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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 6

LIFE AFTER “DEATH’: THE CHINESE RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED REFORMS AND RESTORATION OF THE CHINESE COUNCIL OF BATAVIA

While ethnic divisions were an obstacle to implementation of the government’s plan to introduce an equal and unmediated administrative system for all the different races of the population, an even bigger one was the Chinese community’s scepticism. As a consequence, the proposed reforms were not carried through and in Batavia the same old system was revived. On 10 December 1927 a conference was held in the building of the Chinese Council of Batavia to discuss the reorganisation of the Chinese officers and neighbourhood chiefs in the residency. The conference was attended by the Chinese officers, the secretary of the Chinese Council, the assistant-resident of Batavia, the inspector of finances and the regent of Batavia. During the conference chairman Khouw Kim An announced to which districts the Chinese officers would be reassigned and the neighbourhood chiefs they would supervise.⁶⁸⁰

This chapter will analyse the Chinese response to the proposed reforms in Chinese administration. Chinese public opinion was for an important part manifested through the Chinese-Malay press as we have seen in chapter 4. But Chinese public opinion was also formed in gatherings that were set up by Chinese cultural associations and political societies. The pertinent rejection of the reform plan by the Chinese raises the question how the colonial government could have misjudged Chinese public opinion. Furthermore, attention will be given to the question how

⁶⁸⁰ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 10 December 1927: pp. 300–301.

the colonial government coped with this unexpected rejection and how the authorities were ultimately forced to restore the institution of Chinese officers in Batavia.

6.1 The “battle of words” between *Sin Po* and *Perniagaan*

The reactions in the Chinese-Malay press on the proposed reforms in Chinese administration were dominated by a war of words between the China-orientated *Sin Po* and the Indies-orientated *Perniagaan*. Under the editorial leadership of Kwee Hing Tjiat and Tjou Boe San, *Sin Po* was among the absolute supporters of the government’s plans and argued roughly as follows: the officer system was created in the era of “Asiatic despotism”, when the Chinese people were still uncivilised and obediently followed orders from the colonial government. In this era, the officers enjoyed elite status in the Chinese community; they were rich and influential and were seen as the natural leaders of the Chinese people. According to *Sin Po*, Chinese parents looked up to the officers and hoped that some day their sons would attain their status. They did not realise that the officers were merely slaves of the colonial government and had never used their influence for the benefit of the Chinese people. But the twentieth century had brought change; education and political development had directed the Chinese people towards modern principles and new ideas about leadership. It was in this era of modern principles that the Chinese people became aware that the Chinese officers were in fact unprofessional officials who served the colonial government’s interests. Frustration grew while one incompetent officer was replaced by another. Animosity against the officers increased and was answered with reprisals by the latter. The institution of Chinese officers had sown discord in the Chinese community and harmony would only be restored if the government decided to carry out its reforms.⁶⁸¹

Sin Po also considered being directly subjected to European administration an important step towards obtaining equal status with the Europeans, and it urged its readers to embrace the

⁶⁸¹ *Sin Po*, 22 November 1916; *Sin Po*, 2 November 1918.

government's plans with enthusiasm. *Sin Po* acknowledged that the new administrative system might be flawed, but the newspaper was confident that the government would continue to improve the system until it ran smoothly and favourably to the Chinese. For now it was more important to call for the dismissal of the Chinese officers, as they were part of an outdated institution that had only served Dutch interests. The officers were throwbacks who represented Chinese silence and obedience; instruments of the colonial government that had become rusty.⁶⁸²

Sin Po followed every established newspaper that reported on the Chinese officers and did not hesitate to give its unvarnished opinion. It noted that of the other main Malay newspapers, only *Perniagaan* fought for the continuation of the Chinese officer system, while the Soerabaja-based newspapers *Pewartas Soerabaja* and *Tjhoen Tjhioe*, and the Semarang newspapers *Warna Warta* and *Djawa Tengah* more or less supported the proposed reforms.⁶⁸³ That *Perniagaan* showed strong opposition to the proposed reforms in Chinese administration was not surprising considering that the newspaper was financed by several Chinese officers and peranakan businessmen.⁶⁸⁴ At the time the editorial staff of the newspaper consisted of F. D. J. Pangemannan, Lie Kim Hok, and Gouw Peng Liang.⁶⁸⁵ The latter, especially, broke a lance for the Chinese officers, as will be shown later. As the most outspoken supporter of the Chinese officers, *Perniagaan* took great efforts to point out the value of the officers in handling Chinese affairs. And, according to *Sin Po*, *Perniagaan* did not hesitate to use unjustified measures to mislead the Chinese people. Its rival maintained that the newspaper constantly spread false statements on delicate issues in hopes that the Chinese people would plead for the continuation of the officer system before the colonial government. The editors of *Sin Po* felt it was their duty to warn its readers about these assertions, and in late October 1918,

⁶⁸² *Sin Po*, 7 November 1916; *Sin Po*, 11 December 1916.

⁶⁸³ *Sin Po*, 5 December 1916.

⁶⁸⁴ *Sin Po*, 30 October 1918.

⁶⁸⁵ L. Suryadinata, *Etnis Tionghoa dan Nasionalisme Indonesia: Sebuah Bunga Rampai 1965–2008* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2010), 26.

the newspaper devoted its front page for one week to expose all the “lies” of *Perniagaan*.⁶⁸⁶

Although some arguments appeared to be plausible, *Sin Po*'s critique of *Perniagaan* was mostly anti-Chinese Council propaganda.

The first supposed falsehood that *Perniagaan* aired was that the colonial government would confiscate all possessions of the Chinese Council in Batavia after its abolition. The newspaper reported that the resident of Batavia had already been meddling in the financial management of the Chinese Council by demanding that all expenditures of 1000 guilders or more should first be reported to him. “What a nerve to demand such a thing, considering that the Chinese officers are still in office and the fact that the Council’s money actually belongs to the Chinese community!” *Perniagaan* warned that confiscation would be the next step, and that the Chinese people should join hands in support of the Chinese officers and the Chinese Council to keep its resources in the Chinese community.⁶⁸⁷

Sin Po challenged this assertion by placing parts of a written interview with the advisor for Chinese affairs, J. L. J. F. Ezerman. To a question concerning the Council’s finances, Ezerman answered that even after the termination of the Chinese officer system the financial possessions of the Council would be used solely for the benefit of the Chinese community.⁶⁸⁸ This answer showed that the information spread by *Perniagaan* was incorrect and that, as *Sin Po* argued, *Perniagaan* had deliberately tried to mislead the Chinese people with false information in an attempt to mobilise them to support the Chinese officer system. It was obvious that the Chinese officers were behind this. According to *Sin Po*, *Perniagaan* used to be in favour of frequent inspections of the Council’s finances by the resident, but now that *Perniagaan* was owned by several Batavia officers, it

⁶⁸⁶ *Sin Po*, 29 October 1918-2 November 1918.

⁶⁸⁷ *Sin Po*, 30 October 1918. See also Malay minutes, no. NM4, 3 October 1918: pp. 63–64 for the resident’s order that the Chinese Council should first report to him when it anticipated expenditures of 1000 guilders or more, and *Perniagaan*, 22 October 1918.

⁶⁸⁸ *Sin Po*, 29 October 1918.

opposed any government interference. Moreover, *Sin Po* argued that it would make no difference if the Council's possessions were under the resident's surveillance because as collaborators of the Dutch, the Chinese officers were already managing the Council's finances in a way that primarily served the interests of the colonial government, without taking account of the Chinese community. Therefore, the Chinese people should urge for an even quicker end of the Chinese officer system, rather than protesting against it.⁶⁸⁹

The second shrewd "lie" spread by *Perniagaan*, according to *Sin Po*, was its presumption that after doing away with the Chinese officers, every Chinese in the colony would automatically turn into a Dutch subject (*Nederlandsch onderdaan*), which undoubtedly would also involve compulsory military service. *Perniagaan* reasoned that as long as the institution of Chinese officers existed, the Chinese people were still considered Foreign Orientals who were governed by their own community leaders, despite the Dutch Subject Law of 1910. With the Chinese people still being Foreign Orientals, the Dutch would not be able to impose military duty on them. However if the colonial government carried through its plan to abolish the Chinese officers, the Chinese people would no longer be Foreign Orientals and military duty would lie in wait. Again, the newspaper urged for a protest campaign against the government's plans.⁶⁹⁰

Sin Po pointed out that military service had nothing to do with the dismissal of the Chinese officers and would only become an issue if the Chinese people accepted the Dutch Subject Law and chose to participate in the People's Council. In fact, *Sin Po* argued, the Chinese officers had always been in favour of becoming Dutch subjects, participation in the People's Council *and* military service. The officers, as servants of the colonial government, had used their influence to pressure the THHK and Siang Hwee into sending delegations to a meeting in Deca Park in Batavia on 31 August 1916 that was organised by the Comité Indië Weerbaar (Committee for the defence of the

⁶⁸⁹ *Sin Po*, 30 October 1918.

⁶⁹⁰ *Sin Po*, 31 October 1918; *Perniagaan*, 30 September 1918.

Indies) to campaign for the establishment of an Indies militia. Major Khouw Kim An even was a member of the militia committee.⁶⁹¹ On the same day the Deca Park meeting took place, Major Khouw offered a motion to the governor-general in favour of an Indies defence force.⁶⁹² So why would *Perniagaan* now claim that if the Chinese officers were abolished, the Chinese people would be subject to military duty? This was yet another false comedy play performed by *Perniagaan* to deceive the Chinese people. *Sin Po* warned the Chinese people not to fall for this lie. If they really wanted to make sure they would not be subject to military duty, they had better urge for the immediate dismissal of the Chinese officers.⁶⁹³

It indeed appears as though *Perniagaan* did try to take advantage of Chinese aversion to compulsory military service. The Indies Chinese had managed to remain free from this obligation since October 1620, when the VOC relieved all Batavia Chinese from civic guard duty to allow them to focus on their trading activities.⁶⁹⁴ Fear of military duty was probably deliberately spread because the Indië Weerbaar movement had raised the question of forming an Indies militia on the eve of the First World War.⁶⁹⁵ One proposal called for enlisting all Dutch subjects in the Indies for military service, including the Indies-born Chinese who had been declared Dutch subjects by the Dutch Subject Law of 1910.⁶⁹⁶ As this law was a diplomatic instrument to keep China at a safe distance from the Indies Chinese, it had nothing to do with the Chinese Council. The Chinese remained Foreign Orientals because of the Constitutional Regulation of 1854 and the Dutch

⁶⁹¹ *Sin Po*, 23 August 1916; *Sin Po*, 28 August 1916.

⁶⁹² *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 10 October 1916.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁴ *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek*, vol. I, 1602–1642: pp. 76–77 and 547.

⁶⁹⁵ K. van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War 1914–1918* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), 255.

⁶⁹⁶ Setiono, *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik*, 443. However, according to Van Dijk the initial idea was for a militia of Europeans and Javanese. The Chinese were excluded because the immediate pre-war years had shown that the Chinese as a group were too restless. The Arabs were left out because they were distrusted for religious reasons, Van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War*, 256.

Nationality Law of 1892. In addition, and *Sin Po* was right about this, the Chinese officers supported the Indië Weerbaar movement, which weakened *Perniagaan*'s argument. In a Council meeting of 6 September 1916, Major Khouw Kim An ordered the neighbourhood chiefs to remind people of the purpose of the Indië Weerbaar, especially those who complained that participating in a militia would be disadvantageous to the Chinese people. Criticising the militia was of no benefit to the Chinese people, and what's more, it would only put *him* in a delicate position (given his role in the Comité Indië Weerbaar).⁶⁹⁷ Benny Setiono mentions that in 1917 *Perniagaan* also supported the Indië Weerbaar movement and Chinese participation in the People's Council.⁶⁹⁸ However, *Perniagaan*'s strategy to play on people's aversion to military service was a clever one. In its issue of 17 October 1918, the paper reported that its tactic had worked: after its warning that military service awaited the Chinese, letters had poured in to support *Perniagaan*'s stance.⁶⁹⁹

The third unjust assertion of *Perniagaan*, according to *Sin Po*, was its claim that after the termination of the Chinese officer system, the Chinese people would be placed under indigenous government officials and would again suffer from the cruelty of the *priyayi*.⁷⁰⁰ In August 1917, *Perniagaan* had presented the case of Lioe Min Nji, who became a victim of unjust treatment by indigenous officials. The newspaper reported that in June 1917, Lioe paid a visit to his friend who lived in Dawoean Poerwakarta (Krawang). Lioe was a *singkeh* who, like so many Chinese, had come to the Indies to try his fortune. Besides visiting his friend, he also wanted to see for himself the living conditions in Dawoean. According to *Perniagaan*, Lioe was a kind-hearted man who had never shown any misconduct and had never violated any law. Yet he was suddenly arrested by the *wedana* of Dawoean on the suspicion that he did not possess a valid residence permit. He was then brought in to the regent of Dawoean and subsequently transferred to Batavia under police escort.

