

PLACING THE CHINESE IN JAVA ON THE EVE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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To place the Chinese in late nineteenth-century Java one must find them first.¹ Finding them is by no means easy. Until now, scholars of the Chinese in Indonesia have touched on this period only lightly.² Many primary sources remain underexplored, and in some important cases they are meager. Aside from *peranakan* Chinese writings of the late century—only now being explored with vigor³—few Chinese records remain. And what is, to my knowledge, the best collection has been transmitted to us only indirectly, that is, Liem Thian Joe's *Riwayat Semarang* of 1933, based largely upon the archives of the Chinese Council of Semarang and augmented by Liem's own collections and the *peranakan* talk stories of his day.⁴ A rich store of information may await the collector of oral histories. But one hundred years is too long to expect *facts* to come through undisturbed, especially in large families where polygamy and the dispersal of various branches around the world have complicated

¹A fuller discussion of the Chinese in late nineteenth-century Java is presented in James Rush, *Opium to Java: Revenue Farming and Chinese Enterprise in Colonial Indonesia, 1869–1910* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990). This sketch draws upon additional materials, but it does not break new ground. Instead, it addresses the topic broadly to comport with the symposium for which it was written: "The Role of the Indonesian Chinese in Shaping Modern Indonesian Life." Despite the title, the emphasis here is on central and east Java. Batavia and its hinterland are underrepresented, a serious gap because the largest single community of Chinese in Java was settled there.

²See G. William Skinner, "The Chinese Minority," in *Indonesia*, ed. Ruth T. McVey (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1963), pp. 97–117; idem, "Java's Chinese Minority: Continuity and Change," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 20 (May 1961): 353–62; Donald E. Willmott, *The Chinese of Semarang: A Changing Minority Community in Indonesia* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1960); Lea Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism: The Genesis of the Pan-Chinese Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1916* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960); Leo Suryadinata, *The Chinese Minority in Indonesia* (Singapore: Chopmen Enterprises, 1978). Other recent works, like those by Peter Carey, have addressed earlier periods; see Peter Carey, "Changing Javanese Perceptions of the Chinese Communities in Central Java, 1755–1825," *Indonesia*, 37 (April 1984), pp. 1–47.

³See Claudine Salmon, *Literature in Malay by the Chinese of Indonesia. A Provisional Annotated Bibliography* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981) and other works by Salmon, including her article in this issue.

⁴Liem Thian Joe, *Riwayat Semarang (Dari Djamannja Sam Poo Sampe Terhaposnja Kongkoan)* (Semarang: Boekhandel Ho Kim Yoe, 1933). Liem died in 1963.

genealogies, and where bankruptcies and contested inheritances have long since divided kin from kin and story from story. (To avoid being embroiled in such controversies, Liem Thian Joe expurgated the *Riwajat*, as he frankly admits.) Lore about the Chinese in Indonesia has an importance all its own, but in reconstructing the last century, it must obviously be weighed against facts and observations retrieved directly from the times. Where can facts be found?

One unequipped to use Javanese sources directly unavoidably turns to the Dutch. As Java's industrious colonial masters, they were busy keeping track of things—certain things. For example, year by year, their *Regeerings Almanak* listed by name all of Java's Chinese officers, residency by residency, district by district. Java's Dutch-appointed Chinese majors, captains, and lieutenants were truly influential men who stood between the colonial state and its Chinese subjects, and who also dominated the Chinese economy. Therefore, the *Almanak* provides something akin to a demography of power among the Javan Chinese, permitting one to *place* the leading families and, where auxiliary genealogical information is available, to trace the rise of some, the demise of others. (The Bes and the Oeis, both based in Semarang, are dramatic examples.)

