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The Decline of the Chinese Council of Batavia

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Citation

Erkelens, M. (2013, October 15). *The Decline of the Chinese Council of Batavia*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/21954>

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Title: The decline of the Chinese Council of Batavia: the loss of prestige and authority of the traditional elite amongst the Chinese community from the end of the nineteenth century until 1942

Issue Date: 2013-10-15

CHAPTER 5

THE CHINESE COUNCIL IN CRISIS: THE DEBATE ON CHINESE ADMINISTRATION AND THE FUTURE OF THE CHINESE OFFICER SYSTEM

The social and political developments in colonial society analysed in the previous chapters called for intervention by the colonial government. The published attacks on Chinese officers, which incited physical violence in some cases, and the increasing unpopularity of the officer post, were clear signs for the colonial government that the traditional approach to dealing with the Chinese community on Java needed to be critically re-evaluated. The government's rather simplistic attempts to revamp the system discussed in chapter 3 did not have the desired results, as shown in chapter 4. More far-reaching steps were in order and this triggered a lively debate among government officials that went beyond the inner workings of Chinese administration. The problems of leadership in the Chinese community did not exist in isolation and had to be viewed in a larger context. Political factors played a crucial role.

This chapter presents the debate among colonial government officials in which the institution of Chinese officers was re-evaluated, and analyses the solutions brought forward to improve the administration over the Chinese. The debate culminated in a meeting held in the Department of Internal Affairs in September 1917. The meeting was called to draw conclusions from the debate and to draft reorganisation plans for the Chinese administration, which was becoming a priority of the colonial government—specifically, to create more equality among the different non-white races in the Indies. This led to the consensus to incorporate the reorganisation of Chinese administration into a master plan that aimed to reform the whole system of local

administration in the *hoofdplaatsen* of Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja, and introduce a new system that would apply to every population group. Before turning to this debate and the decisions taken in the September 1917 meeting, we must look at developments preceding the debate. After briefly reviewing the problems in Chinese administration and how the colonial government had approached them, I will use the analysis of an ex-government official to show how the government previously misjudged the situation and why it seemed lost in approaching the problems. Eventually the assistance of an “outsider” was called in to examine and handle the defects of the system.

5.1 The problems in Chinese administration

The colonial government initially viewed the problems in Chinese administration as rather isolated questions. In chapter 3 we saw that the abolition of the revenue farms had deprived Chinese officers of the unofficial, but substantial financial compensation for their unpaid activities. With the increasing interference of the colonial government over the lives of its subjects in the twentieth century and the emergence of professionals to handle legal matters and business affairs, the Chinese officers were forced to share their authority with other professionals in the Chinese community. This loss of influence, prestige, and potential for material gain discouraged Chinese men from applying for the position of community leader. As a result, more and more officer posts were left vacant in the early twentieth century. The government took steps to raise the prestige of the Chinese officers and attract candidates to fill the vacant positions by granting privileges in the freedom of movement and domicile, the judicial system, and education. These proved a short-term solution—if they constituted a solution at all—because they were overshadowed by vigorous protest campaigns against the institution of Chinese officers initiated by the Sino-Malay press. Recent developments in the Chinese community such as the provision of modern education, exposure to new concepts and ideologies, the emergence of platforms to express new thoughts and ideas made the Chinese people question the legitimacy of the existing Chinese officers. One pillar of modern society was the

professionalisation of the bureaucracy. The image of the modern government official who is educated and conscious of his duties was laid down as a standard in the modern bureaucracy by the colonial government, but was not applied to the Chinese officers. The Chinese officers continued to be selected from prominent families and wealth rather than competence and capability was a prerequisite. Resistance to this selection procedure and the institution of Chinese officers as a whole began to grow. It no longer sufficed to simply make the job more attractive; the colonial government had to think about how the traditional institution of Chinese community leadership would fit in a modernising society that was beginning to demand more from its leaders. But the colonial government was reluctant to deal with this matter.

Henri Borel put his finger on the problem by demonstrating how little the colonial government knew of recent developments in the Chinese community. In a number of articles published in various newspapers and journals, Borel criticised the colonial government for the way it dealt with the problems in Chinese administration. Borel had acquired a thorough command of Chinese in Leiden and Amoy and had worked five years (1894–99) as an interpreter in imperial China. In 1909, Borel was appointed as the official for Chinese affairs in Soerabaja, and three years later he was transferred to Makassar to oversee Chinese affairs. After repatriating to the Netherlands in 1913 he became a journalist and literary critic for the newspapers *De Telegraaf* and *Het Vaderland*. In the years he spent in China and the Netherlands Indies, Borel became very well acquainted with the language, culture, and customs of mainland and Indies Chinese as well as with the recent social and political developments in both countries.

According to Borel, the colonial government's inability to grapple with the problems in the Chinese administration could be attributed to the fact that local officials knew too little about the Chinese community. Borel saw that the only Chinese people the residents, assistant-residents, and the controleurs knew were conservatives with a boundless, even servile respect for European

officials and who viewed material wealth as the principal criterion for government office.⁶⁰⁷ The local governments knew little of the political agitation among the Chinese, which was one reason why officials and the Chinese of this era had become estranged. To Borel's dismay, they also had a poor understanding of developments in China, much less their implications for the situation in the Indies.⁶⁰⁸ Had the local governments put more effort into understanding the nature of the emancipated Chinese, they would have realised that the institution of Chinese officers had no place in a modernising society such as that in the Indies. The traditional institution of Chinese community leadership was a remnant of the Company's regime, which was oppressive and out of fashion. The local governments should also have realised that to expect the community to acknowledge the Chinese officers simply because they were appointed by the colonial government—even against the wishes of the Chinese community—was in conflict with the ethical program. Borel pointed out that a large percentage of the *hoofden hunner natie* (headmen of their nation) neither knew China, nor could speak, read, or write Chinese. They were also almost completely unfamiliar with the Chinese laws and institutions. And yet, these officers were still seated in the *Landraad* and the *Raad van Justitie* to give “expert” advice on Chinese law, customs, and traditions. Borel admits that before the emergence of the Chinese movement this oligarchic system of rule worked. But now that the colonial government had provided modern education for the Chinese people and emancipation had found its way into the Chinese community, the colonial government should not be surprised to see that they were no longer willing to obey the instruments of colonial capitalism. More important, the colonial government should not blame this emancipated people for turning to the chairmen and board members of modern organisations—representatives of knowledge and competence—because they had outgrown the traditional system of community leadership. Now it was the task of the

⁶⁰⁷ H. J. F. Borel, “De Chineesche Kwestie en de Ambtenaren van ’t Binnenlandsch Bestuur”, *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 2:1 (1913): 53–54.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 41–42.

colonial government to acknowledge the changes in the Chinese community and to find a satisfactory solution for the problems in Chinese administration.⁶⁰⁹

According to Borel, the local government's ignorance of recent developments in the Chinese community could to a certain extent be blamed on the ambiguous position of the officials for Chinese affairs, which originated in the post of "interpreter for the Chinese language" in 1860. This was the first time that European officials had been appointed as official Chinese-language interpreters. At the time, the colonial government felt the need to appoint European interpreters because its leaders believed they could no longer rely on translators from the Chinese community, especially for a correct assessment of Chinese publications, and in legal proceedings involving Chinese speakers. European interpreters-to-be were educated in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies and also spent a few years of their training in China for practical experience. After completing this special training, they were employed as official interpreters and were expected to provide oral and written translations to the judicial and administrative authorities. They were also occasionally employed by local governments as advisors with regard to Chinese affairs.⁶¹⁰

In 1895 it was decided to move the interpreter's function as advisor to the forefront. The *Indisch Staatsblad* 1895–135 set forth official instructions regarding the post, formation, titles, education, and salary of the officials for Chinese affairs, as the interpreters for Chinese languages were now called. In *Indisch Staatsblad* 1896–96 the advisory duties of the officials for Chinese affairs were emphasised: they were foremost expected to supply information and provide expert advice on Chinese affairs to the judicial and administrative authorities and its institutions; to submit proposals in connection with the administrative, judicial, social, and political affairs within the Chinese community; and if necessary, to provide oral and written translation services to the authorities and private persons. Five offices were set up, in Batavia, Soerabaja, Tandjong Pinang,

⁶⁰⁹ "Chineesche Officiëren", *De Indische Gids* 36:1 (1914): 885–87.

