29.

caused some irritation among the Chinese officers. At the Council meeting of 9 March 1929 one private member indignantly asked why the amendment of the Council's statutes was discussed as the fourth item on the agenda. He uttered that the amendment of the statutes was a matter of high importance that should be discussed as the first item on the agenda. The major responded by telling him that this item had been discussed repeatedly in previous meetings. He explained that undecided matters needing further discussion were usually placed at the end of the agenda as new items were given priority. The major then remarked: "Had you been present at the previous meetings you would have known this." Lieutenant Na Tjioe Kim went a little further than that and said: "If certain members do not show up at Council meetings and do not care about what is discussed in these meetings, they only have themselves to blame. If for this reason they miss out on certain discussions, they have no reason to object to these repeatedly discussed items being placed at the end of the agenda in the next meetings."⁹¹⁷ It also appears that there were misunderstandings among the private members about the Chinese Council's subordination to the colonial government. When discussing the amendment of the Council's statutes, the chairman said that the amendments would be sent to the resident for approval. One of the private members remarked that he always thought that any decision made by the Chinese Council was binding. The major then pointed out to him that "the Chinese Council always has to answer to the colonial government and that the resident also has the right to cancel any decision that he finds inappropriate or in violation with the Council's statutes."⁹¹⁸

There was also a heated discussion about hoisting the Chinese nationalist flag on Chinese public holidays. Several private members noted that some foreign embassies in China flew their flags at half-mast on the anniversary of Dr Sun Yat-sen's death and felt that the Chinese Council should do the same way. Lieutenant Tan In Hok reminded them that they lived in a Dutch colony

⁹¹⁷ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 9 March 1929; pp. 405–406.

⁹¹⁸ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 9 March 1929; pp. 406–407.

and that the colonial government had prohibited the Chinese Council from raising the Chinese nationalist flag. Captain Yo Heng Kam proposed a compromise: on Chinese public holidays the Chinese Council could raise the Dutch flag. This proposal however encountered opposition from the private members. They maintained that the Chinese Council represented the Chinese community and that only the Chinese flag was appropriate. The major then explained that the foreign embassies' plan of hoisting their flags at half-mast was a gesture of respect towards their host country. But the Chinese Council of Batavia was situated in a Dutch colony and had to abide by the rules of the colonial government. One of the private members then blurted out: "Is the Chinese Council property of the Dutch government or the Chinese community! The Chinese Council has always looked out for the interests of the Chinese community here. It would be different if the Chinese Council belongs to the Dutch government!" The major then explained that even though the Chinese Council was financed by money from the Chinese community, the Chinese Council had always been subordinate to the colonial government. "Since the era of the Company, the colonial government has appointed and dismissed Council members; it has seen to it that decisions of the Council were in accordance with its statutes; and it has given the Chinese Council the legitimacy to manage civil affairs and properties of the Chinese community. Therefore the Chinese Council always has to follow the laws and regulations of the Dutch colonial government." The private members then proposed hoisting both the Dutch and the Chinese nationalist flags. Lieutenant Tan In Hok then intervened by reminding the private members that they were engaging in political affairs while, according to the decree of the governor of West Java, private members of the Chinese Council were only appointed for the management of the Chinese Council's properties. The discussion then abruptly came to an end.⁹¹⁹

Inviting the press to the meetings helped the process of democratisation, but of course also cleared the path for more criticism. *Sin Po*, *Siang Po* (previously *Perniagaan*), and *Keng Po* in

⁹¹⁹ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 12 April 1929: pp. 431–32, and 13 June 1929: pp. 440–43.

particular took the opportunity to attend the board meetings. At the April 1929 meeting, it turned out that the schools receiving subsidy from the Chinese Council had never sent the Council an account of their finances, with the exception of the THHK Batavia. One of the private members then suggested that from now on the Chinese Council should demand a financial report from these schools every three months. If the schools fail to do so, the Chinese Council would stop the subsidy flow. The proposition was adopted.⁹²⁰ *Sin Po* had sent a representative to the meeting and did not hesitate to point out the errors of the Chinese Council in this case. The fact that the schools were not required to regularly send a financial account was beyond comprehension, according to the newspaper:

The Council never has resisted the supervision of the resident over its finances and therefore it is really surprising that the Council never finds it necessary to inspect the financial management of the organisations it supports. The Chinese Council does not have to be suspicious of the school boards, but business is business. If the Chinese Council decides to financially support an organisation, it has to know how this organisation operates, how its financial administration is managed and if its income and expenses are in order. The Council should at least know how its money is spent, and this should all be in black on white.⁹²¹

One reason for this neglect might be, *Sin Po* argued, that up until the admission of the private members, the Council had always been shrouded in mystery. But now that the Council was opening its affairs to the public it had to set an example, because everyone knew about the many irregularities in the administration of Chinese organisations.

