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The Decline of the Chinese Council of Batavia

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CHAPTER 2

THE CHINESE COUNCIL OF BATAVIA: ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

Dutch officials in official attire were present when the captain-to-be arrived at the city hall in his sedan chair, carried by eight bearers and preceded by hundreds of slaves bearing flags and lanterns, and hundreds of Chinese bearing the different symbols for his authority. After the future captain got out from his chair, his letter of appointment was announced to the public.¹¹⁰

The fragment above illustrates the formal introduction of a Chinese captain to the public during the period in which the Dutch East India Company expanded its territorial power in the Indonesian archipelago. The appointment of a captain was proclaimed to the Chinese community by his official presentation to the public. On this day the appointee was escorted to the town hall in ceremonial procession where he was received by the governor-general. After the latter handed over his letter of appointment, the document was read out loud by government officials in the Dutch and Chinese language.¹¹¹ This distinguished ceremony shows that the installation of a Chinese officer went hand in hand with a display of great splendour indicative of the prestige and stature of the position.

Indeed, the institution of Chinese officers was a prestigious and eminent system of communal leadership in the Indies. It was the local elite of the Chinese community that worked together to coordinate and oversee social and religious matters. The organisation in which these

¹¹⁰ Sidharta, "On the Remnants of the 'Gong Goan' Archives in Jakarta", 514 (text modified).

¹¹¹ Hoetink, "Chineesche Officieren te Batavia onder de Compagnie", 2.

activities were institutionalised was the Chinese Council. For nearly three centuries this organisation collaborated with the Dutch colonial government in governing the Chinese community on a semi-autonomous basis. The organisation was semi-autonomous in that the Dutch for practical reasons had delegated a significant amount of authority to the Chinese officers to govern their countrymen, although the officers ultimately remained subordinate to the Dutch. The Chinese officers fulfilled an important intermediary role between the Dutch authorities and their community, a role which they largely owed to their wealth. In the course of the twentieth century new standards were introduced with regard to officialdom that favoured competence and suitability over wealth and influence. This development was widely approved by the Chinese community, which had started to resist the institution of Chinese officers. As a result, the traditional Chinese community leaders increasingly lost authority over their countrymen and the institution was drowned in a wave of fierce criticism and outright ridicule. In order to analyse how the traditional Chinese community leaders lost respect from their co-citizens, the following questions need to be answered:

How did the system of Chinese community leadership become embedded in the local administrative framework? Why had the post of Chinese officer become a privilege of the rich? And what was the nature of the relationship between the Chinese officers and the Dutch administrators?

2.1 The organisation of Chinese administration in the Residency Batavia

The institution of ethnic community leadership was not reserved only for the Chinese community in the Dutch East Indies. Although the institutionalisation of communal authority was much stronger in the Chinese community, the same system also applied to the Arabs (*kapitein der Arabieren*) and the Moors and Bengalis (*hoofd der Mooren en Bengaleezen*). The “foreign Indonesians”—that is, indigenous people whose origins lay outside Batavia—were also subject to communal leadership.¹¹²

¹¹² J. C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1983), 139.

As such, Ambonese, Balinese, Bandanese, Buginese, Banjarese, Makassarese, and Timorese each had a *kommandant* in charge of their communities. Unlike the Chinese officers, these *kommandanten* were required to supply manpower in times of war. This policy of strict segregation stemmed from a general feeling of fear that was inherent among the Company rulers. “Colonial anxiety” sprang from the painful awareness that the Company and its entourage only formed a small segment in colonial society. Non-Europeans made up the overwhelming majority of people in colonial society. The presence of so many people and so many groups with very divergent customs, laws, and religions were constant reminders of the potential danger to the VOC’s profit-making activities. To deal with this inherent fear and safeguard the achievement of its aims, the Company enforced the rule of separating the ethnic groups.¹¹³ Just like the non-native, non-European communities, indigenous ethnic groups were required to live in separate quarters under the supervision of their own headmen.¹¹⁴ However, Bondan Kanumoyoso has shown that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, people lived in their own *kampong* and under their own leaders, but enjoyed a relative degree of freedom in choosing their religion, observing their own customs, and also in moving from one *kampong* to another. Thus, while Company officials adhered to the official policy of confining ethnic groups in separate quarters for the purpose of administering them easily and keeping them apart, in reality the various ethnicities interacted quite closely with one another.¹¹⁵

When Dutch rule was re-established on Java after the Napoleonic Wars, the institution of ethnic community leadership was officially continued. Segregation remained a pragmatic affair to guarantee stability in peacetime and facilitate administration and military recruitment in times of

¹¹³ R. Raben, “Batavia and Colombo: The Ethnic and Spatial Order of Two Colonial Cities 1600–1800” (PhD diss., Leiden University, 1996), 161–62.

¹¹⁴ W. E. van Mastenbroek, *De Historische Ontwikkeling van de Staatsrechtelijke Indeling der Bevolking van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1934), 23–24.

¹¹⁵ Kanumoyoso, “Beyond the City Wall”, 71–75.

war.¹¹⁶ However, in 1829 the Dutch found that the “foreign Indonesians” had been integrated into native Batavian society to such an extent that they did not need their own headmen anymore. From then on the indigenous people of the Indonesian archipelago were administered by the same *kommandant*.¹¹⁷ The system of indirect rule over indigenous subjects and non-indigenous, non-European communities, the so-called Foreign Orientals, was incorporated into the colonial administrative framework. Executed through the apparatus of the Department of Internal Affairs (Binnenlandsch Bestuur), the indigenous administration (*Inlandsch bestuur*) ran on parallel lines with the Foreign Orientals administration, which was responsible for the Chinese, Arabs, Moors, and Bengalis. The Chinese officers carried out the local administration over the Chinese, which was called the *Chineesch bestuur*. On Java and Madoera, the institution of Chinese officers served as a counterpart to the indirect rule of the indigenous population, both of which were placed under European administration (*Europeesch bestuur*).¹¹⁸

In the early twentieth century the Residency Batavia consisted of five divisions (*afdeelingen*): *Stad en Voorsteden* (city and suburbs; also referred to as the *hoofdplaats*) in the northern-central part, Tangerang in the western part, Meester-Cornelis and Krawang in the eastern part, and Buitenzorg as the southern division. The *Stad en Voorsteden* was the centre of Batavia. Tangerang, Meester-Cornelis, Krawang, and Buitenzorg together formed the Ommelanden, a large region of private estates in the outskirts of the city Batavia, most of them owned by Dutch and Chinese. The residency was headed by the resident.¹¹⁹

As the core of local Chinese administration and most Chinese activities were concentrated in the *Stad en Voorsteden*, I will focus on this part of the Batavia residency where the building of the

¹¹⁶ Raben, “Batavia and Colombo”, 182.

¹¹⁷ M. Lohanda, *Sejarah Para Pembesar Mengatur Batavia* (Jakarta: Masup Jakarta, 2007), 177, and Regeerings-almanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië 1829 (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1865–1942): 41.

¹¹⁸ Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 73–74.

¹¹⁹ Lohanda, *Sejarah Para Pembesar Mengatur Batavia*, 195–96.

Chinese Council, the main temple, schools, the Chinese Hospital, commercial houses, Chinese cultural associations, and political organisations could be found.¹²⁰ The Stad en Voorsteden was divided into two districts: Batavia and Weltevreden. The *assistent-resident voor de politie* (assistant-resident), assisted by a *controleur voor de politie* (inspector), was in charge of the division and responsible for police affairs and security. The Gouvernementsbesluit of 4 January 1913, no. 27, determined that the Chinese Council of Batavia consist of eight members (two captains and six lieutenants) under the *majoor der Chineezzen*, who chaired the Council.¹²¹ Batavia and Weltevreden were each under one Chinese captain and three lieutenants.¹²² Within these districts, they administered the following six important Chinese neighbourhoods (*wijken*): Tanah Abang, Pasar Baroe, Pasar Senen, Pendjaringan, Mangga Besar and Jakatra.¹²³ Administration of the indigenous population followed the same pattern, though with different nomenclature. Regencies (*regentschappen*) were run by a regent (*patih*), whose position was equivalent to that of a Chinese major. He supervised two district heads (*wedana*), in charge of the districts Batavia and Weltevreden, and four subdistrict heads (*assistent-wedana*).¹²⁴ These were equal to the Chinese captains and lieutenants.

¹²⁰ Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 80.

¹²¹ The chairman and *majoor der Chineezzen* was Khouw Kim An; Tio Tek Soen and Nio Hoeij Oen were the two captains; and Khoe A Fan, Khouw Keng Liong, Lie Tjian Tjoen, Oeij Kim Liong, Oh Sian Tjeng, and Liong A Tjan were the six lieutenants. See the Chinese (nos. 21024–21025) and Malay (no. NM2) minutes of the monthly board meetings of the Chinese Council for the year 1913, Kong Koan Archive, Leiden.

¹²² See confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor-General, 18 October 1912, no. 319/C, in Gouvernementsbesluit, 4 January 1913, no. 27, Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (ANRI), Jakarta.

¹²³ Tanah Abang, Pasar Baroe and Pasar Senen were officially recognised as Chinese neighbourhoods (*wijken*); Pendjaringan, Mangga Besar and Jakatra were sub-districts (*adjudantschappen*) in which large concentrations of Chinese resided. See confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 18 October 1912, no. 319/C, in Gouvernementsbesluit, 4 January 1913, no. 27, ANRI, Jakarta.

¹²⁴ See *Het een en ander over het Binnenlands Bestuur op Java en Madoera* (Masman & Stroink, 1947), 3–4; Regeerings-almanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië 2 (1913): 157–58.

2.2 The Chinese officers: appointment and dismissal

In the three principal cities of Java (Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja) Chinese Councils had been established in which, according to hierarchical order, one major and several captains and lieutenants were seated. The major was the chairman of the Council and therefore also head of the Chinese community. He usually chaired the board meetings of the Chinese Council and had the most influential vote in the decision making on issues that concerned the Council or the Chinese community.¹²⁵ Consequently, he carried most of the responsibility for his countrymen. The second officer in hierarchical order was the captain. In the absence of the major, he chaired the board meetings of the Chinese Council and signed official letters on behalf of the major. He also attended the frequent meetings in the office of the resident or assistant-resident.¹²⁶ The lieutenants were the lowest officers in rank. They had the most frequent contacts with members of the Chinese community, either personally or through the neighbourhood chiefs. The neighbourhood chiefs usually submitted complaints and requests from the Chinese people to the lieutenants.¹²⁷ Official members of the Chinese Council were regarded as “effective” officers, as they were responsible for the daily administration of the Chinese population. In addition to these, there was a group of “non-effective” officers who were not members of the Chinese Council. These “non-effective” officers were granted the title of titular major, captain, or lieutenant for outstanding performances valuable to the Chinese community. Chinese functionaries who were employed by government agencies, such as the *Wees- en Boedelkamer* (Chamber of Orphans- and Estates) were also given a titular rank, as long as they were in office. Titular ranks were also given to retired effective officers who had performed their duties satisfactorily.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Decisions of the Chinese Council were taken by vote in the monthly board meetings.

¹²⁶ Usually the most senior captain—the one appointed first—replaced the major in his absence.

¹²⁷ Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 75–76.

¹²⁸ Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, 37.

