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The Decline of the Chinese Council of Batavia

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CHAPTER 1

BATAVIA AND CHINESE SETTLEMENT

Apart from serving as the headquarters of the Dutch East India Company, Batavia also came to function as an important trade emporium in Southeast Asia and an urban centre to an agrarian hinterland.²⁹ The industrious Chinese played an important role in the construction of the town and its further expansion. This chapter gives a brief overview of the Chinese settlement in Batavia and its surroundings in order to provide a historical and contextual background for the rest of the chapters. Close attention is also given to the early days and development of the Chinese officer system and its forerunners throughout Southeast Asia.

1.1 Modern Chinese emigration to the Nanyang and early structures of ethnic community leadership

The seven vast maritime expeditions led by Zheng He in the early fifteenth century can be seen as precursors of modern Chinese emigration to the Nanyang. Between 1405 and 1433, Zheng He's seagoing junks, carrying thousands of soldiers, sailors and courtiers set sail from China to the Southeast Asian waters, then cruised westward across the Indian Ocean as far as the Persian Gulf. The epic voyages were commissioned by Ming Emperor Yongle who wished to incorporate the states of South and Southeast Asia into China's tribute system. But more important to China's modern emigration history was the knowledge of trade routes and potential markets brought back

²⁹ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 19.

by the sailors.³⁰ The great Ming expeditions sparked the interest of merchants in the coastal provinces of South China who smelled new trading opportunities with the outer world. Powerful merchant families went abroad with large ships and bartered Chinese luxury goods such as silk, porcelain, and tea against silver, the currency for long-distance trade and payment of taxes.³¹

The Ming imperial court was not pleased with the foreign trade of its subjects, fearing that it would intervene with the tribute relations. Moreover, allowing free contact with foreigners could lead to conspiracy to overthrow the dynasty. Therefore the Ming emperors issued bans on private maritime trading, although with varying effectiveness. Yet, provincial officials and the local elite who understood that prosperity of the coastal provinces depended on the overseas trade and who also had vested interests in maritime commerce implored the imperial court to revoke the trade bans, which the court reluctantly agreed to do in 1567. When the Manchus conquered China and established the Qing dynasty, maritime trade bans were again imposed. As the Manchus were still struggling to control Taiwan and the southeastern coast during the early decades of their rule, they feared that free contact between Ming loyalists outside mainland China and dissident subjects could lead to plots against the new dynasty.³² The bans on private trade with Southeast Asia and emigration also had to do with the traditional Chinese prohibition against the desertion of one's family and ancestral graves.³³ As an extra incentive to stay in mainland China, the court imparted an ideology that imputed moral and social superiority to agriculture over overseas trade. But this attitude of anti-commercialism and the preference for farming had everything to do with fiscal interests because the court derived most of its revenue from taxes it imposed on people in its

³⁰ It must be noted that Zheng He followed well-established trading routes on his expeditions. However, the size of his fleet and the impact of the expeditions were unprecedented.

³¹ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 99; J. K. Fairbank and E. O. Reischauer, *China: Tradition and Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), 197–99; P. A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 8–10.

³² Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 8–9.

³³ R. L. Irick, *Ch'ing Policy toward the Coolie Trade 1847–1878* (Taipei: Chinese Materials Center, 1982), 390.

interior realm. Farming required people to stay in one place, where they could be registered and taxed. Commerce was associated with human movement and appeared a less reliable tax base, especially when merchants set out to sea. But the economic reality of coastal China could not be ignored and after the Manchus had solidified their position they allowed foreign trade again in 1684.³⁴ Between 1717 and 1727 bans on private trade with the Nanyang were reimposed for security reasons, but these were met with opposition from merchants, officials, and literati from the southern Chinese provinces.³⁵

The commercialisation of the south China coastal provinces of Fujian and Guangdong was unstoppable. The biggest junks carried 200 to 300 sailors and dozens, sometimes hundreds, of merchants with a wide range of Chinese merchandise to trade, ranging from bulk to luxury goods. The import and export of handicrafts and locally cultivated cash crops provided thousands of people with work in the shipping business and other sectors of the south Chinese economy. The maritime trade with Southeast Asia was an important stimulus to the region's economy, so important that the income of China's coastal population became dependent upon trade with the Nanyang.³⁶ Soon merchant junks began to carry passengers to port cities in Southeast Asia as more and more members of poor families sought a livelihood far from their crowded homeland. The Southeast Asian trade routes provided opportunities for farmers who, driven by poverty, tried their luck overseas as craftsmen and labourers.³⁷ It was their intention to earn sufficient financial means during their temporary stay overseas in order to create a better livelihood after returning to China. For many, however, the odds of returning to their homeland were slim as inadequate resources forced them to stay. Many of these sojourners became unintended emigrants and married local women with whom they established second families. Upon arrival in the Southeast Asian ports the

³⁴ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 17–22.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 87–89.

³⁶ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 97–100

³⁷ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 12.

merchants and fortune-hunters were normally received by (mostly non-native) harbour masters appointed by local rulers to collect dues and maintain order. These *syahbandars* were part of a system of ethnic community leadership that was applied to many groups of foreign traders that settled in important trading centres in the Southeast Asian kingdoms.³⁸ The *syahbandar* functioned as a go-between and operated on the margins of two realms: that of the local rulers and that of the foreign traders. In the Malay Archipelago for instance, the *syahbandar* functioned as the representative of the king and dealt with foreign visitors, trade, transactions, and diplomatic relations. He was the first person the foreign traders encountered upon arrival and he was also often the head of customs.³⁹ He allotted them warehouses, dispatched their merchandise, and provided them with lodging.⁴⁰ If the *syahbandar* was of foreign origin or descent, he became the representative of his countrymen who had settled in town for mercantile activities. He was in charge of settling internal disputes and maintaining order, while he also became the channel of communication between them and the local authorities.⁴¹ In the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya several quarters for Chinese, Burmese, Japanese, Malays, Moors⁴², Portuguese and, sporadically other European merchants were established, and each under the authority of its own leader. These

³⁸ Smaller communities of foreign traders without a settlement area clustered around the group that appeared to be the most familiar or advantageous. Upon arrival in an area unknown to them, most of these foreign traders chose to attach themselves to a community with whom they felt the greatest affinity and from whom they could expect the most support and patronage. Usually this was a community from the same region, or at least with the same religion. See U. Bosma and R. Raben, *Being "Dutch" in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500–1920* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 6.