⁶¹⁰ "Chineesche Zaken (Ambtenaar voor-)", in: *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* (1917), vol. 1: 477–78.

Medan, and Makassar. Later on, new offices were opened in Semarang and Pontianak, while the office in Medan was replaced by a new one in Padang.⁶¹¹ It is striking that the officials for Chinese affairs reported directly to the director of justice without sending copies of their reports to the local government heads, who remained unaware of what went on among the Chinese in their localities, especially with regard to the Chinese associations.⁶¹² The lack of awareness was illustrated by the Chinese riots of 1912, which took the local authorities by surprise.⁶¹³ Borel explained that the problem also lay in the fact that the chiefs of local governments relied on the Chinese officers for information on local affairs, while keeping the officials for Chinese affairs at arm's length.⁶¹⁴ This was not the best choice as the rise of Chinese nationalism had placed the Chinese officers in a difficult position between the interests of Dutch colonial rule and the promoters of a "Greater China".⁶¹⁵ One of the officers' most important duties was to inform the colonial government about what went on in the Chinese neighbourhoods, but they were reluctant to inform on nationalists seeking support for a revolution in China from the overseas Chinese. This lack of information was dangerous enough, but the officers also gave false information to avoid any *soesah* (difficulties) with the modern Chinese organisations. Borel referred to a report from an official for Chinese affairs warning that the Soe Po Sia book clubs frequently opened their doors to revolutionary refugees from China who fiercely condemned imperial authority and called for the establishment of a Chinese republic, and who strongly denounced the colonisation of Eastern colonies by Western powers. When the local authorities demanded an explanation for these inflammatory public meetings, the Chinese officers denied the accusations and stated that the meetings were merely organised to hold lectures about Chinese ethics. Satisfied with this explanation, the authorities let

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² "Bestuursambtenaar en Adviseur voor Chineesche Zaken", *De Indische Gids* 35:1 (1913): 382.

⁶¹³ "Bestuursambtenaar en Adviseur voor Chineesche Zaken", *De Indische Gids* 35:2 (1913): 949.

⁶¹⁴ Borel, "De Chineesche Kwestie en de Ambtenaren van 't Binnenlandsch Bestuur", 45–46.

⁶¹⁵ Confidential letter of the Director of Internal Affairs to the Governor-General, 10 December 1915, no. 685 G/B, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

the meetings continue. But regret followed instantly when Macao Chinese, frequent visitors of the meetings, committed violent crimes to show their support for the Chinese revolution.⁶¹⁶

The influence of Chinese nationalism on the officers was also demonstrated by Captain Nio Hoey Oen, who replaced Major Khouw Kim An on the immigration committee in December 1914. The committee had convened to discuss the requests of nine Chinese immigrants, members of the Kuo Min Tang, to be allowed admittance to the Netherlands Indies. The discussion of this case was in fact just a formality since the colonial authorities considered such immigrants undesirables and their presence in the Indies was not appreciated. But as soon as Captain Nio Hoey Oen learned he was expected to give advice in this matter, he excused himself from the meeting, claiming ill health, but clearly he wanted to avoid passing judgement on these revolutionaries. Possible sympathy for the revolutionary cause or fear of animosity and possible retaliation made it difficult for the Chinese officers to function. Therefore it was no longer possible to exclusively rely on the Chinese officers for information.⁶¹⁷ Yet, Borel said with regret, most local government heads still viewed the officials of Chinese affairs as a *quantité négligeable*.⁶¹⁸ It was of course easier for the residents and assistant-residents to deal with the Chinese officers who were subordinate to them, as an independent European official would not bow to everything they said. Nevertheless, had the local administrators been willing to confer with the officials for Chinese affairs on a regular basis, they would have been aware of the developments in the Chinese neighbourhoods. They would also have anticipated that the current system of Chinese administration did not meet the standards of a modernising and emancipating society, like that of the Indies Chinese society. Thus, Borel urged for a change in the bureaucratic arrangements for the official for Chinese affairs.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁶ Borel, “De Chineesche Kwestie en de Ambtenaren van ‘t Binnenlandsch Bestuur”, 45–47.

⁶¹⁷ Memorandum of the Assistant-Resident of Batavia, 25 December 1914, in: Mailrapport, no. 34/16, NA, The Hague.

⁶¹⁸ Borel, “De Chineesche Kwestie en de Ambtenaren van ‘t Binnenlandsch Bestuur”, 45.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 45–46.

Changes occurred in 1913 when a *Kantoor voor Chineesche Zaken* (Office for Chinese Affairs) was set up in Batavia as the main centre of information for Chinese affairs within the Department of Internal Affairs. This office consisted of the advisor for Chinese affairs (who headed the office), and the officials for Chinese affairs. The colonial government realised that the situation in the Chinese community had become complex and the nationalist movement drew Indies Chinese into the political arena. Now that the government could no longer rely on the Chinese officers, it needed a centralised intelligence service to keep tabs on the Chinese community. Putting the office in the Department of Internal Affairs⁶²⁰ meant that the local branches of the Office for Chinese Affairs would be placed under local administrations, a prospect that was hard for the officials to swallow. Claiming that the Department of Internal Affairs had so far not concerned itself with Chinese politics and the fact that the local administrations had always ignored them, they insisted on remaining part of the Department of Justice and thus independent from local government heads. The director of justice also failed to see why the Office for Chinese Affairs should move to another department, given that—according to his judgment—the office ran well under its supervision. He also scoffed at the Department of Internal Affairs’ view of the Indies Chinese as well-behaved subjects with only a few grievances. In the eyes of Internal Affairs the Indies Chinese were the *peranakan* on Java and therefore it was sufficient to turn to the Chinese officers when information was needed. It completely disregarded the *totok* element that was in close contact with Chinese revolutionaries in China and other parts of Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the dispute was decided in favour of the Department of Internal Affairs. The colonial authorities stressed that close cooperation between the Office for Chinese Affairs and local administrations was critical for monitoring new developments in the Chinese community. They had no stomach for a reprise of the 1912 riots. By

⁶²⁰ “Chineesche Zaken (Ambtenaar voor-)”, in: *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* (1917) vol. 1: 477–78.

Koninklijk Besluit (royal decree) of 10 March 1913, no. 84, the Office for Chinese Affairs was placed under the Department of Internal Affairs.⁶²¹

Another issue with implications for the administration not only of Indies Chinese but of all Foreign Orientals was the growing tension between the ethnic communities. In the previous chapter it was shown that the early twentieth century marked the beginning of a crucial period for non-Western groups in the colony. Influenced by developments in the wider world and also by each other, the Chinese, the natives, and also the Arabs in the Netherlands Indies were moving towards nationalist consciousness and awaking to the realisation that they could attain social and economic parity with the West. This resulted in the establishment of political movements and societies that used the streets and press as platforms to voice their collective demands for equality with Western groups in the colony. Due to the policy of segregation that had lasted centuries, ethnic communities manifested their “awakening” by emphasising their own identities. As a result, social pluralism became even more visible. Feelings of frustration over government rules that favoured one ethnicity above the other led to increasing mutual intolerance. For this reason, the colonial government was forced to consider creating more equality among the ethnic groups in the spheres of administration, education, justice, taxation, freedom of movement and domicile, and so on. More uniformity would not only answer the demands to receive the same treatment as the Western groups; it would also create more equality among the non-Western communities, which might reduce the tension and feelings of communal jealousy and resentment. As the system of Chinese community leadership in its current structure was no longer workable, and the Arabs had also expressed their dissatisfaction with the Arab officers, it might be the right time for the colonial government to create a form of administration that could be applied to all the (non-Western) communities.