On Java and Madoera, the post of Chinese officer was honorary and thus an unpaid position. The officers were only compensated for expenses made while fulfilling their duties as major, captain or lieutenant. This compensation was called a *toelage*. Chinese officers who sat in several governmental committees (such as those dealing with immigration and taxation) or the *Landraad* (the indigenous court of justice) received a monthly compensation for their services. Because their positions were unpaid, most positions in the Chinese Council were filled by members of the Chinese elite. In the *Buitengewesten* (outer regions) of the Dutch East Indies, the post of Chinese officer was a paid position.¹²⁹

Chinese officers were appointed and dismissed by the governor-general, who also provided the officers with the required instructions.¹³⁰ Although these were actually drafted by the *hoofd van gewestelijk bestuur* (head of local administration—usually the resident) because he was more familiar with the situation in his locality. The instructions were published in the newspaper *Javasche Courant*.¹³¹ The secretaries of the Chinese Council were also directly appointed by the governor-general but unlike the Chinese officers they were given an official salary. Knowledge of the Chinese language was an important prerequisite for the job. The secretaries recorded the board meetings of the Chinese Council. As mentioned in the introduction, from 1920 onwards, the meetings were only documented in Malay. The reason why Chinese was never used again seemingly had to do with the fact that most Chinese officers had lost their command over the Chinese language by that time. In the meeting of 5 May 1916, acting Lieutenant Tan Tjin Bok asked why the minutes were still recorded in Chinese since the majority of the officers were unable to read Chinese characters. Major Khouw Kim An acknowledged that most officers were incapable of

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ *Indisch Staatsblad* 1855–2, article 73.

¹³¹ Liem, “Het Instituut der Chineesche Officieren”, 70. See also letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 18 May 1920, no. 363/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta and *Indisch Staatsblad* 1882-232.

reading the Chinese characters, but he maintained that it was important to honour their Chinese heritage and officers having trouble reading through the minutes could ask the secretary to translate.¹³² The major's answer represented the situation of most peranakan Chinese in the Indies, who tried to sustain their Chinese identity by upholding the Chinese language, religion, and traditional Chinese celebrations. But in the long run, their social environment made it difficult and peranakan culture was a distinctive mix of Chinese heritage overlaid with Dutch and Indonesian influences. Already in the second half of the nineteenth century the majority of the peranakan Chinese on Java read the Chinese classics and other popular works in Malay translations.¹³³ When the institution of Chinese officers came under attack in the twentieth century, critics cited their inability to speak Chinese as evidence that they had lost their sense of "Chineseness" and were unable to connect to the waves of Chinese immigrants who had begun arriving en masse in the late nineteenth century. The neighbourhood chiefs were appointed by the local authorities (the assistant-resident).¹³⁴

In most cases only the post of lieutenant was open to new applicants because the vacant positions of captain and major were usually filled by lieutenants and captains who were in office at the time. Only in rare cases were people directly appointed to a higher position than lieutenant. On 26 September 1879 for instance, Tan A Kauw was instantly appointed as captain.¹³⁵ People interested in the position of lieutenant wrote an application letter directly to the governor-general. The application letters normally contained information about the applicant's age, place of residence,

¹³² Malay minutes of the monthly board meetings of the Chinese Council, no. NM3, 5 May 1916, Kong Koan Archive, Leiden: p. 158 (hereafter shortened as Malay minutes).

¹³³ Rush, *Opium to Java*, 91.

¹³⁴ Liem, "Het Instituut der Chineesche Officiëren", 70; Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 30 December 1914: p. 147. See also Malay minutes, no. NM2, 30 December 1914: p. 327.

¹³⁵ Regeerings-almanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië (1880): 180.

profession, and family background, especially if he was related to an officer.¹³⁶ In the twentieth century, applicants also included their educational background.¹³⁷ This probably had to do with the growing criticism against the common practice of recruiting only wealthy men for the position of Chinese officer instead of judging applicants on their skills. (This issue is discussed at greater length in the following chapters.) After receiving the application letters, the governor-general sought the advice of the resident of the residency where the applicants resided. If the applicant lived in Batavia, Semarang, or Soerabaja, the resident ordered the officers of the Chinese Councils to evaluate the candidates. After having ascertained that the information given in the application letters was truthful, a further evaluation of the applicants was conducted in the board meetings. The foremost requirement was wealth; chances were very slim that people without sufficient financial means were selected. The officers also paid special attention to the following criteria: a candidate was supposed to be of irreproachable conduct (civilised and well-mannered) and was not to have had any negative encounters with the police. The usage of opium contributed to a negative assessment of the candidate. The officers also inquired whether the applicants were respected members of the Chinese community and familiar with the morals and customs of their countrymen. Another important consideration of the officers was the family background of the applicants. Preference of the Council members usually went out to candidates who came from officers' families.¹³⁸ Finally, the Chinese officers also preferred colleagues who were born in the Indies and

¹³⁶ Application letters enclosed with the confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor-General, 24 July 1883, no. La.X1, Gouvernementsbesluit, 18 August 1883, no. 9, ANRI, Jakarta.

¹³⁷ See the application letters included with the confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor-General, 18 October 1912, no. 319/C, Gouvernementsbesluit, 4 January 1913, no. 27, ANRI, Jakarta.

¹³⁸ Confidential Letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor-General, 24 July 1883, no. La.X1, Gouvernementsbesluit, 18 August 1883, no. 9, ANRI, Jakarta; Confidential letter of the Resident to the Governor-General, 6 August 1884, no. La.C3, Gouvernementsbesluit, 31 August 1884, no. 20, ANRI, Jakarta.

were of Hokkien descent.¹³⁹ Candidates who were born in China or whose ancestors were of non-Hokkien descent (such as Hakka or Cantonese)¹⁴⁰ were usually rejected. This changed in 1878 when the colonial government decided that as a rule the Chinese Council should be composed of members from the various Chinese population groups (see chapter 3). It was obvious that desired requirements for aspirant European officials, such as ability and competency, were not applicable to the Chinese officers.¹⁴¹ After they had evaluated the candidates, the officers sent their conclusions to the resident, who in turn sent his list of nominees to the governor-general. Once a Chinese officer was appointed, he was sworn in by the resident (or in the absence of the resident, by the assistant-resident or controleur).¹⁴²

In principle, the appointment of a Chinese officer was permanent, vacancies opened only in case of death, forced dismissal, or when an officer resigned. Lawsuits, bankruptcy, or illegal activities were reasons why an officer could be dismissed.¹⁴³ Sickness, old age or a return to China were reasons for an officer to voluntarily withdraw himself from office.¹⁴⁴ Another reason why an officer would ask for dismissal was the feeling of embarrassment when being passed over at

¹³⁹ The Hokkien originated from the region of coastal Fujian province colloquially known as Minnan (south of the Min River). Before 1878 most Chinese officers were of Hokkien descent.

¹⁴⁰ The Hakka (literally ‘guest people’) originated from the Central Plain in China (which covers modern-day Henan and parts of Hebei, Shanxi and Shandong province) and had in a series of migrations moved to South China (in particular the south Chinese provinces Fujian and Guangdong) but also to countries abroad. The Cantonese originated from the south Chinese province Guangdong. Hakka and Cantonese people were generally considered to be uncivilised and ill-mannered by the Hokkien and Dutch.

¹⁴¹ Letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor-General, 13 August 1872, no. 5650, Gouvernementsbesluit, 31 October 1872, no. 11, ANRI, Jakarta.

¹⁴² See “Proces Verbaal van Beëdiging van Majoor Khouw Kim An, 29 Augustus 1910”, in Certificates of the appointments of Khouw Kim An (Batavia) and Tan Siau Lip (Semarang), private collection of the Friends of the Kong Koan Archive Foundation, Leiden.

¹⁴³ Letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 28 September 1871, no. 5940, Gouvernementsbesluit, 3 February 1872, no. 26, ANRI, Jakarta.

¹⁴⁴ Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, 38.

promotions. On 24 December 1877 Lieutenant Gouw Eng Hoei asked to be discharged after having been passed over twice during his career.¹⁴⁵ In 1912 the advisor for Japanese and Chinese affairs feared that Lieutenant Khoe A Fan would feel offended over the nomination of Lieutenant Nio Hoey Oen to the rank of captain, as both officers had been appointed by the Gouvernementsbesluit of 9 February 1905, no. 8. Anticipating that Lieutenant Khoe A Fan would turn in his resignation, he urged the resident of Batavia to reconsider the nomination. Apparently Lieutenant Khoe A Fan was not a man whose pride was easily hurt, because he promised the assistant-resident that he would not withdraw from office if his colleague was promoted to the rank of captain instead of him.¹⁴⁶

2.3 Tasks and responsibilities of the Chinese Council

Until 1907 no clear official determination was given out with regard to the tasks and responsibilities of the Chinese Council. The resolution by which Souw Bing Kong was officially appointed as the first Chinese headman in 1619 determined that it was his duty to maintain law and order in the Chinese community and to handle all civil affairs that concerned his countrymen.¹⁴⁷ The resolution of 8 July 1729 indicated that the lieutenants were appointed to assist the captain in settling minor disputes between members of their community. Whether the rank of lieutenant was otherwise subordinate to the rank of captain was not mentioned.¹⁴⁸ During the eighteenth century, the institution of Chinese officers became firmly embedded in colonial society after a meeting room was allocated to the officers and secretaries were added to the staff. The officers made sure that

¹⁴⁵ Confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor-General, 14 February 1878, no. 2047, Gouvernementsbesluit, 13 March 1878, no. 39, ANRI, Jakarta.

¹⁴⁶ Confidential letter of the Advisor for Japanese and Chinese Affairs to the Resident of Batavia, 1 August 1912, no. 248; Confidential letter of the Assistant-Resident to the Resident of Batavia, 22 October 1912, no. 199; Confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor-General, 18 October 1912, no. 319/C. All three letters can be found in Gouvernementsbesluit, 4 January 1913, no. 27, ANRI, Jakarta.

¹⁴⁷ Hoetink, "So Bing Kong", 13.

¹⁴⁸ Hoetink, "Chineesche Officieren te Batavia onder de Compagnie", 4.

government regulations were carried out by their fellow countrymen and advised the government in matters that involved the Chinese, and they were the spokesmen of the Chinese community. They also administered justice in minor offences and small disputes between their countrymen in accordance with Chinese law.¹⁴⁹ In 1907 the official regulation for the Chinese Council of Batavia was laid down in *Residentsbesluit* (resident decree) of 20 August 1907, no. 15548/36. This official regulation stipulated the tasks and responsibilities of the Chinese Council as follows: “The Chinese Council looks after the interests of the Chinese community of Batavia, provides as much as possible free education for children of impecunious Chinese, arranges and funds the annual religious ceremonies, and manages the Chinese cemeteries, which are situated on the landed properties of the Chinese Council.”¹⁵⁰ This description of course gives a rather general overview of the tasks and responsibilities of the Chinese Council. A more elaborated analysis of the Council’s activities will be given now.

¹⁴⁹ Vermeulen, “Eenige Opmerkingen over de Rechtsbedeeling van de Compagnie”, 11–12. Chinese law as utilised by the Chinese officers to settle disputes and offences, but also marital affairs and inheritance issues was not entirely based on traditional Chinese law as practiced in China. The Chinese law that was used as a norm among the Chinese people in the Dutch East Indies was basically a blend of the Qing Code (*Da Qing lüli*—the great Qing legal code) and customary law (traditional Chinese standards and values). See Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, 63.