The *Koloniale Verslagen*—the colonial ministers' voluminous annual reports to parliament—periodically give population figures for Chinese, although the figures are somewhat impressionistic. (It is not clear, for example, who was counted as a Chinese woman.) Nevertheless, its figures permit one, roughly, to place the Chinese population spatially in Java, mapping its concentrations and dispersements across the island. After 1875, these population figures are given by *afdeling* (more or less coterminous with a regency) and after 1895, by district. The same report gives yearly accounts of the government's revenue farms, and, thus, vast amounts of information about regionally based Chinese enterprise—for virtually all revenue farms were Chinese-run. Colonial officials in Java generally made it a point to keep politicians at home in the dark about certain realities in the colony, the enormous economic influence of the Chinese among them. This is probably why the *Koloniale Verslagen* rarely identify the revenue farmers by name. Only occasionally do they acknowledge in print that they were Chinese at all. (When they do, however, the facts are telling: the *Koloniaal Verslag* for 1875 reveals, for example, that of 922 licensed pawnshops in the East Indian possessions in 1874, all but nine were held by Chinese!)⁵ Knowing the connection between government revenue farms and the Chinese, however, makes the *Verslagen* rich sources for charting the health of the Chinese economy region by region. In fact, if one looks carefully, the Chinese appear often in the *Verslagen*. (For example, in appendix A of the *Verslag* for 1889 one learns inter alia that there were then twenty-two Chinese furniture makers in Kediri, and that in all Java, only fifty-five Chinese were Christian!)

The Chinese can also be found in other official documents. Between 1866 and 1886, for example, the colonial government at Batavia published twenty-one or so statutes designating and expanding Java's authorized Chinatowns; these statutes can now be found in bound volumes entitled *Staatsbladen van Nederlandsch-Indië*. Another example is the massive *Onderzoek naar de Mindere Welvaart der Inlandsche bevolking op Java en Madoera* (10 vol., 1905–1914), in which Chinese economic activities late in the century are examined in the context of a perceived decline in the welfare of Java's indigenous population.⁶

⁵Dutch East Indies, *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1875, pp. 164–65.

⁶Dutch East Indies, *Onderzoek naar de Mindere Welvaart der Inlandsche bevolking op Java en Madoera*, 10 vols. (Batavia: 1905–1914) [hereafter cited as *Mindere Welvaart Report*].

The Chinese appear in even greater profusion and sharper focus in the archives of the former Dutch Ministry of Colonies. Here rest file upon file of raw materials unedited for public consumption, although, it is true, carefully selected for internal perusal. Those unfamiliar with archives and perhaps imagining shelves full of dull reports far removed from the nitty-gritty of Java will be surprised to discover the richness and intimacy of these sources—the result of bureaucratic procedure. When reporting administrative actions to his minister at home, the governor general in Batavia ordinarily appended to his official letter a bundle of supporting documents—the advice of his secretariat, of his advisory council (the *Raad van Indië*) and, often, of his administrative subordinates in the field. Thus, alongside routine reports from Batavia—reports used to fill the various chapters of the annual *Verslagen*—came supporting documents for administrative decisions, among them revisions to regulations governing Chinese residence and the revenue farms. Many of these documents have remained unread until now and are filed permanently with the *mailrapport* (equivalent to a diplomatic pouch) in which they were originally shipped to the Netherlands. Others were taken for study and deliberation, then deposited in separate files, by subject, as the minister or his staff finished with them. The same thing happened to additional materials drawn from the colony at the request of parliament.

Appended to deliberations concerning revenue farms, for example, one finds court documents and colonial intelligence reports detailing the business operations of wealthy Chinese merchants, audits of their plantations and mills, lists of their real estate holdings, notarial acts giving the names of their *kongsi* partners (and their respective shares in, say, an opium farm), and, now and then, descriptions of their private wealth—such as the gems and betel boxes treasured by reclusive peranakan women. Although to the modern researcher the archive yields its data unsystematically, it does so abundantly.

Even so, Dutch preoccupation with fiscal matters leaves vast areas unexplored. Some of these areas may be approached in unofficial Dutch sources, colonial newspapers and magazines, plus books offering sketches, memoirs, fiction, and polemics—although here, too, economic matters often prevail. The Chinese appear regularly, for example, in the *Indisch Weekblad voor het Recht*, the Indies lawyers' trade paper that reported precedent-setting cases. Indeed, this is a unique source of published information about the inner workings of Chinese business partnerships—those that had dissolved, that is.⁷ From newspapers, too, the fragments one gathers are more often than not economic—advertisements for this *toko* or that, and announcements like this one from the *Javansch Courant*, December 10, 1872: "Ho Tjenio, wife of Tan Tjong Toen, declared bankruptcy on December 6, 1872." But newspapers sometimes reported other news: marriages, deaths, grand events, and crimes involving the leading Chinese. From two stray notices in 1864 one learns, for example, that Be Biauw Tjoan contributed 55 guilders to a school for Chinese orphan boys in Semarang and that he owned rice warehouses in Surabaya. (The latter had been robbed.)⁸