⁶⁹⁷ Malay minutes, no. NM3, 6 September 1916: pp. 182–83.

⁶⁹⁸ Setiono, *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik*, 445.

⁶⁹⁹ *Perniagaan*, 17 October 1918.

⁷⁰⁰ *Sin Po*, 1 November 1918.

There he was imprisoned for three or four days before he was finally released. Unfortunately, *Perniagaan* argued, such incidents were not exceptional in places without Chinese officers. Had there been a Chinese captain or lieutenant stationed in Krawang, Lioe would have never suffered such torment and humiliation. A Chinese officer would first investigate a matter like this before sending a person to jail and the indigenous officials should have handled the case of Lioe the same way. However, indigenous officials were not concerned with the welfare of the Chinese. Therefore, the Chinese people should come to the defence of the Chinese officers in order to prevent subjection to the *priyayi*.⁷⁰¹

Perniagaan was not the first newspaper to express its concerns about the possibility of indigenous leadership over the Chinese. *Warna Warta* had begun to come around in support of the Chinese officers in 1915, and two years later it rejected the abandonment of the traditional system, fearing that the European government officials would employ indigenous subordinates to handle Chinese affairs. It would be wrong to expect that the Chinese would accept being administered by people whom they considered their inferiors. Moreover, the Chinese people had not forgotten about the extortion practices of indigenous officials when the police courts still existed. It was not only the lower officials who committed extortion; even the prosecutors (*djaksa*) frequently abused their power.⁷⁰² *Tjahaja Timoer* also began to reject the abolition plans because it questioned the integrity of the interpreters who would be used by the European administrators once the Chinese officers were discharged. It also feared that without the Chinese Council religious affairs would not be looked after properly.⁷⁰³ *Pewarta Soerabaia* asked its readers whether they, after having scoffed at the Chinese officers and neighbourhood chiefs and calling them slaves of the whites and traitors of

⁷⁰¹ *Perniagaan*, 7 August 1917.

⁷⁰² “Persoverzicht: De Chineesche Pers, Augustus 1915”, *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 4:2 (1915): 1541–42.

⁷⁰³ “Persoverzicht: De Chineesche Pers, September 1915”, *Koloniaal Tijdschrift*, 4:2 (1915): 1690.

their own race, would be more pleased being governed by Javanese administrative and police officials, with whom Chinese girls would also have to deal.⁷⁰⁴

In reaction to these concerns, *Sin Po* again referred to the interview with Ezerman. The advisor for Chinese affairs stressed that the Chinese people would be placed under European administration and not under indigenous leadership. The government intended to create an equal system of administration in the cities, in which every race would be treated the same under a uniform and unmediated leadership. In practice this would mean that neighbourhoods with a majority of European people would be under the supervision of a European neighbourhood chief. Neighbourhoods in which the indigenous or Chinese were in the majority would be supervised by indigenous or Chinese chiefs, respectively. The advisor assured *Sin Po*'s readers that the European and indigenous neighbourhood chiefs would be assisted by Chinese clerks if a large concentration of Chinese people resided in their wards. Furthermore, he emphasised that the neighbourhood chiefs would under no circumstances be regarded as administrative officials; they merely served to transmit government regulations to the people living in their neighbourhoods. This way, every Chinese in the main cities of Java would be under direct European administration.⁷⁰⁵

Regardless of the merits of these journalistic arguments, most Chinese considered the unification plans ill-timed. Animosity between the Chinese and Indonesians was not a memory of a distant past; segregation was deeply embedded in colonial society. As we have seen, for centuries the Dutch had prevented ethnic groups from developing an "Indies identity" by limiting their interaction. Lifting these restrictions tended to strengthen rather than weaken social pluralism. The emancipation process suddenly made the various population groups aware of their own identity, and they began to isolate themselves from each other and became increasingly intolerant towards one another. This growing tension became apparent in the anti-Chinese outbreaks of 1912–13. Thus, it

⁷⁰⁴ "Persoverzicht: De Chineesche Pers, December 1914", *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 4:1 (1915): 395–96.

⁷⁰⁵ *Sin Po*, 29 October 1918; *Sin Po*, 1 November 1918.

would certainly not be groundless to assume that the Chinese would refuse indigenous neighbourhood chiefs in their neighbourhoods and vice versa. (The Arabs had already indicated that they would not accept the presence of Chinese chiefs in their neighbourhoods.⁷⁰⁶) In a meeting of the People's Council, Kan Hok Hoei (also known as H. H. Kan), a *peranakan* landowner and leading businessman, confirmed that it would be premature to appoint "foreign" neighbourhood chiefs in Chinese quarters, especially considering that the government still found it necessary to appoint Chinese representatives in certain government committees to serve the interests of the Chinese community. Placing "foreign" chiefs in Chinese neighbourhoods would definitely lead to conflicts.⁷⁰⁷ *Perniagaan* also pointed out that the Europeans living in "native" neighbourhoods would be much better off than the Chinese as the indigenous chiefs were accountable to a European official who could easily overrule the native neighbourhood chief to protect "his" people. He would be less inclined to do this for the Chinese.⁷⁰⁸

The fourth "lie" of *Perniagaan*, *Sin Po* revealed, was the assumption that the Chinese people still needed Chinese representation. The newspaper persisted in its opinion that the officers still formed an important bridge between the Chinese community and the colonial government. Moreover, European administrators would not put much effort into taking Chinese customs and traditions into account. For instance, a European official would not be willing to thoroughly investigate marital conflicts. According to *Perniagaan*, if a couple filed for divorce and gave a plausible reason, the *controleur* would be inclined to grant the couple's request instantly. A Chinese officer would first examine the couple's complaint and then try to find a proper solution. In most cases, the officer urged reconciliation. Only when there was no hope for the couple to reconcile did

⁷⁰⁶ Letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 25 September 1918, no. 18327/1, Agenda, 1918, no. 31028, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁷⁰⁷ *Handelingen van den Volksraad*, 13th meeting (19 November 1918) (Batavia: Volksraad van Nederlandsch-Indië, 1918–1941/42): p. 276.

⁷⁰⁸ *Perniagaan*, 3 October 1918.

the officer grant a divorce. Chinese females would also not feel comfortable going to a controleur to report a complaint. A controleur would bluntly encourage a Chinese woman to share her problems by giving her a pat on the back and telling her she can trust him. The woman would be ashamed being improperly touched by another man and would not be encouraged to proceed with her complaint. A Chinese officer would know how to properly deal with such matters.⁷⁰⁹

Sin Po challenged this assumption by arguing that the officers had never looked after the Chinese people and had only been serving the colonial government, as was shown by their over-zealous effort to collect tax money from the Chinese people and the flag incident of February 1912.⁷¹⁰ *Sin Po* also questioned the actual influence of the Chinese officers. Now that the government was increasingly taking over core activities of the officers, they merely served as the authorities' errand boys and only had advisory roles in matters concerning the Chinese, roles that came with little power or influence.⁷¹¹ Two years before, in 1916, *Sin Po* had already compared the officers with employees of a *toko*: the shop owner (that is, the colonial government) hired the employees to sweep the floor and keep the shop tidy, but the account books were off limits!⁷¹² Yet *Perniagaan*'s claim that the Chinese community needed Chinese representation made it the definite winner in the war of words with *Sin Po*, as Chinese public opinion increasingly shifted in support of the Chinese officers. In fact, *Sin Po*'s insistence that the need for Chinese representation was a lie was itself a misrepresentation of the truth.

The other battles of *Sin Po*

The argument with *Perniagaan* was not the only one to engage *Sin Po*, which challenged other government measures aimed at weakening ties between the Indies Chinese and their ancestral

⁷⁰⁹ *Perniagaan*, 22 June 1918 and 3 October 1918.

⁷¹⁰ *Sin Po*, 1 November 1918.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹² *Sin Po*, 11 December 1916.

country or individuals and groups that *Sin Po* considered allies of the Dutch. *Perniagaan* was sympathetic to the Dutch, in the opinion of *Sin Po*, because it was owned by Chinese officers and *peranakan* businessmen whose roles and position in colonial society depended on the Dutch. In *Sin Po*'s eyes sympathy for the Dutch automatically meant hostility towards China and the Chinese.⁷¹³ The paper's most conspicuous campaigns took on the Dutch Subject Law and, in relation to this, compulsory military service in 1918, and Chinese participation in the People's Council in the years leading up to the foundation of the representative body.

The campaign against the Dutch Subject Law failed bitterly. The campaign took the form of a series of articles enumerating the dangers and disadvantages of the Dutch Subject Law, which obliged one to compulsory military service. With mounting international tension on the eve of the First World War, the Dutch authorities began seriously considering the formation of an Indies militia. Dutch experts realised that the colonial army of 10,000 European and 25,000 native professional soldiers and volunteers was neither equipped nor trained for warfare against a modern armed foreign enemy (such as Japan). In 1916 supporters of an Indies militia organised a campaign under the slogan *Indië Weerbaar*. The leadership of this semi-official movement rested with the Comité Indië Weerbaar. In 1917 the committee sent a deputation to the Netherlands to petition for the establishment of an Indies militia. The idea of a militia composed of all Dutch subjects soon became entangled with demands from the natives for the creation of a popular representative body. The natives argued that the Dutch could only expect Indonesians to defend the colony if they were represented in the colonial government. After the colonial government promised to establish the People's Council through which the Indonesians could participate in colonial politics, the indigenous people were prepared to support the *Indië Weerbaar* movement.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹³ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917–1942*, 14.

⁷¹⁴ H. Burgers, *De Garoeda en de Ooievaar: Indonesië van Kolonie tot Nationale Staat* (Leiden: KITLV, 2010), 168–69; Van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War*, chap. 10.

The matter was not so simple for the Chinese, for whom military service had always been a tricky issue. Defending a regime that refused to treat the Chinese as equals had never been negotiable to the Chinese. And even now after the colonial government had made a number of concessions to the Chinese, they still were unwilling to jeopardise their lives for Dutch interests.⁷¹⁵ This was shown by the Chinese reticence with regard to the Indië Weerbaar movement. According to *Sin Po*, compulsory military service was correlated with the Dutch Subject Law. Therefore *Sin Po* encouraged the Indies Chinese to reject the Dutch Subject Law and support the newspaper's petition for rights to repudiate Dutch nationality. The Chinese nationalists planned to petition the Chinese government in Peking to pressure the Dutch into granting the peranakan Chinese repudiation rights. The outcome of the actions was quite successful: *Sin Po* gathered nearly 30,000 signatures in favour of the petition and 200 Chinese organisations also pledged their support.⁷¹⁶ The prospect of compulsory participation in the Indies militia most likely had triggered this support. Furthermore, the Dutch Subject Law was unpopular among the Indies Chinese because it suddenly made them second-class Dutch subjects (after Europeans), and stripped them of their Chinese nationality. The petition was offered to the Chinese government in Peking in early 1919 by Hauw Tek Kong, a former director of *Sin Po*. The reason for starting the campaign in 1918 had to do with the Paris Peace Conference in Versailles in 1919 and the hopeful expectations for a successful outcome for China. *Sin Po* (and the entire Chinese nation) hoped that China, as part of the allied victors after World War I, would be able to negotiate about regaining full sovereignty over those areas it had earlier leased to Germany. The claims of the Chinese diplomats were denied, leading to

⁷¹⁵ "Persoverzicht: De Chineesche Pers, December 1916", *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 6:1 (1917): 685.

⁷¹⁶ The exact number of signatures was 28,789.

the May Fourth Movement in China.⁷¹⁷ When Hauw Tek Kong offered the petition of the *Sin Po* campaign, the Chinese government stuck to the consular agreement with the Netherlands of 8 May 1911 in which China promised to recognise Dutch jurisdiction over the Indies-born Chinese. The Chinese government probably felt it was in no position to meddle in this affair after the failure of the Chinese diplomats in Versailles. The question of the Indies militia was resolved by itself when the colonial government abandoned the idea of an Indies defence force.⁷¹⁸

The campaign against Chinese participation in the People's Council was not only a battle against the colonial government, but also against a group of *peranakan* Chinese whom *Sin Po* regarded as pro-Dutch and thus anti-Chinese. Led by the vocal H. H. Kan, the group consisted of Dutch-educated intellectuals and businessmen who foresaw a future in the Dutch East Indies for the Indies Chinese. These *peranakan* Chinese welcomed the foundation of the People's Council and embraced the government's proposal to open membership to the Chinese. They saw the council as an instrument to expand their roles in Indies politics and improve the position of the Indies Chinese in colonial society. They acknowledged they were emotionally tied to China, but they found it evident that the future of the *peranakan* Chinese was in the place where they lived. Acknowledging that the position of the Indies Chinese in colonial society was improvable in many ways, they grasped the opportunity to represent the Chinese people in an official body in which grievances could be expressed and proposals for improvement submitted and voted upon.⁷¹⁹ They argued that with China in a state of turmoil and unable to protect their interests, the Indies Chinese had to look after themselves and political participation was the only means to assure they would be heard. In

⁷¹⁷ The May Fourth Movement broke out of discontent at the failure of the Chinese delegation to negotiate favourable terms for China at the Paris Peace Conference. On 4 May 1919 Chinese students took to Tiananmen Square to demonstrate against the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The demonstrations were also an expression of dissatisfaction with China's political state.