¹⁵⁰ See article two of chapter 2 of the official regulation for the Chinese Council, *Residentsbesluit*, 20 August 1907, no. 15548/36, *Binnenlandsch Bestuur*, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.



Former office of the Chinese Council of Batavia on Jalan Tongkangan, c.1930



Meeting room in the former Tongkangan office, c.1930

The meetings

The Chinese Council usually convened once a month to discuss the affairs of the Chinese community. As a rule the Council convened on the third day of each month provided it did not fall on a Sunday or a European, Chinese, or indigenous holiday. Why meetings were not supposed to be scheduled on Sundays is not entirely clear, but the colonial authorities may have committed the Council to follow the Christian rule that Sundays were days of rest. Although participants were expected to gather in the building of the Chinese Council at 9 a.m., most meetings did not begin until the late morning or afternoon.¹⁵¹ Chaired by the major, the gatherings were attended by the officers, secretaries, and neighbourhood chiefs of Batavia and Weltevreden, and sometimes by Dutch officials when important affairs such as taxation or the combat of epidemic diseases needed to be discussed. When a Dutch official was newly appointed (either a resident, an assistant-resident or controleur, but also a tax commissioner or police official), he also came to the Council meeting to introduce himself to the Chinese officers, secretaries and neighbourhood chiefs.¹⁵²

After the chairman opened the meeting, the secretary read aloud the minutes of the previous board meeting. After the minutes were approved by the Council members, the items on the agenda were discussed.¹⁵³ One recurring topic was the inspection of the tax collection. The neighbourhood chiefs turned in their tax assessment registers the last Saturday of the month for inspection.¹⁵⁴ The Dutch abolished revenue farming at the end of the nineteenth century, and following the unification of taxes in the first decade of the twentieth century, the head tax was replaced by the income tax for Chinese non-agriculturalists. The kind of revenue the neighbourhood chiefs were supposed to collect was not specified, but the minutes probably refer to the income tax and perhaps the property

¹⁵¹ Chinese minutes of the monthly board meetings of the Chinese Council, no. 21024, 4 November 1912: pp. 93–94, Kong Koan Archive, Leiden (hereafter shortened as Chinese minutes).

¹⁵² Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 5 May 1917: p. 157.

¹⁵³ Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 3 May 1913: p. 1; Malay minutes, no. NM4, 14 April 1920: p. 129.

¹⁵⁴ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 13 November 1908: p. 126.

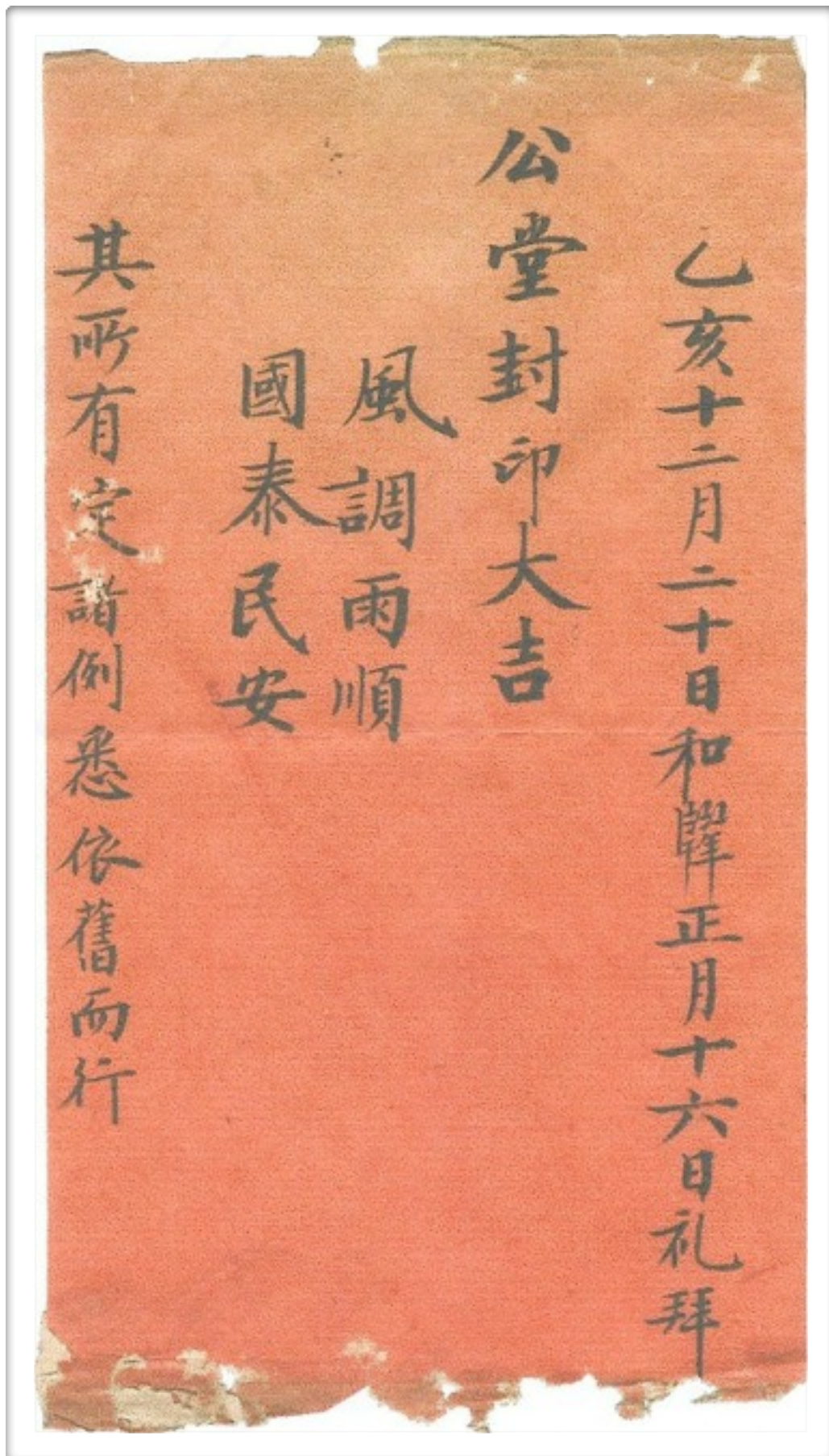
tax (*personeele belasting*), which was assessed on material possessions such as furniture, vehicles and horses. In the meeting of June 1918 it was mentioned that neighbourhood chiefs were allowed to collect ground tax (*verponding*) not exceeding twenty guilders.¹⁵⁵ Each month the neighbourhood chiefs also had to report to the Dutch inspectors, usually the tax commissioner or the controleur, how much tax they had collected and how much was still awaiting payment. When not enough tax was yielded, the neighbourhood chief was strongly urged to call in the remaining tax shortages. Continuous shortages in tax money could lead to the dismissal of a neighbourhood chief.¹⁵⁶ The people most often unable to fulfil their tax obligation in time were petty merchants, small shop owners, and cashiers; employees of printing companies; carpenters; and poor coolies. Sometimes those in arrears were brought to the meeting for a confrontation with the Dutch officials. Usually after being questioned these people were given time to pay their remaining debts in instalments. In case this term expired and the taxpayers were still in arrear, the neighbourhood chief was ordered to issue enforcement orders (*dwangschrift*) or carry out confiscation. People who could no longer bear the tax burden asked for confiscation themselves. Others simply ran away. In extraordinary cases, such as extreme poverty or severe illness, tax exemption was granted. For these cases, the neighbourhood chief had to present ample evidence.¹⁵⁷

Each year, a few days before the end of the traditional Chinese lunar calendar, the Council closed its doors for a ten days' recess. In this last meeting of the lunar year, the minute book of the Council was symbolically sealed to close the year of activities of the Council (*Hong In*). The following phrases were read by the secretary to conclude the ceremony:

¹⁵⁵ Hesselting-Tjan, "The Kong Koan in Crisis", 118; Malay minutes, no. NM4, 4 June 1918: pp. 47–48.

¹⁵⁶ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 August 1912: pp. 60–61.

¹⁵⁷ Malay minutes, no. NM1, 30 October 1909: pp. 14–20 and 28 April 1910: pp. 45–48.



Phrases that were read by the secretary to conclude the *Hong In* ceremony

The Chinese Council officially closes the year;

May the coming year bring us prosperity;

May our people live in peace.¹⁵⁸

Provided it did not fall on a Sunday, the Chinese officers, secretaries and neighbourhood chiefs gathered in the building of the Chinese Council to “unseal the minute book” and open the new year (*Koei In*) on the fourth day of the first month of the Chinese lunar calendar (*Tjia Gwee Tje Sie*).¹⁵⁹ During this ceremony the major usually delivered a New Year’s speech in which he wished everybody a happy New Year and expressed his gratitude for being able to meet with his officers, secretaries and neighbourhood chiefs in peace and good health. Then he thanked heaven for giving everyone the opportunity to come together again and perform their duties for state and society. He also thanked the officers, secretaries, neighbourhood chiefs and other staff members for all their efforts in the previous year, and expressed his hope that they would continue to show the same dedication in the coming year. Then everyone raised their glass and cheered:

Long live Queen Wilhelmina!

Long live the Republic of China!

Long live the Netherlands Indies!

After that the major asked the secretary to conclude the ceremony by reading the following phrases that were written in Chinese characters on red paper:

¹⁵⁸ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 30 January 1913: p. 136.

¹⁵⁹ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 10 February 1913: p. 137.

The Chinese Council officially opens the New Year;

May this year bring us prosperity;

May the people live in peace.¹⁶⁰

While inspecting the Chinese and Malay minutes of the Council's board meetings, one can imagine how the distinguished gentlemen came together in the early twentieth century to discuss the various important affairs that were current in the Chinese community. The meetings seem to have been reasonably orderly, with every item on the agenda being discussed point by point. Yet it is sometimes hard to suppress a feeling of amusement while going over the minutes, because the meeting room of the Chinese Council apparently also resembled a hen house. Acting Lieutenant Tan Tjin Bok frequently complained about the disorderly behaviour of the participants during the meetings and called for a code of conduct in the meeting room. People seemed to have paced back and forth chatting with each other and not paying attention to the meeting, talking through one another and talking out of turn, or just walking out of the meeting when it suited them. In the Council meeting of 12 February 1912 the major addressed himself to one of the neighbourhood chiefs but it turned out that the chief in question had already gone home. Acting Lieutenant Tan Tjin Bok urged everyone to remain seated during discussions and announcements, for the meetings would be pointless if nobody paid attention.¹⁶¹ In the Council meeting of 3 September 1912 acting Lieutenant Tan Tjin Bok tried to set everybody straight again: "During the meetings everybody should wait for his turn to speak and not talk through one another. Just now Mr Major was speaking about something, but neighbourhood chief Jo Kim Eng suddenly started to talk about something else which created confusion among the other participants. If this happens all the time the meetings are a waste of time!"¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 29 January 1914: pp. 83–84; Chinese minutes, no. 21028, 17 March 1920: pp. 3–4.

¹⁶¹ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 12 February 1912: pp. 7–8.

¹⁶² Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 September 1912: p. 82.