Dutch novels, sketches, and "investigative reports" provide glimpses into aspects of Chinese social life and behavior unrecorded elsewhere. But because they were written either for the amusement of their fellow Dutch or for their edification—more often than not the latter—they tend to emphasize the extravagant or the scandalous. Some, like M.T.H. Pellaer's *Baboe Dalima* (1886) and Isaac Groneman's *Uit en over Midden Java* (1891) are frankly polemical and reflect sinophobia among the Dutch and fears about the Yellow Peril. Yet it is

⁷In issue no. 1331 of 1888, for example, the *Indisch Weekblad van het Recht* took up a civil suit involving ten members of a *kongsi* that had been formed to manage the opium farm in Batavia, Krawang, and the Lampongs.

⁸*De Locomotief*, November 25, 1864; February 29, 1864.

writers like these who also tell you what people are wearing; take you along to a wedding; or walk you down the main street of Chinatown in a provincial capital, as does Louis Couperus in *The Hidden Force (De stille kracht)* (1900). And it is often from them, as well as from *peranakan* sources directly, that one can learn something about those in Java's Chinese community who are hardest to find, the women. But keep in mind that Therese Hoven's comment about *peranakan* ladies more or less says it all, "We rarely see them."⁹

In fact, this is true of most *individuals*. Many appear in my notes only once: Tan Ing Tjan, a convert to Christianity who did not (the news clipping makes a point of remarking) Europeanize his name, died in October 1889.¹⁰ I know nothing more about him. In the same way, the best description of an opium farm auction comes from Semarang; of an opium farm's internal structure, from Madiun; and of the private wealth of a Chinese officer, from Kediri. The fit is never perfect. Yet, building from sources such as these, one can begin to place the Chinese in late nineteenth-century Java.

As far as the Dutch knew, 198,233 Chinese lived in Java in 1878, a little more than half of them men. They were massed heavily in Batavia and its immediate environs and in the north coast cities of Cirebon, Rembang, Surabaya, and Semarang. With a Chinese population of some thirteen thousand, Semarang hosted the second largest community after Batavia and was the commercial gateway opening to Central and East Java. Virtually all residency capitals contained Chinese populations of a few thousand, with communities ranging from several hundred to one or two thousand souls scattered in the district towns and beyond. The exception was the Priangan, whose population of Chinese numbered less than one thousand. In general, the Chinese were more densely concentrated closer to the north coast and the older centers of trade. But by the late 1870s, outside the Priangan, every regency in Java had at least a few hundred, including the eastern frontier residencies of Probolinggo and Besuki.¹¹

Altogether the Chinese accounted for only one percent or so of the entire population, a very small minority indeed. Yet no one living in, say, Rembang at the time would have had any trouble finding them or identifying them as Chinese. Chinese men especially were completely conspicuous. Every one of them wore a long braid down his back, the mark of the Manchus that the Dutch also required of their Chinese subjects. (Men and boys shaved the front part of their heads; boys rolled their braids into buns.) Chinese were also required to "dress" like a Chinese. Photographs and paintings show Chinese officers in Mandarin-style gowns and otherwise depict men wearing pajama like garments of loose shirts and robes over wide pants. Thick-soled shoes were also distinctively Chinese.¹² Although some men living in villages with local wives no doubt assimilated to Javanese ways—and a tiny handful, by decree, were made "Dutch" *gelijkgesteld*—generally speaking, there was no mistaking a Chinese male.¹³ Although officially lumped together with other Foreign

⁹Therese Hoven, *In sarong en kabaai* (Amsterdam: L. J. Veen, 1892), p. 93.

¹⁰*De Indische Tolk van het Nieuws van den Dag*, October 15, 1889, p. 1.

¹¹*Koloniaal Verslag*, 1875, app. A, 1879.

¹²See the photographs and illustrations in Rob Nieuwenhuys (Breton de Nijs), *Tempo Doeloe; Fotografische documenten uit het oude Indië* (Amsterdam: E. Querido, 1973); James Rush, *Opium to Java*; and Liem, *Riwajat*.