⁹²⁰ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 12 April 1929: p. 420.

⁹²¹ *Sin Po*, 15 April 1929.

The heated discussion between the private Council members and the Chinese officers about the Chinese nationalist flag hoisting on Chinese public holidays also invited *Sin Po*'s criticism. It rebuked the weak attitude of the Chinese officers towards the government that had forbidden the Chinese Council to hoist the Chinese nationalist flag on the memorial day of Dr Sun Yat-sen's death:

The attitude of the Chinese officers in this matter is familiar; they do not insist on doing the right thing [namely, raising the nationalist flag in honour of Dr Sun], no, they even help bringing forward all kinds of reasons why the Chinese nationalist flag should not be hoisted in front of the Chinese Council.

No one has ever seen a Chinese flag at their houses, but never do they dare to forget hoisting the tricolour on Dutch public holidays, for instance on 31 August.

If they wish to honour the Dutch Queen as officials of the colonial government, *soit*, but this does not mean they should neglect their own people, at least if they do not wish to make their titles of "Chinese headmen" a laughing stock.⁹²²

Sin Po also persisted in confronting everyone defending the institution of Chinese officers. When People's Council member Loa Sek Hie claimed that many Chinese people still could not do without the mediation of the Chinese officers when dealing with colonial government officials, *Sin Po* countered:

The reason Mr Loa Sek Hie brings forward is appallingly weak and has no meaning. Many Chinese people still bathe in the river, but this does not prove that river water is better than tap water. The fact that many Chinese people still use river water to wash

⁹²² *Sin Po*, 24 June 1929.

themselves should not be used as an argument that the Chinese people still need river water. Those people should instead be taught not to use river water but tap water which is much more hygienic.

The reason why many Chinese people still turn to the Chinese officers is because most of these people are still “afraid” or feel “awkward” when dealing with the Dutch directly. This is a case of an “inferiority complex” which should be put to an end immediately and should not be nurtured. They have to be taught not to be “afraid” or feel “awkward” when dealing with a European official . . . and there is no faster way to teach them how to lose this attitude . . . than radically abolish the institution of Chinese officers. To continue this outdated institution is to continue this sense of inferiority. . . .

From a political perspective as well as from a psychological perspective it is best to terminate this institution.⁹²³

7.4 The final years of the Chinese Council: the centre of the Chinese community?

The Council’s request for an extra subsidy was granted and from 1930 onwards the colonial government issued a monthly contribution of 475 guilders to the Chinese Council. This money was to be used exclusively for the Council’s activities on behalf of the government: immigration, tax collection, and matters of justice and police.⁹²⁴ However, the inspector of finances had ordered the Chinese Council to remit the full amount of government subsidy to the tax office first in order to pay off the tax arrears.⁹²⁵ The Chinese Council continued to struggle with budgetary deficits and tax arrears and in 1932 the colonial government also cut two thousand guilders from its subsidy. The

⁹²³ *Sin Po*, 23 August 1929.

⁹²⁴ Malay minutes, no. NM6, 23 January 1930: p. 7.

⁹²⁵ Letter of the inspector of finances to the chairman of the Chinese Council of Batavia, 1 September 1928, no. 2834/Inv.-, the Kong Koan Archive, MR2B I/IX, no. VI, Leiden.

Chinese Council faced additional cutbacks on its budget for school subsidies, temple management, and annual religious festivities, in the salaries of its personnel, and in its transportation budget.⁹²⁶ Furthermore the Council was forced to deny requests for mortgages and other loans.⁹²⁷ In late 1934, the Chinese Council had to acknowledge the municipality's superiority when the Council and a number of Chinese organisations were unable to raise enough funds to build a modern Chinese cemetery in Tandjoeng Djembatan Doeren, west of the Bandjir Canal. However, the plan was never effectuated.⁹²⁸