⁶²¹ Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 213–17. See also *Indisch Staatsblad* 1913-350.

5.2 The advice of temporary government advisor W. J. Oudendijk

It was now apparent to the colonial government that the institution of Chinese officers could no longer deal with the changes in the Chinese community and that it was impossible to leave Chinese administration in the hands of the Chinese officers. Government intervention was required and the colonial authorities were forced to find a way to incorporate the administration over the Chinese into their new vision of colonial rule. Before the colonial government could come up with a solution, it was first necessary to be fully informed about Chinese public opinion, the inner-workings of the Chinese community, China and the Chinese movement, and the image of the Chinese officers among their countrymen. For this, the colonial government sought the advice of W. J. Oudendijk, an experienced Dutch diplomat who had held office in China, Russia, and at the time his services were requested by the colonial government, Persia.

Born in 1874 in Kampen, a river town in the Dutch province of Overijssel, Oudendijk was sent to Amsterdam as a teenager by his parents to attend secondary school. After completing his secondary education, Oudendijk went to Leiden University to study law. After his graduation he successfully passed the entrance examination for the Foreign Office and was told he would be sent to the legation of Peking. With this destination ahead, Oudendijk followed a preliminary course in the Chinese written language given by the famous Leiden Sinologist J. J. M. de Groot. The Foreign Office officially appointed him to the Dutch legation in Peking in February 1894. Starting out as an apprentice interpreter, he rapidly climbed the bureaucratic ladder to the post of envoy extraordinary.⁶²² After four years in Peking, Oudendijk spent a leave of absence in Russia. He returned to China in 1900, right in the midst of the Boxer uprisings. Oudendijk headed the St. Petersburg legation in 1907 before returning to Peking a year later. Oudendijk was appointed consul-general in Teheran in 1910, with the personal title of minister plenipotentiary. According to

⁶²² W. J. Oudendijk, *Ways and By-ways in Diplomacy* (London: Peter Davies, 1939), 1–78.

his memoirs, his years in Teheran were the happiest of his life.⁶²³ In 1913, the minister of foreign affairs dispatched him to Java to advise the colonial government on the reorganisation of the outdated administrative system for the Chinese population. Given his long experience as a diplomat in China and his profound knowledge of international affairs, and in particular the recent developments in China, Oudendijk was judged as the most suitable person to shed light on the problems in Java.

To be able to assist the colonial government in laying the foundation for extensive reforms in the antiquated administrative system that was the Chinese Council and its officers, Oudendijk carried out a meticulous investigation into the condition of life of the Chinese settlers:

I travelled all over Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and other islands. I had conferences with all the residents and all the officials who had any dealings with the Chinese section of the population; and wherever there was a Chinese community of any importance, I convened a meeting of its principal members and of the committees of their societies, and inquired about their wishes, their grievances and their opinions in general. . . .

. . . I also travelled to the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, and consulted with the British officials in Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore; and had a general look round at the ways and methods of the British in their colonial administration. With the knowledge thus gathered I drafted my proposals to the Governor-General.⁶²⁴

In February 1914 he presented his report to the governor-general in which he underlined the fact that the colonial government had insufficient knowledge of the developments in the Chinese community. For a long time, this had not mattered, but since a new intellectual trend in East Asia

⁶²³ Ibid., 78–191.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 197, 198.

had led to the formation of Chinese political associations in the Indies, demanding equal status with the Europeans and propagating against colonial authority, it became necessary for the colonial government to forge closer relationships with the Chinese community.⁶²⁵ Oudendijk pointed out that the institution of Chinese officers had been established in an era when the main objective of Dutch colonists in the archipelago was commerce and the Chinese were considered essential for the development of the region's economy. Previously the system of indirect rule had been a practical and lucrative way to govern these people with their strange languages and customs, but with the intensification of Dutch direct rule over the archipelago and the increasing interference from the Chinese government, it was time for the colonial government to show more concern for the affairs of the Indies Chinese, who had become Dutch subjects by the Dutch Subject Law of 1910. No longer could they be considered as foreigners and the colonial government now had the obligation to look after their best interests and re-evaluate their position in colonial society. According to Oudendijk, the institution of Chinese officers was one of the matters that needed re-evaluation. He observed that the Chinese people in the Netherlands Indies were no longer willing to accept the Chinese officers' patriarchal way of governance, and they could no longer identify themselves with the officers who were members of the established elite and had little understanding of the new challenges their countrymen were facing. The Chinese officers no longer served their community; neighbourhood chiefs sometimes committed extortion by demanding excessive taxes from the people and the officers did not do anything to prevent this. Some officers even allied with the neighbourhood chiefs in their extortion activities and split the profits. Oudendijk anticipated that the Chinese people would expect better treatment under direct European administration.⁶²⁶

Another issue that Oudendijk raised was the Dutch practice of encouraging the different races and ethnic groups to live in accordance with their own customs and traditions, and under laws

⁶²⁵ Report of the Government Advisor on Chinese Affairs W. J. Oudendijk to the Governor-General, 4 February 1914, no. 28, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

that took those customs and traditions into consideration.⁶²⁷ In this new era in which the non-Western communities started to demand equal rights, it should become the government's ambition to administer all ethnic groups as equitably as possible. The system of segregation was no longer workable. Therefore it was imperative, according to Oudendijk, to place the Chinese under direct European administration and to abolish the officer system that only emphasised the *status aparte* of the Chinese. However, he argued, in a plural society a Chinese representative was always necessary to assist the Department of Internal Affairs in dealing with the Chinese, just as the regents did for the indigenous people. The Chinese needed a confidant who would observe their interests and defend them in disputes or clashes with the natives. As the unpaid Chinese officers no longer functioned satisfactorily, the colonial government should create a new salaried position for someone who could take an independent position between the Chinese people and the colonial government; on the one hand he should serve the interests of the Chinese community, but on the other hand he should be the eyes and ears of the colonial authorities in the Chinese neighbourhoods.⁶²⁸ Oudendijk imagined this official to be a police official, still designated as captain, as the Chinese were familiar with this title. The captain should be directly accountable to the local authorities and therefore be equal and not subordinate to the local Dutch police official. He should receive a salary of 200 guilders per month and have a police office at his disposal, to be named the "Chineesch Kantoor".⁶²⁹ He should be assisted by police officers—partly Chinese, partly indigenous—who will take care of the civil registration and the collection of tax money. In the principal cities such as Batavia and Soerabaja, two or three of these offices should be established. Oudendijk estimated the total costs for sixty-one offices in Java and Madoera at 180,000 guilders per year, including the

⁶²⁷ Oudendijk, *Ways and By-ways in Diplomacy*, 195.