The committees

Each year the officers were assigned monthly and daily tasks. The division of tasks usually took place when the minute book of the Chinese Council was sealed in the last meeting of the year and unsealed at the opening of the New Year.¹⁶³ Among officers' assignments were their duties in the various government committees and institutions, for which they were given financial compensation.¹⁶⁴ Two officers were on duty at the *Landraad*, which convened three times a week, where they were assigned by the judge to render advice in cases involving Chinese. The Chinese Council was also responsible for bringing in witnesses who had been summoned by the *Landraad*. These witnesses were tracked down by the neighbourhood chiefs for which they were given restitution.¹⁶⁵ Two officers had to attend the proceedings at the *Politierol* (police courts) that also convened three times a week.¹⁶⁶ Two officers were appointed by the resident to be seated in the local tax assessment committees, and another two were assigned to the immigration committee.¹⁶⁷ Chinese newcomers (*singkehs*, literally meaning "new guests") were first sent to the Chinese Council for inspection after disembarkation. The Chinese officers examined applications for employment permits of Chinese nationals and judged requests to enter or stay in Batavia from Chinese nationals and Dutch subjects who had returned to China.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately the immigration committee decided

¹⁶³ Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, 59.

¹⁶⁴ Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 18 December 1913: p. 73.

¹⁶⁵ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 August 1912: p. 64; Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 4 January 1917: p. 130; Letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 18 May 1920, no. 363/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

¹⁶⁶ Letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor-General, 13 August 1872, no. 5650, in: *Gouvernementsbesluit*, 31 October 1872, no. 11, ANRI, Jakarta.

¹⁶⁷ Letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 18 May 1920, no. 363/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

¹⁶⁸ See the applications for employment (MM05I-000009–MM05I-00011/11A) and entry permits (MM05I-00011/11A–MM05I-00018), the Kong Koan Archive, Leiden.

whether a person could stay in the Netherlands Indies or not.¹⁶⁹ Finally, two officers were on duty in the Chinese Council, and responsible for granting marriage licenses and received complaints and reports of criminal offences from the neighbourhood chiefs. They also informed the colonial authorities about the Chinese inheritance law and gave advice regarding new applicants for vacancies in the Council and newly-arrived Chinese immigrants. In addition, the officers assessed the financial capacity of persons who applied to the Chinese Council for loans, as well as their guarantors. Pawnshops also frequently asked the Council to assess applicants for loans and their guarantors.¹⁷⁰ When organisations, private persons, or the government wished to buy land from the Council, the officers on duty were ordered to inspect the requests, assess the value of the land, and advise the Council on what price should be asked from the potential buyers.¹⁷¹

The registration of marriages and divorces

From 1717 onwards, the officers and, after its establishment, the Chinese Council were given the authority (and obligation) to register the marriages of the Chinese.¹⁷² From that year on, a Chinese marriage left the domestic realm and entered the Dutch official system of civil registration.¹⁷³ In the period under study, Chinese marriages were registered until 1919, when the Dutch Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (*Burgerlijke Stand*) was applied to the Chinese, thus bringing an end to the two-centuries-long practice of registering and judging civil affairs by the Chinese officers. From 1900 until 1919, 1539 marriages were registered by the Chinese Council. This number does not indicate the total amount of registered marriages in this period, as the data for the years 1909–11 are missing.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 21 February 1908: p. 100; Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 April 1912: pp. 19–20.

¹⁷⁰ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 13 October 1902: p. 67 and 8 May 1909: p. 146.

¹⁷¹ Malay minutes, no. NM4, 8 April 1922: p. 309; Malay minutes, no. NM5, 13 October 1923: p. 137.

¹⁷² *Plakaatboek*, vol. 4, 1709–1743: pp. 93–94.

¹⁷³ Vermeulen, “Eenige Opmerkingen over de Rechtsbedeeling van de Compagnie”, 7.

¹⁷⁴ The duplicates of marriage certificates from 12 March 1909 until December 1911 are missing.

On a fixed day of the week, the officers on duty in the Chinese Council received and inspected the notifications of marriage. These notifications were given out by the neighbourhood chiefs and brought to the Council by the witnesses of couples that wished to get married. If an intended marriage was in some way not in accordance with Chinese (customary) law, the officers could refuse to give permission to the couple. A marriage between people bearing the same family name, for instance, was strictly forbidden.¹⁷⁵ When a marriage was approved, a marriage certificate was issued. In the twentieth century, the Council maintained the fees for marriage certificates as determined in article 64 of the regulation of the commissioner-general of 31 May 1828: children of Chinese officers were required to pay forty guilders, children of well-off families twenty guilders, and common people five guilders.¹⁷⁶ The marriage certificate was usually issued at the office of the Chinese Council, although the officers were sometimes asked to give out the certificate in the house where the wedding was celebrated. After the officers complained about having to wait too long in people's houses before they could issue the certificate, the Chinese Council announced in 1914 that couples only needed to pay one guilder for this official document, provided they were willing to come to the Chinese Council to collect their marriage certificate.¹⁷⁷ From 1914 onwards, the Chinese Council never gave out marriage certificates on public holidays or days of official mourning, such as *Tjengbeng* (Tomb Sweeping Day) and the commemoration of Confucius' death.¹⁷⁸ The married couple was given the original certificate and the secretaries kept a duplicate in the marriage register of the Chinese Council. Until February 1913, the marriage registers were written in Chinese. From February 1913 until 1919 the registers were bilingual (Chinese and

¹⁷⁵ Chen Menghong, "Between the Chinese Tradition and Dutch Colonial System: Chinese Marriages in Batavia in the Nineteenth Century", in *Archives of the Kong Koan of Batavia*, edited by L. Blussé and Chen Menghong (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 59; Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, 43–45.

¹⁷⁶ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 26 May 1909: p. 150.

¹⁷⁷ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 April 1913: pp. 155–157; Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 29 January 1914: p. 86.

¹⁷⁸ Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 4 May 1914: pp. 101–102. The *Tjengbeng* festival usually falls on the fifth or sixth day of April and gives people the opportunity to mourn and honour their ancestors at their graves.

Malay). The information about the bride and groom recorded in the marriage certificate included their names, age, birthplace, the neighbourhood in which they lived, and the names of their parents. For the registration of a marriage, two witnesses—one for the bride and one for the groom—were required. These witnesses could be fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins—as long as they were related to the bride and groom. The name of the matchmaker was also mentioned on the certificate, as well as the officers and secretaries on duty.¹⁷⁹

Also from the year 1717, Chinese couples who wished to divorce had to ask the Chinese officers for permission.¹⁸⁰ After the husband or wife had filed for divorce, the Chinese officers conducted a thorough investigation in the course of which officers interviewed both parties and possible witnesses. If one of the parties lived far away, he or she sent a letter to the Council which contained his or her statement. The final decision was made in the monthly board meetings of the Council. Judging from the divorce cases in the period 1900–19, most divorce requests were granted. In a few cases the Chinese officers urged for reconciliation if they did not see sufficient reasons for a legal separation, or if one of the parties did not agree with a divorce because he or she still loved his or her spouse. When the Council did grant a divorce, both parties were required to sign the registry for divorces. In the period 1900–19, the Council handled 238 divorce cases.¹⁸¹ Lea E. William's observation that the Chinese officers only handled a few divorce cases a year is therefore incorrect.¹⁸²

A woman usually filed for divorce when her husband refused to give her money, had chased her away, or had taken in a concubine. A woman might also seek a separation out of shame, if her husband was involved in criminal activities, for instance, or if she was openly accused of adultery

¹⁷⁹ In the bilingual registers, the date of birth of the couple (based on the Chinese lunar calendar) was also added.

¹⁸⁰ *Plakaatboek*, vol. 4, 1703–1743: pp. 94–95.

¹⁸¹ This number should be higher as the officers sometimes decided not to include discussions on divorce cases in the minutes.

¹⁸² Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 125.

or unchaste behaviour. In a divorce case of November 1908, a woman was accused of parading in a horse carriage looking for illicit sexual relations.¹⁸³ Neglect, physical abuse, and not showing filial piety to her parents were other reasons for a woman to leave her husband. Finally, a woman might see no other option than divorce if her husband left for China and showed no sign of returning. In December 1912 such a case was presented to the Chinese Council. After the woman had been interviewed, her brother-in-law appeared before the officers declaring that his brother would return from China the next month. The officers decided that the woman had to wait three months for her husband to return. Until then, his younger brother was required to give his sister-in-law fifteen guilders per month to support her child. After four months, the younger brother reappeared before the Council saying he had not heard from his brother and he could no longer bear the financial burden of supporting his sister-in-law and nephew. The Council then decided to grant a divorce.¹⁸⁴

A man filed for divorce when he suspected that his wife had committed adultery or if she had run away with another man. Showing improper conduct, such as not keeping her chastity or being a bad housewife or daughter-in-law were other reasons. In addition, when a man could not get along with his parents-in-law or when his wife had run away to her parental home and refused to come back, he asked the Chinese Council to grant him a divorce. Sometimes a couple filed for divorce together, when both agreed that the marriage was over. Usually these proceedings were scandal free. In one exceptional case, the parents of a young married woman initiated divorce proceedings to prevent their daughter from following her husband to Probolinggo in East Java, fearing maltreatment of their daughter by her husband and his parents.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 13 November 1908: pp. 124–125.

¹⁸⁴ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 December 1912: pp. 121–122 and 3 April 1913: pp. 154–155.

¹⁸⁵ Malay minutes, no. NM4, 4 June 1918: pp. 52–53.

The provision of free education and other charitable ends

Before the twentieth century, colonial authorities never showed any interest in educating the Chinese, who had to establish their own schools. The official regulation of the Chinese Council stipulated the Council's responsibility for providing free education for the children of poor Chinese families. In 1775 the Beng Seng Sie Wan was opened on the initiative of the Chinese officers.¹⁸⁶ It was the first school for Chinese orphans and children of poor families, which was established with money donated from the Chinese community. A school providing free education as such was better known as the *Gie Oh* among the Chinese people. The school was located in Petak Sembilan (Glodok), in the yard of the main temple, Kim Tek Ie, built in 1650.¹⁸⁷ The school's curriculum was based on the traditional Chinese education system, in which the focus lay on reciting the Confucian classics. After the Chinese Council was established, the school became its responsibility.¹⁸⁸ Most private schools were run by Chinese officers or other wealthy Chinese. In 1901 the first modern Chinese school was opened in Batavia by the first modern Chinese organisation, the Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (THHK). Many Chinese officers were on the board of directors of the THHK and as its schools proved to be better, it wound up absorbing the *Gie Oh*. The remaining finances of the school were divided among the THHK schools.¹⁸⁹ The Chinese Council gave the THHK a monthly subsidy of 275 guilders to cover the costs of free education for the children who were sent to the THHK schools by the Council.¹⁹⁰ These children were known as the *anak Kong Koan* (children of

¹⁸⁶ According to F. de Haan, the Beng Seng Sie Wan was already established in 1729; see F. de Haan, *Oud Batavia: Gedenkboek uitgegeven door het Bataviasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen naar aanleiding van het driehonderdjarig bestaan van der stad in 1919*, 4 vols. (Batavia: Kolff, 1922), 1:506. The Chinese chronicle of Batavia mentions 1690 as the year of establishment.

¹⁸⁷ The temple still exists and is now named Wihara Dharma Bhakti.

¹⁸⁸ Nio Joe Lan, "De Eigen Onderwijsvoorziening der Chineezzen", *Koloniale Studiën* 23:1 (1939): 69–71.

