

BANGKA IN THE 1950S: INDONESIAN AUTHORITY AND CHINESE REALITY

Mary Somers Heidhues

After his doctoral research in Thailand, which resulted in two influential books about the Chinese community of that country, American anthropologist G. William Skinner returned to Southeast Asia in 1956–58 as a research associate for the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project. The themes of his earlier research—assimilation and acculturation of the Chinese minority in Thailand, especially their national integration, kinship, and social structure—informed his project in Indonesia. He published a number of articles about the Chinese minority there, but, soon returning to his earlier interest in China, he brought out no major work on Indonesia.¹ Only one assistant completed and published a monograph.² Skinner's papers now repose in various libraries, with his Indonesia materials held by Cornell University Library.

Mary Somers Heidhues has taught at universities in the USA and Germany. Her publications include *Southeast Asia: A Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000) and *Golddiggers, Farmers, and Traders in the "Chinese Districts" of West Kalimantan, Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 2003). The author expresses her thanks to Sharon Carstens, Hui Yew-Foong, Jane Keyes, Claudine Salmon, Myra Sidharta, and *Indonesia*'s reviewer for helpful comments; to the staff members, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, for their support; and to Tjika Thomas (徐啟忠) for assistance with Hakka terms (the author and editors are responsible for any errors).

¹ See: E. A. Hammel, *George William Skinner, 1925–2008: A Biographical Memoir* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 2009), 5–7; and Charles F. Keyes, “Skinner and the Study of Chinese in Thailand and the Study of Thai Society,” unpublished paper from the workshop “The Legacy of G. William Skinner’s Field Research: China and Southeast Asia,” Seattle, WA, 2011. Skinner’s publications are listed at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~chgis/data/skinner/publications.html>, accessed September 24, 2015.

² Giok-lan Tan, *The Chinese of Sukabumi* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1963). I thank Mely Tan for her recollections of working with Skinner in the 1950s (personal communication, September 9 and 11, 2015).

Among these are the extensive research notes of Tan Fay Tjhion, another assistant, who studied the Chinese of Belinyu, Bangka.³

Bangka and Indonesia in the 1950s

My dissertation about Chinese in Indonesia, based on fieldwork in 1961–63, concentrated on an overview of state policies toward that minority from independence to 1963. From the beginning of the 1950s up to Guided Democracy—with its balance of power between the president, the military, and political parties (above all, the Indonesian Communist Party)—anti-Chinese measures grew in intensity.⁴ These included challenges to citizenship, the implementation of the so-called PP-10 regulation forbidding alien retail activity in rural areas (discussed later), and the closing of Chinese-language schools to Indonesian citizens. Although I traveled to some locations outside of Java, my study was distinctly Jakarta-centric.

When in the 1980s I turned to the history of Bangka,⁵ Tan Fay Tjhion's papers were not available, although I knew about his fieldwork. Other source materials were copious, but more information about the island during the 1950s was inaccessible. As Ruth McVey has pointed out, with regard to Indonesian history, the 1950s was a “disappearing decade,” and this was especially true of local history.⁶ And although that decade seems, in retrospect, to have been a period of experimentation in widening democracy and giving meaning to citizenship, a countercurrent existed in which the state was not a defender of a common citizenship but, rather, in the assessment of Henk Schulte-Nordholt, an instrument for feeding “neo-patrimonial networks,” a means “to control and to extract” wealth. By the time of Tan’s stay, “the revolutionary honeymoon [if Bangka had ever had one] was definitely over.”⁷ Economic problems, exacerbated by institutional weakness, nationalist experimentation, and international factors, only made things worse.

The possibility of reconstructing some of this time in Bangka’s history and at the same time seeing how Jakarta’s anti-Sinitic measures played out on the local level led me to delve into Tan’s notes. They document how the Indonesian government was trying to extend its control over the Chinese in Bangka, how the community of

³ G. William Skinner papers, #14-27-2778, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, indexed by Hui Yew-Foong, hereafter “Skinner Papers,” <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMA02778.html>, accessed August 26, 2011. All materials on Bangka are in Box 5, Folders 6–16. The third assistant was Wongsokenongo, who studied Purwokerto.

⁴ Mary F. Somers [Heidhues], “Peranakan Chinese Politics in Indonesia” (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1965).

⁵ See: Mary F. Somers Heidhues, *Bangka Tin and Mentok Pepper* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1992); and Erwiza Erman, *Menguak sejarah timah Bangka-Belitung: Dari pembentukan kampung ke perkara gelap* [Laying open the history of tin in Bangka-Belitung: From the formation of kampungs to illicit matters] (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2009).

⁶ Ruth McVey, “The Case of the Disappearing Decade,” in *Democracy in Indonesia: 1950s and 1990s*, ed. David Bourchier and John Legge (Clayton: Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994), 3–15.

⁷ Henk Schulte-Nordholt, “Indonesia in the 1950s: Nation, Modernity, and the Post-Colonial State,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 167, 4 (2011): 396, 397, 401.

Belinyu responded and resisted, and, above all, how local issues predominated over such questions as Indonesian nationalism and Cold War rivalries.⁸

Tan Fay Tjhion

Between his arrival in Belinyu (then spelled Blinju) in April 1957 and his final departure for Bandung in March 1958, Tan Fay Tjhion,⁹ a native of Belinyu, gathered data, gossip, and impressions about the life of the Chinese there, especially the numerically dominant Hakka.¹⁰ Skinner had his researchers keep a regular diary of their activities and frequently conferred with them personally.¹¹ Tan's diary fills 1,065 typewritten, double-spaced pages, in English.¹² He began a summary report but never finished it, leaving it and his other notes with Skinner. Why he did not finish it, apart from personal reasons, may be apparent from this article.

Belinyu had been the center of one of the oldest and most important tin-mining districts on Bangka before Pangkalpinang became the capital of the island in 1913.¹³ In 1957–58, all of Bangka was a *kabupaten* (district) in the province of South Sumatra.¹⁴ In 2000, Bangka and neighboring Belitung became a province (Babel). Belinyu is now a *kecamatan* (third-level district) in *kabupaten* Bangka Induk (Bangka Regency).

Belinyu interested Skinner because, in 1957, the majority of the region's population of about 25,500 were ethnic Chinese (58.6 percent, or almost 15,000), making it one of the few Chinese-majority districts in Indonesia, and most of these were Hakka.¹⁵ Furthermore, Belinyu was as much rural as it was urban. Still, the area was hardly isolated: airplanes reached Bangka's airport at Pangkalpinang from Jakarta

⁸ An earlier version of part of this article was presented at the workshop "Chinese Diaspora Studies in the Age of Global Modernity," Asia Research Institute, Singapore, November 19, 2015.

⁹ Born in 1921 (or 1920) in Belinyu, Tan Fay Tjhion studied anthropology at the University of Leiden, 1946–52, where he earned a *doctorandus* (master's) degree. He settled in Bandung, teaching at the IKIP (Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Institute of Teacher Education and Educational Sciences) and later at other institutions there. From 1960–62 he pursued a master's degree in library science at New York University. He also worked part time as a translator for the Indonesian MPRS (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara, Interim People's Consultative Assembly, the upper chamber of parliament). As "Felix Tan," he contributed to the periodicals *Star Weekly*, *Intisari*, and the daily *Kompas*. Disappointed by the anti-Chinese atmosphere he experienced, he moved to the United States, where he taught at a community college in Hawaii. He died in 2001.

<http://www.indonesiamedia.com/rubrik/tokoh/tokoh00july.htm>, accessed June 26, 2014. See also his obituary in *Honolulu Star Bulletin*, August 18, 2001, <http://archives.starbulletin.com/2001/08/18/news/obits.html>, accessed September 5, 2014.

¹⁰ Hakka are a Chinese sub-ethnic or speech group that migrated to Indonesia and elsewhere from Fujian and Guangdong provinces.

¹¹ Mely Tan, recollections.

¹² Citations are from Tan's diary ("Diary" and page numbers), his unfinished report ("Report" and page numbers), and other items from the collection as named.

¹³ See "Skinner Notebook," 16, in Skinner Papers, Folder 6.