³⁹ Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 54–55.

⁴⁰ A. Reid, "The Origins of Revenue Farming in Southeast Asia", in *The Rise and Fall of Revenue-Farming*, ed. J. G. Butcher and H. W. Dick (New York: St. Martins Press, 1993), 71.

⁴¹ Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 66.

⁴² The Moors referred to the Muslim "Keling", i.e. the inhabitants of Kalinga, a state along the Coromandel Coast in India. Today Kalinga corresponds to northern Andhra Pradesh, most of Orissa, and a portion of Madhya Pradesh in central-eastern India.

headmen were commonly chosen by their own community, and after approval of the king they were given Thai noble titles. The court regarded them as Siamese functionaries and they were accountable to the Thai official in charge of foreign and commercial affairs. Similar arrangements in the organisation of community leadership could be found in other parts of Southeast Asia.⁴³

After the arrival of European colonists in Southeast Asia, the leadership system was continued. Impressed by the efficiency of such coordination, the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, and French adopted similar systems for controlling the Asian traders in their newly conquered territories. Among the many nationalities that served as middleman were the Chinese. In most Southeast Asian colonies collaborative structures existed between the Chinese and the Western colonists. Although the Europeans were able to subdue important trading centres, they were ill-equipped to keep their colonies profitable. Backed by armed force but lacking the skills or manpower to control a foreign region with native populations of whose language and customs they knew little, the colonists depended on the Chinese who were familiar with the region and trading system due to their long-term presence in the region. As tax farmers they helped the colonial masters extract revenue from the indigenous population. The Chinese thus fulfilled a variety of important intermediary roles and were indispensable collaborators in the Europeans' colonial empires.⁴⁴ To administer the growing Chinese communities in the colonies, the European colonists appointed headmen to govern their own communities. Although their titles differed from place to place throughout Southeast Asia, the most widely used term was "captain", from the Portuguese practice of naming the Asian headman in Malacca *capitão* after they subdued the Muslim sultanate in 1511.⁴⁵ Implementation of the captain system depended on the composition of the Chinese community. In Batavia, Semarang, Soerabaja, and Manila for example, the Chinese community was

⁴³ G. W. Skinner, "Overseas Chinese Leadership: Paradigm for a Paradox", in *Leadership and Authority: A Symposium*, edited by G. Wijeyewardene and R. F. Khan (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1968), 191.

⁴⁴ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 57–62.

⁴⁵ Skinner, "Overseas Chinese Leadership", 192.

quite homogeneous because it could trace its origins back to Fujian province, and usually one leader was appointed to administer the entire Chinese community. The Chinese populations in Malaya, Singapore, and Phnom Penh, on the other hand, were heterogeneous, as various dialect groups from China had settled in these regions, and different headmen were appointed for each ethnic subgroup within the Chinese community.⁴⁶ Thus, the Dutch practice of appointing headmen to govern the Chinese community was hardly unique, but the system in the Dutch East Indies (especially Batavia) stands out for its longevity and the importance the Dutch and Chinese attached to it.

1.2 The Chinese in Batavia

On the orders of Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1619–23, 1627–29), the town of Jayakarta was razed in May 1619 so that the Dutch East India Company could establish its long-desired headquarters. Although this mission was completed, the Dutch were by no means secure of their possession, as they had to fight off two large-scale offensives by the Sultanate of Mataram (1628–29) and they were threatened continuously by the Banten Sultanate. The Dutch decided to build a walled city in the shadow of the castle's ramparts to ward off further attacks. From the walled town, the Company activities were run. Soon it was realised by the governor-general that, to transform the fortification into the heart of the intra-Asian trading network, the town needed more manpower to support the Company servants. Following the overthrow of Jayakarta, the native Javanese inhabitants fled the town or were chased away by the Dutch, who feared an insurrection, leaving the town quite isolated. Coen first proposed the idea of turning Batavia into a European colony, but soon had to let go of his dream because the *Heeren XVII* (Gentlemen Seventeen) would not allow private trade by European free citizens. With little incentive to make the long and arduous

⁴⁶ Skinner, "Overseas Chinese Leadership", 192; Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya 1800–1911* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986), 124–25; C. F. Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992), 292; E. Wickberg, *The Chinese in Philippine Life 1850–1898* (Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2000), 36–37.

trip to the East, few Europeans were willing to plunge into an oriental adventure. The town was then populated with people from all over Asia: free traders, soldiers and slaves were brought in from India, Japan, the Philippines and from within Nusantara.⁴⁷ But the most attractive to the governor-general were the Chinese.

When the Dutch besieged Jayakarta, they encountered a sizeable Chinese presence of approximately 400 to 500 people. Most Chinese settlements were concentrated on Java's north coast from which the Chinese mainly served as intermediaries in the intra-Asian wholesale trade of Indies and Chinese goods. Exports from the Indies included cloves, nutmeg, mace, pepper, sandalwood, gold, gems, and tin. The main commodities brought from China were silk, porcelain, lacquer ware, copper ware, paper, sugar, and medicinal goods.⁴⁸ Their skills did not go unnoticed by Coen. Realising he needed the Chinese to build the economy and infrastructure of Batavia, Coen induced large numbers of Chinese merchants, farmers and craftsmen to make a living in the newly conquered city. When not enough people accepted his "kind invitations", he simply ordered the Company's officers to kidnap Chinese men, women and children aboard the junks sailing in the Nanyang or on the China coast and bring them to Batavia:

Meanwhile in the Indies they thought that there were not nearly enough Chinese, and when they attempted to intercept the trade of the Spanish and Portuguese settlements in 1620 and the years after, for which among others Chinese junks had to be seized that were headed to or came from those settlements, the commanding officers were repeatedly ordered to try capture as many Chinese prisoners as possible and to ship them to the Indies.