Budget deficits were caused not only by the extraordinary high taxes imposed on the Council's land. The great economic depression of the 1930s, which hit the Indies economy very hard, also affected the Council's budget. The Chinese Council was deluged with demands for financial support from Chinese men who had lost their jobs. Sometimes up to thirty men a day came to the Council asking for an allowance. The Chinese Council reserved extra money for poor relief, but in the end it was forced to restrict aid to people over the age of sixty and the disabled.⁹²⁹ With the increase of the poor and needy, the Council also had to double its expenses for buying coffins, as fewer and fewer people could afford to buy a coffin.⁹³⁰ Even though the Council had set a maximum quota of 150 women receiving a monthly allowance in 1925, this number had risen to 250 women in 1937. The Council could no longer ignore the increase of women in desperate need of financial support in these difficult times. But to help as many underprivileged women as possible, the Council had to reduce the distribution from three or four guilders to two guilders per

⁹²⁶ The Chinese Council paid for the transportation of Council members when their presence was needed in the *Landraad* or the Council of Justice.

⁹²⁷ See the Malay minutes of the Chinese Council board meetings of the years 1925–1933 (nos. NM5 and NM6).

⁹²⁸ Malay minutes, no. NM6, 9 november 1933: pp. 141–142, 15 August 1934: pp. 168–172 and 30 November 1937: pp. 231–32.

⁹²⁹ Malay minutes, no. NM6, 26 September 1931: pp. 90–1 and 22 December 1931: pp. 94–8.

⁹³⁰ Malay minutes, no. NM6, 14 August 1936: pp. 197–198 and 26 November 1936: pp. 205–206.

person.⁹³¹ At the same time, the Council's income from its real estate and burial grounds decreased severely. The Council frequently received requests from tenants asking for rent reductions because of economic hardship. The Council was forced to grant most of these requests, and usually reduced the rent with ten to fifteen percent.⁹³² The selling of burial plots and graves also declined, not necessarily because of the economic depression but because healthcare had improved significantly, resulting in a lower mortality rate.⁹³³

The Chinese Council also lost land to the government. In chapter 3 we saw that in 1910 the colonial government passed a law entitling the government to repurchase private lands for industrial development and political reasons. Between 1912 and 1931, a total of 456,709 hectares of private lands across the entire archipelago was repurchased or expropriated by the colonial government. Between 1931 and 1936 no private lands were bought back because of necessary austerities.⁹³⁴ Land was also repurchased from the Chinese Council. Seeing that the local authorities were bit by bit repurchasing land and taking into account the poor state of the Council's budget, some Council members suggested selling all the land owned by the Council to the local authorities, on the condition that the selling price was sufficient to cover all the monthly expenses of the Council. The other members agreed and in early 1930 the Chinese Council informed the governor of West Java that it was willing to sell all its land to the local authorities, with the exception of existing graves on the Council's land, land that was currently used for graves, and land that was reserved for the expansion of existing cemeteries. The governor did not respond to the offer and the Chinese

⁹³¹ Malay minutes, no. NM6, 30 November 1937: pp. 229–30.

⁹³² Malay minutes of the Chinese Council board meetings of the years 1931–1932 (no. NM6).

⁹³³ The income from selling burial plots (*sioehék*) and graves (*koeboeran*) was 7,475 guilders in 1931. The Council estimated that for the year 1932 this amount would drop to 6,600 guilders. See Malay minutes, no. NM6, 22 December 1931: p. 95.

⁹³⁴ *Memorie Penjelasan Atas Undang-Undang No. 1 Tahun 1958 Tentang "Penghapusan Tanah-Tanah Partikelir"*, Undang Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 1 Tahun 1958 Tentang Penghapusan Tanah Tanah Partikelir.

Council prepared for more years of financial adversity.⁹³⁵ It was not until 1940 that the Council's budget again showed a surplus.

From the records of the monthly board meetings it can be concluded that in the 1930s and 1940s, the Chinese Council of Batavia's primary function was to manage its properties and endowments for the public welfare. While the colonial government had assumed many of its responsibilities, the Council handled land sales, examined applications for construction permits, maintained and managed the Chinese cemeteries, judged requests for the excavation of bodies and their transport to China, assisted in immigration affairs, conducted regular inspection of Chinese schools, and afforded financial assistance to schools and the poor and needy. The Chinese Council was little or not involved anymore in marital affairs, conflicts within the community, and police affairs. The development of the municipal government also affected the Chinese Council as these local authorities increasingly purchased more land from the Council for infrastructural expansion and also took over some activities of the Council. During the 1930s the frequency of the board meetings declined and fewer members attended. In the period 1927–31 the Chinese Council convened about nine times a year with usually an average of six to nine members present. By the *Gouvernementsbesluit* of 31 December 1932, no. 5, the number of officers and official members of the Chinese Council was reduced to three: one major, one captain, and one lieutenant, who received allowances of only 300, 250, and 200 guilders respectively.⁹³⁶ The frequency of the board meetings dropped to an average of only three meetings per year in the period 1932–41 with four or five Council and private members attending. Sometimes meetings were cancelled because not enough members were present.