⁷¹⁸ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917–1942*, 21–22; L. Suryadinata, *Tokoh Tionghoa and Identitas Indonesia: Dari Tjoe Bou San sampai Yap Thiam Hien* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2010), 5.

⁷¹⁹ L. Suryadinata, *Pemikiran Politik Etnis Tionghoa 1900–2002* (Jakarta: Pustaka LP3ES Indonesia, 2005), 65.

addition, they argued that there were considerable differences in lifestyle and culture between the peranakans and totoks and that it would be illusory to believe that the Indies Chinese would return to China. Without doubt the peranakans would be unable to cope with the way of life in China.⁷²⁰

Obviously, this line of thought ran counter to the ultra-nationalist message sent out by *Sin Po* and arguments between the two groups raged in the Chinese-Malay press. *Sin Po* contended that the clique of H. H. Kan consisted mainly of landlords, leading businessmen, and Dutch-appointed officials who were keen on maintaining the status quo as their alliance with the Dutch protected their interests. The majority of the Indies Chinese, however, were not in such a privileged position and the colonial government did not care about their well-being. Therefore it was of no use to accept membership of government councils. Participation in Dutch institutions would, like the Dutch Subject Law, only split the Chinese community.⁷²¹

The Indies-oriented peranakans accused *Sin Po* of pushing the Indies Chinese towards China against their will.⁷²² They argued that participation in government councils would not separate the peranakans from the totoks, but would actually bring the two groups together. Members of the municipal councils strove for the improvement of living circumstances in the Chinese neighbourhoods and made sure streets were maintained and repaired and that Chinese cemeteries were managed properly. They fought for tax reduction and an accommodating environment for Chinese traders, pedlars and businessmen. The Chinese representatives of the People's Council would strive for more Dutch-Chinese Schools (HCS), more medical doctors, and more supervision when Chinese houses were searched by the police. All these proposals benefitted not only the peranakan Chinese but also the totoks. So how, they wondered, would Chinese representation in government councils split the Indies Chinese community, and why should the peranakans and

⁷²⁰ Setiono, *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik*, 478.

⁷²¹ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917–1942*, 13.

⁷²² Suryadinata, *Pemikiran Politik Etnis Tionghoa 1900–2002*, 65.

totoks turn on each other and become enemies? The H. H. Kan group considered the arguments of the Chinese nationalists not only nonsense, but corrupt and vicious lies.⁷²³

On 4 November 1917 a conference was held in Semarang in which representatives of Chinese organisations, Chinese members of local councils in Java, and any other interested Chinese discussed whether Chinese representatives should be sent to the People's Council. It was the largest gathering ever held by the Chinese since the rise of the Pan-Chinese Movement. A majority of the conference participants moved against Chinese representation in the People's Council.

Nevertheless, in 1918 H. H. Kan and Liem A Pat, a Chinese officer from Muntok, accepted appointments from the colonial government as members of the People's Council.⁷²⁴

6.2 The public outcry of the Chinese people against the reform plans

Although the Chinese-Malay press dominated the debate on the Chinese officers, it was not the only forum for public discussion. Throughout Java, members of various Chinese organisations held gatherings to discuss the reforms in Chinese administration. Interestingly enough, despite the severe criticism of the Chinese officers over the previous decade, most meetings ended in support of the Chinese officer system. What follows are four examples of protest movements against the government's plans to terminate the officer system and subject the Chinese people to unmediated colonial administration.

As early as May 1915 a petition on behalf of the Chinese people of Semarang was sent to the governor-general to plead for the preservation of the Chinese officers and the Chinese Councils. The petition was signed by Kwik Djoen Eng, The Pik Hong, and Kwee Yan Tjo, all representatives of various Chinese organisations in Semarang. The petition argued that the Chinese people of Semarang were familiar with the Chinese officers, to whom they could turn for help, and that it

⁷²³ Ibid., 75–79.

⁷²⁴ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917–1942*, 7–14.

would be difficult for the Chinese people, especially the poor, to express their needs and problems to European officials. Therefore, the three gentlemen pleaded for the right to select the officers themselves and asked the government to reconsider its plans. The petition was never answered by the colonial government.⁷²⁵

A year later, on 6 October 1916, a conference held in the building of the Siang Boe (Siang Hwee) of Semarang was attended by representatives of various Chinese organisations, Advisor for Chinese Affairs H. Mouw and two lawyers. The conference was organised to present a motion to Mouw acknowledging the need to improve the current system of Chinese administration, but urging for the preservation of the Chinese officers who were deemed indispensable for taking care of the religious affairs of the Chinese people, providing financial help to the poor, catering assistance in marital affairs and divorce cases, arranging funerals, and mediating in minor civil disputes among the Chinese. The motion was supported by the 7000 members of the Chinese organisations represented at the conference.⁷²⁶ The advisor for Chinese affairs challenged the motion by arguing that the Chinese did not need mediation anymore; the last decennium had shown that the Chinese were capable of expressing their needs and grievances in the interest of improving their position in colonial society. No longer *onmondig* (voiceless) they had no reason anymore to be hesitant in turning to the European officials for assistance. Mouw also pointed out that the Malay language had increasingly replaced the various Chinese dialects in the daily speech of the Indies Chinese and that the Chinese officers were no longer needed as translators. In addition, the Chinese could still voice their opinion through their representatives in the municipal and regency councils, and, as of 1918, in the People's Council.⁷²⁷

⁷²⁵ *Sin Po*, 14 October 1916; "Persoverzicht: De Chineesche Pers, November 1916", *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 6:1 (1917): 248.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*

The Chinese delegates persisted in their opinion that mediation was still necessary, although certain reforms in the recruitment of officers were needed. One delegate observed that while the government's advisor claimed that mediation was superfluous, the government had made no arrangements to abolish the indigenous leaders like the regents, *wedanas*, *assistent-wedanas*, *loerahs*, and so on. If those leaders were allowed to stay on, why not the Chinese officers? More important, subjection to European administration did not automatically mean equal status with the Europeans, as assumed by *Sin Po*. When Mouw was asked whether the Chinese would be granted equal status with the Europeans if placed under unmediated colonial administration, he answered that equal status for the Chinese would not happen in the near future because the Chinese in general were still unequal to the European people in terms of intellectual development. In reaction to this statement, one of the Chinese delegates argued that the government was to blame for this. The Chinese had always been eager to receive good education but it was not until 1908 that the first Hollandsch-Chinesche School was opened to provide Western education to the Chinese: "And even now there are not enough of these schools. In Semarang there are still nearly 400 children who could not be enrolled in the HCS." Subsequently the motion was adopted and signed by the various Chinese organisations present. The Chinese did not wish to be placed under European administration without equal status.⁷²⁸

On 23 July 1918, 221 Chinese inhabitants of Batavia and Weltevreden filed a petition against the government's plan to abolish the Chinese officers and the Chinese Councils in Batavia and the rest of Java. They pleaded for retaining the Chinese officer system on the grounds that most Chinese people in the Indies were "poor and uneducated" (*miskin dan bodo*) who considered the "educated and experienced" Chinese officers as leaders to whom they could express their wishes and interests. If the Chinese officers were abolished, these "poor and uneducated" Chinese would lose the courage to register their complaints with the authorities. Moreover, most totok Chinese

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

were unable to address themselves to the colonial authorities as they were not yet articulate in the Malay language.⁷²⁹

According to the petition, the position of Chinese officer and the institution of the Chinese Council had never harmed the Chinese people or violated their rights. For hundreds of years, the officers had functioned as intermediaries between the Chinese community and the colonial government, which they provided with information on the Chinese community including the sentiments and wishes of the Chinese people. In addition, the officers had a thorough understanding of Chinese customs and morals, rituals, and religious affairs. Placing the Chinese people under direct European administration would only lead to misunderstandings that could harm not only the Chinese community but also the government.⁷³⁰ The petitioners did acknowledge that the officer system failed to work properly owing to the unwritten rule that only wealthy Chinese were eligible to serve as Chinese officers. It frequently happened that wealthy appointees had absolutely no affinity for the job and hardly knew what was going on in their resort. Therefore the petitioners pleaded for the right to select the Chinese officers themselves, by passing a list of their own recommendations to the resident so that his appointment would reflect the will of the Chinese community.⁷³¹

In reaction to this petition, Advisor for Chinese Affairs Ezerman held a meeting in Batavia on 18 September 1918 to discuss the Chinese objections to the proposed reforms. Twenty-five Chinese from all walks of life were invited to the meeting, but only twelve attended.⁷³² Nevertheless, Ezerman tried to open a dialogue to come to a mutual agreement on reforming the Chinese administration. He explained that the Chinese people would be placed directly under

⁷²⁹ Petition of 221 Chinese inhabitants of Batavia and Weltevreden to the Governor-General, 23 July 1918, no. 23316, in: *Agenda* 1919, no. 1635, ANRI, Jakarta. See also *Perniagaan*, 18 September 1918.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*

⁷³² Second secretary Khoe Siau Eng represented the Chinese Council at this meeting.

European administration and that the European government officials would be assisted by salaried neighbourhood chiefs recruited from all races. Chinese aversion to the possibility of being placed under the supervision of indigenous neighbourhood chiefs was uncalled for, as Ezerman pointed out that Chinese chiefs would also supervise indigenous neighbourhoods and that Europeans would be in the same position as the Chinese and indigenous people. The activities of the neighbourhood chiefs would include receiving complaints and objections from the Chinese people and providing them with advice and information regarding government regulations and rules. Indigenous and European neighbourhood chiefs would be assisted by Chinese clerks and interpreters so that the “poor and uneducated” Chinese, as well as newcomers not yet fluent in Malay, could still turn to Chinese “intermediaries” for assistance. The religion of the Chinese needed no further discussion as Ezerman considered this a private matter. With regard to Chinese customs and traditions, the Chinese could turn to the Chinese neighbourhood chiefs and Chinese “intermediaries” as well as to the Office for Chinese Affairs and the Chinese-Malay press. The forthcoming introduction of the *Chineesche Burgerlijke Stand* (Chinese Civil Registry) in 1919 should remove concerns about Chinese civil affairs such as marriage licences and divorce requests.⁷³³ Ezerman deemed it unnecessary to discuss the Chinese plea for voting rights with the forthcoming implementation of a unified city administration. Granting the Chinese the right to select their own headmen would only emphasise their special position in colonial society, while the government intended to create an equal administrative system for all ethnic groups. Moreover, the Chinese were asking for something that was not even granted to the Europeans and indigenous, although Ezerman omitted that the village heads (*desahoofden*) were in fact elected by the indigenous people. Ezerman pointed out that like the indigenous, the Chinese already had voting rights for the municipal council.⁷³⁴ Although Ezerman intended for this to foster a dialogue with the Chinese community, he left little room for

⁷³³ Letter from the Advisor of Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 20 September 1918, no. 379/18, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta. See also *Perniagaan*, 18 September 1918.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*

discussion and seems to have used the meeting more to defend the proposed reforms. Most of the Chinese people present answered Ezerman's "propaganda action" with silence, while those who did speak declared that they could not make a proper judgement of the plans yet.⁷³⁵

The failed meeting of September 1918 was followed in October by a campaign against abolishing the Chinese officer system led by Gouw Peng Liang, director of the newspaper *Perniagaan*.⁷³⁶ Gouw was known as a good Malay stylist. He had also been the secretary of the Chinese Trade School, the Kong Boe Siang Hoei, but he was accused of devoting himself more to gambling than to this position. He was also a personal friend of the Chinese lieutenant in Meester-Cornelis.⁷³⁷ For the campaign of October 1918, Gouw wrote a number of blunt, sometimes fierce articles in *Perniagaan* to mobilise the Chinese people against ending the Chinese officer system. He called on the various Chinese associations on Java to support his proposal to send telegrams to the Dutch parliament in The Hague and to Her Majesty the Queen, in which the Chinese associations, as representatives of the Chinese community on Java, should plead for the preservation of the Chinese officers and the Chinese Councils.⁷³⁸

On 12 October 1918 *Perniagaan* stated that it had received numerous telegrams from around the Netherlands Indies expressing Chinese opposition to abolishing the Chinese officers. "The government must realise some day that the Chinese people wish to retain the Chinese officers and its Councils", it reported. On the same day, a meeting was held at the THHK in Meester-Cornelis to collect signatures in support of Gouw's proposal.⁷³⁹ Three days later, the newspaper reported receiving three gentlemen who handed over a sealed document with more than 150 signatures of prominent Chinese from Meester-Cornelis. The document was also signed by various

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

⁷³⁶ Suryadinata, *Prominent Indonesian Chinese*, 27.

⁷³⁷ Confidential letter from the Advisor for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 8 November 1918, no. 457/18, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁷³⁸ Ibid.