¹³The Dutch were extremely reluctant to give Dutch status to Asians. As one member of the *Raad van Indië* noted, "For the cunning Chinese here, Dutch nationality would be a 'cover' [*dekmantel*], just as Christianity is in the Philippines." Memorandum and Advice, *Raad van Indië*, April 17, 1857, filed in the colonial archives in Verbaal no. 22, March 1, 1888.

Oriental—a category that embraced “Arabs,” “Moors” and “Bengalis”—in practice, Chinese were treated as a special group. They lived under the authority of their own officers and enjoyed a mixed legal status: in criminal and civil matters they were subject to codes and procedures for Natives; in commercial ones, those for Europeans. At court, Chinese officers sat prominently by to advise the Dutch judge.

Every city or town of consequence had its own Chinese quarter (*patjinan*) and the Chinese were generally required to reside there. These neighborhoods were often set off with ornamental gates and were characterized by crowded streets of shop-houses, temples, and the family compounds of the better off. (As an observer of Semarang’s *patjinan* remarked in 1850, “The tasteful home and pretty gardens of the Chinese Captain are worth a look.”)¹⁴ Although a few Chinese were exempted from living in them, and others took advantage of lax vigilance here and there, these official ghettos gave the community a clear spatial focus in each city and town. They were places apart to Javanese and Dutch alike, where sounds and smells, the shape of buildings, and the pace and habits of daily life were strange. In smaller towns, too, the Chinese tended to live in clusters, probably in or near a clutch of buildings just off the *alun-alun*, including a few provision shops and the local opium store, pawnhouse, and bordello. These city neighborhoods and small-town clusters were the centers of Chinese life and commerce on Java, and to the Javanese they must have seemed something like beehives: busy and dangerous havens, full of honey, from which swarms of menacing but useful intruders fanned out daily in a relentless, apparently instinctual, quest for livelihood.

It was the intensity and variety of this quest for livelihood that most thoroughly marked the Chinese, for they were everywhere “material man.” As people of commerce in Java they were not unique, of course; Javanese, Dutch, Eurasians, and others, to one degree or another, also had a hand in the economy. The Dutch dominated large-scale importing and exporting, the heights of the European banking sector, and other activities where industrial acumen or privileged access to government concessions gave them an edge, as in railroad building. Although already losing their traditional hold, Javanese merchants still carried on in the tobacco and textile industries and, on a small scale, in many others. Village men and women who provided commodities for market and engaged in petty trade were legion.¹⁵ But where the economy was concerned, the Chinese were ubiquitous and essential. Sooner or later everyone doing business in Java had to do business with a Chinese—from the Dutch planter needing wagons and tools to the Javanese villager with fruits and eggs to sell. So dependent were Europeans and other urbanites on Chinese-provided goods and services that daily life itself—as they came to know and enjoy it—was impossible without them. Moreover, except for a few schoolmasters, Java’s Chinese men—and an untold number of the *peranakan* and indigenous women to whom they were married or related—were almost all active in the money economy.

From top to bottom, commerce marked the Chinese. They were shippers, warehousemen, and labor contractors; builders and repairmen; and suppliers of *all things* to town and country. They were tinsmiths, leather tanners, and furniture makers. They bought and sold real estate, worked timber concessions, and speculated in the plantation economy. They organized the manufacture of batik and tobacco products. (In 1877, villagers in Wonosobo

¹⁴P. Bleeker, “Fragmenten eener Reis over Java: Reis langs de Noordkust van Midden-Java,” *Tijdschrift van Nederlandsch-Indië* 1 (1850): 18.

¹⁵On batik, see Christine Dobbin, “From Revenue Farmers to Entrepreneurs: The Chinese in the Javanese Textile Industry, 1870–1939.” Author’s collection. Typescript, n. d.

still remembered the names of the Chinese who some seventy years before had taught them how to cultivate tobacco.)¹⁶ The Chinese brought the products of village farmers to market—rice, sugar, indigo, cotton, pepper, coconuts, cacao, and soybeans, fruits, ducks, chickens, and eggs. They milled rice, tapioca, cotton and sugar; processed *kapok* and copra and castor oil; and manufactured *tahu* and soy sauce. (Investigators for the *Welvaart Onderzoek* found fifty Chinese-run *kecap* “factories” in Surabaya.)¹⁷ And, aside from their own wares, they supplied indigenous vendors with goods like gambir, salt, *trasi*, and cooking oil for the village trade. As opium farmers they brought opium to everyone; and as, for instance, “water buffalo farmers” they took in fees for slaughtering animals and, on the side, did a brisk business in hides. Those Chinese who acted as officials were not only merchants but Java’s biggest and richest entrepreneurs.