⁶²⁸ Report of the Government Advisor on Chinese Affairs W. J. Oudendijk to the Governor-General, 4 February 1914, no. 28, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶²⁹ The name of the police office in Chinese characters should be added for those *singkeh* Chinese who are not able to read Dutch: 華民事務衙門.

salaries of the officials and clerks, but not including the rental of office space. The reason why Oudendijk intended the new captains to function as police officials was twofold: first, with a Chinese police official in charge of police officers and detectives, the colonial authorities would be directly informed about developments in the Chinese community. Second, with the handing over of certain police affairs to the Chinese captain it would not be necessary to charge subordinates of the native administration to deal with Chinese police matters. Well-to-do and educated members of the Chinese community found it trying to have native officials handling Chinese police affairs.⁶³⁰

Although the tools of administration might vary from one ethnic group to another, Oudendijk advocated a uniform colonial administration in which the Chinese were governed the same way and subject to the same laws and regulations (and tax system!) as the other inhabitants. Therefore the colonial government should avoid granting the Chinese people privileges, like the right to choose their own neighbourhood chiefs and police officials, which would imply that the Chinese community formed an autonomous group in the Indies society. It would also be dangerous to grant the Chinese voting rights for their own representatives, for this could invite China's interference, leading to a *staat in een staat* (a state within a state). The Chinese were still not fully aware of the meaning behind Dutch citizenship and still focussed their attention on China. Therefore the Chinese police official, or captain, should be a Dutch citizen chosen and appointed by the Dutch.⁶³¹ In consideration of a uniform and unmediated colonial administration, Oudendijk urged for the striking out of the words *onder leiding van hunne eigene hoofden* (under the supervision of their own headmen) in article 73 of the Constitutional Regulation of 1854, pending the withdrawal of the whole article.⁶³²

⁶³⁰ Report of the Government Advisor on Chinese Affairs W. J. Oudendijk to the Governor-General, 4 February 1914, no. 28, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Ibid.

As a transitional measure, Oudendijk recommended the appointment of “aspirant captains” in the main cities such as Batavia, Soerabaja, Semarang, Bandoeng, Solo, Djokja, Medan, Padang and Makassar. Candidates should be young educated Chinese, Dutch citizens who had successfully passed the *klein-ambtenaars-examen* (civil service examinations) required for entry into the lower echelons of the bureaucracy. Thorough knowledge of the Hokkien dialect should also be a prerequisite. Aspirant captains, who in time could be promoted to captain, would receive a monthly salary of fifty guilders and a pension.⁶³³ Oudendijk only recommended the new system in places that required a change in administration. As far as the outer regions were concerned, in cases where the existing situation was satisfactory, no alterations should be implemented.⁶³⁴

Oudendijk also addressed the well-known Chinese grievances such as the police courts, the travel-pass system, and the requirement to live in designated quarters of the towns. He proposed abolishing the police courts, lifting the travel and residence restrictions, and expanding the facilities for Dutch education for the Chinese.⁶³⁵

Even though Oudendijk was not thrilled to leave his post in Teheran to study the problems in Chinese administration in the Dutch East Indies, he derived much satisfaction from his work. His efforts were very much appreciated not only by the governor-general and other high officials of the colonial administration, but also by the Chinese community, which spontaneously expressed its sincere appreciation for his work, as he described in his autobiography, though his description of their gratitude may sound a bit too rosy:

How sincere the feelings of the Chinese towards me were, was proved by the many enormous baskets of flowers that decorated the great drawing-room and dining-hall of the Rotterdam Lloyd liner in which my wife and I were to travel back to Europe. They

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Oudendijk, *Ways and By-ways in Diplomacy*, 198.

were addressed by the leading Chinese personalities and Chinese societies in Batavia to my wife. We could not but be exceedingly touched by these delicate tokens of appreciation. I was leaving the country, so they had nothing more to expect from me; this wealth of flowers was therefore a real and genuine mark of affection and gratitude. Equally touched were we by a beautiful basket sent by the Governor-General and his wife. I travelled home with the pleasant feeling that I had done well and had achieved something for the good of my country.⁶³⁶

5.3 The debate on reforming Chinese administration

Although the highest authorities of the colonial government showed their gratitude for Oudendijk's proposals, not everyone appreciated his appointment. In *Het Vaderland* on 14 July 1913, Henri Borel disapproved the government's decision to place the Office for Chinese Affairs under the supervision of the Department of Internal Affairs. The reason why the officials of this office had been able to inform the government about the affairs of the Chinese, he argued, was because they were subordinate to the director of justice and thus independent from the local administrations. Instead of appreciating their efforts, they were downgraded to being subordinated to the local governments. Such was their reward! Then, Borel added, there was the temporary appointment of a young outsider from Teheran as head of the Office for Chinese Affairs, which was especially annoying to the officials for Chinese affairs. Oudendijk also failed to make direct contact with the Chinese community in the Indies. Borel referred to Oudendijk's trip to Tangerang to inspect the situation there. He admitted that Oudendijk was an outstanding Sinologue, but he only spoke the Mandarin Chinese language and not the Hokkien dialect, the language spoken by the Chinese he encountered in Tangerang. Therefore he lacked the practical experience needed to give expert advice to the government. According to Borel, the trip in vain to Tangerang was definitely no

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 200.

exception. Why, Borel wondered with annoyance, did the government fail to see the importance of the officials for Chinese affairs?⁶³⁷

B. A. J. van Wettum, the advisor for Japanese and Chinese affairs, disagreed with Oudendijk's suggestion to abolish the institution of Chinese officers. He expressed his full support for the preservation of the traditional system of community leadership, although he admitted that a few changes should be made. He deemed it now an indispensable condition to grant the Chinese officers compensation for their services in order to improve the quality of the institution. This compensation should be given in the form of an official salary.⁶³⁸ Making the Chinese officers paid government officials had already been suggested after the release of the Fokkens report in 1894, which noted that the Chinese officers had suffered immensely from *Indisch Staatsblad* 1887–12, which exempted the headmen of Foreign Orientals from paying the business tax on their unpaid leadership activities, but not on their private businesses. Hitherto the Chinese officers had been exempt from paying the business tax on their own trading businesses.⁶³⁹ The Chinese officers objected to the changes, but the first government secretary who drafted the ordinance on the business tax brushed aside their objections, although he did propose to make the Chinese officers paid government officials, just like the indigenous officials. The director of finances backed the first government secretary,⁶⁴⁰ as did the director of internal affairs who added that a fixed government salary was more appropriate than tax privileges because a salaried position would also give less well-to-do but nonetheless qualified people the opportunity to apply.⁶⁴¹ Proposals for introducing

⁶³⁷ “Een Inspecteur voor Chineesche Zaken in Ned.-Indië”, *De Indische Gids* 35:2 (1913): 1240–41.

⁶³⁸ “Kort overzicht van de in den laatsten tijd uitgebrachte adviezen over een reorganisatie van het Chineesch Bestuur”, *Binnenlandsch Bestuur*, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶³⁹ *Indisch Staatsblad* 1857-99. See the Fokkens Report, part 1, 1894, NA, The Hague: pp. 291–92.

⁶⁴⁰ Letter of the Director of Finances to the Governor-General, 29 March 1895, no. 5177, in: *Mailrapport*, no. 13–1896, NA, The Hague.

⁶⁴¹ Letter of the Director of Internal Affairs to the Governor-General, 29 June 1894, no. 3722, in: *Mailrapport*, no. 13–1896, NA, The Hague.

fixed salaries in the Chinese officer system were volleyed back and forth, but in vain: the system of privileges was continued in a desperate attempt to make the unpaid post more attractive. Now, twenty years later, the colonial government had to admit that granting privileges was not a solution to improve the system of Chinese community leadership, and the idea of paying the Chinese officers was suggested once again.