⁷³⁹ *Perniagaan*, 12 October 1918.

Chinese organisations from Meester-Cornelis, Ambarawa, and Bandoeng to emphasise that there was common support for maintaining the Chinese officer system.⁷⁴⁰ In the editions of 16, 19, 21, and 22 October 1918 Gouw reported that more meetings had been set up in Java to discuss the proposal, and *Perniagaan* had also received dozens of telegrams and letters from Chinese associations and inhabitants in support of the proposal. The most remarkable among the supporters were the Tjong Hoa Ing Giap Hwee from Semarang, which claimed to represent *all* Chinese associations in Semarang⁷⁴¹ and the petitioners from Bandoeng, who, like the Batavian Chinese, pleaded for the right to select the Chinese officers themselves: “*soepaja orang Tionghoa bisa kasi hak memili aken goena itoe djabatan*” (“so that the Chinese people are given voting rights for that post”). At last, the telegram to the governor-general was sent on 23 October 1918 and on 24 October to the Minister of Colonies.⁷⁴²

Advisor for Chinese Affairs Ezerman was far from impressed and characterised the campaign as a bold attempt to challenge the government. In a confidential letter to the director of internal affairs, he pointed out that the supporters of Gouw’s motion included “the Tjong Hoa Hwee Koans in the Netherlands Indies”, but that in fact, only fourteen of the over two hundred THHK schools on Java and the outer regions supported the telegram.⁷⁴³ It was misleading of Gouw “to claim the support of [all] the Tjong Hoa Hwee Koans in the Netherlands Indies”. Ezerman reported that a meeting in Soekaboemi only attracted twenty-four people, eight of whom opposed the motion. The meeting in Bandoeng was also attended by just a few people. Another official for

⁷⁴⁰ *Perniagaan*, 15 October 1918.

⁷⁴¹ The decision to support the proposal was taken in a meeting that was attended by six hundred representatives of Chinese organisations in Semarang and private persons.

⁷⁴² Confidential letter from the Advisor for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 8 November 1918, no. 457/18, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁷⁴³ The branches of the THHK in the following cities supported the motion: Tjiandjoer, Krawang, Ambarawa, Djoeana, Batang (residency Pekalongan), Meester-Cornelis, Soemedang, Laboean, Tangerang, Garoet, Serang, Soekaboemi, Solo, and Batavia (with two subdivisions in Tanah Abang and Pasar Senen).

Chinese affairs, A. D. A. de Kat Angelino, reported that the *Tiong Hoa Ing Giap Hwee*, which supposedly represented all the Chinese associations of Semarang, was merely an employment agency and could not be said to represent all the Chinese associations in Semarang. According to De Kat Angelino, the Semarang action could be attributed to the advisor of the *Tiong Hoa Ing Giap Hwee*, Lim Kim Siang, who was an influential person and member of various associations that supported the Chinese officers. De Kat Angelino also reported that a protest campaign in Koedoes was instigated by Major Khouw Kim An, who had written a letter to the Chinese lieutenant of Koedoes urging him to support the motion.⁷⁴⁴

Ezerman concluded that apart from the fourteen *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koans*, only twenty-seven Chinese associations in a number of cities sided with Gouw Peng Liang.⁷⁴⁵ Batavia was best represented on the list with ten associations, followed by Ambarawa with six. Considering that most actions took place in Batavia and the substantial properties the Chinese Council of Batavia owned and managed, this was not surprising. In addition, most of the supporting associations shared the same board members, and Ezerman suspected that the associations of Ambarawa had at least some overlapping board members. Moreover, he thought that as a Chinese settlement Ambarawa was too insignificant to carry a lot of weight in the campaign. The same was true of other places (except for Batavia and Bandoeng) in which the Chinese inhabitants signed telegrams to protest against the government's plans, such as Djoeana, Dawoean, Laboean, Meester-Cornelis, Serang, Soemedang, Tasikmalaja, Temanggoeng, and Tjitjalengka. Remarkably, Soerabaja apparently did not participate

⁷⁴⁴ Confidential letter from the Advisor for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 8 November 1918, no. 457/18, *Binnenlandsch Bestuur*, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁷⁴⁵ Chinese associations in the following cities supported the motion: Koedoes (3), Semarang (1), Krawang (2), Ambarawa (6), Meester-Cornelis (1), Batavia (10), Buitenzorg (2), Gombong (1), and Soekaboemi (1).

in the campaign. *Perniagaan* did call for support from East Java in its edition of 12 October 1918, but by then the Chinese Council of Soerabaja probably had lost too much influence.⁷⁴⁶

Ezerman suspected that the Chinese major of Batavia Khouw Kim An and his father-in-law Phoa Keng Hek, president of the THHK in Batavia were the brains behind Gouw's campaign. Khouw and Phoa were known to be very wealthy, but rumours had begun spreading that both men were suffering financial difficulties. Phoa was said to have been in debt to Reynst en Vinju, or at least to have owed a lot of money to the firm's representative in Soekaboemi. Ezerman also revealed that the chairman of the Chinese Council received more than 300 guilders per month and estimated that Khouw Kim An earned nearly 3,000 guilders for his activities as major although he admitted that he was unable to prove this.⁷⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Ezerman argued, it would explain why Khouw Kim An strongly objected to the government's plans: the end of the Chinese officer system would mean a great financial loss for him.⁷⁴⁸

It is interesting that Ezerman suspected that the *majoor der Chineezzen* of Batavia was the mastermind behind Gouw's campaign, for the minutes of the Council's board meetings give no indication of resistance to terminating the Chinese officer system. But in November 1918, *Sin Po* reported that the Batavian Chinese officers and their loyal followers frequently came together in "secret" meetings to discuss the government's intention to do away with the institution of Chinese officers. The gatherings were never held in the building of the Chinese Council, but in buildings of Chinese organisations such as the Siang Hwee and the THHK and those present agreed to fight for the continuation of the Chinese officer system. To the great indignation of *Sin Po*, the officers

⁷⁴⁶ Confidential letter from the Advisor for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 8 November 1918, no. 457/18, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁷⁴⁷ The major received a monthly compensation (*toelage*) of three hundred guilders from the state for his administrative activities and all the expenses involved. The rest of his "income" came from so-called "voluntary contributions" from (Chinese) associations and benevolence or *douceurs*.

⁷⁴⁸ Confidential letter from the Advisor for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 8 November 1918, no. 457/18, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

afterwards claimed that the Siang Hwee and THHK actually agreed with their decision. Whether the report in *Sin Po* was based on facts or not, it helps explain why the Council's minutes yield no clues about how the officers regarded their pending dismissal.⁷⁴⁹

Thus, Chinese public opinion on the Chinese officer system and its future fell into two camps. Most peranakan Chinese compared the officer system with a house that, though old, had a solid foundation. The new system in which the Chinese would be subjected to direct European administration was like a new house built on sand and with no solid foundation. The peranakans challenged the reform plans of the government: "Which house would be better to live in? An old house, that is still strong or a new house that could easily break down? An old house with a solid foundation only needed to be renovated by replacing a few windows or doors. It should not be necessary to demolish the whole building and replace it with a new one. Indeed, reforms are necessary as there are a number of officers who are not functioning well. These incompetent persons should of course be replaced." The peranakan Chinese suggested that the government should consider paying the officers fixed salaries and granting the Chinese people the right to select their own headmen. "But why should the entire institution of Chinese officers be replaced by a brand new system that is shaky?" For its part, *Sin Po* mockingly compared the Chinese officer system with a rotten mango: "A mango is indeed a delicious fruit if it is still fresh; however, once the mango is rotten, it should be thrown away."⁷⁵⁰

Now that we have seen that the Chinese were split into two camps as far as the Chinese officers were concerned, we also can see that Lea Williams' conclusion about the Chinese officers—that the Chinese officers were installed by the Dutch authorities rather than their countrymen, that they only served Dutch interests, and that they were never really in a leadership position in the Chinese community—does not really correspond to this development.⁷⁵¹ It seems that Williams was

⁷⁴⁹ *Sin Po*, 1 November 1918.

⁷⁵⁰ *Sin Po*, 6 December 1916.

⁷⁵¹ Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, 171–72.

fixated on the totok's protests, while overlooking the needs *and* the nature of the peranakan Chinese community of Batavia. The institution of Chinese officers may have been a casualty of nationalism, but in the long run, especially, the situation in Batavia developed differently than in other Javanese cities. The colonial government made the same mistake.

6.3 The ill-fated plans of the colonial government to reforming Chinese administration

Ever since the emergence of nationalism among the Indies Chinese had invited China's interference in their affairs, the Dutch colonial government had adopted a policy that favoured the Indies-born peranakan. Considering the peranakans' significance to the colony, it was important to keep China at arm's length. Among the reasons why the colonial government intended to place the Indies Chinese under direct European administration, was that the Chinese officers were no longer able to deal with the incoming nationalist streams from China. Given the volume of criticism levelled at the Chinese officers and the peranakans' wish to equal treatment, the government assumed that its reform plans would be welcomed with enthusiasm. However, the policy of favouring the peranakan Chinese did not reveal a deep understanding of the inner-workings of the Chinese community, which is why the colonial government was taken by surprise when the Chinese vehemently rejected the proposed reforms.⁷⁵²

One important mistake of the government was that it relied too much on the fierce anti-officer criticism of the China-orientated press. According to the Indies Chinese, the Office for Chinese Affairs was partly to blame for this, as it took a rather unbalanced interest in the developments in China and the China-orientated movement in the Netherlands Indies. According to the Office for Chinese Affairs, the political activities of the *singkeh* Chinese and the China-orientated peranakans in the colony reflected the policy of the Chinese government regarding its overseas subjects. The activities of the Chinese nationalists could stir up anti-Dutch sentiment

⁷⁵² Lohanda, *Growing Pains*, 228–29.

among the *peranakan* community, which would ultimately threaten Dutch authority. Therefore, the Kuo Min Tang movement should be put under strict surveillance. Because of this focus on the China-orientated movement, the advice given by the Office for Chinese Affairs did not reflect the actual circumstances in the Chinese community. The office was established to stay attuned to the political situation, social condition, customs and traditions, and mentality of the Chinese community and its employees were appointed to be the advisors, confidants, and if necessary, the defenders of the Indies Chinese. But with a few exceptions, the officials for Chinese affairs were completely unknown in the Chinese community, and the newspaper *Djawa Tengah* even wondered if they had ever set foot in the Chinese neighbourhoods.⁷⁵³ To the Indies Chinese, the office was more a government spy instead of their friend.⁷⁵⁴ Chinese animosity towards the office intensified after its advisors brushed aside the various petitions and other protest campaigns that were organised by the *peranakan* Chinese and defended the government's plans.

Questions began circulating in the Chinese community as soon as word came out about the proposed reforms. The primary concerns were why the government had never consulted the Chinese on the proposed reforms, and why it was in such a hurry to reform Chinese administration. For centuries the government had taken the Chinese officers for granted and never properly compensated them for all their work. The least the government could do was to allow the officers to resign of their own volition, so they could be spared the humiliation of dismissal.⁷⁵⁵ Although the minutes of the Chinese Council's board meetings do not mention how the officers viewed their upcoming dismissal, other sources reveal that the Chinese officers had indeed been feeling unappreciated by the colonial government for quite some time now. More and more officers felt that the government had freely bestowed rich Chinese with titles so to push off the administration over the Chinese and it had never rightfully rewarded them for all their work. In Semarang the Chinese

⁷⁵³ "Persoverzicht: De Chineesche Pers, January-February 1914", *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 3:1 (1914): 527.

⁷⁵⁴ *Handelingen van den Volksraad*, 5th meeting (16 June 1924): p. 54.

⁷⁵⁵ *De Locomotief*, 4 December 1918.

officers had already realised this in the early years of the twentieth century and as a result they almost all had resigned, one by one. Only the major was left. The Chinese mockingly proposed that the authorities place the following add to recruit candidates for the vacancies in the Semarang Council:

Wanted:

Seven rich Chinese merchants to function as Chinese officer

Uniform: to be paid by the candidate himself

Wages: none, as usual

The employment of an *oppasser* [servant] is allowed, but he is to be paid by the candidate himself

Candidates are expected to arrange their own office supply

Applicants should submit their sealed requests to the local authorities of Semarang⁷⁵⁶

On 4 December 1918, *De Locomotief* announced that rumours circulated in the Chinese communities that the Chinese officers on Java planned to turn in their resignations en masse out of dismay over the government's plan to abolish the officer system. The Chinese officers, who felt that their loyal services had never been fully appreciated by the colonial government, did not wish to be simply brushed aside as useless material.⁷⁵⁷ In the eighth meeting of the People's Council in 1925, Major Khouw Kim An acknowledged the fact that the institute of Chinese officers had become unpopular and outdated, but stressed that the Chinese officers were not the only ones to blame. "It often occurs", said the *majoor der Chineezen*, "that the post is forced upon potential candidates. Wealthy Chinese with influence in the community are often summoned by the assistant-resident or resident to take on the officer post once a vacancy opens. Fearing vexation and feelings of shame, these people reluctantly yield to the authorities' urgent request." According to Khouw Kim An, the

⁷⁵⁶ *Het Nieuws Van Den Dag*, 26 January 1911.