⁴⁷ B. Kanumoyoso, "Beyond the City Wall: Society and Economic Development in the Ommelanden of Batavia, 1684–1740" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2011): 47–49. Nusantara is the Indonesian term for the Indonesian archipelago.

⁴⁸ J. C. van Leur, *Eenige Beschouwingen Betreffende den ouden Aziatischen Handel* (Middelburg: Den Boer, 1934), 160.

That order was explicitly repeated when in 1622 an expedition headed to China to willy-nilly open the trade with that country. If it were to come to hostilities, as was written in the instruction of the admiral, he had to ‘take in as many people, men, women and children as possible to populate Batavia, Amboyna, and Banda.’⁴⁹

To avoid the danger of undermining the Company’s trade monopoly, Europeans were in theory not allowed to trade privately, but because the goods brought by the Chinese were useful to the local population and to the Company’s trade with Europe, the Chinese were permitted and even encouraged to trade.⁵⁰ To stimulate the Chinese money-making activities, the Company exempted the Chinese from *diensten voor het Kasteel* (service as labourers in building the settlement of Batavia) and the *schutterij* (civic guard duty).⁵¹ To compensate for this, each Chinese inhabitant had to pay a monthly *hoofdgeld* (poll tax) of 1.5 *reals*.⁵² With the arrival of the Company, the focus of Chinese commercial activity shifted from the intra-Asian trade to the domestic market. This change was prompted by Coen, who opined that the Company should limit its trade to that of a mighty wholesaler, whilst retail trade was to be left to the Chinese. As a result, the Chinese increasingly became a link between East and West, between European and indigenous society, between the indigenous cultivator and the foreign export apparatus, and between foreign enterprise and the indigenous consumer.⁵³ Despite his aggressive efforts to populate Batavia, the Chinese enjoyed a

⁴⁹ W. P. Groeneveldt, “De Chineezzen-questie in Nederlandsch-Indië”, *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 13 March 1879. Groeneveldt, who started his official career as a Chinese interpreter, was considered a specialist on Chinese affairs in the Indies.

⁵⁰ Abeyasekere, *Jakarta*, 23–24.

⁵¹ *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek*, vol. 1, 1602–42 (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1885–1900): pp. 76–77, 547.

⁵² *Plakaatboek*, vol. 1, 1602–42: pp. 76–77.

⁵³ W. J. Cator, *The Economic Position of the Chinese in the Netherlands Indies* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), 7; Phoa Liong Gie, “De Economische Positie der Chineezzen in Nederlandsch-Indië”, *Koloniale Studiën* 5–6 (1936): 101–2.

fair, if not favoured treatment under Coen, who did not tolerate any arbitrariness by the Company's officials towards them. The Chinese served the Company well: as contractors they recruited wage labourers and craftsmen and supplied bricks and timber for buildings and the city wall, and as tax farmers they collected revenues from the native population. They also catered to the needs of Batavia's inhabitants: they kept taverns for sailors and soldiers, they were industrious in many crafts, being good smiths and carpenters, and they were also indispensable in agriculture. Not only did they ensure that everything was available all year round, they also were engaged in market gardening and horticulture.⁵⁴

After Coen's death, no major changes occurred in the favoured treatment of the Chinese, leading the Dutch middle-class to protest to the States-General in Holland about the High Government's protection of Chinese mercantile activities. In 1647 and 1652, 270 free burghers submitted complaints against the monopolistic practice of the Company, which increasingly restricted their overseas trade, while allowing Chinese junks to trade freely within the archipelago and overseas as far as China and Japan. The Dutch traders found this situation utterly unfair, but their complaints were fruitless. The Chinese junks traded with ports that were otherwise inaccessible to the Company, but the free burghers' traded in the same places as the VOC, thereby putting them in direct competition with the Company.⁵⁵ Hence, the Chinese remained dominant in and around Batavia.

In order to transform the town into a self-sufficient agricultural colony, it was essential to pacify the hinterland and open it up for cultivation. Gardens had to be laid out, trees planted, and factories built to supply the town with fruits, vegetables, wood, and so on. The gardens abandoned when the city was razed needed care before they reverted to wilderness.⁵⁶ But it was not an easy

⁵⁴ Abeyasekere, *Jakarta*, 24.

⁵⁵ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 83.

⁵⁶ W. de Veer, *Particuliere Landerijen en de Openbare Veiligheid in de Residentie Batavia* (Batavia: Javasche Boekhandel & Drukkerij, 1904), 14.

task to find volunteers. Land was distributed as fiefs to Europeans (first to men who had fulfilled their duty with the Company)⁵⁷, Chinese, *Mardijkers*,⁵⁸ and the headmen of the indigenous population groups. These plots of land could ultimately be transferred into landownership.⁵⁹ But Batavia was still militarily challenged by Banten and natives of Jayakarta who roamed the hinterland and threatened the walled town. The marshy and thickly forested region and tropical climate discouraged Dutch farmers from cultivating the area,⁶⁰ and in general the Dutch rarely set foot out of the walled town.⁶¹ After an armistice was concluded with Banten and a line of defence works was constructed, more reconnaissance trips were undertaken to the hinterland and land was granted to anyone who was willing to cultivate it.⁶² But there was more to it than putting hands to the plough. Landowners were also responsible for maintaining peace and order, they were expected to build and maintain the infrastructure necessary to transport their agricultural products to markets,⁶³ and they were responsible for the welfare of the indigenous population living on their lands.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the distribution of land was quite successful; order and stability returned and more

⁵⁷ L. van der Hoek, "De Particuliere Landerijen in de Residentie Batavia", *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 11 (1922): 37.