The Chinese Council of Batavia was no longer the centre of the Chinese community and the Chinese officers were no longer the absolute representatives of the Chinese people. The Chinese

⁹³⁵ Malay minutes, no. NM6, 23 January 1930, pp. 1–2 and 22 December 1939: pp. 256–58.

⁹³⁶ *Memorie van Overgave van de Residentie Batavia van den Resident van Batavia* L. G. C. A. van der Hoek, NA, The Hague.

Council merely served as a charitable organisation and even lost this position towards the end of the 1930s. The Chinese officers still managed the public properties of the Chinese community and fulfilled important social functions, but could no longer uphold the status of community leaders. Critiques from the Chinese press had faded. Most newspapers were preoccupied with political events in and outside the Netherlands Indies and paid less attention to the Chinese Council. Now and then *Sin Po* devoted some space to report on it, but these never made the sort of headlines they had twenty years before. In general, attention for the Chinese Council was overshadowed by the looming political issues of the day: the possible outbreak of a big war in Europe, the struggle for independence of the Indonesians and the future of the Chinese community under a possible Indonesian leadership, and an increasingly aggressive Japanese state that had invaded China and showed signs of expanding its sphere of interest in the whole region. People listened to politicians, followed and participated in political debates and looked upon these politicians as their role models. The Chinese Council stayed out of politics. Political activity was left to the leaders of the three political streams (Sin Po Group, CHH and PTI) who were competing against each other in the 1930s. It was palpable that these Chinese politicians had taken over the position of community leaders. After more than three centuries, the Chinese officers in Batavia were no longer the central figures in the Chinese community.

The last board meeting of the Chinese Council before Japanese occupation ended Dutch rule in the Indies, took place on 11 October 1941. When the Japanese troops invaded the Netherlands Indies in 1942 and detained Major Khouw Kim An in a prison camp in Tjimahi, the Chinese Council was deprived of its chairman and the Chinese people of Batavia were left without “their leader”. With his death on 13 February 1945, an era ended. Although he headed an institution that lost much of its flair in the twentieth century, Khouw Kim An—with his unbounded enthusiasm and tireless effort—had remained an authoritative figure in the Chinese neighbourhoods but also in local government circles.

Independent Indonesia

Throughout the Japanese occupation and the struggle for independence, some Indies Chinese openly sided with either the Dutch or the Indonesians, but most remained neutral and were primarily concerned with the safety of their family and property. This noncommittal attitude raised doubts among Indonesian nationalists as to the loyalty of the Chinese to a future Indonesian nation, and it sometimes led to violent outbursts against Chinese communities by Indonesian revolutionaries.⁹³⁷ After independence, the new leaders of the archipelago were confronted with the development of the new unitary state. Matters that required attention at the time were the expansion and professionalisation of the army, the bureaucracy and judiciary, drafting a constitution, restoring the economy, and the development of a national awareness. The government's policy with regard to the ethnic Chinese was ambiguous. Most Indonesians, including politicians, stuck to their opinion of the Chinese: the Chinese remained a separate group of foreigners whose actions were only driven by profit. Their loyalty lay with the Dutch, and after the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, many Indonesians feared that the ethnic Chinese would shift their allegiance to communist China. On the other hand, the economically strong Chinese remained essential to the development of the young republic.⁹³⁸

In April 1946 the provisional republican government in Yogyakarta issued a citizenship law that made the Chinese Indonesian citizens. But due to the Chinese Nationality Law of 1909, the Chinese government still regarded the Indonesian Chinese as Chinese nationals. This dual nationality became a problem because to the Indonesians, dual nationality was the same as dual loyalty. During the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in 1955, the Dual Nationality Treaty was signed by the Chinese and Indonesian ministers of foreign affairs. This treaty made provisions for

⁹³⁷ J. Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia, 1996–1999* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 7–8.

⁹³⁸ L. Suryadinata, *Indigenous Indonesians, the Chinese Minority and China: A Study of Perceptions and Policies* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilm International, 1982), 154–55.