⁷⁵⁷ *De Locomotief*, 4 December 1918.

Chinese community also often submitted a request to the local government to appoint one of their rich members.⁷⁵⁸

More to the point, the new administrative system that supposedly would unify the population groups in the main cities appeared shaky, at best. There was no guarantee that the indigenous, Arabs and Europeans would accept Chinese neighbourhood chiefs in their quarters, but it was certain that the Chinese would refuse indigenous leadership over their community. In addition, as the Dutch Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages would not be applied to the Chinese until 1919, who would take care of the Chinese civil registry in the meantime? The Chinese also worried about the lack of Chinese representatives in government committees and councils of justice with the disappearance of the Chinese officers. Finally, the government had yet to propose a satisfactory solution for the management of the Batavian Chinese Council's possessions. In the thirteenth meeting of the People's Council in 1918, H. H. Kan also expressed his concern about the government's hasty decisions: "Would it not be advisable to look after a solid foundation first prior to building a temple in which association and assimilation should be housed?"⁷⁵⁹

The peranakans were well aware that the system needed reform and pleaded for voting rights to improve the recruitment of candidates. This way, the Chinese community would have more control over the Chinese Councils, which they helped establish with their own money.⁷⁶⁰ The peranakans rejected reforms that would place the Chinese under European administration. The heart of the matter lay in the fact that the Chinese, although Dutch subjects, were still classified as Foreign Orientals. To speak in terms of Rousseau's concept of a social contract between the state and the people, the Indies-born Chinese were *sujets* (subjects) and not *citoyens* (citizens) of the Dutch state. In the fifth meeting of the People's Council in 1924, Han Tiauw Tjong, one of the founders of the Chung Hwa Hui and member of the *Volksraad*, denounced the forced mass

⁷⁵⁸ Handelingen van den Volksraad, 8th meeting, (19 June 1925): p. 242.

⁷⁵⁹ Handelingen van den Volksraad, 13th meeting (19 November 1918): p. 276.

⁷⁶⁰ *De Locomotief*, 5 December 1918.

naturalisation of the Indies-born Chinese as Dutch subjects. The Chinese did not become Dutch citizens, but a second-rate group of Dutch subjects or *heimatlosen*.⁷⁶¹ Although he opined that the Chinese Council was a showy institute without substance, he and other prominent Chinese asked what the benefit would be for the Chinese, if they, as second-rate Dutch subjects, were placed under direct European administration.⁷⁶² Being subject to direct European administration without any Chinese representation would place the Chinese in a fragile position and would not contribute to an improvement in accommodating their interests. The government's argument that the Chinese could still voice their opinion in the municipal, regency, and provincial councils was received with howls of derision. The Chinese representatives in the local councils were unable to exercise influence because participation was determined by quotas, financial status, and Dutch literacy, the last requirement being considered particularly burdensome. Not only was it unfair to consider Dutch literacy as a criterion for intellectual development, the government itself was to blame for the fact that so little of the Chinese people were proficient in the Dutch language.⁷⁶³ The Chinese people had no objections to a unified city administration, but as long as the indigenous people were still represented by their own leaders, the Chinese wanted the same arrangement for themselves. Dismantling the Chinese officer system was premature as long as the Chinese were still *heimatlosen*. In other words, the Chinese people did not object to abolishing the officer system if it meant full equal status with the Europeans.⁷⁶⁴ This was confirmed by Major Khouw Kim An who argued that there would be no need for Chinese officers anymore when the Chinese people were subject to the same laws as the Europeans.⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶¹ Handelingen van den Volksraad, 5th meeting (16 June 1924): pp. 55–56.

⁷⁶² Handelingen van den Volksraad, 5th meeting (16 June 1924): p. 54.

⁷⁶³ Handelingen van den Volksraad, 5th meeting (19 June 1918): p. 123.

⁷⁶⁴ “Persoverzicht 1918: De Chineesch-Maleische Pers, *Perniagaan* 15 June 1918”, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 4390, ANRI, Jakarta; “Persoverzicht: De Chineesche Pers, September 1918”, *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 8:1 (1919): 117.

⁷⁶⁵ Confidential letter of the Advisor for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 16 July 1926, no. 367/26, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

The government was reluctant to listen to the wishes of the peranakan Chinese. In the 1915 Semarang meeting, it had been pointed out to Advisor for Chinese Affairs Mouw that the Chinese-Malay press did not speak for the whole Chinese community. The newspapers were edited by Indies Chinese, but most Chinese disagreed with their editorial positions, those of the China-orientated press in particular.⁷⁶⁶ In the People's Council meeting of 25 November 1918, H. H. Kan presented thirty telegrams and twenty letters, representing seventy Chinese associations throughout Java, in support of the Chinese officers. He then asked why the government had never consulted these people about reforming the Chinese administration, for "these telegrams and letters are no mystifications!"⁷⁶⁷ Director of Internal Affairs Carpentier Alting replied it was not the government's concern whether the Chinese wished to retain the Chinese officer system or not; the point was to consider which administrative system would be best for the Chinese people, and only the government as legislator should answer this question.⁷⁶⁸

Nevertheless, the government could not carry out the formative plans drawn up in the September 1917 meeting, which left Chinese administration in Batavia more or less intact. The only substantive change involved the office of neighbourhood chief, although this in fact had been implemented two years before, when by *Indisch Staatsblad* 1915-88, the neighbourhood chiefs of Batavia became fully paid government officials.⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶⁶ "Persoverzicht: De Chineesche Pers, November 1916", *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 6:1 (1917): 249.

⁷⁶⁷ Handelingen van den Volksraad, 14th meeting (25 November 1918): p. 288.

⁷⁶⁸ Handelingen van den Volksraad, 14th meeting (25 November 1918): p. 293.

⁷⁶⁹ *Indisch Staatsblad* 1915-88 superseded section three of *Indisch Staatsblad* 1914-724, which determined that the neighbourhood chiefs would be paid government officials on a temporary basis. *Indisch Staatsblad* 1915-88 determined that a total of forty-eight neighbourhood chiefs will be employed in the districts Batavia and Weltevreden, as well as Meester-Cornelis in the Ommelanden of the residency Batavia, for a salary of fifty guilders per month. Those neighbourhood chiefs will be assisted by 52 writers (*twiedies*) who would receive twenty-five guilders per month and 153 messengers (*sareans*) against a monthly salary of fifteen guilders.

In a meeting of the Chinese Council on 3 December 1914, the major reminded the neighbourhood chiefs of the government's intention to reduce their number and appoint the remaining neighbourhood chiefs as paid government officials, and he advised them to show diligence and attention; lazy neighbourhood chiefs would certainly be dismissed.⁷⁷⁰ Almost a month later, on 30 December 1914, the Council convened a special meeting in which the neighbourhood chiefs were given guidelines the government followed in selecting nominees for the “new” post of paid neighbourhood chief.⁷⁷¹ To qualify, the neighbourhood chiefs had to

- show progress in collecting taxes;
- show sincere and correct behaviour;
- show diligence;
- show capability and knowledge;
- show loyal conduct.⁷⁷²

In the Council meeting of 4 January 1915, a list of the selected neighbourhood chiefs and their assistants—writers/*twidies* and messengers/*sareans*⁷⁷³—was presented. Twelve neighbourhood chiefs were appointed as of 1 January 1915,⁷⁷⁴ and they were expected to have moved to their

⁷⁷⁰ Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 3 December 1914: p. 142. See also Malay minutes, no. NM2, 3 December 1914: pp. 319–20.

⁷⁷¹ These nominees would be selected from the current neighbourhood chiefs.

⁷⁷² Chinese minutes, no. 21025, 30 December 1914: pp. 145–14. See also Malay minutes, no. NM2, 30 December 1914: p. 325.

⁷⁷³ In the Malay minutes of the Chinese Council's board meetings, the writers and messengers, known to the public as *twidies* and *sareans*, are defined as “second-neighbourhood chiefs” and “sergeants”. The Chinese minutes recorded the writers and messengers as 對理 and 是連, both corruptions of the Malay words *twidie* and *sarean*, which were loan-words of the Dutch words *tweede* (second) and sergeant.

⁷⁷⁴ See Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 4 January 1915: pp. 1–2, and Malay minutes, no. NM3, 4 January 1915: pp. 3–4 for a detailed list of the selected neighbourhood chiefs, their assistants and their assigned jurisdictions.

assigned neighbourhoods by 1 April.⁷⁷⁵ In 1916 the uniforms of the neighbourhood chiefs were determined by the assistant-resident:

- The official uniform for daily use consisted of a white jacket, white trousers and a white cap. The jacket had five buttons inscribed with the letter *W*.⁷⁷⁶ The cap was adorned with a crown or oak branch;
- The ceremonial uniform for special occasions consisted of a black jacket and black trousers. The jacket was adorned with two stripes. The trousers were also adorned with stripes.⁷⁷⁷

Although the neighbourhood chiefs were now officially employed by the government, they still received the *collecteloon*⁷⁷⁸ for taxes collected from people whose yearly income did not exceed six thousand guilders. People earning more than that had to pay their taxes at the tax office themselves without the intervention of the neighbourhood chiefs.⁷⁷⁹ Those chiefs who were not selected as of January 1 were honourably discharged, and the Chinese Council established a fund to offer financial help for those who were not able to find a new job.⁷⁸⁰ The major compliantly accepted these changes. In the New Year's meeting of 17 February 1915, when the Council's office was reopened, he regretted the cuts in his staff but also expressed his gratitude for the selection of

⁷⁷⁵ Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 3 April 1915: pp. 18–19. See also Malay minutes, no. NM3, 3 April 1915: p. 33.

⁷⁷⁶ The *W* stood for Wilhelmina and referred to Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands.

⁷⁷⁷ Malay minutes, no. NM3, 6 September 1916: pp. 179–80. See also Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 6 September 1916: p. 112.

⁷⁷⁸ The *collecteloon* was a percentage of the tax collection (8 percent), which the neighbourhood chiefs received for their tax collection services.

⁷⁷⁹ Malay minutes, no. NM4, 3 January 1922: pp. 280–81; Malay minutes, no. NM5, 16 October 1922: pp. 32–33.

⁷⁸⁰ Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 8 February 1915: pp. 7–8. See also Malay minutes, NM3, 8 February 1915: p. 15.

his most capable men: “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” (*Lebih baik satoe boeroeng di tangan dari 10 jang ada di atas awan*).⁷⁸¹

In the meantime, the Chinese Council of Batavia continued its activities. There were no captains officially in office anymore; acting Captain Khouw Keng Liong retired in 1917, while Captain Lie Tjian Tjoen stepped down in 1919. Major Khouw Kim An also officially retired in 1919, but on special request of the government, he remained active as a titular major.⁷⁸² Lieutenant Tan Tjin Bok died in 1919. Five lieutenants and one secretary were still officially in office.⁷⁸³ Although membership had been reduced, the Council still convened almost once a month. From 1918 to 1919, Captain Lie Tjian Tjoen, as *waarnemend* (acting) *majoer* took the chair from Major Khouw Kim An, who almost disappeared entirely from the Council meetings in those years. He only appeared in the meeting of 4 March 1918, still in the function of major and chairman of the Council. After Captain Lie retired, the meetings were chaired by Lieutenant Lay Soen Hie, but Lie Tjian Tjoen still attended the meetings as a titular major. In the meeting of 17 March 1920 titular Major Khouw Kim An resumed chairmanship, probably because the Dutch had asked him to.⁷⁸⁴

But with only five official members active, there was not always a quorum of at least five members in attendance. In light of this, Resident Hunger approved the following changes regarding the quorum: if the Council had six members, the attendance of at least four members was required (including the chairman); in case of four to five members the attendance of at least three members was required; if there were only two or three members, the attendance of at least two members was required (but a minimum of three persons had to attend the meeting: the chairman, one member, and

⁷⁸¹ Malay minutes, no. NM3, 17 February 1915: pp. 17–18. See also Chinese minutes, no. 21026, 17 February 1915: pp. 9–10.

⁷⁸² Khouw Kim An retired by Gouvernementsbesluit, 24 March 1919, no.15.

⁷⁸³ These lieutenants were Oh Sian Tjeng, Liong A Tjan, Oeij Kim Liong, Lie Sin Leng and Lay Soen Hie. Khoe Siau Eng was the remaining secretary.