⁵⁸ The *Mardijkers* were slaves and descendants of manumitted slaves from the Indian subcontinent who had been brought to the Indonesian archipelago by the Dutch. Most of them came from the Coromandel Coast and Bengal, regions dominated by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Because of their Indian and Portuguese origins, they spoke a Portuguese Creole patois. After being freed in the Indonesian archipelago they adopted Portuguese or Dutch names and started to dress in a European fashion, which was permitted because of their conversion to Christianity.

⁵⁹ "Geschiedkundig Onderzoek naar den Oorsprong en den Aard van het Partikulier Landbezit op Java", *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 1:11 (1849): 245.

⁶⁰ E. von Zboray, *De Particuliere Landerijen Bewesten de Tjimanoeek* (S.I.: s.n., 1948), 18.

⁶¹ De Veer, *Particuliere Landerijen en de Openbare Veiligheid*, 17.

⁶² From 1686 onwards, land could only be sold through taxation or public sale, although small plots of land were still granted unofficially to people from time to time. See *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* ('s Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhof, 1919), vol. 3:345.

⁶³ Von Zboray, *De Particuliere Landerijen*, 19.

⁶⁴ D. Mulder, *De Terugbrenging der Particuliere Landerijen tot het Staatsdomein: Praeadvies van D. Mulder* (Weltevreden: Albrecht, 1917), 19–20.

agricultural adventurers arrived, taking the pressure off the increasingly crowded walled town. Populating Batavia's environs also bolstered the Company's finances, as the people in the Ommelanden were required to pay taxes and deliver *contingenten* (a proportion of their crops) to the Dutch.⁶⁵ Yet with very few exceptions, Europeans remained uninterested in agricultural entrepreneurship. Most of the Dutch burghers were only interested in grabbing riches in the easiest possible way before returning home to the republic. Committing themselves for a while to stabilise Batavia was not in their interests.⁶⁶ They leased their lands to natives, *Mardijkers*, and the Chinese, and it was these last, in particular, who were responsible for developing the Ommelanden.

Just as they were encouraged to trade, the Chinese were encouraged to farm the hinterland by exemptions from paying the poll tax, guaranteed purchase of products by the Company, and fixed minimum prices.⁶⁷ In short order, the Chinese were zealously engaged in market gardening, growing fruits and turning land into paddy fields. But above all, they controlled the sugar industry. Many Chinese officers were engaged in sugar cultivation, but rich Chinese merchants from the sugar-producing province of Fujian also owned sugar plantations and ran sugar mills.⁶⁸ Soon sugar plantations were spreading across the Ommelanden. Of the 130 sugar mills owned by 84 entrepreneurs in 1710, no less than 79 were owned by the Chinese.⁶⁹ The success of the sugar industry and the opening up of new land resulted in a rush of Chinese labourers seeking work on the plantations and in the mills.⁷⁰ The influx of coolies coincided with the peace treaty concluded with Banten in 1683, the same year that Taiwan was finally brought under Qing control. This was followed by a relaxation of the maritime trade restrictions the Manchu regime had imposed during

⁶⁵ De Veer, *Particuliere Landerijen en de Openbare Veiligheid*, 21–22.

⁶⁶ J. G. Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 9.

⁶⁷ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 84.

⁶⁸ Kanumoyoso, "Beyond the City Wall", 148–49.

⁶⁹ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 90.

⁷⁰ Abeyasekere, *Jakarta*, 25.

its struggle to capture the island. The consolidation of power in South and Southwest China by the Manchus in the 1680s also induced many Ming loyalists to flee mainland China in order to escape persecution. These simultaneous developments resulted in a steady flow of Chinese immigrants into Batavia and its surroundings and the Chinese presence became dominant. In fact, as Leonard Blussé has observed, Batavia was basically a Chinese colonial town under Dutch protection: “Batavia castle with its warehouses functioned as the “keystone” in the system of Dutch trading posts all over Asia, while Batavia town operated as a “cornerstone” of the Chinese trade network in Southeast Asia. These two aspects coexisted harmoniously and peacefully for a considerable period.”⁷¹

Phoa Liong Gie described the VOC period as “the golden age of Chinese settlement in the Netherlands Indies”. The Siauw Giap agrees with him that the era of the Company, in particular the period before 1740, was the “heyday” of the Chinese community on Java.⁷² Likewise, Kwee Hui Kian regards the eighteenth century as the “Chinese century” thanks to the dominant economic exploits by the Chinese along Java’s northeast coast. And all along the Pasisir Chinese traders were essential to the Company’s trade network. From the late 1670s Chinese trade activities along Java’s northern coast expanded explosively at the Company’s instigation. After ousting other undesired European and Indian traders from the region, the Company authorities encouraged Chinese traders to fill the economic vacuum because the Company itself was still not capable of engaging in small-scale trade. European and Indian traders who managed to adapt to the local economy posed a serious threat to the Company’s domain of intra-Asian trade and its pursuit of a monopoly over the spice trade. The Chinese did no trespassing and had a wealth of practical knowledge. They helped the Company sell imported products on the local market and to purchase the goods needed to

⁷¹ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 74.