Chinese merchants, shopkeepers, and petty traders were also often the first source for loans and credit and certainly the last. Most of Java’s day-to-day banking was in their hands. Most of this activity occurred *within* the Chinese community, but Dutch and *priyayi* officials also borrowed heavily from them—loans were provided on easy terms in return for privileges and favors. In the rural economy, Chinese loans to village farmers and petty hawkers fueled the trade of village commodities for store-bought things: threads and yarns, knives, scissors, mirrors. These debts compromised the Dutch: they bent the *priyayi* to Chinese interest; and they bound the peasant to the Chinese peddler (and his patrons elsewhere), who offered cash and goods on credit secured by the upcoming harvest. Debt, in fact, was fundamental to the Chinese economy, inside and out. Alongside employment giving and the official status of Chinese officers, debt was a decisive variable in placing each individual on his or her step in the pyramidlike formations of patrons and clients that formed the invisible skeleton of the community.¹⁸

This skeleton took the shape it did in part because of certain distinctive features of the Chinese community: first, the prominent role of trade in the Chinese economy, which facilitated a division into a chain of credit-giving/debt-paying patrons and clients; second, the place within it of economically rooted *peranakan* Chinese families, on the one hand, and a steady flow of newcomers from China on the other. (Chinese *singkeh*, as the newcomers were known, naturally sought jobs among their own people, gravitating first to those with similar surnames and home districts. In any case, upon arrival, *singkeh* would immediately have been steered to the Chinese quarter and the office of the Chinese officers, where connections could be made. They needed a patron quickly; without a job they could be sent home.)¹⁹ But some elements of its structure were uniquely tied to the Dutch colonial household on Java and the *official* role of the Chinese within it, namely, as revenue farmers.

¹⁶*Mindere Welvaart Report: Landbouw* 1: 152.

¹⁷*Mindere Welvaart Report: Inlandsch Handel en Nijverheid* 4: 130.

¹⁸The role of credit in the Javan Chinese economy is discussed extensively in contemporary documents. The relationships connecting petty traders to “big men” are also described. Moreover, some detailed information about the dynamics of these debt relationships as they related to the Chinese pecking order comes from Dutch accounts of opium farmers who, in crisis, attempted to cover debts to the state by calling in *their* debts. However, as I have remarked elsewhere, it was T’ien Ju-k’ang’s study of the Chinese in Sarawak that showed me how debt (and not simply monetary debt) disciplined relationships of this kind, that is, through Chinese officer-dominated chains of patrons and clients. T’ien Ju-k’ang, *The Chinese of Sarawak: A Study of Social Structure*, London School of Economics and Political Science, Monographs on Social Anthropology (London: 1953).

¹⁹J. E. Albrecht, *Soerat Ketrangan dari pada hal kaadaan Bangsa Tjina di Negri Hindia Olandia* (Batavia: Albrecht en Rusche, 1890), p. 5.

As revenue farmers, Chinese merchants were a critical part of the state apparatus. They had been so since the earliest days of Dutch East India Company (VOC) enterprise on Java. Over the centuries, the Chinese had delivered vast sums to the colonial treasury through an array of franchised or “farmed out” monopolies. By the late nineteenth century, some of these had fallen by the wayside, notably the market farm, abolished in 1851 in an attempt to weaken the hold of the Chinese on the rural economy. Of those that remained, the opium farm was paramount. In most of Java, the others—such as the pig- and cattle-slaughtering farms—were invariably subordinate to it, not by official design but as a logical byproduct of the way the Chinese economy was shaped by Holland’s revenue-farming policies.

As noted, Holland required most of its Chinese subjects to live in ghettos. To move beyond them, traders needed passes approved by Chinese officers and invigilated locally by *priyayi* officials. Because of their large and apparently irreplaceable contributions to the colonial treasury, however, revenue farms were accorded privileged access to Java’s rural markets. Farm employees were exempt from the pass and residency rules. They were also permitted, with a wink and a nod from local officials, to use coercive techniques to protect the farmer’s tax-gathering monopolies. In a typical residency, an opium farmer’s formal organization included several dozen official stores and a small army of Chinese salesmen, clerks, and chemists; their work was augmented informally by hundreds of Chinese and indigenous vendors who bore opium (and other products) into the villages. Moreover, teams of spies and toughs hired by the farm stood by everywhere to muscle aside black-market dealers and otherwise to foster the opium farmer’s interests.