⁷⁸⁴ Interestingly, from this meeting on the use of officer titles disappeared. From then on everyone who attended the meetings was addressed to as *Toean* (Sir), even the persons who were still official Council members.

the secretary). The changes were ratified by Residentsbesluit of 23 March 1920, no. 7174/6, and in the Council meeting of 14 April 1920 the remaining members of the Chinese Council officially agreed with this change of rule.⁷⁸⁵

Although the Chinese Council continued its activities, the plans to abolish it were still on the table. In the meeting of 8 September 1921, Assistant-Resident Gessler Verschuur informed the Chinese officers and neighbourhood chiefs that “proposals regarding the reorganisation of Chinese administration were in progress, but were unlikely to be implemented within a short period”.⁷⁸⁶

6.4 Looking for Plan B: a new discussion on reforming Chinese administration

After so many Chinese people had vehemently rejected the proposed reforms in Chinese administration, the government was forced to reconsider the plans formulated in the September 1917 meeting. The concept of a unified city administration was not completely abandoned, but it clearly could not be realised in the near future. This was also due to the disagreement that arose between the government officials on the specific details regarding the unification plans. From the Chinese Council meeting of 3 December 1917 it appears that the colonial government officials still disagreed about how to collect taxes once the Chinese officers were dismissed.⁷⁸⁷ Nor was there agreement about when to transfer more authority from the assistant-resident to the mayor, as it was intended to delegate the unified city administration to the municipal government. Governmental cutbacks delayed the reforms even more.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁵ Chinese minutes, no. 21028, 17 March 1920, pp. 3–5. See also Malay minutes, no. NM4, 17 March 1920, pp. 116–117; Residentsbesluit, 20 August 1907, no. 15548/36 regarding the official instruction for the Chinese Council, section 9, subsection 2, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta; Malay minutes, no. NM4, 14 April 1920, pp. 129–131; and Residentsbesluit, 23 March 1920, no. 7174/6. See also Hesseling-Tjan, “The Kong Koan in Crisis”, 121.

⁷⁸⁶ Malay minutes, no. NM4, 8 September 1921: pp. 258–59.

⁷⁸⁷ Malay minutes, no. NM4, 3 December 1917: p. 28.

⁷⁸⁸ Confidential letter from the Director of Internal Affairs to the Governor-General, 1 December 1923, no. 800, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 2065, ANRI, Jakarta.

The Kuo Min Tang: an imminent threat

Yet political developments in China began to alarm the government officials. The Office for Chinese Affairs warned the government that the Chinese nationalist movement, inspired by the revolutionary ideology of the Kuo Min Tang (KMT), posed a potential threat in the Indies.⁷⁸⁹ The office contended that Chinese political activity in the Indies mirrored China's policy regarding its overseas subjects. Therefore the colonial government should follow events in China and all non-peranakan Chinese activities closely. In an overview on the Chinese movement in the Indies, the office reported that in the last years of the imperial regime the ideological principles of Dr Sun Yat-sen had begun to gain influence among the Indies Chinese, as well as among overseas Chinese in the United States and Canada. Overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, especially the peranakan community on Java, were initially quite conservative and preferred Kang Youwei's reformist ideas. Nevertheless, towards the end of Manchu rule more and more peranakans turned their support to the revolution. The shift of the Nanyang Chinese allegiance from reform to revolution was due partly to internal strife among the reformists and partly to effective propaganda and persistence of Dr Sun.⁷⁹⁰ In 1905 Sun organised various anti-monarchist groups into the Tung Meng Hui (Revolutionary Alliance) in Tokyo, which planned and supported the overthrow of the Manchu regime up to the proclamation of the Chinese Republic on 1 January 1912. The Chinese historian Yen Ching-hwang considers the organisation to be the mainstream of the 1911 revolution.⁷⁹¹ The role of the overseas Chinese in the revolution was also important:

They became the main source of finance for funding various revolts in China and they contributed part of the manpower to the revolution. Overseas Chinese communities

⁷⁸⁹ Confidential letter from the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 10 August 1925, no. 1384/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁷⁹⁰ Shih-shan Ho Tsai, "The Revolution of 1911 and the Role of the Overseas Chinese", 16.

⁷⁹¹ Yen, "Nanyang Chinese and the 1911 Revolution", 23.

became the centres for publishing and spreading the revolutionary message; they also became the bases for planning and staging revolts, and the sanctuaries for revolutionary refugees.⁷⁹²

The Tung Meng Hui was reorganised as the KMT in Peking on 25 August 1912. The Batavia branch of the party opened the next January and more Indies Chinese became attracted to its revolutionary doctrine. Peranakans who felt left behind by the colonial government increasingly shifted their support to the revolutionaries. Together with the totok Chinese, they dreamt of a big and powerful Chinese state that would some day come to the rescue of its overseas sons.⁷⁹³

The KMT frequently sent revolutionary comrades to the Indies in an attempt to nurture the revolutionary spirit among the Indies Chinese. The KMT movement and its sympathisers were mostly active in the Soe Po Sia book clubs, but the press and educational institutions were also infiltrated. Nearly every Chinese newspaper editor in the Indies and a large percentage of Chinese schoolteachers were born in China and members of the KMT, and they tried to get their fellow party members from China to fill vacancies in the world of print and education. The Chinese government also sent some propagandists disguised as journalists or teachers to the Netherlands Indies in order to spread the anti-imperialistic message.⁷⁹⁴

After the foundation of the Chinese Republic, Sun Yat-sen was proclaimed president of the republic for a few weeks in 1912 until he resigned in favour of Yuan Shikai, a powerful military leader of the Qing who had shifted his support to the new republic. To give way to Yuan Shikai was a strategic move of Sun as Yuan possessed military strength to keep the young republic together.

⁷⁹² Ibid., 26.

⁷⁹³ “Overzicht over de Chineesche beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië”, ANRI, Jakarta; Suryadinata, *Prominent Indonesian Chinese*, 124.

⁷⁹⁴ “Overzicht over de Chineesche beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië”, ANRI, Jakarta; Shiraishi, “Anti-Sinicism in Java’s New Order”, 200.

However, after Yuan was appointed president he quickly showed signs of dictatorial behaviour. In 1913, he ordered the KMT disbanded and two years later he proclaimed himself emperor, though he was forced to abdicate as there was no common support for this move.⁷⁹⁵

Between 1916 and 1928 China was divided among competing warlords. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 inspired Sun Yat-sen to revive the KMT. But he needed help to eliminate the warlords and reunify the politically fragmented country. He found help in the Soviet Union and in 1923 he forged an alliance with the Comintern. The KMT-Comintern alliance meant cooperation with the nascent Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It was a marriage of convenience for both parties but quite fragile because of ideological differences. Both parties agreed on the evils of imperialism, but Sun Yat-sen did not link imperialism with class struggle. He favoured the struggle of oppressed nations against oppressing nations. Thus, his interests were pure nationalist rather than communist.⁷⁹⁶

Sun died of cancer in March 1925, by which time the Communist-KMT alliance had become a mass movement. The growth of the CCP and its influence on the nationalist government in Canton put the KMT on the defensive and ideological differences began to strain the fragile alliance. In 1926 Chiang Kai-shek staged a *coup d'état* at Canton and ousted part of the CCP leadership and some Soviet advisors. Like Sun, he emphasised anti-imperialism on a united, national basis rather than through class warfare. Yet he reaffirmed his loyalty to the alliance with the Comintern as he needed CCP and Soviet support to undertake the great Northern Expedition to crush the warlords and reunify the country under one government. Yet a split was unavoidable and during the expedition Chiang Kai-shek openly turned against the communists. In 1928 China was under nominal control of Chiang who established his capital in Nanking.⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁹⁵ J. K. Fairbank and M. Goldman, *China: A New History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 250–53; Fairbank and Reischauer, *China*, 413–19.

⁷⁹⁶ Fairbank and Goldman, *China*, 279–83.

⁷⁹⁷ Fairbank and Reischauer, *China*, 446–51; Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 314–52.

Although peranakan Chinese came to support the revolutionaries, after the foundation of the Chinese Republic, the political chaos made them realise that waiting for China's aid was hopeless. They increasingly focussed on the Netherlands Indies as their home country and it is questionable whether the KMT really posed a serious threat to the Netherlands Indies. The rekindled interest in local affairs of the peranakans led to renewed discord with the totoks. In an open letter that was published in the *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* in 1912, a peranakan Chinese defined the members of the Soe Po Sia as a reckless and arrogant group that tried to stir up the Chinese people against the colonial government. When the Soe Po Sia was founded in Batavia, the organisation asked to use some rooms of the THHK building for its activities. The THHK refused because the organisation was well aware of the revolutionary ideas the Soe Po Sia was advertising.⁷⁹⁸ The same peranakan Chinese pointed out that the members of the Soe Po Sia could not get along with the local peranakans in Batavia because the peranakan Chinese did not wish to cooperate with them: "They [the Soe Po Sia members] accuse us of having sold ourselves to the Dutch, but we understand the laws of the colonial state; we know what we are allowed to do and what not."⁷⁹⁹ Thus, even though the popularity of the KMT movement peaked in the 1910s, it was unlikely that most peranakan Chinese in Batavia would join the *singkeh* organisations. That the revolutionary ideas of the KMT increasingly lost influence among the Indies Chinese was also shown in July 1925, when the Chinese consul-general in Batavia organised a memorial ceremony to pay respect to the deceased Dr Sun Yat-sen. The attendance was poor, owing to the reluctance of the Chinese officers to summon their people to attend the ceremony. The failure of this memorial service demonstrated the Indies Chinese' indifference to political developments in China, but it also implied that the Chinese officers still had influence in Batavia.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁸ "Een Chinees over de Chineesche Beweging", *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 1:2 (1912): 667–72.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 669–70.

⁸⁰⁰ Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia*, 170–71.

According to the Office for Chinese Affairs, enthusiasm for the nationalist movement was due not to home-grown changes in attitudes among the peranakan Chinese, but to government policies that prevented further influence from China infiltrating the peranakan Chinese, including frequent inspections in the press and schools and the expulsion of every journalist and teacher who expressed anti-imperialistic ideas. After these intellectuals had been expelled, leadership fell into the hands of incompetent persons who degraded the movement into a tame, slow-moving organisation. As a result, more and more Indies Chinese became attracted to local politics, leading to the emergence of the Chung Hwa Hui as the dominant party among the peranakan Chinese.⁸⁰¹

In spite of reduced KMT influence over the Indies Chinese, the Office for Chinese Affairs still found it necessary to issue warnings about recent developments in China. The Chinese government was too weak to assert itself in foreign politics, but this did not mean that it did not try to do so. Although the warlords competed against each other, they recognised the existence of the Chinese state, and the Peking government continued to have a diplomatic role.⁸⁰² Chinese consuls were instructed to protect Chinese inhabitants overseas against the “cruel regulations and foreign suppression” and to strengthen the ties between Chinese emigrants and their motherland as much as possible.⁸⁰³ The KMT-Comintern alliance and the Northern Expedition indicated the advent of a strong and powerful Chinese nation and rang alarm bells in the Dutch East Indies. In the eyes of the Office for Chinese Affairs, this imminent nationalist threat from China was all the encouragement the colonial government needed to establish firm leadership over the Indies Chinese soon. The ill-fated reform plans had put Chinese administration in limbo, which made the Indies Chinese susceptible to KMT manipulation. Therefore, the establishment of a solid administration “that

⁸⁰¹ “Overzicht over de Chineesche beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië”, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸⁰² Fairbank and Reischauer, *China*, 424.

⁸⁰³ “Overzicht over de Chineesche beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië”, ANRI, Jakarta.

understands, supports, and improves the interests of this group” was crucial for the development and continued peaceful existence of the colonial state.⁸⁰⁴

The decision to restore the institution of Chinese officers in Batavia

In the period 1920–26 three consecutive *residenten* of the Batavia residency submitted proposals for reforming the Chinese administration. Although details varied, the proposals had a common purpose: to reinstate the role of Chinese middlemen. Resident J. D. Hunger, who submitted the first proposal, seemed susceptible to the objection raised by the Chinese that as long as the government retained indigenous leadership, the government had no right to abolish the Chinese community leaders. Hunger argued that it was still necessary to appoint Chinese intermediaries between the European administration and the neighbourhood chiefs. But he recommended dismissing the remaining Chinese officers, including the titular officers still functioning in Batavia and Meester-Cornelis⁸⁰⁵ and appointing two *Chineesche bestuursambtenaren* (Chinese administrative officials) as intermediaries, one for Batavia and one for Weltevreden.⁸⁰⁶ These would be added to the staff of the assistant-resident to carry out the tasks being (sporadically) fulfilled by the Chinese officers and Council secretaries, such as advising the government committees of taxation and immigration. The *bestuursambtenaren* would also have a seat in the Chinese Committee that would manage the properties of the Chinese Council, which would be abolished, as discussed in the meeting of September 1917. The neighbourhood chiefs would, according to current practice, have an advisory

⁸⁰⁴ Confidential letter from the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 10 August 1925, no. 1384/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸⁰⁵ The positions of captain and lieutenant of the Chinese in Meester-Cornelis had been vacant for quite some time and no suitable candidates could be found to fill the vacancies.