⁷² Phoa Liong Gie, “De Economische Positie”, 107; The Siauw Giap, “The Socioeconomic Role of the Chinese in Indonesia 1820–1940”, in *Economic Growth in Indonesia 1820–1940*, edited by A. Maddison and G. H. A. Prince, (Dordrecht: Foris, 1989), 1.

provision its personnel and supplement Batavia's supplies of cash crops. They also helped finding new taxation opportunities and assisted the Company in transporting its goods. The Company in turn gave the Chinese a free hand in trade and helped them eliminate commercial rivals. The Chinese were involved in practically every domain of the economy along the Pasisir: they leased lands from the regents for the cultivation of agricultural products, dominated the trade in rice, salt, and timber, engaged successfully in tax farming, and were feverishly active in shipping activities. Without doubt, these were the glory days of the Chinese.⁷³

Whereas Chinese immigration was highly encouraged in the seventeenth century, a different attitude was displayed by the High Government of Batavia when it witnessed the dramatic increase of Chinese immigrants flooding the Ommelanden in the early decades of the eighteenth century. The steady influx of Chinese immigrants was at the expense of law and order, which was aggravated when the sugar market collapsed after 1710 and numerous sugar mills had to be closed. Many Chinese labourers lost their jobs. An obscure Chinese society emerged in the Ommelanden with thugs and thieves roaming the region. The Company became alarmed by this and sought to curb the number of Chinese immigrants entering Batavia. In 1706, the number of Chinese immigrants arriving in big junks was limited to one hundred, and small junks were only allowed to transport eighty. Still many Chinese immigrants kept entering the region because lower-ranking Company officials did not enforce the rules set to protect the China trade and their own interests. In 1727 another attempt was made to reduce the number of Chinese immigrants, in particular the "useless subjects" among them. Every Chinese living in Batavia and the Ommelanden, including those who already had been living there for a longer period, had to apply to the Chinese officers for a residence permit (*permissie briefje*) costing two *rijksdaalders*. Only those who were useful citizens in the eyes of the government could obtain such a permit. Those who were denied a

⁷³ Kwee Hui Kian, *The Political Economy of Java's Northeast Coast, c. 1740–1800: Elite Synergy* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 31–33, 162–68.

residence permit were chained and deported back to China. As this rule also turned out to be unsuccessful, the High Government issued an edict on 25 July 1740, ordering all jobless Chinese in the Ommelanden who had fallen into banditry and other illegal activities, to be chained and deported to Ceylon. Soon the rumour spread that, while en route to Ceylon these deportees would be thrown overboard. This led to a rebellion in the Ommelanden and shortly afterwards the Chinese rebels attacked Batavia. Fearing that the Chinese living in the city would side with their rebellious countrymen, Dutch officials and citizens killed more than 8000 Chinese citizens and burnt down their houses.⁷⁴

After this horrific incident, the relationship between the Chinese and Dutch was tainted by mutual distrust and the Dutch felt uncomfortable with the Chinese living close by. Therefore the High Government decided to confine the Chinese to special quarters outside the walled town. Before the massacre, the Chinese were permitted to live freely within the city walls. But Batavia's dependence on the Chinese became painfully clear when the surviving Chinese fled the town during the disturbances, leaving it without food and services. Commercial interests encouraged the Chinese to return to the city. Blussé has also shown that both parties perceived the massacre as a tragic accident at variance with the normal course of events. Although the incident represented a severe crisis in their collaboration, this breakdown was by no means of a lasting nature. Gradually Chinese immigration resumed, although it was not until the nineteenth century that it reached high levels again.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See "De Oorzaken van den Opstand der Chineezzen in 1740", *De Chineesche Revue* 2:3 (July 1928): 24–34. For more information on the Chinese massacre of 1740 see R. Raben, "Uit de Suiker in het Geweer: De Chinese Oorlog in Batavia in 1740", in *Het Verre Gezicht: Politieke en Culturele Relaties tussen Nederland, Azië, Afrika en Amerika. Opstellen Aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. Leonard Blussé*, ed. J. T. Lindblad and A. Schrikker (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2011), 106–23.

⁷⁵ Abeyasekere, *Jakarta*, 27; Blussé, *Strange Company*, 96.

After the VOC period more land was sold. During the term of Governor-General Herman Willem Daendels (1808–1811) and the British interregnum (1811–16) public land sales occurred on a large scale. The large number of private landholdings made Batavia unique among the cities of Java. By a resolution of 1 May 1855, the governor-general was no longer allowed to sell land for private ownership. The government was only permitted to sell small plots of land for city development and the construction of public infrastructure.⁷⁶ Of the 304 private estates in Batavia, Meester-Cornelis, Tangerang, and Buitenzorg a century later (in 1904), 101 were in the hands of the Europeans and 203 were owned by “Foreign Orientals” (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*)—Chinese, Arabs, and other Asians—the Chinese accounting for 169. Buitenzorg, south of Batavia was mostly occupied by the Dutch and other Europeans. Chinese landowners were in the majority in Meester-Cornelis, and Tangerang was almost entirely in the hands of the Chinese, who numbered 300.000 and owned more than 150.000 *bouws* (150.000 hectares) of land.⁷⁷ It was certainly no exaggeration to call Tangerang a Chinese city.⁷⁸

The Dutch continued to rely on the Chinese in the retail trade. As the Dutch monopolised the wholesale trade and the indigenous trading class had not yet emerged, the Chinese were the ones to fill the gap. As shopkeepers, holders of eateries, and owners of soap-, cigarette- and ice factories, arrack distilleries, sugar- and rice mills, tanneries, and other industries, the Chinese not only assisted the Dutch in the sale of export products for the world market, but also managed to work their way up to a stable middle-class. Thanks to their good business sense, diligence, frugality, and their aspiration to move forward, the Chinese succeeded in consolidating their economic power.⁷⁹

The authorities depended almost exclusively on the Chinese to run the revenue farms, because they

⁷⁶ Van der Hoek, “De Particuliere Landerijen in de Residentie Batavia”, 41–42; Von Zboray, *De Particuliere Landerijen*, 21–22.

⁷⁷ De Veer, *Particuliere Landerijen en de Openbare Veiligheid*, 44.

⁷⁸ M. van Till, *Batavia bij Nacht: Bloei en Ondergang van het Indonesisch roverswezen in Batavia en de Ommelanden, 1869–1942* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2006), 35.