However, most government officials judged that a salary alone was not sufficient to overcome the problems in Chinese administration. Therefore, Oudendijk's proposals became the basis for the plans drafted to reorganise the Chinese administration. There was a consensus of opinion among government officials that the outdated institution of Chinese officers should be abolished and that the Chinese population should be subjected to more direct government control. Reorganisation should first take place in the *hoofdplaatsen* of Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja, but opinions differed on how this should be accomplished. The first disagreement was over whether to place the Chinese people under direct European administration or to appoint salaried Chinese intermediaries to replace the Chinese officers. The former plan included the installation of a controleur for handling the administrative affairs of the Chinese community in the *hoofdplaatsen* of the residencies, specifically assisting local governments in dealing with the Chinese inhabitants; maintaining the registers of birth, marriage, divorce, and death; and participating in the taxation- and immigration committees. Self-evidently he should be informed on every movement in the Chinese neighbourhoods. The controleur would be assisted by a Chinese advisor, interpreters and other office staff. The Chinese advisor should be reliable, well-educated, and familiar with the local circumstances and affairs, and he should have a command of the most important Chinese dialects.⁶⁴² But under no circumstances should he act as a mediator between the colonial

⁶⁴² For his services he should receive a salary of 300–400 guilders per month. See the memorandum of the Assistant-Resident of Batavia, 25 December 1914, in: Mailrapport, no. 34/16, NA, The Hague.

administration and the Chinese people.⁶⁴³ This ran counter to Oudendijk's suggestion to appoint a Chinese representative who would function in a similar way as the indigenous regent. Advocates of direct European administration argued that such a representative would only preserve the current situation in which the Chinese people were governed by their own people, while the aim should be to subject the Chinese to direct European administration, which they were confident the Chinese people would accept as a step towards obtaining the same rights as Europeans. Apparently these government officials no longer feared that subjecting the Chinese people to direct European administration might offend the indigenous administration corps. Increased Chinese nationalist radicalism was a more imminent threat. They also argued that a salaried Chinese representative would be less inclined to report nationalist radicals or support the colonial government's efforts to bind the Chinese people to the Dutch crown.⁶⁴⁴ According to reports of the residents of Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja, it was also virtually impossible to find any suitable, educated and trustworthy Chinese to qualify for the position of official Chinese representative.⁶⁴⁵ Even if the government was able to find a suitable person, this person could not be properly prepared for his duties as training simply did not exist for such a position. The Chinese officers were never professionally trained because they were appointed for their wealth.⁶⁴⁶ A different but interesting outlook came from the acting advisor for Chinese affairs, H. Mouw, who argued that it was now more necessary than ever to place the Chinese people under direct European leadership because Japan was seeking closer relationships with China. Japan was already involved in aiding China with its educational system, which was modelled on that of Japan, while a significant number of Chinese

⁶⁴³ Confidential letter of the Director of Internal Affairs to the Governor-General, 10 December 1915, no. 685 G/B, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁵ Confidential letter of the Director of Internal Affairs to the Governor-General, 31 January 1917, no. 111/B, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶⁴⁶ Confidential letter of the Director of Internal Affairs to the Governor-General, 10 December 1915, no. 685 G/B, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

students were being educated in Japan. Mouw observed that the unstable political situation in the young Chinese republic had invited Japanese interference in spheres other than education. The Indies Chinese, who had been disillusioned with the political developments in China, might find new hope in a Chinese republic led by Japan, the first Asian country that had proved itself the equal of its Western counterparts. The appointment of a Dutch official to administer the Chinese community was the most efficient way to counterbalance Japanese influence on the Indies Chinese, as a Chinese representative might not be dependable enough to resist possible Japanese overtures.⁶⁴⁷

The Raad van Nederlandsch-Indië (Indies Council) opposed direct European administration on the grounds that the controleur, as a Dutchman, would fail to win the trust of the Chinese people and that no one in the Chinese community would turn to him when needed. The Indies Council agreed with Oudendijk that it would be best to place an educated and salaried Chinese representative in charge of the Chinese community. Only someone familiar with Chinese customs and traditions, and circumstances in the Chinese neighbourhoods qualified to look after the best interests of the Chinese community. Moreover, placing the Chinese directly under the controleur would lead to a striking and unsuitable difference between the administrative systems over the Chinese in the *hoofdplaatsen* of the residencies Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja and those in the rest of Java and Madoera. The Chinese subjects in the *hoofdplaatsen* would be placed under direct European administration, while the Chinese residing outside the *hoofdplaatsen*, would remain subject to indigenous administration. Appointing a local Chinese representative for the Chinese community would also fit the administrative system of a plural colonial society.⁶⁴⁸ The Indies Council acknowledged the fact that there was no one trained for the post of Chinese representative, but the Council argued that it would only be difficult to find qualified persons in the beginning and that it certainly was not impossible to find suitable candidates among those who had received a

⁶⁴⁷ “Beschouwingen van het Kantoor voor Chineesche Zaken”, in Mailrapport, no. 352/17, NA, The Hague.

⁶⁴⁸ “Advies van den Raad van Nederlandsch-Indië, uitgebracht in de vergadering van 5 mei 1916”, no. XVIII, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

proper education at, for instance, the secondary school (HBS). Gradually, the Chinese representatives would be able to train their successors.⁶⁴⁹ The resident of Soerabaja, Van Aalst, who initially was in favour of appointing a controleur to administer the Chinese community, reconsidered his views and reasoned that only a Chinese would be able to gain the trust of the Chinese community. Moreover, he argued that the Chinese people often complained that they were only awarded a salaried government position in exceptional cases. The appointment of a controleur for Chinese affairs would definitely give rise to bitter sentiments that Chinese money was only good for paying the salaries of European officials.⁶⁵⁰

Another point of disagreement concerned the question of establishing advisory boards to compensate for the dismissal of the Chinese officers as official spokesmen of the Chinese community. Supporters of the idea argued that these would give the Chinese a way to voice their needs and complaints in an unconstrained way. The current Chinese officers, the chairmen of the main Chinese incorporated associations, and other respected members of the Chinese community could be given a seat in the boards and thereby function as the new spokespersons of the Chinese people. The board members would be appointed by the colonial government, possibly on the basis of recommendations from the Chinese community. Direct elections were out of the question. Neither should the colonial government follow the advice of the advisory boards at all times. The establishment of advisory boards was mostly intended to reassure the Chinese that the colonial government was not out to govern the Chinese *sur eux sans eux*. In the Straits Settlements such advisory boards were quite successful in improving the communication between the government and the various groups in the Chinese community.⁶⁵¹ The chieftain system had been officially

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Letter of the Resident of Soerabaja to the Director of Internal Affairs, 23 March 1915, no. 3/23g, in: Mailrapport, no. 34/16, NA, The Hague.

⁶⁵¹ Letter of the Official for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 14 October 1915, no. 352, in: Mailrapport no. 34/16, NA, The Hague.

abolished in 1826 when Singapore was grouped together with Penang and Malacca into a single administrative unit (the Straits Settlements) and brought under the jurisdiction of the court of judicature at Penang.⁶⁵² Chinese secret societies had plagued the Straits Settlements until 1889 when the British government passed the Societies Ordinance Bill, which outlawed them. With the suppression of the secret societies, the British had to find new means to seek communication with the Chinese community leaders and a Chinese Advisory Board (CAB) established the same year proved a success. With the establishment of the CAB, the British not only recognised the status of Chinese community leaders, but they were also able to address the grievances of the Chinese community.⁶⁵³ Proponents of such an advisory system in the Dutch East Indies argued that it would have the same satisfying results there as in the Straits Settlements. Opponents argued that as members of these boards would have no authority to make decisions, advisory boards would be powerless, and that it would be more advisable to allocate a fixed number of seats to the Chinese in local government bodies such as the municipal council, and allow them to choose their own representatives. Moreover, a separate board for the Chinese community would only underscore their position as a separate entity in colonial society.⁶⁵⁴

5.4 The meeting of September 1917

On 1–2 September 1917, Director of Internal Affairs H. Carpentier Alting called a meeting to discuss reforming the Chinese administration in the *hoofdplaatsen* of the residencies Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja. In attendance were the residents and assistant-residents, some officials

⁶⁵² Yen, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya*, 111.

⁶⁵³ Yong, *Chinese Leadership and Power in Colonial Singapore*, 292–95.