These interests were legion. Under the protective umbrella of the opium farm, members of the farm organization and other clients of the farmers and their *kongsi* partners traded comprehensively throughout the farm territory. Whenever possible, opium farmers gained control of the minor revenue farms as well. In the hands of their (Chinese) competitors they could be conduits for opium smuggling and other unwelcome commercial competition. In such a system, opium farmers’ positions within the commercial life of a residency could be quite domineering, all the more so when the opium farmers and/or his *kongsi* partners were Chinese officers. And they nearly always were. For these reasons, in much of Java the pyramids of patrons and clients that provided the internal structure of the Chinese economy (and that also established the pecking order of social position in the community) were either linked to the opium farm itself and headed by the farmer and his partners—the dominant constellation—or represented *competing* pyramids (or fragments thereof) headed by the farmers’ competitors, that is, alternative or potential opium farmers.²⁰

Liem Tian Joe tells us that the *peranakan* Chinese called the opium farm auctions “the battle of the kings.” It was not being an opium farmer per se that made men like Be Biauw Tjoan and Ho Yam Lo “kings,” however, or for that matter, being named Chinese captain or major. What really made them big men was their position as paramount patrons of central Java’s great Chinese commercial networks.

But this power was based, in part, on the colonial system itself. Holland’s revenue-farming policies limited the number of key players and made it possible for a *few* men to achieve great wealth and influence. Enjoying it meant *to be part* of the system, to accept the basic premise of power on which it was based—Dutch preeminence. And it also meant, wherever possible, manipulating the state’s institutions and its agents to personal advantage. This was important because, officially speaking, many farm activities were in violation

²⁰There were no opium farms per se in the Priangan or Bantam, although the farmer for Batavia was permitted to operate a few stores in Bantam.

of the state's laws and policies. Almost no real revenue farm adhered strictly to the rules and regulations the Dutch set for it; a farmer's agents in the countryside often went beyond the powers allotted them by the state, for example, in collecting debts and fending off competitors roughly. And, to speak of more flagrant illegalities, opium farmers routinely imported opium to Java independently of the state; that is, they smuggled. To protect these activities the Chinese placed themselves as close as possible to local Dutch officials and to the priyayi administrators of the countryside. The most advantageous place to be, and the safest, was *close to power*.

And so one witnesses a pattern of behavior among the *peranakan* "kings" characteristic of a dependent elite, constantly and conspicuously currying the favor of other elites: the Dutch, who were more powerful than themselves and the Javanese, who were more numerous and permanent. The friendly loans mentioned were but a small aspect of this behavior. There were also overt gifts, covert bribes, and a variety of subtler subsidies for officials and their establishments. For regents (*bupati*), *wedana*, and other priyayi officials, there was free opium, plus bonuses for good work done on behalf of the farm or other Chinese interests—money to shore up an official's own small retinue of client subordinates and to meet obligations to the official's many needy relatives. Chinese obsequiousness to Dutch officials was the subject of caricature by the Dutch themselves, and the lavish entertainments at which Dutch guests were feted are a matter of record. (In 1866, a senior official from Batavia issued this warning to residents, "I have pointed out elsewhere how cautious it behooves one to be in regard to the goodwill and obligingness of Chinese Officers or wealthy Chinese, who in Java . . . are everywhere involved in the opium farm.")²¹

Aside from strategies of this kind—part of the dance of collaboration in which the relationship between official rules and actual behavior was negotiated among local elites—it is worth emphasizing that the Chinese were also *physically* close to power. They were concentrated in the provincial capitals, which were the centers of Dutch administration, and in the regional towns, where only a few Dutch were posted and where the priyayi prevailed. The seats of *bupati*, *wedana*, and assistant *wedana* were also the sites of opium stores and other Chinese-run enterprises—the smaller the town, the more obvious the connection. Moreover, court cases related to violations of the revenue farms reveal that collaboration between opium farm spies and police agents of local priyayi was commonplace in village Java. From top to bottom, the Chinese were close to power and nested within the power structure.