⁸⁰⁶ Meester-Cornelis only had one Chinese quarter and therefore it was not necessary to appoint a *Chineesche bestuursambtenaar* there. The Chinese neighbourhood chief would be directly accountable to the controleur. See letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 18 May 1920, no. 363/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

role in proceedings of the *Landraad* that involved Chinese citizens. The *bestuursambtenaren* would be part of colonial officialdom and would, to a greater extent than the Chinese officers, actually assist the controleur in his daily activities concerning city administration.⁸⁰⁷ The proposals of Hunger's successors Schenk de Jong and J. C. de Bergh apparently sought the restoration of the Chinese officer system. The two residents kept in mind that someday all ethnic groups in the three *hoofdplaatsen* of Java would be placed under a unified city administration. However, they did not expect that the unification plans could be carried out in the near future and both agreed that the Chinese people in Batavia were now vulnerable to KMT manipulation. Therefore, it was imperative to have strong Chinese leadership in the interim. For practical reasons, the restoration of the Chinese officers was preferable to the creation of a new system of young and ambitious, but inexperienced Chinese administrators.⁸⁰⁸

Advisor for Chinese Affairs H. Mouw strongly opposed the reintroduction of the Chinese officer system, which would perpetuate the special position of the Chinese in the colonial state—*die van staatje in den staat*—and obstruct a possible forthcoming equal position of the Chinese in colonial society.⁸⁰⁹ Instead, he favoured appointing one Chinese official and two assistants to help the local government in administering the 50,000 Chinese residing in Batavia and Weltevreden (including Meester-Cornelis). These officials would be directly accountable to the European administration. For the sake of tradition, Mouw did not object to giving the official and his two assistants the titles of “major” and “captain”, but under no circumstances were they to be

⁸⁰⁷ Letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 18 May 1920, no. 363/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸⁰⁸ Confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 10 August 1925, no. 1384/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta; Confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor of West Java, 7 June 1926, no. 583/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta; Confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor of West Java, 25 October 1926, no. 924/E, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸⁰⁹ Confidential letter of the Advisor for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 16 July 1926, no. 367/26, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

considered permanent Chinese community leaders. Rather, they were to facilitate the transition to a unified city administration in which all ethnic groups would be administered by the same neighbourhood officials.

The advisor for Chinese affairs argued that reverting to the officer system was also unnecessary, because nowadays the Chinese people could easily find their way to the authorities to express their grievances, and this seldom required engagement with the Chinese officer. Moreover, the Chinese Council was no longer involved in marriage and divorce affairs and it no longer gave advice on inheritance cases. The police had their own Chinese detective force, and the taxation office also had its own Chinese officials and interpreters. Hence, it should be sufficient to appoint one Chinese administrative official and two assistants for Batavia and Weltevreden. This advice from the Office for Chinese Affairs suggests again that it had a poor understanding of the *peranakan* community of Batavia, whose protest campaigns in favour of retaining the officers were clear and persistent. The office chose to ignore them and saw the issue through the prism of criticism from previous decades,⁸¹⁰ although Mouw's considerations could also be seen in view of Oudendijk's report of 1914, which aimed at initiating further homogenisation of administrative structures while discarding privileged feudal institutions.

In the end, Schenk de Jong and De Bergh's plans calling for the restoration of the Chinese officer system were approved, although some details would be changed in the final draft. The government had observed that the Chinese people, especially in Batavia, had moderated their hostility towards the officers. The Batavian Chinese even campaigned to keep the officers as community leaders, whereas the majority of the Chinese-Malay newspapers had suspended their fierce campaign against them.⁸¹¹ In 1925 W. V. Smeets, acting director of internal affairs, confirmed this change of attitude towards the Chinese officer system:

⁸¹⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹¹ See the confidential letter of the Advisor of Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 16 July 1926, no. 367/26, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

In recent years it appears that the aversion against the institute of Chinese officers is by far not as great as expected. The majority of the regional government officials also opine that the Chinese officers cannot be missed for the time being. The government cannot assent to the assertion that the majority of these civil servants are not able to cope with their tasks, although it willingly acknowledges that Chinese affairs in these regions have changed so much that different requirements should be met for the officers.⁸¹²

The governor of West Java also agreed that the Chinese officers were still needed in Batavia and he recommended the Chinese officer system as the best option for the city's administration over the Chinese—at least for the time being. He also anticipated that it would no longer be difficult to find candidates for the officer posts because the Chinese Council was no longer held in low esteem by a large part of the Chinese community. Ironically, the lack of candidates was one of the key reasons why the government started the reform plans in the first place.⁸¹³ The Chinese officers also regained their confidence, and perhaps even got a little bit overconfident. In the Council meeting of 27 January 1927, Captain Lie Tjian Tjoen congratulated Major Khouw Kim An and Lieutenant Yo Heng Kam with their (re)appointment in the People's Council and said:

Nowadays Chinese people acquire fancy titles after having completed their high education. But the fact that two of our members have been chosen (again) as council members shows that we, Chinese officers are still appreciated by the Chinese people.

The responsibilities of a People's Council member are not to be taken lightly and this

⁸¹² *Handelingen van den Volksraad*, 14th meeting (26 June 1925): p. 474.

⁸¹³ Confidential letter of the Governor of West Java to the Director of Internal Affairs, 23 June 1926, no. G 18/2/12, *Binnenlandsch Bestuur*, no.1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

confirms that the Chinese people have faith in us as representatives of the Chinese community.⁸¹⁴

6.5 The final draft for restoring the Chinese officer system

Let us now examine the final draft of plans to restore the Chinese officer system. According to a report of the controleur of Batavia, in 1925 the Chinese community in Batavia consisted of ± 50.000 people supervised by twelve Chinese neighbourhood chiefs in the following areas:

1. District Batavia with $\pm 22,500$ people, supervised by nine neighbourhood chiefs;
2. District Weltevreden with $\pm 17,000$ people, scattered through the neighbourhoods of Pasar Senen (nearly 10,000), Pasar Baroe (over 4,000), and Tanah Abang ($\pm 3,000$), and supervised by three neighbourhood chiefs;
3. Division Meester-Cornelis with $\pm 8,000$ people.⁸¹⁵

It was decided to retain the neighbourhood chiefs with their titles, although it was deemed more practical and financially attractive (by making it easier to collect taxes, for instance) to combine certain Chinese neighbourhoods so that fewer neighbourhood chiefs would be needed. The government decided to reduce the number of neighbourhood chiefs in the district of Batavia from nine to five. In addition, it was decided to attach Meester-Cornelis to Weltevreden, giving the enlarged Weltevreden a total population of ± 25.000 Chinese, with one extra neighbourhood chief. In sum, the number of neighbourhood chiefs in Batavia and Weltevreden would be reduced from

⁸¹⁴ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 27 January 1927: pp. 262–63. Major Khouw Kim An was reappointed, while Lieutenant Yo Heng Kam was appointed for the first time in 1927 as member of the People's Council.

⁸¹⁵ Confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 10 August 1925, no. 1384/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

twelve to nine, five in Batavia and four in Weltevreden.⁸¹⁶ The neighbourhood chiefs would receive a monthly salary of 50–100 guilders (an average of 75 guilders). The 8 percent *collecteloon* (almost 200 guilders per month) that the neighbourhood chiefs previously received would be reduced to 5 percent (125 guilders), but they would be provided with an office phone and clerks, assistant-clerks, and messengers.⁸¹⁷

Two captains would be appointed in Batavia and Weltevreden to supervise the neighbourhood chiefs with a monthly allowance (*toelage*) of 300 guilders, and an additional 75–150 guilders for office rent and travel expenses. A clerk and two messengers would be added to their staff and they, too, would be provided with an office phone.⁸¹⁸ The captains would each be assisted by two lieutenants, who were required to have completed a training as interpreters and to speak fluent Mandarin Chinese and the usual spoken dialect of Batavia. These requirements were an obvious attempt at soothing the totok community. The lieutenants should receive an average allowance of f 200,- per month and an additional f 25,- for travel expenses. They should be provided with an office phone and two messengers.⁸¹⁹

The *majoer der Chineezen* was to assume leadership over the captains, lieutenants, and neighbourhood chiefs, and the government favoured reappointing Khouw Kim An for this post,

⁸¹⁶ Confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 10 August 1925, no. 1384/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta; Confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor of West Java, 7 June 1926, no. 583/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸¹⁷ The clerks should receive an average salary of f 40,- per month. The assistant-clerks and messengers should be paid around f 25,- per month. See confidential letter from the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 10 August 1925, no. 1384/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸¹⁸ The captain's clerk would receive an average salary of f 75,- per month and the messengers f 25,- per month. See confidential letter from the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 10 August 1925, no. 1384/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸¹⁹ The lieutenant's messengers should, just like the neighbourhood chief's messengers, receive a monthly salary of 25 guilders. See confidential letter from the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 10 August 1925, no. 1384/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

even though the advisor for Chinese affairs warned against his reappointment because of Khouw's "fickle" opinion of the Chinese officer system. The advisor pointed out that in 1919 Khouw had been dismissed from the major's post at his own request, and after the government convinced him to stay on as acting titular major, he repeatedly asked to be relieved of his duties. At a meeting of the People's Council in 1925, Khouw declared that "the so-called institute of Chinese officers was outdated and untenable",⁸²⁰ but by the time that word came out that he would be renominated for the post he seemed to have changed his mind about the officer system and even recommended the appointment of three captains and six lieutenants for Batavia and Weltevreden. Despite the advisor's misgivings about appointing a person with such inconsistent views about the Chinese Council,⁸²¹ Khouw became the first choice for the post because the government considered him diligent and reliable, and he and his family were well respected in the Chinese community. He would receive a fixed allowance of f 400,- per month and an additional f 26.100,- for the period April 1919–June 1926 in which he, at the government's request, actively served as (titular) major, despite his official retirement on 24 March 1919.⁸²²

The officers and neighbourhood chiefs would assist the local government with the civil registry of people in the Chinese community, and they would be responsible for the tax collection, providing information on tax assessments, taking care of emigration and immigration affairs, and providing information on Chinese political movements and public opinion of the European administration. Since the officers were to receive a fixed allowance rather than an official salary, the government realised that it could not prohibit the officers from taking other jobs on the side, for to

⁸²⁰ Handelingen van den Volksraad, 8th meeting (19 June 1925): p. 242.

⁸²¹ Confidential letter of the Advisor for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 16 July 1926, no. 367/26, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸²² Gouvernementsbesluit, 24 March 1919, no. 15, ANRI, Jakarta. See also confidential letter from the Resident of Batavia to the Governor of West Java, 7 June 1926, no. 583/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

The amount of f 26.100,- was based on 87 months (300 guilders per month) of unpaid services and expenses between April 1919 and June 1926.

do so would make qualified people reluctant to take the post. The *majoor der Chineezen* would still be accountable to the assistant-resident and not to the municipal government. With regard to smaller cities with sizeable Chinese communities, it was decided to retain the existing system of neighbourhood chiefs and unpaid captains and lieutenants, at least for the moment.⁸²³

The government acknowledged that the persons nominated for the officer posts had never received formal administrative instruction—due to the government’s own negligence to train the Chinese officers. However, the government still valued the experienced officers and agreed with Resident De Bergh who warned against appointing young educated and ambitious Chinese with “fancy diplomas” who lacked appropriate experience. In cooperation with the neighbourhood chiefs, the new officers—who had both experience and influence in the Chinese community—would be able to counter nationalist influences among the Indies Chinese. The irony is that one of the main reasons the government sought to dismantle the Chinese officer system was its conviction that the Chinese officers were unable to cope with the nationalist influences from China. The colonial government seems to have changed its mind about this or simply felt it had no better alternative to counteract KMT activities about which the Office for Chinese Affairs had warned.⁸²⁴ Another perhaps more plausible consideration is that the colonial government had no choice but to surrender to the Batavian Chinese protests against doing away with the Chinese Council. In the end, though, it had little to fear from either the Beiyang government (the warlords) or the KMT, as neither was able to gain a firm foothold in the Netherlands Indies. In Batavia, especially, the majority of the Chinese were indifferent to these Chinese influences. The Northern Expedition led by Chiang Kai-shek also made no difference. It is more likely that the colonial government had

⁸²³ Confidential letter from the Resident of Batavia to the Director of Internal Affairs, 10 August 1925, no. 1384/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta; Confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor of West Java, 7 June 1926, no. 583/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸²⁴ Confidential letter of the Resident of Batavia to the Governor of West Java, 7 June 1926, no. 583/C, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

given in to the Chinese claims in favour of keeping the Chinese Council in function. But it should be noted that Dutch officials continued to view the restoration of the Chinese officer system as a temporary measure pending the establishment of a unified administration.