⁶⁵⁴ “Advies van den Raad van Nederlandsch-Indië, uitgebracht in de vergadering van 5 mei 1916”, no. XVIII, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta; “De regeling van het bestuur over Chineezzen en andere Vreemde Oosterlingen na het verdwijnen van wijken voor ingezetenen van die landaarden”, in: Mailrapport, no. 3426/22 of Verbaal 10 March 1923, no. 5, NA, The Hague.

from the Office for Chinese Affairs, the controleur of Batavia, and other government officials involved in dealing with the Chinese administration.⁶⁵⁵ It was agreed that the inefficiency of the traditional Chinese community leadership system and its declining influence over the Chinese population proved that it was unsuitable for current conditions. The unpaid Chinese officers viewed the administrative tasks assigned to them as a matter of secondary importance and most lacked the diligence and dedication needed to fulfil their administrative duties.⁶⁵⁶ Moreover, the government officials were not convinced of the Chinese officers' ability to resist nationalist pressure and remain loyal to the colonial government now that China was seeking to extend its influence over the Chinese overseas. In addition, more uniformity in administration was desirable. The people in the surrounding areas or countryside were all subject to indigenous administration, which worked properly, but city administration was based on ethnicity and mediation; the Chinese were governed by the Chinese officers, the Arabs were governed by the Arab officers, while there were separate administrative systems for the indigenous and European people.

It was agreed to carry out an experiment that would eliminate the Chinese Councils and place the Chinese community under direct colonial government control as of 1 January 1918. The Dutch present at the meeting assumed that as most Chinese no longer depended on the Chinese officers and sought equal status with Europeans, they would welcome the idea of being placed directly under European administration. At the same time, most government officials favoured placing Arabs, Indians, and Moors under the indigenous administration, which would be dealt with separately in the future.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁵ Minutes of the meeting held on 1–2 September 1917 at the Department of Internal Affairs, enclosed with the confidential letter from the Director of Internal Affairs to the Residents of Batavia, Semarang and Soerabaja, 14 September 1917, no. 792/B, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶⁵⁶ Memorandum of the Assistant-Resident of Batavia, 25 December 1914, in: Mailrapport, no. 34/16, NA, The Hague.

⁶⁵⁷ Minutes of the meeting held on 1–2 September 1917 at the Department of Internal Affairs, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

It was decided to appoint a controleur to oversee the reorganisation. Except for some translators and other office staff, the controleur would need the help of Chinese assistants to transmit and explain government rules to the Chinese community. These assistants would not replace the Chinese officers as community heads but merely serve the controleur in dealing with the daily administrative affairs. For these activities they would receive an official salary of approximately 200–400 guilders per month. The current Chinese neighbourhood chiefs were regarded as the right persons to fulfil the role of these assistants, although not all of them would be needed. Five neighbourhood chiefs would be appointed for Batavia, six for Semarang, and four for Soerabaja. Each would be given an office, two assistant-neighbourhood chiefs, a Chinese writer, and a messenger.⁶⁵⁸ As the neighbourhood chiefs were not replacing the Chinese Council, it was suggested the defunct institution's responsibilities would be divided among several government bodies and Chinese associations: Chinese notables could be appointed to give advice in various government committees, such as those concerned with immigration, taxation, or the local councils of justice. Special cashiers could take care of tax collection with the assistance of the neighbourhood chiefs.⁶⁵⁹ The local police could now supervise security in the Chinese

⁶⁵⁸ The salaries of the assistant-neighbourhood chiefs and the Chinese writer would be 80–100 guilders and 50–80 guilders per month respectively. No information was given about the messenger's payment. The total costs for hiring these personnel were estimated at 92,000 guilders per year. See minutes of the meeting held on 1–2 September 1917 at the Department of Internal Affairs, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶⁵⁹ Given the complaints about neighbourhood chiefs using their power to extract more tax money from the people, the government decided to appoint special cashiers for the collection of taxes. Those cashiers would collect the taxes on certain days in the neighbourhood chief's offices. The neighbourhood chiefs should only be responsible for summoning or reminding the people to pay their taxes. The resident of Soerabaja feared that taking away the tax collection duties from the neighbourhood chiefs would make them reluctant to assist the cashiers, for it would mean that they no longer were entitled to receive eight percent of the tax collection as a reward for their collecting services. This was called the *collecteloon*. The resident of Batavia argued that close supervision by the controleur would guarantee the constant revenue of tax money. Moreover, the neighbourhood chiefs would be given reasonable fixed salaries of 200–400 guilders per month.

neighbourhoods and inform the government on sanitation matters such as the possible spread of contagious diseases like cholera and smallpox, and last but not least, suspicious Chinese nationalist societies.⁶⁶⁰ Until the introduction of the Dutch Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, the neighbourhood chiefs should temporarily take care of the Chinese civil registry, while public and religious ceremonies were to be organised by the Chinese associations (already common practice in Semarang). Finally, the municipal government should be given the task of maintaining the roads in the Chinese quarters.⁶⁶¹

The last important task of the Chinese Council that needed assignment was the management of the Chinese burial grounds and funeral fund in Batavia. The Chinese Councils of Semarang, and Soerabaja could be closed without any objection, as the Chinese burial grounds there were managed by the town council and were under the supervision of a committee in which the *majoor der Chineezen* and a few retired officers were seated. The Chinese Council of Batavia was a different story. Throughout the centuries, the Chinese Council of Batavia had acquired considerable extensive properties and financial resources. In 1917 the properties managed by the Council were in three mortgages, fifteen plots of land, five houses, bank deposits, and shares. Its income was derived from interest, rent, public land sales, and biannual land leases.⁶⁶² Anticipating that the Chinese community would fear Dutch confiscation of the Council's properties, it was proposed that the Council's properties be transferred to a committee of Chinese notables. This proposal was elaborated in more detail in a concept-ordinance drafted by the Office for Chinese Affairs, which recommended that management of these properties be handed over to a "Committee for the management of the properties owned by the former Chinese Council". This so-called Chinese

⁶⁶⁰ Minutes of the meeting held on 1–2 September 1917 at the Department of Internal Affairs, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² "Opgaaf van de bezittingen van den Chineeschen Raad te Batavia 1917", Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

Committee should consist of nine members, to be selected from the Chinese community. Every two years one-third of the nine members would have to stand for re-appointment, subject to input from the Chinese community and approval by the resident. This would assure the Chinese community that the management of the Council's properties remained exclusively in Chinese hands. Like the Chinese Council, the committee should present a yearly report of its activities and financial status to the resident. Other management details were not stipulated in the draft ordinance, which meant that the committee would have a free hand in managing the properties and appointing its own secretaries and other office personnel.⁶⁶³

With the management of the properties of the Chinese Council of Batavia settled, nothing seemed to be standing in the way of carrying out the reform on the agreed date. The Dutch officials present at the meeting were confident that the test case on Chinese administration would have a successful outcome, and therefore it was agreed to release the Chinese officers from their posts, while retaining their titles on an honorary basis, and express official appreciation for their services.⁶⁶⁴

The experiment on Chinese administration was meant to be a transitional measure while awaiting the realisation of an unmediated city administration in the *hoofdplaatsen* of the residencies of Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja that would put all Asian races under a uniform system of local government. The assistant-resident of Soerabaja, L. J. Schippers, had drafted the reorganisation plan for a unified city administration, which he presented to the participants of the meeting. He believed that this reorganisation should be implemented at once, without a transitional phase, as did the resident of Soerabaja, Van Aalst. The plan involved abolishing of the current specially-designated quarters for Europeans, Chinese, Arabs, and indigenous people, reorganisation of these into new