¹⁴ A province is divided into *kabupaten* (second-level districts), and those into *kecamatan* and *kelurahan* (town quarters). In Tan's time, Belinyu had eleven *kelurahan*—six "Indonesian" and five Chinese, although residence was not necessarily ethnically segregated and lines of administration overlapped. Most Chinese *kelurahan* and Chinese villages had Chinese names, often taken from tin-mining *kongsis* (mine-working organizations). See Tan, "Report," 1, 2, 4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8.

in about an hour, and the trip by bus from there to Belinyu took about two-and-a-half hours on a fairly good road.¹⁶

Tan divides Belinyu's Chinese residents into *peranakan* (those born in Indonesia; unlike Java's *peranakan*, they spoke a variety of Hakka and considered themselves Hakka) and those whom he called "China-born,"¹⁷ who were Hakka, Teochiu, Hokkian, Hokchia, Cantonese, Funam, and "Kongsi" or Guangxi (elsewhere usually called Kwongsai).

Divided by citizenship, just under 8,500 of all Chinese were Indonesian citizens (WNI, *warganegara Indonesia*) and almost 7,000 were considered foreigners (WNA, *warganegara asing*). All foreign-born, and many local-born, were WNA.

For Tan, non-Chinese were "Indonesians," which meant Bangka Malays¹⁸ or "outsiders" (*orang luar*): Javanese, Madurese, Butonese, Buginese, Ambonese, and Bataks. Many Bangka Malays spoke Hakka, in addition to the local Malay, some quite well. All "Indonesians" were citizens.¹⁹

Chinese also differed by education, political attitudes (toward China), and, most important, wealth. The *songka* (商家 or 上家, *shangjia*), the upper class, were those with money, even if it came from illicit activities (such as smuggling).²⁰ A man who was not necessarily wealthy but could mix with *songthew ngin* (上头人, *shangtouren*), [Indonesian] authorities, might also belong to that class, which also included government or tin company officials. Most people were in the middle; the self-described "poor" constituted a small group. Some twenty "professional" gamblers, who were always invited to festivities, were a group apart, described below.²¹

As far as politics were concerned, most Chinese were unsure about what "Indonesia" as a nation should mean for them, although they readily identified themselves as "Chinese." One example is Tan's estimate that only about one-third of eligible Chinese voters participated in the December 1957 regional elections. About two-thirds of them voted for Baperki (Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia, Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship,²² theoretically a nonpartisan interest group to defend citizens' interests), which they perceived as the "Chinese

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ Local people called *peranakans* "T'ong ngin tse" (唐人子, *tangren zi*), descendants of Chinese. Those born in China were "T'ongsan loi" (唐山来, *tangshanlai*), "coming from Tangshan [China]." If both parents were China-born, their local-born children tended to use the parents' language, otherwise they spoke the local Hakka (Tan, "Report," 45). Although men wore simple Western clothes, adult women wore the distinctive *peranakan* sarongs common in Java, while immigrant women favored trousers. Here and elsewhere, for Chinese expressions, the first is Belinyu Hakka, in Tan's transcription (which varies), Mandarin *pinyin* in parentheses. Other italicized terms are Indonesian. See P. Y. van de Stadt, *Hakka-woordenboek* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1912; reprinted, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2015).

¹⁸ Bangka Malays from the town called themselves "*orang Melayu*" (Malay people) and called village dwellers "*orang darat*" (land people). Usually, the Chinese spoke of them as "*fan ngin*" (番人, *fanren*), foreigners, and "*gniou long*" (牛郎, *niulang*), villagers (Tan, "Report," 43). The latter term often applied only to *orang lom*, non-Muslim natives of Bangka.

¹⁹ I follow Tan's usage in speaking of "Chinese" and "Indonesian" as mutually exclusive categories. Today, the terms "ethnic Chinese" or "Chinese Indonesian" and "ethnic Indonesian" would be preferable.

²⁰ Tan, "Diary," 45.

²¹ Tan, "Report," 54–56.

²² On Baperki, see Somers, "Peranakan Chinese Politics in Indonesia," 143–73.

party.” Other Chinese voters, especially tinworkers, voted for the Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI), or, in third place, the Catholic Party.²³ Baperki, which had hardly campaigned, fell into a deep sleep after elections.²⁴ Citizenship had made little impression on Belinyu Chinese; how could they imagine Indonesia as their nation?

Skinner was interested in Belinyu as a predominantly Hakka community in contact with Malay society. Belinyu’s language appeared to be an “almost creolized” Hakka incorporating Malay expressions.²⁵ Chinese shared some customs with Malays, for example, relatively frequent matrilocal marriage (about one-fourth of all unions²⁶). On the other hand, the Chinese of semi-rural Belinyu lived a very different life from the urbanites of Java’s cities, as studied by Willmott (Semarang) and Giok-lan Tan (Sukabumi). A significant portion of them were laborers and small farmers. Only later did a comparable study of Tangerang’s Chinese villagers appear.²⁷

Little distinguished the town from surrounding villages in appearance or lifestyle. Buses traveled back and forth, village children bicycled to the town school, and villagers frequented the market and movie houses. Families, dispersed among settlements, exchanged visits and formal invitations. Language and social and religious practices did not differ between town and village.²⁸ Above all, gossip traveled at high speed, not least through Belinyu’s coffee shops.²⁹

Tan gathered information on population, economic activities, income, housing, kinship terms, and family life. He attended soccer (football) and basketball matches; spirit medium performances with singing of Hakka mountain songs, called *sanke* (山歌, *shange*);³⁰ and firewalking³¹ and temple festivals. He commented on weddings, birthdays, funerals, education, religious rites, child-raising practices, entertainment, prostitution, and ubiquitous gambling.

All this presents an unusual community in a time irretrievably past. Bangka in 1957–58 was no Asian Miracle; it shared much of the poverty, unemployment, petty corruption, and bureaucratic lethargy³² that prevailed in Indonesia during that time. If Bangka lacked the heady political atmosphere of Java that others have described for

²³ Tan, “Diary,” 764–65.

²⁴ Ibid., 861–62.

²⁵ “Almost creolized” are Skinner’s words; see G. William Skinner, “The Chinese Minority,” in *Indonesia*, ed. Ruth McVey (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1963), 97–117.

²⁶ Tan, “Report,” 60–61.

²⁷ See: Donald E. Willmott, *The Chinese of Semarang* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960); and Giok-lan Tan, *Chinese of Sukabumi*. On Tangerang, see Go Gien Tjwan, *Eenheid in verscheidenheid in een Indonesisch dorp* (Amsterdam: Sociologisch-historisch Seminarium voor Zuidoost Azië, Universiteit Amsterdam, 1966).

²⁸ Tan, “Report,” 3.

²⁹ Tan, “Diary,” 457–58; compare to Erwiza Erman, “Dinamika komunitas warung kopi dan politik resistensi di Pulau Belitung” [Dynamics of the coffee shop community and politics of resistance in Belitung Island], *Masyarakat Indonesia* 40, 1 (2014): 89–107.

³⁰ Tan, “Diary,” 586.

³¹ Ibid., 363–66.

³² Ibid., 157.

these years,³³ political and ethnic tensions persisted under the surface of Belinyu's peeling façades and corroding economy.

Economically, at least half of those employed (and their families)³⁴ depended directly on tin mining, and others depended on that industry indirectly, yet tin production fell constantly and other export goods failed to make up the losses. A central administration managed operations for the company, now a state-owned enterprise called TTB (Tambang Timah Bangka, Bangka Tin Mining). Indonesians, often outsiders, had taken over management from the Dutch in 1953; and few openings remained for Chinese. Mines were decentralized, open-pit diggings (*parit*), where bachelor miners, mostly immigrants, had formerly lived in barracks on the sites. Now, only about 20 percent of laborers were China-born, the rest were *peranakan* or Indonesian. Many lived with their families, either in the barracks or in nearby villages.³⁵ Chinese and other businessmen were outside contractors for TTB, maintaining company housing, constructing roads, and delivering building materials. Administrators sometimes left the contractors' bills unpaid or awaited bribes, compounding economic troubles for contractors, creditors, and employees.³⁶

Inflation, scarcity, and rising rice prices put pressure on family budgets, while wages stagnated and unemployment or underemployment persisted. In May 1957, rice prices in Belinyu had been Rp 3.25 per kilo, with subsidized rice at Rp 2.75 and rice for tin company workers at Rp 1.30.³⁷ In August 1957, rice was unavailable, even at Rp 7.00. In January 1958, there was no subsidized rice, unless it could be borrowed from dwindling TTB supplies.³⁸

In December 1957, labor unions seized the Dutch-owned inter-island shipping firm KPM (Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij, Royal Packet Navigation Company) in connection with Indonesia's campaign to expel the Netherlands from West Irian (New Guinea). This ended regularly scheduled inter-island shipping. There were far too few Indonesian-owned vessels to take its place.³⁹ The news dismayed people in Bangka, for they believed that only such Dutch enterprises had kept the economy going.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the rice price climbed to Rp 8 per kilo in February–March 1958. Subsidized rice was unavailable, arrived late, or the allotment was insufficient for poor families who could not afford the free-market price.⁴¹

³³ Daniel E. Lev, *The Transition to Guided Democracy: Indonesian Politics, 1957–59* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1966). Ann Laura Stoler writes of a "vibrant intellectual and political environment" in the 1950s and early 1960s in "Untold Stories," *Inside Indonesia* 68, 4 (2001), www.inside-indonesia.org, accessed April 9, 2016. Howard Dick et al., *The Emergence of a National Economy: An Economic History of Indonesia, 1800–2000* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2002), 170–93.