⁷⁹ J. L. Vleming, *Het Chineesche Zakenleven in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Weltevreden: Landsdrukkerij, 1925), 10–11.

were willing to invest considerable sums of money for lucrative tax-farming contracts. Given that state resources were still too poor to support a large bureaucracy that could introduce and carry out a new and efficient tax system, it seemed plausible to hire Chinese businessmen to collect the taxes. The Chinese had the numbers, the organisational network, and the capital, and in most cases they did not pose a military threat. Moreover, as Asians who did not belong to the dominant ethnic group, they were able to maintain closer relations with the indigenous people than the Dutch.⁸⁰ Thus, as in other European colonies in Southeast Asia, there was a business alliance between the Chinese settlers and the colonial rulers. The alliance was successful for two reasons because the Chinese did not seek an empire of their own, but were willing to become collaborators in the empires of others,⁸¹ and because the interests of the Chinese and the Dutch complemented each other. Both groups were engaged in the pursuit of optimal profits from overseas trade.⁸²

1.3 The institution of Chinese officers and the Chinese Council of Batavia

Under the rule of the Dutch East India Company, local administration in Batavia and the Ommelanden was based on a two-tier system. The highest authority lay in the hands of the High Government, which took all important decisions with regard to its subjects. Those decisions were usually determined by colonial interests. Typical Dutch urban institutions like the Bench of Aldermen, Board of Curators, and the Orphan Chamber were established to handle the important civil affairs of the people. In daily life, administration was entrusted to indigenous or Foreign Oriental headmen who governed their communities on basis of their own *adat* and traditions. This

⁸⁰ De Heer W. P. Groeneveldt in de *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* over “de Chineezenquaestie in Ned.-Indië”, *De Indische Gids*, 19:1 (1897): 521–24; Reid, “The Origins of Revenue Farming”, 72. The leasing of monopoly rights to collect a specific tax commenced in the VOC period. The leases were sold on public farm auctions, usually to the highest bidders for a number of years. For more on Chinese revenue farming, see Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, chap. 3.

⁸¹ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 58.

⁸² Blussé, *Strange Company*, 95.

form of local administration was run at a lower level by leaders who headed a neighbourhood (*kampong*) in which their countrymen were grouped together. As long as there were no urgent administrative affairs that required direct government intervention, the *kampong* leaders had a free hand to administer the people according to their own laws. This system of ethnic community leadership, adopted by the Dutch, was quite common in Southeast Asian settlements.⁸³

On 11 October 1619, a few months after the conquest of the port town, Governor-General Coen appointed the wealthy merchant Souw Bing Kong, more familiar to the Dutch as Bencon, as the first headman of the Chinese community in Batavia. The resolution of his appointment stated that Souw Bing Kong was expected to settle all civil affairs among his countrymen and to maintain law and order in the Chinese community. Six years later, in 1625, he was awarded the title of *capitein* (captain).⁸⁴ Although this title indicated a military rank, the Chinese headman was not responsible for military affairs. As mentioned previously, members of the Chinese community were exempted from *diensten voor het Kasteel* and the *schutterij* and paid 1.5 real *hoofdgeld* per month to compensate for these exemptions. This poll tax was collected by the Chinese headman from October 1620 onwards.⁸⁵ In the Chinese chronicle of Batavia, the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji*, it is mentioned that in 1633 the successor of Souw Bing Kong, Phoa Beng Gam (Bingam to the Dutch) asked Governor-General Hendrik Brouwer for permission to hoist a flag in front of his house every first day of each month of the Roman calendar to remind the Chinese people to fulfil their tax

⁸³ Kanumoyoso, "Beyond the City Wall", 61–71.

⁸⁴ B. Hoetink, "So Bing Kong: Het Eerste Hoofd der Chineezzen te Batavia (1619–1636)", *Overdruk uit de Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 73 (1917): 13–14.

⁸⁵ *Plakaatboek*, vol. 1, 1602–1642: pp. 76–77, 547.

obligation.⁸⁶ The exemption from *corvée* labour and military service was inspired by considerations to give the Chinese a free hand in trade, but it might also have been a precautionary measure to keep the Chinese unarmed.⁸⁷ In 1620 the *College van Schepenen* (Board of Aldermen) was set up to exercise justice over all people not employed by the Dutch East India Company—that is, the free citizens and foreigners living in Batavia. As head of the Chinese community, Souw Bing Kong was given a seat in this body.⁸⁸

Chinese captains were appointed by resolutions of the governor-general until 1666. When Captain Gan Dji Ko (Siqua) died in that year, Governor-General Joan Maetsuycker was reluctant to appoint another captain, and he did not appoint a Chinese member to the Bench of Aldermen either. According to J. Th. Vermeulen, Maetsuycker was one of the few governor-generals who was not well-disposed towards the Chinese and intended to end their more or less privileged position.⁸⁹ For twelve years the leadership activities over the Chinese community were carried out by Gan Dji Ko's surviving Balinese concubine. Because of growing resistance within the Chinese community against this female leadership, Governor-General Rijckloff van Goens appointed a new Chinese

⁸⁶ “Chronologische Geschiedenis van Batavia door een Chinees”, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, vol. 3:2 (1840): 16. The accuracy of this Chinese chronicle is questioned by B. Hoetink, who has shown that details of this chronicle are not consistent with the data in the archives of the Dutch East Indies. Hoetink argues that Souw Bing Kong had served at least sixteen years as Chinese captain (from 11 October 1619 to 3 July 1636). Hence, Phoa Beng Gam could not have had succeeded him as a captain in 1633. Hoetink also claims that Phoa Beng Gam was the third person to take over the post of captain in 1645. The second person who filled this position was Lim Lacco. He served eight years (1636–45). See Hoetink “So Bing Kong”, 42–43.

⁸⁷ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 81.

⁸⁸ G. L. Balk, F. van Dijk and D. J. Kortlang, *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)* (Jakarta: Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia and Leiden: Brill, 2007), 67; *Plakaatboek*, vol. 1, 1602–1642: pp. 59–60.