Indonesian Chinese holding dual nationality to be released from the Chinese citizenship. China thereby renounced its claim on Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent.⁹³⁹

However, legal citizenship did not guarantee the same legitimacy of belonging to the Indonesian nation. The Chinese were still treated as a separate group and subject to different sorts of discrimination, varying from unequal treatment by lower officials to stern economic restrictions (the Benteng system and the PP10).⁹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, three important pillars of the Chinese community were allowed to continue their activities: the Chinese schools, the Chinese press, and the Chinese associations.⁹⁴¹ For the Indonesian Chinese a period of great uncertainty had begun. After the general turmoil of the struggle for independence, the Indonesian Chinese found themselves in a country vastly different from before, now being ruled by the group that used to be below them on the hierarchical ladder. They were at the mercy of Indonesian leaders and society who looked at them with great suspicion.

The choice of integrating or assimilating into Indonesian society was a debate that dominated among the Indonesian Chinese during the Sukarno era. The ethnic Chinese political party Baperki (Badan Permusjawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia, Indonesian Citizenship Consultative Body) was in favour of integration, but opined that the pribumi should stop seeing the peranakan Chinese as foreigners and accept them as one of the ethnic groups (*suku*) of Indonesia. While Baperki emphasised the rights of the Indonesian Chinese, another organisation stressed their obligations. The Institute for the Promotion of National Unity (Lembaga Pembina Kesatuan

⁹³⁹ Ibid., 154–55, 160; Coppel, *The Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 26–27.

⁹⁴⁰ J. A. C. Mackie, “A Preliminary Survey”, in *The Chinese in Indonesia: Five Essays*, edited by J. A. C. Mackie (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976), 11–13. The Benteng system sought to protect pribumi importers from Dutch and Chinese competition by reserving highly profitable import licences for pribumi importers. The PP10 imposed restrictions on ethnic Chinese rural retailers.

⁹⁴¹ L. Suryadinata, “Ethnic Chinese and National Integration in Southeast Asia”, in *Proceedings of the Symposium “Human Flow and the Creation of New Cultures in Southeast Asia”, December 3–5 1996* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1998), 87.

Bangsa, LPKB) reasoned that if the Indonesian Chinese wanted to be accepted by the pribumi, they should show more loyalty by assimilating into Indonesian society. This assimilation process could be accelerated by inter-marriage and abandoning all facets of Chinese identity, including name, customs, language, and religion. Clashes between the two organisations occurred frequently, in which Baperki branded name changing and biological assimilation as undemocratic and violations of human rights and the LPKB accused Baperki of being 'exclusive'. President Sukarno supported Baperki's integrationist model, but the army, increasingly suspicious of Baperki's and Sukarno's proximity to the Indonesian Communist Party sided with LPKB.⁹⁴²

After the ill-fated coup of 1965 and subsequent anti-communist purge, Suharto took over presidency. The political system he introduced was shaped by the chaos that had preceded it and he convinced many of the necessity of a strong state.⁹⁴³ During his reign Suharto made sure that the Indonesian society became depoliticised and adhered to one state ideology (*Pancasila*). He secured the unconditional support of the army, and gave high priority to economic development.⁹⁴⁴ For the Chinese it was the beginning of a turbulent period, during which they were exposed to public ridicule and hostilities. They were associated with the hated PKI and blamed for the economic downturn, and in some regions violent outbreaks occurred.⁹⁴⁵ China even sent ships so that the Chinese who did not feel safe anymore could repatriate, though only a few thousand Chinese went.⁹⁴⁶ Most Chinese thought they would adapt easier to the new Indonesian society than to communist China. The government was convinced that the Chinese could not be trusted and that Chinese culture and identity did not belong in Indonesia. Therefore in the New Order, everything

⁹⁴² Coppel, *The Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 43–46.

⁹⁴³ Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia*, 15.

⁹⁴⁴ Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 342–73.

⁹⁴⁵ Coppel, *The Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 63–64.

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

“Chinese” in Indonesian society was banned and an assimilation policy was introduced.⁹⁴⁷ Chinese political parties and organisations were closed, the Chinese press dismantled, the Chinese were strongly urged to adopt Indonesian-sounding ones, Chinese schools had to close their doors, and all public acts of Chinese culture and religions had to be eliminated. But at the same time Indonesian Chinese business was encouraged by the Suharto government. The Chinese remained a vulnerable group, lacking a sound legal basis in Indonesian society and they were forced to establish “friendships” with business partners, members of the army or government to assure the safety of their family and development of their business.⁹⁴⁸ Nowadays, the Chinese enjoy more cultural and religious freedom and the Indonesian government has taken hopeful steps to eliminate discriminatory laws.