³⁴ Tan, "Diary," 449.

³⁵ Skinner Papers, Folder 6, "Tin Mining."

³⁶ Tan, "Diary," 199, 432.

³⁷ Indonesian rupiah. Officially, the exchange rate was US\$1 to Rp 11.4. Tan estimated that a family with four or five children needed Rp 700–1,000 a month to survive in 1957 (159, 162, 166), which seems to be a better measure of the rupiah's value.

³⁸ Tan, "Diary," 410 and 447 (about 1957); 879 (about 1958).

³⁹ Dick et al., *The Emergence of a National Economy*, 181.

⁴⁰ Tan, "Diary," 799–800; 816.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1058.

In Bangka, rising prices meant that coffee shops lost customers, and businessmen complained that people had too little money to get through the month. Harbor workers who handled commodities transported by ship had no jobs. The subsequent nationalization of Dutch export-import companies like Borsumij, with an office in Belinyu, meant more dismissals. Jakarta tried in vain to manage the economy, even forbidding in May 1957 small-scale trading in gold, which acted as savings when people needed cash.⁴² Finally, smallholder products like pepper and rubber fell under discriminatory foreign exchange regulations that left exporters with little profit, an open invitation to smuggling (about which Tan says little, although it was common in the 1950s in all of South Sumatra,⁴³ and a timeworn tradition on Bangka itself).

Tan's diary reveals a community experiencing crisis, as Indonesian political and economic nationalism increasingly disadvantaged the Chinese, drawing in other Bangkans as well. In the following discussion, two examples, a crackdown on gambling and the restriction of Chinese-language schools, show how conflicts between Chinese practice and Indonesian authority intensified—a foreboding for the future.

Gambling Razzias and a Chinese Pastime

[The Chinese] being by nature great lovers of gambling, this takes place on Bangka more than anywhere else.⁴⁴

Gambling is perhaps the commonest form of amusement known to the Chinese. Its speculative character, its prospects of loss or profit, appeal irresistibly to his genius ... From the Chinese point of view, as with us, gambling (whether it be in the form of cards, dominoes, fan-tan, or dice) is *per se* no vice ... It is training ground to him for the real gamble of life.⁴⁵

As if in anticipation of the Chinese New Year on February 18, the razzias began on the night of February 6, 1958. Police arrested four Chinese community leaders in the midst of a game, carting them off to jail for a planned incarceration of seventy-two hours. That same night, police raided another game at the home of a teacher in a Chinese-language school, jailing him and six unidentified Indonesian players.⁴⁶

All unlicensed gambling had been illegal in Indonesia since colonial times. What, then, led to this burst of police diligence, when they had usually just shrugged their shoulders? The first group was not even playing for money, gossips claimed, but for "stones." Besides, they were prominent members of the community, not common

⁴² Ibid., 847 (too little money), 1024–25 (nationalization of Borsumij), and 245–46 (gold-trading).

⁴³ Dick et al., *The Emergence of a National Economy*, 180–81.

⁴⁴ "In den aart Grote liefhebbers van het Dobbelspel zijnde, vind dit op Banca meer dan ergens elders plaats." Report, Jacobus van den Bogaart to Governor-General Johannes Siberg, 1803, Arsip Nasional, Republik Indonesia, Jakarta, File Bangka 21.

⁴⁵ G. K. Hare, "The Game of Chap-Ji-Ki," *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 31 (1898): 63–72. For an overview of games in Asia before modern casinos, see John A. Price, "Gambling in Traditional Asia," *Anthropologica* 14, 2 (1972): 157–80.

⁴⁶ Tan, "Diary," 930–31.

criminals. When some community spokesmen visited the police chief to remind him of the prisoners' good reputations and ask for leniency, the chief even "scolded" them for their audacity.⁴⁷ The schoolteacher was a different story; he was a "professional" who regularly organized and managed games of chance, and considerable sums changed hands under his roof. Were the authorities signaling that popular Chinese diversions, and possibly other aspects of Chinese culture, were no longer acceptable? Or was this just more harassment of a minority that had endured months of concentrated political pressure: alien taxes,⁴⁸ new regulations and registrations, and other limitations on Chinese activities? Was it more of the usual petty extortion, or perhaps even a necessary intervention in view of a "fever" of hectic betting that had seized the community since the beginning of 1958,⁴⁹ surpassing previous enthusiasms, perhaps threatening public order?

Over the next few days, Belinyu's gossip, fed by additional police razzias, constantly returned to the theme of the gambling arrests. Above all, the coffee-shop public lamented the wave of repressions: "*What else should we do? Go to prostitutes instead?*" "*It is our pastime.*" If he wished to punish gambling this way, the police chief would have to "*chain the whole society.*"⁵⁰ Belinyu Chinese saw gambling as part of Chinese culture, a harmless pastime, and an acceptable antidote to boredom.

If Tan was surprised at the "fever" of gambling in early 1958, he should not have been. The venerable age and variety of games of chance played in China with dice, cards, or carefully crafted playing pieces, point to deep roots in Chinese culture and belief. Past and recent observers report that Chinese are ready gamblers. To give an example from colonial-era popular literature, when children of two wealthy Chinese families wed, the guests are so overwhelmed by their curiosity about the mysterious bride that they—amazingly—forget the usual activity at such events: "Although tables and cards were readied for gambling, not one guest, male or female, could think of passing their time in playing cards."⁵¹ Anthropologist Sharon Carstens once summed up her experience in a Hakka village in Kelantan with "Malaysian Chinese will gamble on anything."⁵²

From ancient to contemporary China, moral pronouncements and official prohibitions have denounced gambling, but for most Chinese gambling is and has been "a socially acceptable leisure activity."⁵³ Games assemble friends for conviviality and for entertainment, and most Chinese enjoy the warm, even heated, atmosphere

⁴⁷ Ibid., 930–31.

⁴⁸ Persons who were not citizens of Indonesia, aliens, had to pay a special tax, as discussed later.

⁴⁹ Tan, "Diary," 825.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 932. Belinyu's eleven coffee shops were an abundant source of information. Italics are direct quotes from Tan's diary.

⁵¹ My translation: Maski pun sudah disediakan meja-meja dan kartu cukup aken orang berjudi, tapi tida ada satu tetamu, baek lelaki baek pun prampuan, yang dapet itu pikiran buat liwaten temponya dengen memegang kartu. Kwee Tek Hoay, *Bunga Roos dari Cikembang*, reprinted in Marcus A. S. and Pax Benedanto, eds., *Kesatraan Melayu Tionghoa dan Kebangsaan Indonesia*, Vol. 2 (Jakarta: KPG, 2001 [1927]), 408.

⁵² Personal communication, November 11, 2016.

⁵³ Xavier Paules, "Gambling in China Reconsidered: Fantan in South China during the Early Twentieth Century," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 7, 2 (2010): 179–200.

that hovers over the gaming tables.⁵⁴ Just as gathering over a good meal is an important form of sociability, so is a good contest.

Widespread, and related to Chinese religious beliefs, is the view that individual success in gambling is a matter of “fate” (*ming*, 命) or “luck” (*fu*, 福). Gamblers in a village in China believed that the outcomes of most games were 80 percent luck and 20 percent skill. Repeated wins, like wealth and influence, demonstrate an auspicious fate; repeated losses, the opposite.⁵⁵

While most gambling among Chinese is for small sums, sometimes considerable sums are at stake and the players are anything but poor. Today’s luxury casinos are an obvious example. In an often-quoted article, Ellen Oxfeld Basu reported from Calcutta that well-to-do Hakka Chinese businessmen there were frequent gamblers, for games of chance offered the same combination of risk-taking and luck that they needed in their everyday business as leather tanners. A successful businessman could show that he was easily able to absorb a loss, and the wealthy, whose wins reflected their good fortune, would shrug off their winnings, too.⁵⁶ Prudent businessmen, however, carefully distinguished between capital to be saved and invested and surplus capital to risk—in two separate pockets, as it were.