At the same time, however, Chinese activities intersected broadly and regularly with Java's criminal world. Interdicting competitors in the countryside required working with specialists, as, of course, did opium smuggling. Moreover, certain shadowy realms on the fringes of polite society—those of prostitutes, itinerant entertainers, and other denizens of the "opium world"—were also part of the Chinese place in nineteenth-century Java. Other groups entered these realms selectively and only episodically, but the Chinese moved pragmatically within them day by day. Connections like these made Chinese friends useful as conspirators—Dutch novels of the times depict both Dutch and Javanese going to them for secret undertakings²²—but connections also tainted the Chinese and lent an aura of corruption to their all-too-conspicuous wealth.

²¹Circular to Residents, December 31, 1866, no. 5081, filed in Verbaal Kabinets Geheim, no. 17/C, January 27, 1869, colonial archives.

²²See P. A. Daum (Maurits), *Ups and Downs of Life in the Indies* [1892], trans. Elsje Qualm Sturtevant and Donald W. Sturtevant (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987); and Isaac Groneman, *Een Ketjoe-geschiedenis, Vorstenlanden Toestanden II* (Dordrecht: J. P. Revers, 1887).

Aside from the penniless newcomer, ever present, there were plenty of small-scale vendors and tradespeople among the Chinese whose incomes were modest. Some never rose above menial occupations; others toiled all their lives in small shops for small profits. Only a few achieved the affluence of the *peranakan* upper class, the *cabang atas*. Those who did, however, lived ostentatiously in grand "villas" with specially designed gardens, as did the Chinese captain mentioned above. They showed off their wealth in lavish parties and in largesse to the community. They were borne from place to place in fine horse-drawn carriages; and when they walked about at night, attendants bearing lamps and torches walked with them. Among the Dutch this wealth was a subject of wonder and notoriety. How much more so it must have been to the Javanese, to whom the local Chinese shopkeeper, standing amidst his myriad wares, seemed to possess so many things. Even the lowly peddler always had money.

A Javanese of the late nineteenth century might well have said, "The Chinese are everywhere *with* us, but they are not *of* us"—all the more so because the distinctions born of legal status, dress, residence, occupation, and wealth were reinforced by those of culture itself. *Peranakan* culture was by its very nature one of constant blending and change: formed on the one side by a steady flow of men from China and on the other by indigenous or *peranakan* wives and concubines. By the nineteenth century, the pattern of its formation seems to have stabilized: Chinese men adhered self-consciously to a sense of Chineseness as manifested in custom, dress, and language and, in the upper reaches, paired in marriage their *peranakan* sons to *peranakan* daughters of suitable status. Although few *peranakan* really spoke Chinese, their Malay was evidently interlaced with Hokkien words and spoken with a "Chinese" accent.²³ Merchants, *kongsi*, and Chinese officers identified themselves by special Chinese names and ideographs, and shopkeepers hung from the front of their shops cloth banners decorated with lucky Chinese characters. New arrivals from Amoy kept the Hokkien dialect alive at a certain rudimentary level among the men. Indeed, the fact that until later in the century most *singkeh* were of Hokkien origin gave the Chineseness of *peranakan* culture a certain homogeneity and facilitated taking in newcomers. For *singkeh*, the vitality of the *peranakan*-dominated economy and its internal structure based on a patronage hierarchy—offering upward mobility to the talented and enterprising—made assimilation to *peranakan* society attractive and in many parts of Java the only practical course.

The *peranakan* "big men," opium farmer-Chinese officers, set a tone of Chineseness for the community at large. At the lunar New Year they sponsored great celebrations and distributed alms. They endowed and maintained temples. (Tan Hong Yan and Be Ing Tjioe, for example, together refurbished the temple Tay Kak Sie in Semarang; a few years later when their sons Tan Tjong Hoay and Be Biau Tjoan were named Chinese captains, the ceremonies of investiture were held there.)²⁴ They also patronized Chinese arts. Some brought architects and master craftsmen from China to build their homes and gardens and hired Chinese musicians to perform, alongside Javanese gamelan players, for their private pleasure. Some of them sent sons to live in the ancestral homeland and otherwise fostered a connection with China by acts of charity. China's leaders were aware of this and rewarded generous donations with Mandarin titles and honorific robes and hats. In 1873, for example, Be Biau Tjoan was named Mandarin Fourth Class by the emperor of China for his contri-

²³The *peranakan* accent is commented on in the Javanese short story "Tjandoe Peteng Toewin Panjegahipoen," which, from the context, was written no later than 1903. In G. W. J. Drewes, *Eenvoudig Hedendaagsch Javaansch Proza* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1946), pp. 61–71.