The Chinese Council of Jakarta

During the uncertain period of the Japanese invasion (1942–45) and the struggle for independence (1945–49), the Chinese Council of Batavia (the Chinese Council of Jakarta since the Japanese occupation) was not able to run its activities on a regular basis. After Indonesia gained independence from the Netherlands, the Council resumed its duties. Of the permanent members before independence, only Captain Lie Tjian Tjoen and Lieutenant Lie Boen Sin returned in the Council. On 24 August 1950 the mayor of Jakarta officially appointed ten new Council members. Thus when the Chinese Council resumed its board meetings again on 8 September 1950, the Council consisted of one chairman (Captain Lie Tjian Tjoen) and eleven members.⁹⁴⁹ In the young republic the Chinese Council was no longer a semi-official establishment of community leadership.

⁹⁴⁷ A. Heryanto, “Ethnic Identities and Erasure: Chinese Indonesians in Public Culture”, in *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, edited by J. S. Kahn (London: Tauris Publishers, 1998), 103.

⁹⁴⁸ Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia*, 21.

⁹⁴⁹ Malay minutes, no. NM7, 8 September 1950: p. 1.

On 31 July 1952 Lie Tjian Tjoen and Lie Boen Sin were honourably discharged from their captain and lieutenant function by the mayor of Jakarta. They remained permanent members of the Chinese Council, but no longer as '*kapitein en luitenant der Chineezers*'. With their official discharge as captain and lieutenant, the function of Chinese officer was withdrawn and the Chinese Council became a social institution.⁹⁵⁰

In the 1950s the Chinese Council of Jakarta convened once a month and sometimes even two to three times a month when urgent matters needed to be discussed. Although there were eleven members in the Council, normally only six to seven members attended the board meetings chaired by Lie Tjian Tjoen. The Chinese Council resumed its social activities and continued the management of its landed properties. The Council looked after the Chinese graveyards, temples and *rumah abu* (house of ashes), gave financial support to Chinese schools, hospitals, social organisations and foundations, and contributed to victim relief after natural disasters had struck. It closely cooperated with leading Chinese organisations such as the Sin Ming Hui. It still sold and leased land and real estate, provided mortgages, and granted credit to organisations and private individuals. The mayor of Jakarta formed the bridge between the Chinese Council and the Indonesian government. The Chinese Council was also obligated to submit its budget to the mayor for approval every year.⁹⁵¹

Because the Council now merely functioned as a social institution, it was no longer subject of agitated political debates or fall-outs between prominent Chinese politicians. It dedicated itself to its social tasks and charitable aims and administered its remaining lands, real estate and Chinese cemeteries. It does appear that the Japanese occupation followed by the armed struggle for independence had caused confusion among people about the Council's landownership.⁹⁵² The

⁹⁵⁰ Malay minutes, no. NM7, 29 August 1952: pp. 2–3.

⁹⁵¹ Malay minutes, no. NM7, 14 December 1950: pp. 17–18 and 21 February 1951: pp. 32–33.

⁹⁵² During the Japanese occupation, all private lands fell into the hands of the Balatentara Dai Nippon (Japanese army). See the "Investigation concerning the private lands of the Chinese Council", the Kong Koan Archive, Leiden.

Chinese Council frequently had to deal with people destroying Chinese graves for the purpose of building houses. It is not clear whether people actually assumed that the Chinese Council no longer had rights of landownership or that they just made use of the situation by feigning ignorance. In a special press conference on 4 July 1951 the Chinese Council asked the press to announce that the land still belongs to the Chinese Council and that people wishing to move graves should first send an official request to the Council. The Council would not tolerate the desecration of graves and would not hesitate to call in the assistance of the police. The *wedana* of the lands concerned also explained that Indonesian people wishing to move graves were expected to appeal to the Board of Religion first and Chinese people should turn to the Chinese Council.⁹⁵³

In the 1930s the *gemeente* took on the responsibility of the financially weak Chinese Council to construct a new Chinese cemetery, but the plan was never put into effect. In 1950 the idea to construct a modern Chinese graveyard was raised again. It was agreed to build the cemetery in Djelambar Ilir (current West Jakarta), in close cooperation with the municipality of Jakarta. The new cemetery was opened in early 1955.⁹⁵⁴ In 1954 the Council members decided to build a new office for the *Kong Koan* in Jalan Laotze, behind the Wan Kiak Sie temple. The move from the old office in Tongkangan to the new building took place at the end of 1954. From 1955 onwards the Chinese Council held its meetings at the new location.⁹⁵⁵

Just like the colonial government had started to repurchase land from the Chinese Council for infrastructural development in the early twentieth century, the Indonesian government also increasingly bought lands from the Council for “public interest”. In late 1954 the government bought five plots of land (Djelambar/Zoetendal, Schoonzigt, Tandjung Lengkong, Djati and Gunung

⁹⁵³ Malay minutes, no. NM7, 26 June 1951: pp. 58–60, and 4 July 1951: pp. 61–63; “Sisa Masjarakat Tionghoa Koeno di ini Kota: Kong Koan di Djakarta”, *Star Weekly* 184 (July 1949): 25–27.