On the other hand, poverty itself—or the dream of leaving poverty behind—promotes risk-taking.⁵⁷ People often resort to gambling when they suddenly lose money, are out of work, or have no hope of increasing their income.⁵⁸ Such economic stress certainly prevailed in Belinyu in early 1958, when inflation, economic decline, and joblessness threatened the well-being of the minority. In addition, confusion about their citizenship status and measures imposed on Chinese, including the imposition of a punishing alien tax in July 1957, a constant topic of conversation, led people to question their future under an Indonesian government.⁵⁹

Gambling on Social Occasions

In Belinyu, the choreography of all Chinese celebrations—birthdays, weddings, births—was similar. Invitations came in writing or orally, through a crier, but anyone might show up, even when not personally invited. Etiquette required bringing a small

⁵⁴ Paules and others emphasize the “warm” social aspects of gambling; see Hans Steinmüller, *Communities of Complicity: Everyday Ethics in Rural China* (New York: Berghahn, 2015), 181–82.

⁵⁵ Steinmüller, *Communities of Complicity*, 186; see also his “The Moving Boundaries of Social Heat: Gambling in Rural China,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, 2 (2011): 263–80.

⁵⁶ See: Ellen Oxfeld Basu, “Profit, Loss, and Fate: The Entrepreneurial Ethic and the Practice of Gambling in an Overseas Chinese Community,” *Modern China* 17, 2 (1991): 227–59; and Steinmüller, “Moving Boundaries,” 270. Reuven Brenner et al., *Gambling and Speculation: A Theory, a History, and a Future of Some Human Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 90–112, associates gambling, speculation, and investment.

⁵⁷ Brenner et al., *Gambling and Speculation*, 83–88.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 22–23; 26–34.

⁵⁹ Tan’s informants, clearly upset, repeatedly refer to the tax in pages 336–803. For the alien tax, see Donald E. Willmott, *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia, 1950–58* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1961), 73–74. Even Chinese who were citizens had to pay a registration fee that was nearly as large as the alien tax (421).

gift of money, locally called *ki foli* (Mandarin *ji heli*, 寄 贺礼), for the hosts,⁶⁰ who assigned someone to keep an account of the gifts, so that the hosts could reciprocate appropriately at a return invitation. Indonesian hosts also received *foli*, but Indonesian guests did not contribute. Feasts combined two favorite Chinese pastimes: eating and gambling. While men sat at tables to eat and play, women, who usually arrived first, retired to the kitchen where they, too, might start a game. Since the host or hostess also received a share in the winner's *tong*, or pot (桶, *tong*), this share, added to the gifts, usually defrayed—or exceeded—the expenses for the celebration. As one host put it, “*Birthday parties are somewhat like doing business. One invites people to have evening meal and hopes they will stay and gamble.*”⁶¹

Gambling was inevitably part of a wedding, birthday party, or wake (the latter, however, required no *foli*), although not all guests joined the gambling. In the following, Tan describes a pre-wedding party for the groom:

*The procedure was the same as at other feasts. There were only three tables. The [male] guests had to wait till there were eight persons [to fill one table]. Then they were requested to ... eat. After the meal the gamblers looked for partners to begin their play. Other guests sat down together for some time and [then] took leave.*⁶²

Women usually played card games like *capjiki* (十二枝 *shier zhi*),⁶³ sitting on mats; men favored mahjong, *po*, or other games. *Po* (宝 *bao*), also called “tiger,” was apparently a Southeast Asian version of fan-tan (番摊, *fantan*), popular in Guangdong and neighboring areas in the twentieth century.⁶⁴ *Po* betting, fast-paced and involving high stakes, was called “riding the tiger.”⁶⁵ About twenty “professional” gamblers acted as bankers, or *po kon*, for this game. Tan writes:

*Gradually I begin to recognize the “po kon,” those who are the bankers at the tiger table [Pokon, 宝官 *baoguan*, is the banker or croupier.⁶⁶] They [form] an unofficial association. There are about twenty members. About half of them are professional po-*

⁶⁰ Tan, “Diary,” 33.

⁶¹ Ibid., 190.

⁶² Ibid., 253, 255.

⁶³ Capjiki is a game using twelve cards. There are several variations, see J. W. Young, “Bijdrage tot de kennis der Chineesche hazard- en kaartspelen,” *Tijdschrift voor het Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* XXXI:2b/3 (1886): 281-290); Russel Jones, *Chinese Loan-Words in Malay and Indonesian* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2009), 104 and 187. On Chinese gambling in the Netherlands Indies, Denys Lombard, *Le carrefour javanaise: Essai d'histoire globale*, Vol. II Les réseaux asiatiques (Paris: Éditions de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1990), 260-262, 402-403 (notes 1304-1311) and 405 (figures 62 and 63). . J[onas] D[aniel] Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971 [1854]) 37, writes that Chinese women only gamble with cards, and among themselves.

⁶⁴ Xavier Paules, “Gambling in South China Reconsidered: *Fantan* in South China during the Early Twentieth Century,” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 7, 2 (2010): 179–200, esp. 182, n. 13, citing Circumnavigator (pseud.), “Macao, the Monte Carlo of the Orient,” *Travel*, June 1912: 40–43. Paules says that *fantan* was called *po* in Singapore—and that is presumably true of Belinyu, but names and rules of games might vary from one place or time to another. See also Stewart Culin, “The Gambling Games of the Chinese in America,” *Series in Philology, Literature and Archaeology*, Vol. I, 4 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1891), at <http://gamesmuseum.uwaterloo.ca/Archives/Culin/Gambling1891/index.html>, accessed November 2, 2015.

⁶⁵ Tan, “Diary,” 272.

⁶⁶ Jones, *Chinese Loan-Words*, 151.

*gamblers. The rest [are] part-time gamblers ... But at every feast in the town I saw almost the same faces at the tiger-tables.*⁶⁷

In *po*, substantial sums changed hands in a short time; two friends of Tan's lost a few thousand rupiah within half an hour.⁶⁸ The players, or "tiger-fighters," were well known in the community, for virtually every working man had tried to "fight the tiger" at one time or another. A good friend of Tan's who usually avoided the tables admitted that he had once won a thousand rupiah by placing a subsidiary bet on a habitual tiger-player.⁶⁹

*In the long run the bankers are winners. The social position of the group ... is due to the fact that they cannot be missed at any feast which is worth the name. They are the first to be invited. Their field of operation is the whole region ... [including] the villages. They are the people who can afford to go to a feast in a village by taxi, which is something imposing to the common men. In general a [host] is willing to invite the [professional] gamblers because of the profit he [the host] is to participate in. The more heated the fight with the tiger, the greater the tong and the more his [host's] share. Po has always belonged to the prohibited games, but since the police was not so strict, it was played freely, though consideration was taken not to make a show of it. At the beginning of 1958, the government once again tightened control over all kinds of games of hazard. And po was the first to go deep underground. It was a blow to the group of the tiger-raisers.*⁷⁰

Only at the mahjong tables were there no professionals; players were mostly regulars, and playing with the right group of friends was essential. Partygoers who did not meet with enough friends to fill a table might just leave. When Tan, who usually did not gamble, offered to take an empty place, the others refused, saying they only played with people they knew. Besides, they would be "ashamed" to win money from him, for mahjong players claimed that winnings usually circulated among regulars.⁷¹

In Bangka, games of chance were illegal but could be licensed for a fee. Some party hosts did purchase licenses, even before the New Year razzias. Although some people considered gambling a *peranakan* vice, insisting that immigrants from China avoided it, Tan identified participants from both groups, and both sexes. At a celebration of a child's reaching the age of one (lunar) month, for example, guests enjoyed a meal of *nasi kunyit* (turmeric-yellow rice, *nasek koungit* in Belinyu Hakka), after which four mats of eight women each convened for gambling; except for Tan, the event was an all-woman affair.⁷²

When Tan's uncle died, neighbors and relatives came to his home to take leave of the deceased on the eve of burial. A group of women were playing *kwa* (卦, *gua*, a card game) just behind the sitting-room where the corpse was laid out.⁷³ Later, men gathered to play mahjong, only breaking up at midnight. During the seven memorial

⁶⁷ Tan, "Diary," 295.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 272.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 295.