6.6 Restoration of the Chinese officer system in Batavia

By September 1927, the reorganisation of Chinese administration in Batavia was complete. Chinese administration was composed of one major, two captains, and four lieutenants, who were assigned to the districts Batavia and Weltevreden.⁸²⁵ All officers were subjected to the supervision of the head of local administration (the assistant-resident) and their allowances were determined at 400, 300 and 200 guilders respectively.⁸²⁶ It was decided that nine neighbourhood chiefs would be appointed for the supervision of the Chinese neighbourhoods in Batavia and Weltevreden (including Meester-Cornelis). The remaining three neighbourhood chiefs were to be dismissed before December 1927. The discharged neighbourhood chiefs would be entitled to receive reduced pay (*wachtgeld*), which would comprise 80 percent of their last received salaries.⁸²⁷

There were no plans to resurrect the Chinese Councils of Semarang and Soerabaja. As mentioned in chapter 3, there had been a strong link between the officer post and the revenue farms⁸²⁸ in these cities, and after the farms had been abolished from the late nineteenth century

⁸²⁵ The officers who were (re)appointed were Major Khouw Kim An, Captain Yo Kim Thay, Captain Yo Heng Kam, Lieutenant Tan Yam Hok, Lieutenant Lie Boen Sin, Lieutenant Tan In Hok, and Lieutenant Na Tjioe Kim. The Gouvernementsbesluit of 3 February 1927, no. 26 reappointed Khouw Kim An as major and chairman of the Chinese Council, and Yo Kim Thay and Yo Heng Kam as captains. Lieutenants Lie Boen Sin, Tan In Hok, and Na Tjioe Kim were officially appointed as *luitenant der Chineezzen* by Gouvernementsbesluit no. 12 of 27 September 1927. Tan Yam Hok had officially been a lieutenant since 1925 and was allowed to stay on.

⁸²⁶ Just as before, these allowances (*toelagen*) were to be considered as a compensation for expenses made during the performance of their duties, not as official salaries.

⁸²⁷ Malay minutes, no. NM5, 10 December 1927: pp. 300–301.

⁸²⁸ Rush, *Opium to Java*, chap. 5.

onwards, the post ceased to be popular in the eastern and central part of Java. In 1914, only the position of major was filled in Semarang, while public and religious ceremonies were increasingly taken over by the Chinese associations.⁸²⁹ The situation in Soerabaja was not much different. In 1919 Han Tjong Khing, the major of Soerabaja, wrote a letter to the assistant-resident in which he pleaded for the quick implementation of the announced reforms. He wrote that for years he had been carrying out the duties of the Chinese Council with the assistance of only two neighbourhood chiefs, who had been assigned to take up the duties of a Chinese lieutenant. For years, the six lieutenant posts had been vacant, since no suitable candidates could be found willing to fill the vacancies. For the same reason, the retired Captain The Ing Bie (1916) had not been replaced.⁸³⁰ The major pointed out that he also had been paying for the use of office space and office staff himself, while increasingly feeling reluctant to continue his duty as head of the Chinese community. Because of the ongoing criticism in the Chinese press, the office could not please him anymore. The Chinese community also no longer seemed to appreciate the officers. The only reason why he stayed on as *majoor der Chineezen* was because the resident had asked him not to resign.⁸³¹ In 1924 Major Han Tjong Khing resigned from office.⁸³²

That the Chinese Councils of Semarang and Soerabaja were almost completely defunct can be explained by the fact that the Councils had never been able to acquire the same important

⁸²⁹ “Persoverzicht: De Chineesche Pers, Februari-Maart 1914”, *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 3:1 (1914): 821; minutes of the meeting held on 1–2 September 1917 at the Department of Internal Affairs, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta. According to the Regeerings-almanak, Captain Liem Hiok Liam was still officially in function until the early 1930s, but it is possible that from 1914 onwards the captain no longer actively carried out his duties as a Chinese officer.

⁸³⁰ Letter of the Resident of Soerabaja to the Director of Internal Affairs, 31 March 1919, no. 11/23h, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 4406, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸³¹ Confidential letter of the Resident of Soerabaja to the Director of Internal Affairs, 27 March 1920, no. 151, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸³² Letter of the Governor of East Java to the Director of Internal Affairs, 13 December 1928, no. 21/25H, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

position in Chinese administration like the Batavian Council. In Batavia, the post of Chinese officer did not depend as much on the revenue farms as in the rest of Java. Since the Company commenced with public land sales, the Batavian Chinese had acquired a considerable amount of land in Batavia and the Ommelanden. While the Chinese grip on the local economy in East and Central Java slackened after the abolition of the revenue farms, the Chinese in the western part of the island managed to retain a great part of their capital through private landownership that was not allowed elsewhere on Java.⁸³³ And so did the Chinese Council of Batavia. Even though the Chinese people did not fully depend on the Council anymore after the government took over some core activities, the Chinese Council of Batavia remained an important administrative institution with the management of its own land and properties, its huge financial funds and the management and supervision of the cemeteries and local temples. Therefore, Chinese protest against the end of the Batavian Council was partly rooted in the fear of a governmental take-over of the Council's possessions and financial management, which would possibly lead to the suspension of financial support to the various charitable foundations and educational institutions, and a more Western arrangement of selling Chinese graves.⁸³⁴ Moreover, the Batavian Council was the only institution that represented Chinese self-sufficiency and independence. The Councils of Semarang and Soerabaja had never acquired that much wealth. This was especially demonstrated by Major Han Tjong Khing who had to pay for office facilities himself.

The Semarang Chinese officers were not consulted anymore on matters such as the Chinese movement and the conduct of political figures in the Chinese community. The detective force of the local police department had its own Chinese officials and interpreters. The officers were also never asked again for advice on the foundation of public limited companies and associations, the approval

⁸³³ Chen, *De Chinese Gemeenschap van Batavia*, 94–5; Djie Ting Ham, “Enkele Opmerkingen over den Economischen Toestand van de Chineezzen op Java”, 48–49.

⁸³⁴ Letter of the Advisor for Chinese Affairs to the Director of Internal Affairs, 28 September 1918, no. 379/18, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1935, ANRI, Jakarta.

and amendment of statutes, the establishment of factories and workplaces, and so on.⁸³⁵ Thus, even though Chinese public opinion in Semarang shifted in support of the Chinese officers, it was unlikely that the officer system could be restored there. The situation in Soerabaja was even worse. Not only were the Chinese of Soerabaja reluctant to participate in the protest campaigns that were organised in support of the officers, they even pleaded with the colonial government for the abolition of the Chinese officer system.⁸³⁶ The influential totok community of Soerabaja resented the Chinese officers, who were recruited from the wealthy peranakan community. Most of them were not proficient in any of the Chinese dialects and did not maintain close contact with the totok Chinese.⁸³⁷ They were absorbed in their private commercial activities and were hardly aware of the circumstances in the Chinese community. Former Major Han Tjiong Khing was a perfect example for this. He stood far from the Chinese people and had never shown interest in the community, which made him unpopular as a leader.⁸³⁸ The hatred of the totoks toward the Chinese officers could also have been a reaction of feeling discriminated by the colonial government and the established peranakan community, two elements that the Chinese officers represented. The newly arrived totoks were regarded by both the colonial authorities and the established peranakans as inferior. The Chinese officers, established peranakans themselves, stood close to the government and even determined whether they could stay in the Netherlands Indies or not, being members of the immigration committee. The officers were thus the “natural enemies” of the totoks. Just like other newly arrived immigrants elsewhere in the world, the totoks, feeling left out in society,

⁸³⁵ Confidential letter of the Resident of Soerabaja to the Director of Internal Affairs, 20 December 1921, no. 516, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 4406, ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸³⁶ *Sin Po*, 17 November 1916.

⁸³⁷ Liem, “Het Instituut der Chineesche Officieren”, 74.

⁸³⁸ Confidential letter of the Resident of Soerabaja to the Director of Internal Affairs, 28 December 1921, no. 516, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 4406, ANRI, Jakarta; Letter of the Governor of East Java to the Director of Internal Affairs, 13 December 1928, no. 21/25H, Binnenlandsch Bestuur, no. 1672, ANRI, Jakarta.

naturally sought ways to emancipate and pressure the established elite. A natural reaction of newly arrived (struggling) immigrants that is still seen today.

How different the situation was in Batavia. There, the *totok* Chinese had no reason to feel resentful as the non-peranakan Chinese had been represented in the Chinese Council since 1878.⁸³⁹ The peranakan community of Batavia was also not so much susceptible to nationalist influences. As a result, the Chinese turbulences of 1912–13 did not escalate in Batavia (see chapter 4). However, the role of the Chinese officers in these conflicts should not be forgotten. That the situation escalated in Soerabaja can be attributed to the fact that the Chinese officers had lost grip on the Chinese community. The Batavian officers still managed to exercise influence over the Chinese population, which also helped reduce tension between the *singkeh* and peranakan groups.⁸⁴⁰

In 1931 it was decided to allow the institution of Chinese officers to fade away, (with the exception of Batavia).⁸⁴¹ On 8 January 1931, the institution officially came to an end in Semarang, and from then on the Chinese were governed directly by the local government (assistant-resident) with the assistance of Chinese neighbourhood chiefs.⁸⁴² In Soerabaja, the Chinese officer system was officially terminated in 1934. Also here the administration over the Chinese was carried out by Chinese neighbourhood chiefs who were under direct government control.⁸⁴³ The Batavia Council

⁸³⁹ Gouvernementsbesluit, 22 December 1878, no. 19 ANRI, Jakarta.

⁸⁴⁰ See chapter 4.

⁸⁴¹ “Het Bestuur over Vreemde Oosterlingen”, *Indisch Verslag* 1 (1931): 447.

⁸⁴² Willmott, *The Chinese of Semarang*, 19; Liem, *Riwayat Semarang*, 315–16.

⁸⁴³ A. Noordjanah, *Komunitas Tionghoa di Surabaya (1910–1946)* (Semarang: Masyarakat Indonesia Sadar Sejarah (Mesiass), 2004), 61.

was able to survive the storm of criticism that lasted nearly three decades and continued its activities until the Japanese invasion in 1942.⁸⁴⁴

6.7 Conclusion

The Chinese Council of Batavia was in many respects an exceptional case. While the Chinese Councils in Semarang and Soerabaja were unable to survive the sustained criticism of the institution, the Batavia Council and its officers managed to resist the forces working against them. The colonial government was convinced that the totok and peranakan Chinese were no longer willing to be administered by the Chinese officers, but this proved true only outside of Batavia. The government's misconception of the situation in Batavia can be attributed in part to the fact that totoks' dislike of the Chinese officers was discussed in the Chinese-Malay press at great length, which in turn influenced how the Office of Chinese Affairs interpreted the situation. While focussing their attention on the Chinese nationalist movement in China and the Netherlands Indies, the advisors for Chinese affairs ignored the peranakan community. H. H. Kan pointed out how the Dutch authorities were misled in the thirteenth meeting of the People's Council in 1918:

Owing to the inability to separate chaff from wheat, to gauge the actual streams and sentiments among the Chinese population groups, a minority of the Chinese people was able to give the government the impression that the institute of Chinese officers

⁸⁴⁴ It must be noted that the function of major in Medan also ended with the Japanese invasion in 1942. The last major of Medan was Khoe Tjin Tek, who succeeded Tjong A Fie, the high profile entrepreneur in real estate in Medan. See D. A. Buiskool, *Medan: A Plantation City on the East Coast of Sumatera 1870–1942: Planters, the Sultans, Chinese and the Indian* (Surabaya: Airlangga University, in cooperation with the Netherlands Institute of War Documentation, 2004), 8.

was an anachronism, and that therefore the sooner the better one should throw this age-old institution overboard.⁸⁴⁵

As a result, the government was taken by surprise when the Batavian Chinese vehemently rejected the proposed reforms. The prospect of being placed under direct supervision of the colonial authorities without equal status in colonial society caused even the Semarang Chinese to reconsider their views of the Chinese officer system. However, it was too late to resurrect the institution of Chinese officers in Semarang as the Chinese Council had virtually no involvement anymore in Chinese affairs. Nor did the Chinese community of Soerabaja come to the defence of the Chinese officers, which had lost too much influence there because of the influential totok community.

Eventually, the government was forced to recognise that the situation in Batavia was different. Although the peranakans were influenced by developments in China, they were well integrated into the local society of Batavia and environs, which made them resistant to nationalist Chinese influences and reluctant to associate with the *singkeh* Chinese. Instead, they focussed on improving their lot in the colonial state. When they saw that the government was being misled by the pro-China orientated movement and the Office for Chinese Affairs, the peranakans went to great lengths to convince the government that they still valued the Chinese officers. The Chinese Council of Batavia had the longest history in Chinese administration and was the symbol of Chinese self-sufficiency. It conducted the day-to-day work of Chinese administration and managed the Chinese-owned landed properties that for the large part comprised burial grounds, and even when the very existence of the Chinese officer system was under discussion, it continued its activities. Fearing a loss of self-sufficiency and self-reliance was the essence of Chinese protest. If the Chinese were at the mercy of the Dutch without the same status, Chinese self-determination as symbolised by the institution of Chinese officers would be at stake. Thus, when the government intended to place the

⁸⁴⁵ Handelingen van den Volksraad, 13th meeting (19 November 1918): p. 275.

Indies Chinese under direct government control, the Batavia-born Chinese began to fight for what they considered their last hope for self-determination in the colonial state and ultimately came out as winners.