⁹⁵⁴ Malay minutes, no. NM7, 14 December 1950: pp. 15–16; 21 February 1951: pp. 31–32; 21 March 1952: pp. 128–130; and no. NM9, 28 January 1955: pp. 22–23.

⁹⁵⁵ Malay minutes, no. NM8, 28 April 1954: pp. 158–160, and 25 August 1954: p. 187.



Former office of the Chinese Council of Batavia on Jalan Laotze

Sahari—all in the centre of Jakarta) from the Council for two million rupiahs. In order to purchase the lands, the Indonesian government invoked law no. 6 of 1953, which stated the need to return a number of private estates to the state. The law was ratified by the President of the Indonesian Republic on 11 March 1953. With this law the government of the Republic of Indonesia announced that it wished to abrogate the system of private lands in Indonesia and return those lands to the state. The law also prohibited the Council to sell land as building sites (*kavelingen*) to third parties, because the government had branded the private lands of the Chinese Council public utility. It was evident that the Indonesian authorities wished to exercise tight control over the Council's lands.⁹⁵⁶ By law no.1 of 1958 the Indonesian Republic did away with all the private lands in the archipelago.⁹⁵⁷ After the proclamation of independence in 1945, half of the original areas of private lands were left (1,150,000 hectares, for the greater part situated in West Java). The Indonesian Republic continued the policy of repurchasing on the basis of mutual agreements between the government and the landlords (like the repurchase of the lands of the Chinese Council in 1953). Because of the fast pace of revolutionary changes in the country, it soon became apparent that this process was too slow. Therefore the government decided to put an end to the *particuliere landerijen* once and for all by passing law no. 1 of 1958.⁹⁵⁸ The government reasoned that the private lands were a source of problems as the tenants lived and worked under poor circumstances owing to the *landheerlijke rechten* of the landlords, who ruled over their lands as little potentates. The private lands were in effect little states within a state, which was unsuitable for a modern country.⁹⁵⁹ The extraordinary rights were also in conflict with the principle of social justice, one of the five pillars

⁹⁵⁶ Malay minutes, no. NM8, 22 May 1953: pp. 81–82; 25 August 1954: p. 184; and no. NM9, 22 October 1954: pp. 1–2 and Notary agreement for the relinquishment of landownership rights, no. 212, 19 November 1954, the Kong Koan Archive, Leiden.

⁹⁵⁷ Undang Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 1 Tahun 1958 Tentang Penghapusan Tanah Tanah Partikelir.

⁹⁵⁸ S. Soemardjan, "Land Reform in Indonesia", *Asian Survey* 1:12 (Feb. 1962): 24.

⁹⁵⁹ Memori Penjelasan Atas Undang-Undang No. 1 Tahun 1958 Tentang "Penghapusan Tanah-Tanah Partikelir", Undang Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 1 Tahun 1958 Tentang Penghapusan Tanah Tanah Partikelir.

of the *Pancasila*. Henceforth all private lands were abolished in 1958, and all the rights and privileges held by the previous landowners were assumed by the government. The landlords were given a choice between selling their land directly to Indonesian farmers (the price was to be determined by the government) or transferring the owner rights to the government, after which the authorities redistributed those among the indigenous farmers on the former estates. It was still possible for the landlords to obtain a license from the government to operate their agricultural enterprises on their former private estates within the time limitations provided by the agrarian law.⁹⁶⁰ The expropriation law was implemented in a time when the political climate of Indonesia was moving towards a culmination of the process of economic decolonisation: the take-over and nationalisation of corporate Dutch properties between 1956 and 1959 by the Indonesian government.⁹⁶¹ After the passing of the expropriation law the Chinese Council lost all its lands.