⁷⁰ Tan, "Report," 53.

⁷¹ Tan, "Diary," 36, 296, and 964–65.

⁷² Ibid., 45, 281, and 659.

⁷³ Jones, *Chinese Loan-Words*, 132.

days after burial, the family made offerings and people met—and played; first the women, then the men.⁷⁴

Gambling and Boredom

For all love of risk, gambling was also an alternative to boredom—or perhaps despair. One Sunday, Tan and some friends visited a working tin mine and found seven men (five Chinese, one Indo-European, one Indonesian), all associated with TTB, spending their free day playing *pheh* (possibly *phehki* (八枝) *ba zhi*, a card game using eight cards).⁷⁵ Then four of Tan's friends opened another table for another game. When the visitors departed, only the *kepala parit* (mine headman) took leave of them, the others were too absorbed in play.⁷⁶

One weekday, encountering five young Chinese playing *siap*, a three-man game, with two onlookers, Tan asked why they were playing. “*Why not? We have nothing else to do.*” Only one of the five had a job, and he had taken the day off. Some day-laborers unloading imports at the harbor complained that their co-workers had not shown up for work because they were gambling, although they knew their employer needed to get the job done promptly.⁷⁷

As one community leader put it, Belinyu was a small town, people had a lot of free time, and the town did not offer the diversions that cities did. Better to pass their time at the gambling table than to steal or do nothing. No one was harmed, someone who won today lost tomorrow, so money just circulated. Even the police chief, who used to object to gambling, at least within the town, now just tolerated it, the leader claimed, simply walking by a table if people were gambling: “*Without gambling we would not be able to pass our time.*”⁷⁸

Sports and Other Betting: The “Fever” of 1958

Of course sports, especially basketball and soccer, offered entertainment. At the same time, any contest—international soccer match or impromptu meeting of barefoot schoolboys shooting baskets—might occasion betting.⁷⁹

Soccer matches between visiting foreign teams and Indonesian teams, especially contests that were broadcast on the radio, raised fervent national sympathies. When teams from China or Hong Kong visited, most—but not all—bets favored the visitor side. Some Indonesians joined the betting, while others acted as bookmakers or runners, placing bets for enthusiasts. Betting on matches that were broadcast live

⁷⁴ Tan, “Diary,” 130–31,151.

⁷⁵ Jones, *Chinese Loan-Words*, 148.

⁷⁶ Tan, “Diary,” 75, 76.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 79–80, 123.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 848–49.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 362, 441.

drew crowds to coffee or jewelry shops to follow the games; tin-mine employees had their own betting pool.⁸⁰

Most often, betting on the national team took place at a certain goldsmith shop. In May 1957, an Indonesian national team was to play a team from the People's Republic of China. For days, people at the market or in the coffee shops talked of nothing else, seeking partners for their wagers and third parties to hold the stakes. Some participants weighed their chances carefully, but most followed their political or emotional sympathies for China or Indonesia. When the match was broadcast, people gathered in the coffee or goldsmith shops; in one, as much as six-thousand rupiah was at stake. The shop owner might bet or hold the stakes. One stakeholder was giving the Indonesian team a "handicap" of half a point. When a second match between the PRC and Indonesia was not broadcast directly, people gathered excitedly in coffee shops to await news of the result, and two men—two previous big losers—took in several thousand rupiah by successfully betting on an undecided outcome.⁸¹

Increased gambling preceded Chinese New Year in 1958 by some weeks. The "fever" Tan diagnosed, mostly sports betting, attracted even habitual non-gamblers. The presence of international teams may have added to the excitement, but everywhere Tan observed more intense gambling than previously. Some participants were mere middle-school pupils. Also, in January 1958, a Czechoslovakian team was touring Indonesia. Coffee shops and the market became a center of activity. Sometimes truck or bus drivers, going back and forth between towns, collected bets for others. This system attracted "big bettors."⁸²

With soccer gambling booming, one Malay shopkeeper feared it would infect Indonesians. Some fifty lists were circulating at the market alone. Even women joined in. Although this man (alone, he claimed) did not join the frenzy, he admitted buying lottery tickets.⁸³ Pious Indonesian Muslims certainly avoided gambling, but the Indonesian government successfully maintained national lotteries for decades. Participants came from all groups.⁸⁴

When the Czechoslovak match in Padang was broadcast, half the town seemed to be involved, placing bets or compiling lists of smaller bettors. As soon as results were known, winners received their cash; one day the biggest winner, an Indonesian, took in three thousand rupiah.⁸⁵

By late January 1958, soccer betting fever had subsided, as people became more preoccupied with economic troubles, but the fever soon returned as Chinese New Year drew closer. When the Czechoslovak team played the national Indonesian team fielded

⁸⁰ Ibid., 296, 139.

⁸¹ Ibid., 117–18, 273.

⁸² Ibid., 825, 825–26, 845–46.

⁸³ Ibid., 897.

⁸⁴ See: A. Adib, "Dari Porkas sampai SDSB," *Suara Merdeka*, January 19, 2004, <http://www.suaramerdeka.com/harian/0401/19/nas4.htm>, accessed November 4, 2015; Margot Cohen, "Indonesia's Lottery for God and Country," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, November 15–16, 1991, posted December 3, 1991, <http://www.library.ohiou.edu/indopubs/1991/12/03/0000.html>, accessed October 27, 2015. Islamic objections to gambling played little role in the discussions Tan recorded.

⁸⁵ Tan, "Diary," 854.

by PSSI⁸⁶ in Jakarta, the amounts bet rose even higher. One man, whose tip was excruciatingly close to the final outcome, just missed winning ten-thousand rupiah, a very large sum. Then a Russian team, Spartak, arrived in March 1958. The runners braved a downpour (even the coffee houses had closed) to collect bets on the Spartak-PSSI game, which Spartak won.⁸⁷

Local sporting events in Belinyu attracted participants, fans, and bettors. The town had nine basketball courts, and the Chinese school, as well as other groups, fielded teams. In addition, there were several soccer fields. Above all, as Tan concluded, “*Wager is an inseparable part of the attraction of all matches played in the town.*” In fact, contests usually ended with onlookers rushing onto the field, not to celebrate their team’s victory, but to collect their winnings.⁸⁸

No contest was too trivial for a wager. One day, a basketball team from the Chinese school was waiting to leave for another town for a friendly match. Tan observed the teenaged boys shooting baskets for practice. The one who got the most baskets in three throws got one rupiah from each of the others. One youngster lost consistently; fortunately, the bus arrived before he had gone through all his pocket money for the trip. Such contests recurred a number of times, always involving money. As for the trip to another town, Belinyu lost its games, but it was a great outing.⁸⁹

Nor was betting limited to sports. Even a spirit medium’s performance resulted in a spontaneous bet. A *thung-se* (*tongzi* 童子 medium) wanted to bet his young assistant that the spirit would not possess the assistant that night. The challenge offended the assistant, but the medium won.⁹⁰

Objections to Gambling in Belinyu

In colonial Southeast Asia, gambling—like opium, alcohol, and pawnbroking—was a revenue farm, a state-sponsored monopoly that funneled income into colonial treasuries. The most profitable gambling farms in the Netherlands Indies were among the Chinese mine and plantation coolies, including those of Bangka. The gambling farm was usually awarded to wealthy Chinese, giving them the right to run gaming tables during the long Chinese New Year holiday, when unskilled laborers had just been paid for a year’s work. These workers often lost their entire wages by gambling, and the Dutch abolished these farms on Java in 1914 and elsewhere in 1919. Thereafter, gambling was only allowed upon the purchase of a license, and only on a temporary basis.⁹¹ Colonial laws continued in force after Indonesian independence.

⁸⁶ Persatuan Sepakbola Seluruh Indonesia (All-Indonesian Football Association, or, usually, Football Association of Indonesia).

⁸⁷ Tan, “Diary,” 863, 878, 1023.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 216, 551

⁸⁹ Ibid., 330, 340–41, 326–27.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 440.

⁹¹ See: John Butcher, “Revenue Farming and the Changing State in Southeast Asia,” in *The Rise and Fall of Revenue Farming: Business Elites and the Emergence of the Modern State in Southeast Asia*, ed. John Butcher and Howard Dick (London: Macmillan, 1993), 22, 36, 41; F. W. Diehl, “Revenue Farming and Colonial

Those who played the lottery may not have been breaking the law, but the other gamblers of Belinyu were fully aware that their games of chance were illegal. Nevertheless, they continued to gamble.