¹⁸⁹ Nio Joe Lan, "Bij het 40-jarig Jubileum van de Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan-Batavia", *Koloniale Studiën* 24:3 (1940): 296. Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 13 April 1908: p. 110.

¹⁹⁰ Kwee Tek Hoay, *The Origins of the Modern Chinese Movement in Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1969), 23; Malay minutes, no. NM4, 1 October 1921: pp. 262–64.

the Chinese Council).¹⁹¹ Usually the neighbourhood chiefs looked for children of poor families in their neighbourhoods and informed them of the possibility of obtaining a free education at the THHK schools. When parents showed interest in educating their children, the neighbourhood chief reported the children to the Chinese Council for further arrangements. In 1921 eighty-four *anak Kong Koan* were enrolled in the THHK schools.¹⁹²

The Council also supported other schools financially. Some schools were given a fixed amount per month, while other schools were given money for each child who was enrolled through mediation of the Council.¹⁹³ In 1929 it was decided that each school receiving a subsidy from the Council had to hand in a financial account every three months. Schools that failed to do so would no longer receive subsidy.¹⁹⁴ Aware of the importance of education, the Chinese Council was also generous in selling plots of land at a reduced price if the purchasers intended to build a school on these lands, even if they were not intended exclusively for Chinese students. The Kartini School, a primary school for Javanese girls, only paid 1.5 guilders per square meter for a plot of land in Goenoeng Sahari, in spite of objections of one lieutenant who suggested reserving the land for the Chinese. The other Council members reminded him that the establishment of a school, even though primarily intended for Javanese girls, was a matter of public interest. Thus it was appropriate to sell the land at a reduced price.¹⁹⁵ The Council sold another property in Goenoeng Sahari for the same price to the municipality of Batavia, which intended to build a Hollandsch-Chineesche School

¹⁹¹ Nio, "Bij het 40-jarig Jubileum van de Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan-Batavia", 296.

¹⁹² Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 August 1912: pp. 62–63; Malay minutes, no. NM4, 1 October 1921: pp. 262–64.

¹⁹³ Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 3 August 1916: p. 110.

¹⁹⁴ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 12 April 1929: p. 420.

¹⁹⁵ Chinese minutes, no. 21027, 3 September 1917: p. 12 and 3 October 1917: pp. 18–19. Depending on the location and condition of the plots, most prices varied between three and six guilders per square meter.

(Dutch-Chinese School, HCS).¹⁹⁶ One school in Pasar Baroe, the Tiong Hoa Hak Tong, was even given ownership of the land on which it was built for the symbolic price of only ten guilders.¹⁹⁷

The Chinese officers were responsible for the regular inspection of Chinese schools. The captain conducted four inspections per year, checking which subjects were taught and verifying the backgrounds of teachers and prospective teachers—their reputation, whether they paid their taxes on time, and whether their teaching would unsettle colonial society.¹⁹⁸ Candidates who applied for a licence to teach in the Dutch East Indies had to submit a form with their personal information, their education (including a copy of their diploma), and the subjects they intended to teach and in which language; they were also expected to submit an official certificate of good conduct from the police chief and their residence permit.¹⁹⁹

The Chinese Council also donated money to victims of fire and flood, as well as to organisations set up to help the poor and needy. The Council provided an amount of 40,000 guilders for the building of Ati Soetji, an organisation that sheltered women and neglected children,²⁰⁰ and it donated a plot of land to the *Bedelaarskolonie*, an organisation that provided shelter for the poor and disabled.²⁰¹ In the meeting of October 1924, a request for financial support from a thirty-eight-year old woman was discussed. Because of her young age, the Council declined financial support, but since the woman had lost both of her hands and she also had the care of a young child, the

¹⁹⁶ Malay minutes, no. NM4, 14 April 1920: pp. 131–138.

¹⁹⁷ Chinese minutes, no. 21027, 3 September 1917: p. 11 and 3 October 1917: p. 18.

¹⁹⁸ See the inspection reports of Chinese schools, the Kong Koan Archive, MR6a 000-6, Leiden and Govaars-Tjia, *Dutch Colonial Education*, chap. 6.

¹⁹⁹ See the applications for obtaining a licence to teach in the Netherlands Indies, the Kong Koan Archive, MM05I-00020 and MM05I-00021, Leiden.

²⁰⁰ Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 3 April 1916: p. 93 and 3 June 1916: pp. 103–104. Ati Soetji was founded by Captain Lie Tjian Tjoen and his wife Ouw Tjoei Lan. See L. Suryadinata, *Prominent Indonesian Chinese: Biographical Sketches* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), 85.

²⁰¹ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 20 August 1912: p. 77; Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 3 July 1915: p. 36.

Council decided to have the woman admitted to the *Bedelaarskolonie* and her child to *Ati Soetji*.²⁰²

The Council also supported people who could not make a living in Batavia; a group of twelve poor

Chinese women without any relatives in Batavia were given 500 guilders for their return to China.

One poor couple with health problems was given money for medicine and a trip back to their

hometown Pamekasan (Madoera).²⁰³ In times of economic hardship the Council did not hesitate to

provide help; when the First World War resulted in increased prices of food and other commodities,

the Chinese Council granted a bonus of 10 percent for its employees. On top of this bonus, the

Council donated two *gantang* of rice per month to each employee.²⁰⁴ For the same reason, monks

and caretakers of Chinese temples were also given additional financial support and rice.²⁰⁵

Recurrent financial support was given to elderly women without relatives. It was Major Khouw Kim An who submitted the proposal to grant a monthly stipend of three guilders for Chinese widows and widowers, orphans, and poor Chinese without family, to help with living expenses.²⁰⁶ In principle, only elderly women without financial means and no family to rely on were considered for monthly support. To assess a request for financial support, the Council relied on the reports of the neighbourhood chiefs, though in some cases women were summoned to appear before the Council to be interviewed.²⁰⁷ If a woman appeared to have family after all, the allowance was withdrawn at once. In one case, a woman was removed from the donation list because her granddaughter had been taken in as a concubine by a wealthy man.²⁰⁸ In exceptional cases men were also given a monthly allowance; in the meeting of November 1915 the Council decided to

²⁰² Malay minutes, no. NM5, 25 October 1924: pp. 180–81.

²⁰³ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 15 January 1909: pp. 131–132; Malay minutes, no. NM4, 27 May 1920: pp. 155–156.

²⁰⁴ One *gantang* equals three kilos.

²⁰⁵ Malay minutes, no. NM3, 17 January 1917: p. 224; Malay minutes, no. NM4, 8 July 1919: pp. 93–94 and 14 April 1920: pp. 145–147.

²⁰⁶ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 13 March 1909: p. 138.

²⁰⁷ Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 3 April 1915: p. 19.

²⁰⁸ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 May 1912: pp. 34–35.

grant a blind and disabled man three guilders per month.²⁰⁹ In the Council meeting of October 1920 it was decided to raise the allowance to four guilders per month because food prices had increased after the First World War.²¹⁰ This amount was lowered in 1924 when the Council faced cutbacks and had difficulty meeting the increasing requests for allowances. In March of that year, allowances were reduced to f 3.50 for people already receiving support, while new applicants for welfare received the original amount of three guilders.²¹¹ In 1925 it was decided to limit the number of people receiving monthly allowances from the Chinese Council to no more than 150 people. When this number was reached, people were put on a waiting list. Normally, when a person receiving allowance passed away the first name on the list would take his or her place.²¹² It appears that widows of former neighbourhood chiefs, caretakers, and messengers received a higher allowance, varying from f 5.00 to f 7.50 per month.²¹³ Around Chinese New Year, the elderly women were given a supplement worth one month of their monthly allowances in the form of money, clothes and rice.²¹⁴ In 1933 poor elderly men and women who did not have a place to stay were accommodated in temples and the Chinese Council paid for the renovation of the empty rooms in the temples to make these habitable.²¹⁵

Temple management and annual public ceremonies

The Chinese Council was responsible for the management and maintenance of four temples in Batavia: Kim Tek Ie (Glodok), Wan Kiap Sie (Goenoeng Sahari), Klenteng Antjol, and Klenteng

²⁰⁹ Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 20 November 1915: p. 61.

²¹⁰ Malay minutes, no. NM4, 23 October 1920: p. 202.

²¹¹ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 8 February 1924: pp. 162–63.

²¹² Malay minutes, NM 5, 18 August 1925: pp. 220–22.

²¹³ Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 3 June 1914: p. 104; Malay minutes, no. NM4, 17 March 1920: p. 16 and 1 October 1921: pp. 267–68.

²¹⁴ Chinese minutes, no. 21027, 5 February 1918: p. 36; Malay minutes, no. NM4, 21 January 1922: p. 291.

²¹⁵ Malay minutes, no. NM6, 12 December 1933: pp. 149–151.

Tandjoeng Grogol.²¹⁶ The most important building in a Chinese neighbourhood, the Chinese temple functioned as a centre of religion and culture and was also a reflection of the community that supported it.²¹⁷ The Chinese temple was the place where people came for worship, bringing offerings to ancestors, gods, and spirits, and burning incense on the altar. Chinese public holidays such as Chinese New Year (*Imlek*), Tomb Sweeping Day (*Tjengbeng*) and the Hungry Ghost festival (*Tjioko*) were celebrated in the temples,²¹⁸ as were anniversary days of Chinese gods. The Chinese Council provided funds for these ceremonies, but neighbourhood chiefs also collected donations from ordinary citizens.²¹⁹ Special religious ceremonies were also conducted in temples during Dutch public holidays. In 1913 the major ordered the secretaries of the Chinese Council to supervise prayers in the temples of Glodok and Goenoeng Sahari in honour of the celebrations for the centennial of the Kingdom of the Netherlands' independence from French rule.²²⁰

The Chinese Council recruited and supervised the monks, priests and abbots of the temples. The abbots were responsible for the temple's possessions and ensured that monks and priests performed the religious ceremonies correctly and behaved properly. When a temple needed renovation or a new interior, the Council set up a committee of officers to assess the expenses. After the total costs were determined, the Council provided the funds for the renovation but also asked the Chinese community to donate money. Then the Council contracted out the renovation job.²²¹

²¹⁶ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 16 January 1928: pp. 316–17.

²¹⁷ C. Salmon and D. Lombard, *Klenteng-klenteng dan masyarakat Tionghoa di Jakarta* (Jakarta: Yayasan Cipta Loka Caraka, 2003), 93.

²¹⁸ The *Tjioko* festival takes place on the 15th day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar. On this day offerings are made to the hungry and neglected ghosts and souls that roam the world seeking for prayers and offerings, as they had not received these tokens of respect from their families.

²¹⁹ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 31 December 1907: p. 93.

²²⁰ Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 3 November 1913: pp. 52–55.

²²¹ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 16 October 1922: p. 36 and 11 May 1926: pp. 247–48.