⁸⁹ J. Th. Vermeulen, “Eenige Opmerkingen over de Rechtsbedeeling van de Compagnie in de 17^{de} en 18^{de} Eeuw voor de Chineesche Samenleving”, a lecture given at the China Institute in Batavia, on 11 October 1939, p. 11.

captain in 1678.⁹⁰ As the Chinese population had grown significantly over the years and the scope of their activities had increased accordingly, the captain needed assistance in managing the Chinese community. Thus in 1678 a lieutenant and a *vaandrig* (ensign) were appointed as well, and in 1685 Chinese neighbourhood chiefs (*wijkmeesters*) were tasked with assisting the staff of the captain, though they were *not* part of the captain's staff.⁹¹ With the appointment of the Chinese captain and lieutenant as community leaders, the term "Chinese officer" must have come up.⁹² From then on, more Chinese officers were appointed in Batavia and elsewhere on Java. In 1729, there were six lieutenants. After Captain Nie Hoe Kong was banished to Amboina for his alleged role in the Chinese rebellion, which was suppressed by the horrific Chinese massacre of 1740, the post of captain remained vacant for three years, and the six lieutenants were also removed. In 1743 Governor-General G. W. Baron van Imhoff decided to restore the institution of Chinese officers and appointed a new captain and two lieutenants.⁹³ During the whole period of VOC supremacy, twenty-two captains and seventy-three lieutenants were appointed to administer the Chinese community in Batavia.⁹⁴ Beside the collection of taxes, the administration of civil affairs, and keeping order in the Chinese community, the officers were given additional tasks to maintain the social well-being of the Chinese people, including service in the *College van Boedelmeesteren* (Board of Curators) and the Chinese Hospital. The High Government attached great importance to the administration of the estates of its Chinese subjects and it established a board of curators after it

⁹⁰ P. de Roo de la Faille, "De Chineesche Raad te Batavia en het door dit College Beheerde Fonds", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 80 (1924): 308.

⁹¹ Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 12–13. The Chinese chronicle of Batavia however mentions that as early as 1633, Captain Phoa Beng Gam was already granted the assistance of a lieutenant and a secretary, after he had submitted a request to Governor-General Hendrik Brouwer for more aid in managing the affairs of the Chinese community. See "Chronologische Geschiedenis van Batavia door een Chinees", *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 3:2 (1840): 15–16.

⁹² Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, 7.

⁹³ B. Hoetink, "Chineesche Officieren te Batavia onder de Compagnie", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 78 (1922): 3–4.

⁹⁴ Hoetink "Chineesche Officieren te Batavia onder de Compagnie", 8–9.

noticed an increase in insolvent Chinese estates and continuous problems between creditors and debtors. The fees for administering the inheritances of the Chinese was used to finance the founding of the Chinese Hospital and an orphanage. It was evident that the High Government wished to maintain stricter control over the estates of the Chinese, their healthcare, and social well-being. From 1717 onwards, the Chinese officers were authorised to register the marriages and divorces of Chinese citizens.⁹⁵

It is not known in what year exactly the Chinese Council was established. Some historians claim 1678 as the year of establishment, because it was in this year that the captain was officially assisted by a lieutenant and an ensign (*vaandrig*).⁹⁶ P. de Roo de la Faille gives 1678 as the beginning of the Chinese Council as well, but in the same article he also claims that the Chinese Council was officially established in 1742, when the Chinese officers were given permission to accommodate a *roemah bitjara* (meeting hall) on Tiang Bendera (Flag Street) in Kampong Malacca⁹⁷: “and from this moment on—the establishment of this Roemah Bitjara—Chinese local history dates the existence of the Chinese Council, the so-called Kongkowan.”⁹⁸ Myra Sidharta suggests that the Chinese Council became official in 1717, when the officers received the authority to sanction marriages and divorces.⁹⁹ Anyhow, with the appointment of lieutenants, neighbourhood

⁹⁵ Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, 7.

⁹⁶ Liem Ting Tjay, “Het Instituut der Chineesche Officieren”, *De Chineesche Revue* 2:3 (July 1928): 67–68; Vermeulen, “Eenige Opmerkingen over de Rechtsbedeeling van de Compagnie”, 11.

⁹⁷ In 1866 the Roemah Bitjara was moved to the Tongkangan area. Blussé and Chen, *Archives of the Kong Koan of Batavia*, 3.

⁹⁸ Roo de la Faille, “De Chineesche Raad te Batavia”, 313.

⁹⁹ M. Sidharta, “On the Remnants of the ‘Gong Goan’ Archives in Jakarta: A Preliminary Study”, in *Collected Essays on Local History of the Asian-Pacific Region: Contribution of Overseas Chinese*, edited by Lin Tien-Wai (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, Centre of Asian Studies, 1991), 515.

chiefs and two secretaries,¹⁰⁰ and the increasing variety in responsibilities over the Chinese people, Chinese administration became more and more regulated. However after the Chinese massacre of October 1740, the VOC administration realised it had to reorganise the Chinese affairs and measures were taken to institutionalise the Chinese officer system and to strengthen its ties to the colonial administration.

Chinese officers lacked authority beyond the city wall as landowners in the Ommelanden were supposed to arrange their own safety and security. They appointed village heads and *mandoers* (overseers), who henceforth received an official appointment from the colonial government. In this respect, the organisation of police matters in the Ommelanden differed from that in the rest of Java, where local police affairs were woven into the colonial administrative framework.¹⁰¹ To enforce more administrative control in the region, colonial institutions such as the *College van Heemraden* (district council) and the *landdrost* (sheriff) were introduced, but their actual control over the region was limited in terms of budget and potential since they were dealing with a quickly expanding territory and population. Therefore the region's administration also greatly relied on the *kampong* heads and the neighbourhood chiefs.¹⁰² Prior to 1740 the Chinese people were not organised in a *kampong* in the Ommelanden. Their dwellings could be found anywhere within and beyond the city wall. After the horrific events of 1740, the Chinese were no longer permitted to live within the city walls and were obliged to settle in an area outside the city. Their confinement to a specific quarter was more rigidly enforced in 1816 and 1835 when passes and zoning systems were implemented.