Addictive or “problem” gambling, with its deleterious consequences for individuals and families, was another matter. Others have shown how Chinese are critical of those who continue to gamble but lose repeatedly, or who neglect their businesses, jobs, or family responsibilities.⁹² Tan’s informants in Belinyu also looked down on problem gamblers. What drove the police to intervene in February 1958, however, was not problem gambling.

As for non-Chinese, Tan’s informant Achmad, a villager whom he consulted about Bangka Malay practices, insisted that most Indonesians who lived in the villages did not gamble. Some others, however, played habitually, for example, TTB workers and outsiders. Aware of the problems involved, Achmad indicated little condemnation of the practice among Chinese, at least not to Tan, but he hoped it would not spread to non-Chinese.⁹³

The gambling raids of 1958 were not attacks of fervent Moslems against perceived “immoral” activities, as have occurred in recent decades in Indonesian cities, and although gambling was illegal, enforcement was historically lax. Some of the police were habitual gamblers. Local government or tin company officials frequented Chinese social occasions or staged games of chance in their own homes. The raids, indeed, seemed to be targeting the Chinese, as had the alien tax and other discriminatory measures.

One gambling-prone official was the local police chief, a vice-commissioner. Of part-European origin, he was married to a Chinese woman from Palembang, herself an enthusiastic gambler. For their wedding anniversary in August 1957, they staged an elaborate, two-day event, even renting (without paying) a *godown* or temporary shelter from TTB to shelter the crowd. Tan preserves his written invitation in his notes. While many Chinese businessmen accepted petty corruption as a way of compensating underpaid public servants for their help, they resented such open fishing for money, feeling that it bordered on extortion. When the morning-after arrived, a gleeful policeman reported to the coffee shop public that his boss had lost more than five-thousand rupiah on the event. Apparently neither the contributions of the guests (*ki foli*) nor his share of the gambling pot (*tong*) had met the expenses for the feast.⁹⁴

Low-level policemen (their boss referred to them as his *mantri pajak*, tax-collectors) could profit from razzias—and did so. They raided a mahjong party, pocketing the pot and seizing the mahjong set in the bargain. Probably they would sell it, people said. Another time the police descended on a group of women, threatening to arrest them, but leaving instead with a bribe.⁹⁵

Finances in the Netherlands East Indies, 1816–1925,” in Butcher and Dick, *The Rise and Fall*, 222; and Heidhues, *Bangka Tin*, 136 (n87), 156.

⁹² Steinmüller, *Communities of Complicity*, 186–88. Many Belinyu informants insisted that gambling was a victimless entertainment, although they knew that problem gambling existed.

⁹³ Tan, “Diary,” 944.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 392–93, 400.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 969.

Chinese New Year in Bangka, 1958

The February arrests reminded people of the legal consequences of their behavior. The police announced that people could apply for licenses valid for two days, but only for home gambling, and only for mahjong and dominoes. All other gambling tried to move off the officials' radar, "*behind closed doors and in attics*," and all ages, male and female, joined in keeping gambling hidden from the police. The razzias continued, except for sports betting, but with few arrests. As mentioned, more than one policeman was a known bettor.⁹⁶ Since gambling was a perfectly legitimate Chinese pastime, as Belinyu's Chinese repeatedly insisted, the raids, they felt, could only be intended to victimize Chinese and extort money from them.⁹⁷

Perhaps the New Year season of temporary affluence distracted people from the financial difficulties they faced, namely, stagnating incomes, rising prices for necessities, shrinking opportunities. Perhaps gambling helped distract them, too. Besides, pockets that were filled with New Year gifts and bonuses combined with the conviction that good fortune was in the air during the holidays, moved people to join in the perceived fun of gambling. One young man admitted he had even forgotten to pay respects to his grandmother because he had been so obsessed with gambling.⁹⁸

For children, New Year also meant *foung pao* (*hongbao*, 红包), red packets with gifts of money from older relatives. Even middle-school pupils stashed envelopes for their younger cousins into their pockets.⁹⁹ With their new affluence, some children immediately sought out a game, and one nine-year-old returned home to report that he had just lost forty rupiah. Ten-year-olds might lose fifty to a hundred rupiah.¹⁰⁰ One father, absorbed in gambling at home with his friends, noticed that his eleven-year-old son had been out of the house. The boy wanted to leave again, but the father threatened him calmly by saying that if he heard the boy had gambled, he would take strong measures:

You are not allowed to gamble. Do you understand me? If I knew you have gambled or you are going to gamble I will know no pardon and beat you to death. Go to the front gallery and sit down there.

The boy, ignoring the warning, soon left for a friend's house.¹⁰¹

New Year was simply a time when people had little to do. Nearly all shops were closed for two or three days, as were the movie houses. Some Chinese strolled through town dressed in their holiday finest, or exchanged visits with friends and relatives, but this did not occupy all their time. No wonder they retreated behind closed doors to play.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 969–70.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 943. Months earlier, some soldiers had demanded money from a group that was gambling, in that case clearly targeting Chinese (p. 781).

⁹⁸ Ibid., 975.

⁹⁹ Tan relates that only older relatives give red packets, and some sources indicate that only married ones or those who are closely related may give, but apparently customs varied.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 962–63.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 967.

While one friend of Tan's, afraid of the police, abstained from gambling, another lost forty rupiah. With his shop closed, he said, he needed something to occupy him. New Year was no New Year without gambling. "This is our Chinese custom." Another nearly died of boredom because his friends were afraid to gamble. His shop, too, was closed.

*I had an ocean of time. The only pass-time [sic] I have is to be sitting at the gambling table. Believe me, I wished I [were] dead on those days. We are Chinese. Europeans have their dancing. We have our gambling. Other people have their recreations. What is wrong with this? If this situation does not change I am afraid I shall be a very old man within a short time.*¹⁰²

Adults were at a loss if they had not obtained a permit. Some old men were left just sitting in a house with nothing to do: "... at least gambling should be allowed for men who had reached the age of sixty." They could play for hours for just a few rupiah. One mother-in-law was equally at odds. The poor woman had gone back and forth to the market as if she were "dizzy," having nothing to occupy her. Of course, professional gamblers and those who neglected their work should be punished, people admitted. And gambling should be forbidden for children, it was a scandal that some were out playing *tang loui* (coin-tossing).¹⁰³

The only distraction from gambling was a "fancy fair" organized by the Catholic church to raise money for rebuilding, perhaps also with the idea of drawing people away from the gaming tables. On two nights it attracted crowds of Chinese children and grownups, and many Indonesians, too.

*It was for the first time in Blinju's history that there was a fancy fair organized. It was something new for the people. It was packed with people from the opening until the closing at about half past eleven.*¹⁰⁴

Those operating the booths included Chinese and Indonesians; two bands, one Chinese, one Indonesian, provided musical accompaniment; and the festive atmosphere undoubtedly complemented the Chinese holiday feeling.

On the third day of the New Year, many people were still gambling, but more quietly, and Tan noted that the only players were those people who knew each other well, who played together often. Betting had moved to sports events featuring local teams.¹⁰⁵

In the end, were the razzias petty harassment, or perhaps a veiled reaction by the police chief himself that he did not wish to lose money when he invited people to come and play? After all, cash gifts and his share of the pot (*tong*) had not even covered the expenses of his anniversary party. It is hard to believe that the razzias

¹⁰² Ibid., 968.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 968–69. The object of *tang loui* was to move one's coin (an old Dutch cent) as far as possible and to hit the others' coins in the process (p. 1004). "*Tang loui*" may be from "*tang*," which van de Stadt translates as "throw" (no character given) and "*loui*" (*lei*, which van de Stadt gives as "*duit*," a small coin; see *Hakka-woordenboek*, 353, 380; Jones, *Chinese Loan-Words*, 142.) Both *lei* and *duit* can just mean "money."

¹⁰⁴ Tan, "Diary," 960.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 964–65.

were simply a reminder that gambling had to be licensed. Another possibility is that the razzias were intended as an ominous sign that Chinese customs, however deeply rooted, widely practiced, and long tolerated, were not immune to suppression. A second example of Indonesian authority disrupting non-Indonesians' cultural norms opens room for that explanation.