On 18 March 1959 former *Kapitein der Chineezen* Lie Tjian Tjoen resigned as chairman and member of the Chinese Council after having been in function for 46 years. Tan In Hok replaced him as the new chairman of the Council.⁹⁶² From 1960 onwards the frequency of the board meetings declined with an average of four meetings a year. With the Indonesian government repurchasing and expropriating the private lands, the Chinese Council lost most of its properties. It degenerated from functioning as an authoritative institution of Chinese community leadership in the Dutch East Indies to a small administrative office for Chinese temples and burial grounds in Jakarta. The contents of the minutes of board meetings also confirm this. They do not reveal any sign of dynamic discussions or shocking developments. The Council members only dealt with social and religious

⁹⁶⁰ N. F. Rachman, *Land Reform dari Masa ke Masa: Perjalanan Kebijakan Pertanahan 1945–2009* (Yogyakarta: Tanah Air Beta, 2012), 23–24; Soemardjan, “Land Reform in Indonesia”, 24–25.

⁹⁶¹ J. T. Lindblad, “The Economic Decolonisation of Indonesia: A Bird’s-eye View”, *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 4 (2011): 12–19.

⁹⁶² Lie Tjian Tjoen started his career as a Chinese officer on 4 January 1913. See Malay minutes, no. NM10, 18 March 1959: p. 13.

affairs in the community and this lingered on for another two decades or so. On 8 July 1964 the Chinese Council held its last board meeting. Presumably it was dissolved in the 1980s or 1990s and reorganised into a series of separate temple foundations, a cremation society and an administrative office for Chinese burial grounds. After more than two hundred years of existence, the Chinese Council of Batavia/Jakarta disappeared from the Chinese community.

7.5 Conclusion

The decision of the colonial government to restore the Chinese Council of Batavia in 1927 was for the most part influenced by the pleas of the Chinese community not to abolish the institution. With the support of the Chinese community it seemed like the Chinese officers were able to regain their position as community leaders, and make the Chinese Council the centre of the Chinese community again. However this is not exactly how it turned out. One reason is that over the years the colonial government had taken over several core activities from the officers. When the municipal government was introduced, it assumed most of the Council's functions. The municipality even stepped in when a new Chinese cemetery had to be built. The surprising plea for the continuation of the Chinese officer system stemmed from the continued need for the Chinese officers to serve as intermediaries between the Chinese community and the colonial government. But the Chinese community was foremost concerned with the properties that were managed by the Chinese Council. Fearing that those properties would fall in the hands of the colonial government, it protested the plans to abolish the institution. The request for joint decision making in the financial affairs of the Chinese Council illustrated the Chinese community's principle concern: the democratisation of the Chinese Council and disclosure of its finances, which did in fact belong to the Chinese community. This was also a sign of Chinese distrust of the Dutch. As long as they were not given the same status as the Europeans, they did not risk surrendering any sort of self-determination. The Chinese wanted to control their own properties and institutions. The Chinese officers and the Council still

represented Chinese independence (although to a much lesser extent than before). The officers were to continue their tasks together with other leading members of the community. Therefore, the Chinese urged that the officers be retained but at the same time requested more community control over the institution.

But by the 1930s it appeared that the really influential people in the Chinese community were the leaders of the Chinese political parties and organisations. Concern about the indigenous nationalists' struggle for independence, the looming war in Europe, and increasing Japanese aggression in Asia dominated life in the Indies society. People sought the support of political leaders who were more up against the challenges in these stirring times, which was beyond the purview of the Chinese Council, whose activities were limited to the co-management of its land and cemeteries, the rendering of mortgages and loans, the provision of subsidies to schools and the poor, and temple management. The Chinese Council had regressed from the centre of the Chinese community to a mere charitable institution that co-managed its properties with the Chinese community. And because of the strained circumstances as a result of the economic depression the Council even had difficulties to execute these tasks. The infrequent meetings, absence of Council members, lack of responsibilities, and less attention of the press all contributed to the Chinese Council's fading away.

After Indonesia's independence, periods of relative stability and accommodation alternated with bouts of political chaos and aggression towards the Chinese. In the colonial era, the Chinese could not abide even the possibility of being ruled by Indonesians at the neighbourhood or municipal level. Now they found themselves in a society ruled by Indonesians who looked at them with great suspicion and governed them with highly discriminatory laws. Some Chinese could not cope with the new leadership and repatriated, but most of the Indonesian Chinese stayed and after the start of the reformation era, most discriminatory laws and practices disappeared. This cannot be said about the Chinese Council of Jakarta. Although it reopened its doors during the postwar

struggle for independence, it never played the important role it had in the past. After the Indonesian government took over all the lands of the Council, it functioned simply as a temple and funeral society.