Chinese temple in Batavia c.1900



Chinese priests, presumably in Batavia, c.1900

The Chinese Council also looked after arrangements for annual public ceremonies and festivities. Chinese New Year was always celebrated exuberantly with fireworks display, *wayang* (shadow) plays, lion dances (*barongsai*), card games, an evening fair (*pasar malam*), and other forms of entertainment. For every form of entertainment, permission needed to be obtained from the resident, especially for setting off fireworks, which was strictly forbidden in Batavia. After permission was given, people were allowed to set off fireworks in the courtyards of their houses or temples from 6 p.m. until midnight.²²² Another annual fair was the Pasar Gambir that took place at the Koningsplein (present day Medan Merdeka), from the end of August until the beginning of September. This bazaar had a more official character, as it was organised by the colonial authorities to enhance local trade and industry. After the festive opening of the fair, which was attended by representatives of the local colonial government and various dignitaries, people flocked into the market to enjoy a great variety of local refreshments and visit the various exhibitions and a kind of *galérie du travail*, in which merchants and craftsmen displayed their goods and handicrafts to the public. After a week or so, the Pasar Gambir was officially closed.²²³ In 1921, the assistant-resident asked Major Khouw Kim An and the neighbourhood chief of Pasar Baroe, Yo Kim Thaij, to become members of the committee that organised the fair as members of the Chinese community. Chinese merchants interested in renting a stand on the Pasar Gambir could sign up with Yo Kim Thaij or the secretary of the Chinese Council.²²⁴ Festivities in honour of Dutch public holidays, such as the birth of Princess Juliana on 30 April 1909, the centennial of Dutch independence in 1913, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of Queen Wilhelmina's reign in 1923 were organised by the Chinese Council. The Council also depended in part on donations from the Chinese community for these

²²² Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 28 January 1916: pp. 79–80 and 17 January 1917: pp. 136–137; Malay minutes, no. NM5, 12 June 1925: pp. 191–92 and 6 February 1926: pp. 237–38.

²²³ C. M. Pleyte, *Verslag nopens de Pasar-Gambir: gehouden op het Koningsplein te Weltevreden van 28 augustus–2 september 1906* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1907).

²²⁴ Malay minutes, no. NM4, 16 July 1921: p. 234; Malay minutes, no. NM5, 12 June 1925: p. 216.

celebrations. The Dutch holidays were celebrated in the Chinese neighbourhoods and temples with great enthusiasm; special ceremonies were organised in the Chinese temples, as was entertainment such as music, *wayang* performances, and other kinds of theatre. The Chinese neighbourhoods were cheerfully decorated with flags and lanterns. In 1913 the assistant-resident sent a letter to the Chinese Council to say how impressed the governor-general was to see the enthusiasm of the Chinese people in preparing the festivities for celebrating the centennial independence of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.²²⁵



Special gate erected to celebrate the marriage of Queen Wilhelmina at Pasar Baroe, 1901

²²⁵ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 13 March 1909: pp. 137–138; Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 3 November 1913: pp. 52–55 and 3 December 1913: pp. 58–59; Malay minutes, no. NM5, 3 February 1923: pp. 65–66.

The welfare of the Chinese neighbourhoods: safety, hygiene and healthcare

The neighbourhood chiefs were in charge of a group of night watchmen, appointed to patrol in the Chinese neighbourhoods at night and paid for with money the chiefs collected from the Chinese people.²²⁶ The neighbourhood chiefs also assisted the police in criminal investigations. They accompanied the police when house searches were carried out in their neighbourhoods, and tracked down illegal opium sellers and illegal female immigrants who had been forced into prostitution by women traffickers.²²⁷ The Chinese Council did not maintain a separate police force, as asserted by James Rush.²²⁸



Chinese on the way to Pasar Baroe, c.1900

²²⁶ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 12 February 1912: p. 2; Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 30 December 1914: pp. 148–50.

²²⁷ Malay minutes, no. NM1, 3 December 1910: pp. 64–65; Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 18 October 1915: pp. 55–56; Malay minutes no. 21024, 21 January 1922: pp. 286–89.

²²⁸ Rush, *Opium to Java*, 87.

Twice a year the residents of Batavia were summoned to carry out the “biannual cleaning of their houses and properties”. According to official instructions, houses had to be made dust free; walls plastered, coated with tar, and painted; and broken fences repaired. The neighbourhood chiefs saw to it that everyone in their wards followed orders. People resisting to the clean-up faced one to four days in prison or a fine that could reach up to twenty-five guilders.²²⁹ The Chinese Council was jointly responsible for the infrastructure and communal facilities in the Chinese neighbourhoods. The municipal government asked the Chinese Council to make a financial contribution for the repair of roads, the instalment of street lighting, the drainage of marshes, and the construction and maintenance of sewers, gutters, and public toilets. The Council also donated land for the common good, such as for the construction of a bridge over the Krekot Channel in front of the train station of Tanah Abang.²³⁰

The Chinese Council supervised the Chinese Hospital. Intended primarily for “poor and unattended Chinese”, the hospital was built in the seventeenth century on deserted land that was bestowed by the Company. The hospital was funded by levies on funerals, marriages, the immigration permits of Chinese, and Chinese *wayang* performances, but also by fines imposed on illegal *wayang* performances and the fees that were levied on the certificate of appointment of a Chinese officer. Donations from the Chinese community also contributed to the hospital’s funds. The hospital was administered by the *College van Boedelmeesteren*. Even though the name implied the hospital was exclusively for Chinese patients, the hospital also took in other non-Christians, such as Foreign Orientals and indigenous Indonesians, the name merely indicated that the hospital was run and financed by the Chinese people.²³¹ Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja each had a

²²⁹ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 June 1912: pp. 37–38.

²³⁰ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 13 March 1908: p. 103; Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 May 1912: pp. 28–29; Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 3 May 1915: p. 26 and 3 August 1916: p. 108. The Krekot Channel mentioned in the archive of the Chinese Council refers to the Banjir Barat Channel in Jakarta today.

²³¹ Roo de la Faille, “De Chinesesche Raad te Batavia”, 306–23.

Chinese Hospital until 1912.²³² Officers on duty in the Chinese Council paid regular visits to the hospital for inspections. Irregularities were reported to the assistant-resident. In one case, patients complained about the poor quality of care in the hospital, as they were only given a little bit of rice porridge every day.²³³

Outbreaks of pestilence or tropical disease such as cholera, smallpox, or typhoid occurred frequently in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Such epidemics not only caused personal discomfort, but also paralysed daily life. In 1912 the Dragon Boat Festival and a number of weddings had to be cancelled after an outbreak of cholera.²³⁴ To minimise the risk of an outbreak, the neighbourhood chiefs instructed the inhabitants of their wards to clean their houses, gardens, and the sewers in their immediate vicinity. Street vendors were prohibited from selling *roedjak*²³⁵ and fruit that had been peeled. The secretary of the Chinese Council frequently went into the Chinese neighbourhoods for inspection rounds. People who failed to keep their houses clean faced criminal charges. If a neighbourhood chief discovered people who were infected with a certain disease, he had to report the infection straight away to the Chinese Council, the indigenous district head (*wedana*) or the bureau of health care. People who were infected and members of their immediate family were placed in quarantine.²³⁶ Another preventive measure against the outbreak of diseases was the organisation of vaccination rounds, which took place mostly in the houses of the neighbourhood chiefs. The Chinese Council even financed the training of a female vaccinator, who

²³² The hospitals in Batavia and Semarang carried the name Chineesch Hospitaal and the hospital in Soerabaja was called Semaronggesticht. In 1912, the Chinese Hospital in Semarang was closed. The hospitals in Batavia and Soerabaja were retained, but under new names: Hulpstadsverband and Leprozengesticht Semarong. See *Indisch Staatsblad* 1911-585.

²³³ Chinese minutes, no. 21023, 29 March 1908: p. 108; Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 April 1913: p. 154.

²³⁴ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 22 February 1912: p. 10.

²³⁵ *Roedjak* is a salad made of different kinds of fruit or vegetables, served with a sweet and spicy sauce.

²³⁶ Malay minutes, no. NM1, 24 January 1911: p. 104; Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 Augustus 1912: pp. 63-64; Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 3 September 1914: pp. 128-29.

took care of the immunisation of females and children. The men were vaccinated by an indigenous vaccinator, hired by the Council.²³⁷ Newly arrived immigrants from China also had to be vaccinated, but this turned out not to be so easy. Lack of knowledge probably resulted in their resistance against the vaccinations. Only the threat of being sent back to China or the closing down of their shops made the Hakka and Macao Chinese give in.²³⁸ Neighbourhood chiefs who failed to report a case of infection, or failed to bring in a considerable number of people for the vaccination rounds were fired.²³⁹



Chinese neighbourhood, presumably in Batavia, 1920

²³⁷ Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 18 December 1913: pp. 70–71, 3 June 1914: p. 103, and 6 October 1914: pp. 133–34.

²³⁸ Malay minutes, no. NM2, 4 December 1911: pp. 21–23.

²³⁹ Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 3 December 1913: p. 63.

The management of burial grounds and other landed properties

The Chinese Council can be regarded as a corporate body that not only looked after the interests of the Chinese people, but also managed considerable estates. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Council owned fourteen *particuliere landerijen* (private lands) in and around Batavia, including the building that was its headquarters. Furthermore, the Council managed four *eigendomsperceelen* (that is, compounds), three in the name of Chinese temples, and one in the name of the Chinese officers. Its yearly income was derived from biannual land leases, payments of mortgages, interests on mortgages, the selling of land for public interest, the sale of burial grounds, and so on.²⁴⁰

The Council registered the deaths of the Chinese people and managed the burial grounds and funeral fund. During the first decades of Company rule, Chinese civilians were buried in a public cemetery designated by the Company, while the Chinese captains were buried on their private lands. In 1660 the Chinese people asked permission to construct a new graveyard beyond the *fort Jacatra* because the old one “was filled with graves and bodies”. Eight years later, the Chinese community purchased property rights to this burial site for 400 *rijksdaalders*. To safeguard the cemetery from plundering, permission was given to dig a moat around the plot.²⁴¹ In the centuries afterwards, the Chinese community purchased more land for the construction of cemeteries. In 1745, on the initiative of Captain Liem Beng Kong, a Japanese pavilion and a garden reaching up to Kemajoran were purchased. In close consultation with his lieutenants, Captain Liem Tjip Kong made the decision to buy another burial plot in Goenoeng Sahari in 1762. In 1809 Governor-General Daendels considered the Chinese graves that rapidly turned into “stinking pits” in the most elegant and healthy part of Batavia’s suburbs a health risk for the European population. For this reason a new plot named Tandjoeng, located in the Ommelanden west of the city, was

²⁴⁰ “Opgaaf van de Bezittingen van den Chineschen Raad te Batavia, 1917”, enclosed with the letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor-General, 5 November 1917, no. 22168/6, in *Binnenlandsch Bestuur*, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

²⁴¹ Roo de la Faille, “De Chinesche Raad te Batavia”, 307–308.

allotted to the Chinese to construct a graveyard.²⁴² In 1828 the Chinese Council purchased Slipi to expand the cemetery of Tandjoeng, which lay to the north. Probably in the same year, the Council took over the management of Tandjoeng. In 1855 the Chinese Council bought Djati, located east of Tandjoeng and Slipi. In Gouvernementsbesluit of 17 February 1856, no. 23 the governor-general approved the regulation for the management of the Chinese funeral fund in Batavia, and the management of the three burial grounds in Tandjoeng, Slipi, and Djati was officially delegated to the Chinese Council,²⁴³ which later purchased additional burial plots in Djelambar and Tjidang.