Chinese Schools under Attack

With newspapers reaching Belinyu irregularly, the Chinese schools became the most important centers for imagining China. Belinyu's Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan (THHK, Zhonghua Huiguan, 中华会馆) school first opened in 1908¹⁰⁶ and comprised a primary school (*sekolah rakyat*, SR) of six grade levels and almost 1,330 students and a middle school (*sekolah menengah pertama*, SMP) with three grades and 440 pupils. Students from Belinyu wishing to study in a Chinese school beyond the middle grades had to move to Sungailiat, Pangkal Pinang, Java, or Sumatra.¹⁰⁷

Other primary schools, run by village school boards, operated in all but one Chinese village, each with two to six grades. In all, about 800 pupils were in the village schools. Village children could continue their education in town.¹⁰⁸ In the Belinyu primary school, approximately 900 children were Indonesian citizens and about 450 were so-called aliens; in middle school, almost over 280 were WNI and nearly 160 WNA.¹⁰⁹

Several dozen Chinese children attended Indonesian government schools or a private middle school founded by TTB personnel that served 50 Chinese and 74 Indonesian students. The Catholic mission had an Indonesian-language primary school with 413 Chinese and 156 Indonesian pupils. The mission also had an "experimental" Indonesian-Chinese ("In-Hoa") school where instruction was partly in Chinese, in which were enrolled 244 Chinese and 16 Indonesians (who had not gotten a place in the mission's regular primary school). This experimental school closed in late 1957 and most of its pupils then entered the Indonesian-language Catholic school.¹¹⁰ In general, Chinese parents were reluctant to send their children to the public Indonesian schools, which in any case did not have enough places for them.

Chinese schools focused on the People's Republic of China, classrooms displayed posters of New China's achievements, and textbooks and other reading material came from the PRC.¹¹¹ In principle, the school taught in Mandarin but also used Belinyu Hakka. Teachers no longer arrived from China, nor did many students go there, as had once been the case.¹¹² The Catholic school, using the Indonesian language, tried to

¹⁰⁶ Heidhues, *Bangka Tin*, 163. Bangka's were among the first THHK schools outside Java. Tan, "Report," 84, says 1907.

¹⁰⁷ Tan, "Diary," 459, 492.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 427.

¹⁰⁹ Tan, "Report," 81–86.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 82–83.

¹¹¹ Skinner Papers, Folder 6, "Chinese Education," typewritten note of Tan Fay Tjhion, March 20, 1958, on reorganization of the THHK school for Indonesian citizens. On the posters, see Tan, "Diary," 492.

¹¹² Heidhues, *Bangka Tin*, 164.

propagate an Indonesian orientation and was certainly anti-communist. Parents, even Chinese schoolteachers or members of the THHK board, agreed that the Catholic school was superior to the Chinese school, having trained teachers and better discipline. People complained that the Chinese school, like some Chinese parents, was too “indulgent.” Pupils might still be on the playground enjoying snacks while classes were in session. Still, most Chinese parents preferred to send their children to a Chinese-language school, whatever its political orientation. Although the THHK school was supposed to teach Indonesian language, most teachers did not speak it well, if at all; some felt it was of no use and simply gave up trying to learn it. Parents paid a modest tuition for schooling, but often irregularly. Teachers were scarce and badly paid; several were planning to leave. Some, especially the young women, were themselves recent graduates of THHK’s elementary school, apparently with no further training.¹¹³ Of those who completed secondary school, a handful might “go abroad” for more study or work, but most, men and women, remained in Bangka, unemployed or working in odd jobs.¹¹⁴

Despite its drawbacks, the THHK school represented a half-century of community achievement. Its public festivities and sports programs provided some of the few opportunities for entertainment or leisure activity, apart from movie houses and, of course, gambling. Soccer and basketball teams used school facilities for matches with other towns’ teams, and these games drew interested onlookers (and usually wagerers). Because education meant so much to them, most Chinese supported the school.¹¹⁵

Beneath the surface, though, political divisions festered. Some people regretted losing their Indonesian citizenship in 1949–51, blaming pressure from the Chinese schoolteachers for encouraging their decision. “Propagandists” who encouraged Chinese to “reject” their Indonesian citizenship only confused or exploited poor people, another complained. A small number of Indonesian Chinese supported the Nationalists on Taiwan, but they were usually quiet about their preference because Jakarta had no diplomatic relations with Nationalist China. Some objected to the “leftist” orientation of the school. A few said that living in Indonesia should mean speaking Indonesian, learning about Indonesia, and striving to be good citizens. Most critics of the school kept a low profile, not wanting to upset community harmony.¹¹⁶

Chinese Schools Closed to Indonesian Citizens

On October 1, 1957, the Chinese school celebrated China’s national day, but when its next celebration took place on October 9 to recall the birthday of writer Lu Xun, a shadow fell on the commemorations. The THHK chairman feared that measures taken by military commanders in Semarang and Nusa Tenggara (Eastern Indonesia) to forbid Indonesian citizens from attending foreign (i.e., Chinese) schools might soon apply to all of Indonesia, including Bangka. True, an Indonesia-focused education was

¹¹³ Tan, “Diary,” 668–69; 210–11, 435, 683–84, 714; 672, 688, 698, 711, 714; 194; and 671–72.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 333, 991, 1042.

¹¹⁵ Tan, “Report,” 81.

¹¹⁶ Tan, “Diary,” 337, 644, 652, 739, 766 (citizenship and exploiting the poor); 20–22, 112, 666–67 (Nationalist China); 740 (“leftist” orientation); and 712–14, 726 (learning about Indonesia).

important, but such draconian measures would endanger the Chinese initiative to support their own schools.¹¹⁷

As feared, the regulation was extended to Bangka on October 19, 1957. WNI children had to attend “national” schools that were taught in Indonesian by citizens of Indonesia and that followed a “national” curriculum. What to do? There was no room even for all of the Indonesian children in government schools, much less the displaced Chinese pupils. Some THHK parents had already sought a place in the mission school for their children, but it, too, was soon full. For others, the plan was to divide the Chinese THHK school into Indonesian- and Chinese-language sections. Village Chinese schools would close at once.¹¹⁸ Tan met some middle-school boys who said they planned to stop going to school because, being WNI, they would have no further chance for education anyway—and why continue to pay the school fees, not to mention study?¹¹⁹

On January 27, 1958, THHK officials called an emergency meeting. The school was short two or three thousand rupiah monthly because so many WNI pupils had simply stopped attending classes. If control fell to “*these people*” (Indonesian authorities), that would be bad for the school, but where were the civic-minded Chinese who were willing to work for the interest of the community?¹²⁰ Finally, in February, six Chinese men agreed to supervise the school’s reorganization.¹²¹ Baperki, too, arose from its post-election lethargy to help. (In the end, Baperki opened its own university with branches in Jakarta and Surabaya in 1960, and by 1963 it ran a hundred schools or so throughout Indonesia, most of them in Java; but all that happened after Tan’s study ended.¹²²)

In their homes and in coffee shops, people vented their anger at the new policy on schools. A group of pro-PRC men commented on the measures. One man’s vehemence actually surprised Tan.

*Where are the schools established by the government for the W.N.I. children? If the government closes the village schools, what will become of the Chinese children? Are they to become illiterate? ... We Chinese have to pay. When we look to the right we have to pay for looking at the right side. When we look to left we have to pay ... And ... some day we have to pay for walking in the sun. The pay will be called sun-shine tax ... [We] Chinese had to pay so much to make good the deficit of the government caused by the corruption of its own officers ... Nowhere on earth so much wrong is done to the Chinese as in this country.*¹²³

As Tan’s statistics showed, only about 600 students at THHK Chinese schools were WNA, while 1,180—two thirds of the total student population—were WNI. The six grades of the primary school had nearly 900 WNI. Part of the THHK building could house a new “national” Indonesian school, which would gradually convert from

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 620 (October 9), 621.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 605 (too many students); 760 (THHK sections).

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 867.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 882.

¹²¹ Ibid., 976.

¹²² Somers, “Peranakan Chinese Politics,” 166–70. It is not known whether Baperki later took responsibility for the Belinyu school.