⁶⁶³ "Concept-Ordonnantie", in a letter of the Official for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 12 April 1919, no. 158/19, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶⁶⁴ Minutes of the meeting held on 1–2 September 1917 at the Department of Internal Affairs, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

neighbourhoods (*wijken*) irrespective of ethnicity, and appointing government officials responsible for supervising these neighbourhoods, again irrespective of ethnicity. These neighbourhood officials (*wijkambtenaren*) would replace the Chinese and Arab officers and indigenous village heads. The neighbourhood chiefs, As Schippers suggested they be called, would be tasked with assisting the European and indigenous administration in supervising each neighbourhood (of approximately 3000–4000 citizens). Considering that colonial society was plural, he also proposed appointing European chiefs for the neighbourhoods with a majority of European inhabitants, and Chinese, Arab, and indigenous chiefs for the neighbourhoods where the Chinese, Arab and indigenous people were in the majority. If not enough Europeans, Chinese, or Arabs were willing to take on the job of chief, indigenous neighbourhood chiefs would be appointed in their stead. The European, Chinese and Arab neighbourhood chiefs would be directly supervised by the *controleur* and assistant-resident, while the indigenous neighbourhood chiefs would be directly accountable to the *assistent-wedana*, the *wedana* and *patih*. To give their post an official character, the neighbourhood chiefs should be appointed as temporary or permanent government officials and given an official uniform.⁶⁶⁵

With the increasing demands for equal treatment and growing tension between the ethnic communities in mind, the assistant-resident of Soerabaja argued that it was time to relieve the Foreign Orientals from their separate administrative systems and bring them under the same governmental structure as the European and indigenous classes. Now that it was agreed to abolish the Chinese Council and its officers, and plans could also be drawn up to terminate the Arab officer system, the way was opened for an unmediated and uniform city administration in the *hoofdplaatsen* of the residencies Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁵ “Voorlopig schema (van de) bestuurs-reorganisatie in de gemeente Soerabaja”, enclosed with the confidential letter from the Department of Internal Affairs to the Residents of Batavia, Semarang and Soerabaja, 14 September 1917, no. 792/B, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The reorganisation plan of the assistant-resident of Soerabaja was also linked to the transfer of authority and responsibilities (especially the authority over the local police, as administration and police were closely linked) of the assistant-resident to the mayor, head of the municipality. The new neighbourhood chiefs would accordingly be municipal officials. Appointing the mayor as the head of local administration would end the undesirable dualistic situation in which the authority and responsibilities of the assistant-resident and mayor often overlapped. In this sense the reorganisation of Chinese administration became part and parcel of the discussion on further decentralisation and modern state formation. The director of internal affairs welcomed the idea of a unified city administration that would diminish race distinctions, but he argued that for financial reasons it would be better to reform Chinese administration first—to facilitate a state of transition—and that the plans of the assistant-resident of Soerabaja be reconsidered at a future date. The other officials shared the director's opinion. Decentralisation, they argued, was not something that should be hastily implemented; decentralisation required efficiency, sufficient funds and qualified personnel. All these requirements called for a step-by-step approach. Thus it was decided to implement these reforms gradually.⁶⁶⁷

In the end, none of these reforms or transitional measures was ever put into effect, leaving the local administrations of Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja in limbo. According to the law of 25 July 1918 no. 76, article 73 of the Constitutional Regulation of 1854 was withdrawn, although the Chinese community was still administered by the Chinese officers and neighbourhood chiefs.⁶⁶⁸ In Batavia the Chinese major had already asked permission to resign from office. Even though his request was granted, as a titular major he continued to chair the Chinese Council as a friendly gesture to the colonial authorities. Similarly, in Semarang, and Soerabaja officers had resigned, and the Chinese officers who remained in office did so only for the sake of helping out the local

⁶⁶⁷ Minutes of the meeting held on 1–2 September 1917 at the Department of Internal Affairs, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁶⁶⁸ *Indisch Staatsblad* 1918-794.

government officials.⁶⁶⁹ The end result of the September 1917 meeting was that the status quo of half-hearted measures taken by the colonial government was maintained.

5.5 The end results of the debate: confusion, opposing forces and ultimately the maintenance of the status quo

The striking fact about the debate on Chinese administration was that political factors rather than administrative considerations were predominant. The debate became inextricably bound up with the discussion of implementing reforms to carefully discard racial classification—the cornerstone of colonial society.⁶⁷⁰ In the years of enlightened and benign colonial rule an increasing number of “ethical” politicians had called for the revision of colonial legislation that found its basic principles in racial differentiation. Some conciliatory measures had already been implemented to appease the non-Western groups that were starting to show signs of emancipation, but increasing Chinese agitation and native restlessness called for more far-reaching reforms to achieve racial equality. Colonial officials realised that with a rapidly modernising colonial society, it would be appropriate to introduce a system of governance that would subject all ethnic categories to the same kind of administration. In the meeting of September 1917, it was decided that in the future the racially-bound administrative structures in the *hoofdplaatsen* of Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja should be replaced with a unified and unmediated administrative system. This meant that the reorganisation of Chinese administration became attached to the unification of city administration in the main residencies of the Dutch East Indies. Reform was not limited to the government, and Fasseur has shown that hopeful changes also occurred in the bureaucratic, educative, and legal spheres. For instance, after 1913 non-Europeans became eligible for nearly all offices in the administration and the army (with the symbolic exception that only a Dutchman could be appointed governor-general).

⁶⁶⁹ “De regeling van het bestuur over Chineez en andere Vreemde Oosterlingen na het verdwijnen van wijken voor ingezetenen van die landaarden”, in: Mailrapport, no. 3426/22 of Verbaal 10 March 1923, no. 5, NA, The Hague.

⁶⁷⁰ Fasseur, “Cornerstone and Stumbling Block”, 31.

Secondary and higher education became accessible to all pupils without any racial proviso or reservation—although the enrolment of non-European children was not to be at the expense of European children. Noteworthy progress was made with the introduction of a uniform *Landgerecht* (local tribunal) for minor offences in 1914 which replaced the hated police courts (*Politierol*). In 1918 a unified penal code was promulgated. Tax legislation also displayed a trend for unification: in 1920 an income tax was introduced on a uniform basis for all ethnic groups of the population. Finally, most constraints on the freedom of movement and domicile for non-Europeans were lifted after 1916.⁶⁷¹

It appears that the colonial government was following a new political line that aimed for more equality in legislation, judicial practice, and executive policy. It was a radical change of course from the strict adherence to the multi- racially based caste society that had dominated colonial policy for centuries. However not all change was welcomed. Applying a unified administrative system on the various population groups in the three principal cities of Java proved too complicated. Because the Arabs of Batavia mostly lived in Pekodjan and Kroekoet, which were situated in the predominantly Chinese neighbourhood Pendjaringan, it was highly likely that a Chinese neighbourhood chief would be appointed to take charge of this section of the city. The Arabs objected to this as they refused to accept any form of Chinese administrative leadership over them, including a Chinese neighbourhood chief.⁶⁷² It was also unlikely that the Chinese would agree to be supervised by an Arab chief, or that the Chinese neighbourhood chief would be able to exercise his influence in an indigenous neighbourhood or vice versa.

The deeply embedded racial segregation in colonial society had led to the general acceptance of racial discrimination in the Indies. For centuries the colonial powers had successfully applied a system of “apartheid” to control the various population groups by means of continuous

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 41–43.