When someone wished to purchase a plot for erecting a tomb, he or she sent a written request to the Chinese Council.²⁴⁴ Each month the officer on duty was assigned to examine the requests and measure the requested plots. After thorough examination the officer reported his findings at the monthly board meetings of the Chinese Council. If the officer saw no objection to the sale, and the other Council members agreed with him, the chairman gave permission for the sale and received the purchase price. Then the secretary gave out a receipt, signed by the chairman of the Council or his official substitute.²⁴⁵ If the deceased was someone without means, the chief of the neighbourhood where he or she lived submitted a statement affirming that the deceased person was indeed needy. This statement had to be signed by the Chinese officer assigned to the area in question. After this, the secretary of the Council gave permission for a free funeral.²⁴⁶ Chinese officers, secretaries, neighbourhood chiefs, and other staff members were also allocated free burial grounds (*im tee*), provided they had served the Chinese Council for at least four years and had been

²⁴² Roo de la Faille, “De Chinesche Raad te Batavia”, 316–17.

²⁴³ Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, 48–49.

²⁴⁴ The Chinese Council drew a distinction between burial grounds that were bought before someone was actually deceased (*koeboeran sioehék*) and those bought after someone had passed away (*koeboeran hongsoeij*). The *koeboeran sioehék* were bought in advance to prepare a long resting place for someone.

²⁴⁵ “Reglement voor den Chineschen Raad te Batavia”, articles 3 and 4, in Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

²⁴⁶ “Reglement voor den Chineschen Raad te Batavia”, article 3, in Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

honourably discharged. The rank of a person determined which category grave was given, but usually the best positions in the graveyard were reserved for the Council members and their immediate staff. First-class graves were granted to the officers and secretaries; the Council's inspectors got second-class graves; the neighbourhood chiefs were given third-class graves; and the assistant neighbourhood chiefs, messengers, and other staff members had to settle with fourth-class graves.²⁴⁷

Each month the officer on duty visited the Chinese graveyards for inspection. He was accompanied by the overseer of the cemeteries (*mandoer*). They saw to it that the graves and the roads leading to the cemeteries were maintained and that no graves were desecrated. He also checked whether everyone complied with the regulations regarding the measurements of the graves. If the grave was too big, the purchase price was doubled.²⁴⁸ The secretary kept the registers of people who had been allotted free graves and the funeral books, the so-called *boekoe hongsoeij* or *boekoe sioehék*, in which the secretary recorded which plots of land had been purchased for the purpose of constructing a grave, as well as the name of the purchaser, descriptions and measurements of the plot, and its location.²⁴⁹

The Chinese people always selected the location of their graves carefully. Their choice for a location has to be understood within a context of mystical beliefs and how they viewed the world. In selecting the location of their final resting-place, they always followed the geomantic rules of *feng shui* (*hong soeij*). According to the precepts of *feng shui*, sites are chosen and tombs positioned so as to be in harmony with the spiritual forces wind (*feng, hong*) and water (*shui, soeij*). The Chinese believed that if situated properly the dead would not be disturbed by unfavourable

²⁴⁷ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 3 April 1925: pp. 206–207, 3 August 1927: pp. 285–86, and 18 July 1928: p. 344; Malay minutes, no. NM6, 21 March 1931: p. 73.

²⁴⁸ “Reglement voor den Chineeschen Raad te Batavia”, articles 4 and 12, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

²⁴⁹ “Reglement voor den Chineeschen Raad te Batavia”, article 5, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

influences of wind and water, while the right location would also bring comfort and fortune to all descendants.²⁵⁰ However in the twentieth century it often happened that these traditional practices had to give way to the rapidly modernising society of Batavia. The Chinese Council frequently had to turn over sites containing Chinese graves to the municipality for industrial development. Sometimes conflicts arose between the Chinese Council and the municipality when the Council resisted selling sites that contained many old Chinese graves or when the municipality did not offer enough financial compensation for the relocation of graves. This was the case in 1920 when one of the municipal departments planned to build a slaughterhouse and a cold store on a site owned by the Chinese Council. The municipal department answered the Council's objections with a threat to expropriate the site. After months of haggling, the Council yielded to the municipality's wishes.²⁵¹ In the meeting of January 1923 the Council enacted rules for the relocation of Chinese graves. A tomb was only allowed to be relocated for public interests and only after permission was given by the relatives. The Chinese Council did not have the right to relocate a grave at will. When the municipality wished to do so, it had to place an advertisement in the Chinese and Malay newspapers for three months to inform the relatives of the deceased and to ask them for permission. When permission was given by the family, the municipality had to negotiate about the expenses of relocation, which included the performance of religious ceremonies and the urns in which the bones were kept during the relocation.²⁵²

The lands of the Chinese Council containing many Chinese graves were used exclusively as graveyards, and the Council did not expect that the land would yield revenues. Lands that could still

²⁵⁰ Li Minghuan, "A Portrait of Batavia's Chinese Society Based on the Tandjoeng Cemetery Archives", in *Archives of the Kong Koan of Batavia*, edited by L. Blussé and Chen Menghong (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 80; J. J. M. de Groot, *De Lijkbezorging der Emoy-Chineezzen* ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1892).

²⁵¹ Malay minutes, no. NM4, 14 July 1920: pp. 170–73, 18 September 1920: pp. 193–94, and 22 December 1920: pp. 204–204.

²⁵² Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 25 September 1913: pp. 37–38; Malay minutes, no. NM5, 3 January 1923: pp. 55–56.

bring in revenues and did not contain (many) graves were leased out by the Council for a period of six years. Such leases were set by auctions announced in the daily papers a few months before the lease of the current tenant expired. On the day of the auction, potential tenants and their guarantors gathered to bid on the leases. The Chinese officers followed the auction closely and observed the potential tenants. When the auction was over, the officers convened to discuss the results, comparing the bids and examining the financial background of the bidders and their guarantors. Based on the outcome of this discussion, a decision for a new tenant was made. Usually the officers chose the highest bidder, provided he and his guarantors were financially strong and stable. After the decision was made, the chairman of the Council and the secretary went to the notary who had conducted the auction to draw up the papers.²⁵³ If the land in question contained Chinese graves, the tenant was ordered to keep a watchful eye so that these graves were left undisturbed.²⁵⁴

The Chinese Council also leased out its own compounds.²⁵⁵ For the leasing out of these buildings, the Council placed advertisements in the newspapers. Anyone who wished to lease the buildings could send his bid to the Chinese Council. The officers discussed all the incoming bids in the monthly board meeting. After a decision for a tenant was made, the lease contract was drawn up at the notary.²⁵⁶ The Council also sold lands which were not suitable for the construction of cemeteries, and from which no revenues could be yielded. Once a year, in February, the Chinese Council had to submit a financial report to the resident.²⁵⁷ (The choice for February might have to do with the end of the Chinese lunar year, which normally falls in the months of January and February.) A few days before the end of the lunar calendar the Chinese Council officially concluded its activities for the year.

²⁵³ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 25 April 1927: pp. 271–72 and 12 July 1927: pp. 282–84.

²⁵⁴ “Reglement voor den Chineeschen Raad te Batavia”, article 7, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

²⁵⁵ The rented houses of the Chinese Council were leased out for a period of three years.

²⁵⁶ Chinese minutes, no. 21024, 3 September 1912: pp. 80–81.

²⁵⁷ “Reglement voor den Chineeschen Raad te Batavia”, articles 7 and 14, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

2.4 The elite status of the Chinese officers

On Java and Madoera the post of Chinese officer was honorary and thus an unpaid position.

Therefore in most cases only wealthy Chinese from the local elite such as landowners, owners of sugar mills and rice paddies, and influential merchants could afford to take the position. The Dutch reasoned that it was wealth, which gave a member of the Chinese elite influence in his community and made him an effective middleman between the Dutch authorities and the Chinese people.²⁵⁸

Indeed, in the Chinese community where business played an integral role, wealth and exceptional economic power were essential for leadership status.²⁵⁹ Until the twentieth century the post of Chinese officer was a much sought after position as the Chinese Council dealt with the daily affairs of the Chinese community and because there were financial perquisites attached to the job. To compensate for their unpaid activities, collection of most of the government revenues were farmed out to the Chinese officers. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century the annual auction for revenue farms in Batavia took place at the beginning of every year at the Company headquarters. Historian Liem Thian Joe compared the auctions in Semarang with battles between kings (*peperangan antara raja-raja*) as the bidding resembled close combat between participants, all of whom were members of the local elite.²⁶⁰ The Chinese played a major role in these auctions and the Chinese officers were involved in most of the farms. Success at the auctions meant control over the most lucrative of the government tax farms and the prestige and patronage that went with it. By 1644, the Chinese operated seventeen of the twenty-one revenue farms, such as gambling, markets, import and export tolls, and *wayang* plays.²⁶¹ These sources of income not only compensated the unpaid position of the Chinese officers, but made them even wealthier. Evidence of this wealth is shown in the gifts European and indigenous nobility usually received from the officers on special occasions, such as

²⁵⁸ Ong Hok Ham, "The Peranakan Officers", 281–82.

²⁵⁹ Skinner, "Overseas Chinese Leadership", 195.

²⁶⁰ Liem, *Riwayat Semarang*, 170.

²⁶¹ Reid, "The Origins of Revenue Farming", 74–75.

New Year's, or upon their appointment. Until 1797, the governor-generals received 400 rixdollars *tafelgeld* (table money) per month from the Chinese captains and 1000 rixdollars each year as a New Year's gift.²⁶² The elite status of a Chinese officer was manifested by his presence at official ceremonies and the lavish feasts he organised, as well as by the luxurious gifts he gave to high-placed Dutch officials, his disposal of carriages and the use of a *sombreel* (ceremonial parasol); the last was a privilege requiring Company approval.²⁶³ It signified that the officers were figures of respect and dignity.²⁶⁴ In the introduction to this chapter we saw that the appointment of a Chinese captain went hand in hand with a display of majestic grandeur, and the funeral of a captain was no less spectacular: "When this Captain Wanjok passed away, the Government graced his funeral in October 1684 with "Company soldiers of this Castle", adorned with mourning-bands and sashes for wear, "marching with entailing guns" and more ceremony, as though the man had been a member of the High Government."²⁶⁵

The collaborative structure between the Dutch authorities and the Chinese officers worked well in time. By appointing Chinese headmen, the government gained access to Chinese society without having to worry about the administration over the Chinese community. Language barriers and unfamiliarity with Chinese customs made the Dutch less than keen to directly administer the Chinese community. The leasing of taxes to the Chinese officers not only generated vast sums for the state coffers but also filled the officers' pockets. In this way, the officers who held various tax licences were in effect not only administrative assistants, but also important business partners of the Company and, after the Company's demise, the colonial regime. As licence holders of various revenue farms, they were partners in a business arrangement that was designed to deliver financial

²⁶² Liem, "Het Instituut der Chineesche Officieren", 71. See also *Plakaatboek*, vol. 12, 1795–1799: p. 445, and Haan, *Oud Batavia*, 1:498.

²⁶³ Haan, *Oud Batavia*, 1:499; Vermeulen, "Eenige Opmerkingen over de Rechtsbedeeling van de Compagnie", 10–11.

²⁶⁴ Rush, *Opium to Java*, 86.