¹²³ Tan, “Diary,” 738.

a primary to a middle school as the children grew older. Financing the new school was an open question.¹²⁴ Finding qualified teachers was also a problem: of the eight WNI and sixteen WNA teachers, most spoke poor or no Indonesian. Baperki leaders in Jakarta promised to help procure textbooks and other teaching materials.¹²⁵ Although some Chinese felt they needed the middle school right away to keep youth out of trouble, no one wanted to hire Indonesian teachers for it because, for example, they might allow boys and girls to “touch.” Most important was community solidarity. “*Politics*,” PRC versus Nationalist China, but also China versus Indonesia, must not divide the Chinese. “*The line of division is not drawn by ourselves. It is drawn by political developments. W.N.A. and W.N.I.—we are all fakiaos [华侨, huaqiao¹²⁶] without distinction.*”¹²⁷

When the THHK school reopened in January 1958, a new teacher had been hired but the number of pupils had dropped. This resulted in a shortfall in the school budget, so teachers would now get no overtime pay. Organization was still chaotic when classes began, but by the end of the school year, there would be two schools—one Indonesian-language, one Chinese.¹²⁸

Despite some progress, it was feared that the school might need a new governing board composed only of Indonesian citizens.¹²⁹ Although the THHK was concerned that the school not fall into the hands of non-Chinese managers, few Chinese were willing to take on the onerous job of running (and maybe paying for) the new school.¹³⁰

Divisions soon came to the fore. One respected community leader, sympathetic to Indonesia, complained that the THHK chairman, a wealthy China-born trader (and therefore an alien) and an outspoken admirer of the PRC, had ruled the school board too long. This man had been chairman of the THHK and its board since 1946, making his term the longest in the history of the organization. With most of the pupils Indonesian citizens, “we” [citizens] had the right to take over the whole school.¹³¹

¹²⁴ Ibid., 977.

¹²⁵ Skinner Papers, “Chinese Education.” This paper, Tan’s note to the THHK reorganization committee, also urged it to consult with the mission school. The two schools were rivals in their philosophies, although they stood, literally, face to face.

¹²⁶ Although the PRC gradually abandoned the term “huaqiao,” that is, overseas Chinese, for any Chinese living abroad and restricted it only to Chinese nationals outside China, the speaker clearly did not see things that way. Dividing the Indonesian citizens from the citizens of the PRC was, of course, the whole point of the school regulation.

¹²⁷ Tan, “Diary,” 1048.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 840.

¹²⁹ See the white paper on closing foreign schools, *Pengawasan Pengajaran Asing* [Supervision of foreign education] (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan, Pengajaran dan Kebudayaan bersama Staf Pengguna Perang Pusat, c. 1959). The education ministry and the military co-authored this report. By the time of the report, the number of Chinese-language schools had dropped from 1,800 to 510 (there were two hundred other “alien” schools, of which forty survived), and the number of remaining pupils decreased from 425,000 to 125,000. See: Somers, *Peranakan Chinese Politics*, 165–67; and Leo Suryadinata, “Indonesian Chinese Education: Past and Present,” *Indonesia* 14 (October 1972): 49–71

¹³⁰ Tan, “Diary,” 882–83.

¹³¹ Ibid., 740, 996–97.

Community Divided?

Perhaps because the reorganization aroused strong feelings, other anti-PRC sentiments surfaced as well. When a Chinese policeman talked idly about his belief in ghosts, a young Chinese-school graduate pooh-poohed this as superstition. The policeman exploded:

*I know that you are taught at your RRT [PRC] school to call all belief in ghosts, etc., superstition. Only Mao-tse-tung [sic] is real. What he says you have to believe. All other things are superstition. Let your Mao-tse-tung give you rice to eat. Eat all food he gives you and live in eternity.*¹³²

Not surprisingly, because sports were such a popular entertainment for much of the community, they also contributed to the next dispute.

As noted, Belinyu's sports teams often exchanged visits with teams from other towns, and fans welcomed such matches. In early March, in response to an earlier challenge, and in the middle of the school crisis, a basketball team from Jambi (Sumatra) came to town to play one of the Belinyu's less-successful teams. Instead, the Belinyu players approached the town's top team, the Djakau (literally 夜校, *yexiao*, "evening school," probably comprising older pupils or recent graduates of the Chinese school), and invited those players to meet the challenge—out of local patriotism. Djakau in turn asked the THHK chairman for use of the school's excellent basketball court, which even had night lighting. The chairman refused, saying the Jambi team was "white" [rightist], and swore the group to secrecy about the reason for his refusal. Moreover, the chairman said the players should not ask the mission school for use of its court, for that would suggest that the Chinese community was divided. The local "whites" might then stop contributing to the THHK school.¹³³

Of course the community was divided, and the coffee-shop crowd soon debated the "secret" openly. Most felt the chairman was wrong, first, because he mixed sports and politics (the young people agreed), and, second, because the school's facilities belonged to the entire community. Challenged about his father's position, the chairman's son nearly started a fight with a shop employee. Meanwhile, Tan privately questioned the chairman, who claimed the problem was that the players should have asked the school's sports department, in writing, three days ahead; the THHK itself was too busy to deal with such issues. Also, he admitted, he distrusted the "whites."¹³⁴

In the end, not Djakau but a lesser team played the Jambi guests, losing by twenty-one points on an inferior court. Public opinion agreed that the better team, Djakau, should have faced the visitors.¹³⁵

Epilogue

In the long decades of the 1930s to 1960s, Bangka saw its many international links severed. No imaginary of "Indonesia" had filled their place, even when migrants left

¹³² Ibid., 997.

¹³³ Ibid., 1000–01.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 1001–02.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 1002.

for Jakarta, Palembang, and other cities. What remained were networks of Bangkanese on other islands and a vague idea of China that, for some, would become a route of escape.

One impetus for studies of the Chinese in Southeast Asia in the 1950s was Cold War interest in inhibiting China's presumed expansive policies and protecting Western interests. Attitudes of Belinyu's Chinese, however, confirm that "all politics are local." Not the issue of PRC versus Taiwan, or any other Cold War influences, but local issues like schools and local pride reflected in a basketball contest was what finally brought community tensions into the open. At the same time, local and national interventions against gambling and Chinese-medium schools presaged further actions against Chinese customs and Chinese culture.

After Tan left the island in 1958, these challenges peaked. In 1959, the Indonesian government implemented PP-10,¹³⁶ which banned alien retail trade outside of *kabupaten* capitals—all but a single town on Bangka—and in many areas it disallowed alien residence outside these towns. Although the authorities knew their measures would cripple trade in Bangka and Belitung, aliens had to close shop by February 29, 1960. Thanks to ships sent by the PRC to Palembang, many who had previously dreamed of moving to China could now do so; others who wished to stay saw no alternative to leaving. In the following year, over a hundred thousand Chinese departed from Indonesia, mostly for China. Probably about one-third of them were young people, many of whom had had to interrupt their education because of the school closings discussed here. Among the others who left were many former tin miners.¹³⁷

Although Tan's copious notes describe Belinyu's society in detail, as mentioned, Tan did not finish writing his final research report. Personal factors, including his decision to emigrate, intervened. Significantly, however, the report breaks off before its projected sections on religion, politics, and relations with Indonesians. I believe Tan also hesitated to describe in print the derogatory comments his Chinese informants had made about the political situation, their alienation from the Indonesian government, and its representatives (mostly "outsiders") on Bangka, and especially the disdain most Chinese felt for the impositions Jakarta's policies were making on them.

Tin still characterizes Bangka, but mining methods and markets have changed. The Chinese are still there, too, although even Belinyu probably no longer has a Chinese majority. Although the entire province of Bangka-Belitung officially has only 11 percent Chinese, they are practically all Indonesian citizens.¹³⁸ Despite the many

¹³⁶ Peraturan Presiden (Presidential Regulation) Number 10, November 1959. This regulation adapted and regularized previous measures from the minister of trade and regional military commanders taken since May of that year restricting alien retail trade and residence in rural areas. See Somers, "Peranakan Chinese Politics," 194–223.

¹³⁷ From Indonesian and Chinese (Xinhua) news dispatches, cited in Somers, "Peranakan Chinese Politics," 206.

¹³⁸ The population of Kecamatan Belinyu in 2011 was 45,536, of which 45,510 were Indonesian citizens. Nearly all Chinese are now citizens (see: <http://www.bangka.go.id/data/tabel15.pdf> and <http://www.bangka.go.id/data/tabel16.pdf>, accessed August 20, 2015), and the population of the Province of Bangka and Belitung in 2016 was about 1,400,000 (see <http://babel.bps.go.id/babelsatudata/>, accessed January 21, 2017).

changes of recent decades, Bangka and Belinyu still testify to a unique history of Chinese settlement and adaptation in the Indonesian Archipelago.