The fact that the Chinese revolt in the Ommelanden evolved into the Chinese massacre in Batavia can also be attributed to the waning authority of the Chinese officers vis-à-vis their own

¹⁰⁰ The first secretary was appointed in 1747, see Vermeulen, "Eenige Opmerkingen over de Rechtsbedeeling van de Compagnie", 11. The second secretary was appointed in 1766, see Blussé and Chen, *Archives of the Kong Koan of Batavia*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Van Till, *Batavia bij Nacht*, 37–38.

¹⁰² Kanumoyoso, "Beyond the City Wall", 65–71.

people as well as the Company. Blussé has shown that many Chinese of the countryside fell victim to usurers inside the city, the place where the official Chinese community heads supposedly were in control. The Chinese captain was also increasingly bypassed by Company officials when problems arose. As the urban Chinese leaders and the Company showed themselves unable to enforce strict supervision in the region a power vacuum was left in the Ommelanden.¹⁰³

Thus, in order to keep a close eye on the Chinese and administer them more efficiently, the Chinese Council of Batavia had to become an instrument of stricter control over the Chinese community. The High Government in Batavia granted the Chinese Council more administrative power over the Chinese community and starting in 1743—when Governor-General Van Imhoff restored Chinese administration—the Council functioned as a semi-autonomous organisation with a wide range of duties, including the registration of marriages and divorces; tax collection; the management of temples and burial grounds and organisation of religious ceremonies; the registration of the dead; the organisation and supervision of Chinese education; mediation in civil disputes in the Chinese community; maintaining public order; issuing travel passes; providing advice to the colonial government and its institutions; and the provision of translation services to the colonial authorities. The Chinese Council also registered births, but the only (incomplete) birth records I found in the Council's archive date from the Japanese occupation and after. Liem Thian Joe also mentions the existence of a *buku daftar kelahiran* (birth record book) in Semarang.¹⁰⁴ After the demise of the VOC in 1799 the system of Chinese community leadership was continued. The position of *majoor der Chineezen*, who functioned as the leader of the Chinese community and became the chairman of the Chinese Council was created in 1837. In the history of the Chinese

¹⁰³ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 89–90.

¹⁰⁴ Liem, *Riwayat Semarang*, 316.

Council of Batavia there were five majors: Tan Eng Goan (1837–65), Tan Tjoen Tiat (1865–79), Lie Tjoe Hong (1879–96), Tio Tek Ho (1896–1908), and Khouw Kim An (1910–19 and 1927–42).¹⁰⁵

Official recognition of the institution of Chinese officers was laid down in article 96 of Constitutional Regulation no. 87 of 1818: “Chinese, Moors, Arabs, and other foreigners, not belonging to the Europeans, who have settled in one of the towns of the Netherlands Indies, are, as much as possible, to be placed under the headmen of their nations, all in accordance with the regulations which already exist or which yet have to be formulated”.¹⁰⁶ This article was maintained in subsequent Constitutional Regulations of 1827, 1830, and 1836. Article 96 was amended in the Constitutional Regulation of 1854, requiring the Foreign Orientals to live in separate quarters. Article 73 stated: “Foreign Orientals who have settled in the Netherlands Indies are to be placed as much as possible in separate quarters, under the leadership of their own headmen. The governor-general sees to it that these headmen will be provided with the required instructions.”¹⁰⁷ The Chinese Council was not officially recognised until the *Gouvernementsbesluit* (governmental decree) of 10 February 1868, no. 10, which stated that the Chinese Council of Batavia should consist of one chairman, the *majoor der Chineezen*, and ten members, of which two carry the title of captain and eight the title of lieutenant, and two secretaries.¹⁰⁸ By *Gouvernementsbesluit* of 20 May 1871, no. 37, the composition of the Chinese Council was amended to one major, four captains, six lieutenants, and two secretaries.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Major Tio Tek Ho passed away in January 1908. Captain Nie Hok Tjoan acted as ad interim major from 1908–1910. In 1910, Captain Khouw Kim An assumed the post of major. Nine years later, in 1919, Major Khouw Kim An officially retired from his post because it was the colonial government’s intention to abolish the institution of Chinese officers. In 1927 Khouw Kim An was reappointed after the colonial government dismissed the plans to do away with the Chinese Council. This will be discussed in the chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Indisch Staatsblad* 1818-87.

¹⁰⁷ *Indisch Staatsblad* 1855-2.

¹⁰⁸ *Gouvernementsbesluit* of 10 February 1868, no. 10; *Indisch Staatsblad* 1868-24.

¹⁰⁹ *Indisch Staatsblad* 1871-70.

1.4 Conclusion

The institution of Chinese officers in Batavia was almost as old as Dutch rule in the city itself. The governance of the Chinese people was an administrative fusion between the Dutch and the Chinese officers. The latter ruled over their countrymen according to their own laws and customs, while at the same time running the typical Dutch institutions that were established to officially manage the affairs of the Chinese population. This type of indirect administration was also applied to other non-European groups in the region, but it was the general interdependence of the Dutch and Chinese that made the institution of Chinese officers stand out. Close cooperation between the Chinese and Dutch also existed in other spheres. When the first Dutch East India Company anchored in the region, the Chinese were already present, making a living for themselves as traders and farmers. As they appeared highly skilful and industrious, the founder of Batavia J. P. Coen immediately understood that the development of the newly conquered city and its immediate surroundings depended on the Chinese. Therefore the Chinese were given a free hand in trade and were encouraged to cultivate the lands surrounding the walled city. It is no exaggeration to claim that Batavia and the Ommelanden were opened up and built by the Chinese. A relationship of mutual dependence in administration, trade, and agricultural exploitation soon lasted several centuries, and it was this relationship that strongly determined the position of the Chinese officers not only in the eyes of the colonial administrators but also in their own community, as we shall see in the following chapters.