²⁶⁵ Haan, *Oud Batavia*, 1:498.

profits to both parties. Thus it was important for the government to find licence holders who not only had a strong financial background, but who were also involved in an organisation that would guarantee their ability to collect taxes.²⁶⁶

These requirements were met by the Chinese officers who were directly appointed by the governor-general and who were authority figures in their community. Their authority also spread to the villages, as the officers were regarded as government officials by the indigenous people, who as a result did not dare to resist paying their taxes. They were the economic arms of government in rural areas.²⁶⁷ Moreover, the officers had everything to gain actively carrying out the tax collection (of which they were entitled a percentage of the revenues), to compensate for their unpaid administrative activities.²⁶⁸ They were trustworthy as state agents and business partners also because they benefited from the status quo and were little inclined to press for radical alterations in this arrangement. With their governmental position, connections, and wealth, the officers (and their families) were influential people in their community. Membership in the Council, even though unpaid, guaranteed authority and prestige and was therefore very appealing. The institution of Chinese officers was clearly a stronghold of the Chinese property-owning class.²⁶⁹

That the position of Chinese officer was reserved for the upper crust (*cabang atas*) of Chinese society is also shown by the fact that the post was generally closely held in family circles.²⁷⁰ In the major cities of Java the position was in essence hereditary or at least it had come to be considered the prerogative of certain wealthy *peranakan* families, in the early twentieth century

²⁶⁶ Skinner, "Overseas Chinese Leadership", 195.

²⁶⁷ A. Reid, "Entrepreneurial Minorities and the State", in *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, edited by D. Chirot and A. Reid (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 45.

²⁶⁸ P. Tjiok-Liem, *De Rechtspositie der Chinezen in Nederlands-Indië 1848–1942: Wetgevingsbeleid tussen Beginsel en Belang* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009), 43–46.

²⁶⁹ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 87.

²⁷⁰ Rush, *Opium to Java*, 89.

scornfully called the “government-families” (*pamerintahan-familie*).²⁷¹ In Batavia, the Khouw family included many important landowners and moneylenders, and it also produced the last Chinese major of Batavia, Khouw Kim An. The Tio family was also influential: from 1899 until 1907 the brothers Tio Tek Ho and Tio Tek Soen were members in the Chinese Council, holding the positions of major, captain and lieutenant. In Semarang there were the Be, Liem, Tan, and later the Oei and Hoo families, while the Han, The, Tjoa, and Kwee families dominated Soerabaja. The Be family in Semarang and the The family in Soerabaja produced four to five generations of officers and revenue farmers before the officer and revenue farm systems were abolished in the early twentieth century. In Central and East Java, especially, the post of Chinese officer evolved and expanded together with the revenue farms.²⁷² By the late nineteenth century these *peranakan* families had accumulated great wealth and immense local power, which even transcended district and regional borders, and through intermarriage and nepotism they were able to consolidate their *cabang atas* status. Elite families lobbied to get their sons or sons-in-law officer positions and lucrative tax farms in other towns and districts.²⁷³ But it was not impossible for newcomers to work their way into the elite. In 1884 a certain Oei Tjie Sien, a refugee of the Taiping rebellion in China arranged for his son Oei Tiong Ham—the “sugar lord” and the last and wealthiest of the opium farmers of Java—to marry into the Goei family, a wealthy and respected Chinese family of officers and tax farmers. Two years later, Oei Tiong Ham’s entrance into the elite world was confirmed by his appointment as *luitenant der Chineezen* in Semarang. In 1901 he was appointed *titulair majoor* and by the time of his death in June 1924 Oei Tiong Ham’s firm had—thanks to his business genius

²⁷¹ *Warna Warta*, 16 June 1914; “Chineesche Officieren”, *De Indische Gids* 36:1 (1914): 885–87.

²⁷² Ong Hok Ham, “Chinese Capitalism in Dutch Java”, in *Oei Tiong Ham Concern: The First Business Empire of Southeast Asia*, edited by K. Yoshihara (Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1989), 57; G. W. Skinner, “Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia”, in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, edited by A. Reid (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 80–81.

²⁷³ Ong Hok Ham, “Chinese Capitalism in Dutch Java”, 57–58.

—become the largest Chinese conglomerate in the Dutch East Indies.²⁷⁴ The Han family in Soerabaja produced an extraordinarily large number of majors, captains and lieutenants who held office in Soerabaja and other cities of East Java such as Djoewana, Gresik, Bangil, Pasoeroean, Probolinggo, Kediri, Malang, Kertosono, Djombang, and Koetaradja. It was a family of prominent entrepreneurs that owned agricultural companies and plantations on which paddy, sugarcane, maize, indigo, and coconut palms were grown. The Han family managed to become a new “aristocracy” that succeeded in controlling the local Chinese communities by virtue of its economic assets.²⁷⁵ The Han family had close connections with the The family in Soerabaja, a family of sugar mill owners that had an almost unbroken succession of Chinese officers in the family and produced four majors. Intermarriage was a common practice to preserve the wealth within the most powerful families.²⁷⁶

Since the foremost criterion for the position of Chinese officer was wealth, the institution seemed to be less professional and institutionalised than the administrative structures of the Company and the colonial government, which set great store by competency. The Company and the Indies government possessed bureaucratic and hierarchical structures that guaranteed them a certain political and administrative continuity that was not linked to a specific group of persons.²⁷⁷ Yet Jean Gelman Taylor has shown that family relationships were crucial in the appointments and promotions of Dutch government officials as well, women playing a key role in this. Ambitious

²⁷⁴ H. Dick, “Oei Tiong Ham”, in *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*, edited by J. Butcher and H. Dick (New York: St. Martins Press, 1993), 272–73; Regeerings-almanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië (1908): 181. According to the Regeerings-almanak, Oei Tiong Ham was appointed lieutenant on 7 June 1886. He became captain on 16 November 1891, and on 12 June 1901 he was awarded the title of honorary major.

²⁷⁵ “Chineesche Officieren”, in *De Indische Gids* 36:1 (1914): 885–86, quoted in Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 125; C. Salmon, “The Han Family of East Java: Entrepreneurship and Politics (18th–19th centuries)”, *Archipel* 41 (1991): 78–79; for a list of Chinese community heads in East Java, see pp. 79–80.

²⁷⁶ Ong Hok Ham, “The Perankan Officers”, 287.

²⁷⁷ Blussé, *Strange Company*, 89.

men used marriage to prominent women to cement alliances that ultimately placed them in important government posts.²⁷⁸ In the case of Chinese administration, the appointment of a Chinese officer was based on wealth, personal preference, and bribes. The first Chinese Captain Souw Bing Kong, for example, was a personal friend of J. P. Coen, who not only appointed him, but also gave him two plots of land (coconut plantations in Mangga Doea) on 1 February 1623 for the construction of his houses, which were built of brick and paid for by the Company. To protect Souw Bing Kong and his family, Coen also arranged for a night patrol near his residence.²⁷⁹ Other nominees for the post would send gifts to the governor-general and other high-placed Dutch officials, and these often proved decisive. It was said that Nie Hoe Kong, the unfortunate captain during the Chinese massacre of 1740, had bought his way into the officer system. On 6 February 1733, he followed in his father's footsteps and was appointed a lieutenant, a post which he apparently had bought.²⁸⁰ Three years later he was promoted to captain. According to a Chinese source, Nie paid a cartload of silver to the governor-general for the privilege. Possibly with the same objective, he also donated 500 rixdollars for the benefit of Dutch and Malay churches.²⁸¹ On 11 September 1736, he was promoted "considering that apart from the required qualifications he possesses, he also is a man of means".²⁸²

For three centuries, the practices with respect to the appointment of Chinese officers remained untouched. Wealth, bribes, family relations, and personal preference were important

²⁷⁸ Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*, 71–72.

²⁷⁹ B. G. Setiono, *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik* (Jakarta: Elkasa, 2003), 96.

²⁸⁰ B. Hoetink, "Ni Hoekong, Kapitein der Chineezzen te Batavia in 1740", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlands-Indië* 74:4 (1918): 447n6.

²⁸¹ In a clarification on account of the capital of the Dutch and Malay churches over the year 1735 (R. 10 January 1736) the following post appears under one of the receipts: from sundries to a pious generous gift: of the Chinese Lieutenant Nie Hoekong 500 rixdollars." See Hoetink "Ni Hoekong", 448n1 (text and punctuation modified). The "R" in "R. 10 January 1736" is an abbreviation for "Resolution".

²⁸² Hoetink "Ni Hoekong", 447–48.

prerequisites for becoming a Chinese officer, although from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries attention was increasingly paid to proper conduct and suitability as well. The institution of Chinese officers befitted the alliance between the Dutch and Chinese; both were in the archipelago in pursuit of commercial gain and they had mutual need for each other in gaining optimal profits. The Chinese officers, who had vested interests in the alliance, served as important protectors of this partnership.



A well-to-do peranakan family: Captain Tjung Boek Tek and his wife and children

2.5 Conclusion

The institution of Chinese officers came into being for pragmatic reasons. For nearly three centuries Company and colonial government officials were only interested in gaining optimal profits from the overseas colonies and were not much concerned with the people they ruled. It was sufficient to establish cooperative relations with indigenous rulers and the Chinese population to secure their trade activities. In their pursuit of mercantile profits, they found “a partner in trade” in the Chinese, who assisted the Dutch in their exploitation of commercial opportunities. Establishing a system of Chinese headmen appeared a simple and practical way to maintain order and avoid administrative “hassle”. Simultaneously the headmen served as a middleman between the Dutch and Chinese. As overseers of the Chinese community, the headmen were not empowered with the right to make administrative decisions, nor were they entrusted with vested legislative power.²⁸³

The institution of Chinese officers was a product of the segregation policy which the Dutch implemented in order to keep their vulnerability in the conquered areas to a minimum by a system of divide and rule. The institution was not a colonial innovation per se as the system was a continuation of earlier Asian forms of separate communal leadership systems, but it was colonial in so far as the Dutch gave the institution more formal weight. The same goes for setting boundaries between the various groups and incorporating individuals into discrete communities. The Dutch did not invent the concept of a plural society, which was an offshoot from an earlier world with its own patterns and mechanisms of separation and fusion. Yet the Dutch adopted the system, restricted interracial mingling, and formalised pluralistic administrative and juridical structures.²⁸⁴

Surrounded by a majority of population groups of Asian origin, the Dutch realised their position in colonial society was weak. Threats to their exploitative activities constantly lay in wait. To reduce

²⁸³ Ph. Kleintjes, *Staatsinstellingen van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Amsterdam: J. H. de Bussy, 1933), 82; Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 124–25.

²⁸⁴ Bosma and Raben, *Being “Dutch” in the Indies*, 1–21.

the risks engendered by this cohabitation, the Dutch created separate spheres within the colonial community and implemented an institutional structure of cooperation and delegation of powers.²⁸⁵

The Chinese officers were chosen and appointed on the basis of such criteria as wealth, social relations, and favouritism. That is why the elite of the Chinese property-owning class gained a strong grip on this office. This does not mean that the headmen were only interested in gaining the title of Chinese officer while neglecting the responsibilities attached to the post. The minutes of the board meetings show that the Chinese community was very organised, with the Chinese Council at its centre. All the tasks were clearly divided among the Chinese officers and supporting staff, and most officers took their role seriously. The evaluation of a candidate was also a thorough process in which different candidates' strengths and weaknesses were carefully weighed. But it must still be concluded that overall, the institution of Chinese officers perpetuated the business alliance between the Dutch and Chinese. The Chinese officers, themselves merchants and tax farmers, had everything to gain in the Dutch-Chinese collaboration and eagerly contributed to sustaining this relationship. It was only in the early twentieth century that the Dutch-Chinese alliance seriously weakened, with severe repercussions for the Chinese Council and its officers.

²⁸⁵ Raben, "Batavia and Colombo", 162.