⁶⁷² Letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 25 September 1918, no. 18327/1, in: Agenda, 1918, no. 31028, ANRI, Jakarta.

adjustments in administrative policy and the implementation of distinctive legislature.⁶⁷³ This originated from the Company's policy to separate the ethnic groups and the enforcement of this system by the Constitutional Regulation of 1854 that stimulated the implementation of even more regulations designed to reinforce distinction among Europeans, natives, and Foreign Orientals. Now that concrete plans were drawn up to bring the ethnic groups in the principal residencies of Java under the same administrative system, the government had to face the consequences of its tradition of strict adherence to racial separateness, as not everyone embraced the government's plans. The practice of racial segregation had not only led to the acceptance of the status quo, but it had also prevented the different population groups in the archipelago from developing an "Indies identity", for (according to Dutch colonial legislation):

legally one was either European, native or Chinese. One's legally defined racial status determined where one could live, what taxes one paid, to which laws one was subject, before which courts one was tried, and, if found guilty of a crime, how and with what degree of harshness one was punished. In everyday life, it also determined what a person could wear. A native could not dress as a European, nor could a Chinese male cut off his Manchu braid. Just as the neatness of a village had been equated with its security in nineteenth-century Java, neat racial distinctions had to be displayed openly, precisely because real racial distinctions were not even skin deep.⁶⁷⁴

The Dutch reluctance to allow intense interaction between the ethnic groups, especially between the Chinese and the indigenous people had marked racial relations in colonial society. When important restrictions on the interaction between the ethnic groups of the population were

⁶⁷³ Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, 155.

⁶⁷⁴ Shiraishi, "Anti-Sinicism in Java's New Order", 205.

lifted in the twentieth century, social pluralism tended to intensify rather than weaken: each ethnic group began to unveil its own individual racial identity to the world by returning to their cultural roots and traditions and by setting up their own modern institutions. With these proud displays of group identity, it was evident that the image of the alleged superiority of the white race was under attack, but an increasing animosity among its subject population groups was also discernible. The lack of an “Indies identity” or the feeling of “oneness” among the different races in the Dutch East Indies certainly contributed to this last development. Segregation continued, but this time it was maintained by the ethnic groups.⁶⁷⁵ In 1917, the Indonesian nationalist leader Dr Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo tried to stimulate a sense of common identity when he presented his ideas of an Indies nation. In his view, the Indies nation should be composed of all who considered the Indies their motherland and had its best interests in mind. Thus, his concept of an Indies nation ignored race or ethnic origin and intended to join Dutch Eurasians, peranakan Arabs, and peranakan Chinese together with native Indonesians to build a free Indies nation. Mangoenkoesoemo’s concept was not shared by most Indonesian nationalists, who continued to incorporate the racial concept in their vision of an Indonesian nation. An example was article four in the constitution of the Indonesian Nationalist Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI), which stated that only native Indonesians were eligible for membership in the party. Other Asians could only be associate members. As a result, when the peranakan Chinese Kwee Tjing Hong from Palembang took the initiative to set up a local branch of the PNI, since he was regarded as a Chinese—and hence an alien—by the PNI members, he was never able to hold an executive position in the branch he himself had established. On the other hand, the majority of the Chinese also persisted in retaining the ethnic boundaries. Most were

⁶⁷⁵ Van Doorn, *A Divided Society*, 12, 24–25.

indifferent to the Indonesian nationalist movement and focussed on Chinese nationalist concerns or their own group interests.⁶⁷⁶

In effect, the plans to unify city administration appeared not to be as unified as one imagined. In the proposed scenario, the neighbourhood chief would have to report to the controleur in case he was a Chinese. The indigenous neighbourhood chief however would be directly accountable to the *wedana* and *patih*. This meant that neighbourhoods would still be administered differently and according to race.⁶⁷⁷ Nevertheless, racial antagonism was not the only obstacle to implementing a unified city administration in the near future. In the meeting of September 1917, it was decided to attach the administrative reforms to the transfer of more authority from the assistant-resident to the mayor within the framework of decentralisation, and to make the neighbourhood chiefs paid servants of the municipal government. Since it was decided that the municipality and the position of mayor needed more time to develop, a transition measure would first be implemented. This transition involved the placing of the Chinese community under direct colonial government control on 1 January 1918 while relieving the Chinese officers from their posts. Yet it was all in vain: the status quo was maintained and not the slightest progress was made in reforming Chinese administration.

5.6 Conclusion

There were many reasons why Chinese administration in the Indies had to undergo reform. The winds of change and enlightenment also blew in the direction of the Chinese community and it invited the Chinese people to participate in the process of emancipation. Traditional concepts of leadership were abandoned, while new ideas emerged. Wealth and extended family relations were

⁶⁷⁶ L. Suryadinata, "Pre-war Indonesian Nationalism and the Peranakan Chinese", *Indonesia* 11 (April 1971): 86–88.

More on the political ideas of Dr. Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo can be found in M. Balfas, *Dr. Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo: Demokrat Sedjati* (Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1952).

⁶⁷⁷ "Hervorming van het Chineesch en Inlandsch Bestuur", *De Indische Gids* 41:1 (1919): 495–97.

no longer prerequisites for becoming a Chinese community leader. A potential leader was now subject to new criteria such as competence and a good education. The feudal structure of the officer system did not allow for the adoption of modern concepts and voices against the obsolete system of Chinese community leadership became louder, resulting in an increasing number of openings in the leadership of the Chinese community. The colonial government had no other choice than to admit that the system had become outdated and needed reform. As former official for Chinese affairs Henri Borel pointed out, it was unfair to make modern education available for the Chinese while at the same time expecting them to accept an old-fashioned leadership system such as the institution of Chinese officers.⁶⁷⁸

It was not just the Chinese people who felt they could no longer depend on the Chinese officers. Colonial government authorities also realised they could no longer rely on the loyalty of the Chinese officers. The officers used to inform the colonial government on every issue in the Chinese community, but concealed sympathy for the nationalist cause, or fear of reprisals for being counterrevolutionaries kept the Chinese officers quiet. It sometimes even occurred that false information was given. The colonial government realised it knew too little of what went on in the Chinese community. Ironically this was exactly the reason why the institution of Chinese officers had been set up in the first place. Chinese headmen were appointed simply because the Company officials did not wish to meddle in Chinese affairs, but only in serious disputes.⁶⁷⁹ The current situation did not allow for the colonial government to remain aloof from the developments in the Chinese community. Thus, in order to safeguard national interests it was necessary to subject the Indies Chinese to firm leadership.

Temporary government advisor Oudendijk pointed the way to reforming the Chinese administration. In his vision modernisation necessitated doing away with the institution of Chinese

⁶⁷⁸ "Chineesche Officiëren", *De Indische Gids* 36:1 (1914): 885–87.

⁶⁷⁹ J. Moerman Jz., *In en om de Chineesche Kamp* (Batavia: Kolff, 1929), 54.

officers and placing the Chinese people under direct government control. His advice fitted well in the new era, and governments in other countries were similarly intent on replacing the privileged (feudal) groups and semi-autonomous institutions in society with a more hands-on government that dealt directly with its subjects and brought more equality to society. But reforming the Chinese administration proved to be a complicated matter, especially when it became attached to the reorganisation of the whole system of local administration in the *hoofdplaatsen* of Batavia, Semarang, and Soerabaja. Disagreement arose over whether to appoint Chinese intermediaries between the European administration and the neighbourhood chiefs or to place the Chinese under direct European administration; whether to form advisory boards as centres of communication for the Chinese community; whether to reform Chinese administration first and leave plans for the unification of city administration for the future; and whether to appoint the mayor as head of a local administration in the near future or to maintain the dualistic system of city administration for the time being. The main outcome of the September 1917 meeting was the conclusion that the reform of the Chinese administration could not be dissociated from the proposed plan to introduce an equal system of administration for the different races of the population. It was planned to place this equal administrative system under the leadership of the mayor, but the appointment of the mayor as head of local administration would not be realised for several years. Then there was also the resistance of certain groups that refused to be subject to the supervision of neighbourhood officials of a different ethnic background. In the end, nothing happened; none of the detailed plans formulated in the meeting were effectuated. Instead, a state of equivocation and uncertainty had taken over.