²⁴Liem, *Riwajat*, pp. 104–7, 109, 116.

butions of money and goods to war-ravaged Fukien [Hok Yan] province.²⁵ No less than Li Hung-chang approached the Indies government in 1891 asking it to confer special status upon its overseas "Mandarins."²⁶

Private education was another link to things Chinese. Dutch officials counted 190 Chinese schools in Java in 1887. In them, some 3,452 pupils learned Chinese bookkeeping and memorized "the most important" ideographs. Among Semarang's schoolmasters were degree holders from China—or, more likely, failed degree candidates. But observers noted that such rote learning provided little understanding of the language; moreover, girls rarely attended such schools.²⁷

Indeed, in this show of peranakan Chineseness the role of women was largely ornamental. Liem complains that peranakan men of the times paid little attention to their daughters, so the girls were influenced exclusively by the female side of the family, that is, by their peranakan or indigenous mothers and grandmothers and by indigenous servants. That these women spoke no Chinese meant that both daughters and sons spoke Javanese or Malay as their mother tongue—one reason that command of Chinese atrophied so quickly from one generation to the next. Indigenous wives of Chinese men wore local clothing; so, too, did peranakan women, who preferred *sarong* and *kebaya*. (Ladies of the cabang atas, however, complemented their finery with silks and other adornments from China, one reason, as Skinner has remarked, that "no one could mistake the Peranakan ensemble for the Javanese.")²⁸ In other ways as well, Liem tells us, women of the Chinese community adopted local custom, as in filing their teeth and chewing betel. It should be noted that outside the cabang atas, where women seem to have lived in seclusion, women very likely worked alongside their men in shops and stalls, providing them with critical links to their customers. (This is especially interesting in light of the prominent role of Javanese and Sundanese women in rural marketing generally.)

Thus did the Chinese community form, and re-form, itself in each generation between the self-conscious Chineseness of its men and the Java-ness of its women. By the late nineteenth century, this complex social chemistry had long since yielded a distinct culture. Like the society itself—poised between Dutch and native, city and countryside, legality and illegality—its place in Java was also one in between, to the Javanese and other indigenes at once familiar and strange.

The evolving peranakan culture was an important source of cohesion among the Chinese of Java, reinforcing other ties of presumed kinship among Hokkien, of special legal status, and of the mechanisms of social control built into the Chinese economy and exaggerated by the Chinese officer system and government revenue farming. But Java was changing rapidly in the late nineteenth century, subjecting the cohesion of the community to new strains. Ironically, rising prosperity was one of these. The opening of Java to private enterprise in 1870, the year after the Suez Canal opened, set off a fresh round of development on the island. European planters opened new lands to commercial agriculture for sugar, tobacco, and coffee. This expansion was accompanied by government-sponsored schemes to build roads and railroads, bridges, dikes, irrigation channels, and harbor works. The Chinese moved quickly to take up new opportunities, penetrating regions of the interior now

²⁵*De Indier*, December 6, 1873, p. 1039.

²⁶Minister of colonies to the governor general, January 7, 1892, no. 24/43, filed in Verbaal Kabinets Geheim, no. 24/43, January 7, 1892, colonial archives.

²⁷*Koloniaal Verslag*, 1889, p. 120.

²⁸Skinner, "Java's Chinese Minority," p. 257.

awakening to enterprise and moving in larger numbers to frontier territories in the East Hook.²⁹ Many of the richest became planters themselves; Chinese outnumbered Europeans in acquiring long-term land leases from the Javanese.³⁰ Otherwise, Chinese merchants supplied the nuts and bolts to carry out infrastructure projects and contracted with the Dutch to build warehouses, haul produce, and provision construction crews and plantation laborers. The vast numbers of people now abandoning villages to provide the raw muscle for all this expansion—and who earned wages in money to do so—swelled the ranks of opium smokers and profits to opium farmers. As word of this boon spread to south China, increasing numbers of men made their way to Java, raising the number of singkeh seeking places within the peranakan-dominated economy. Of these new arrivals, a growing number were Hakka and other non-Hokkien.

The massive rural depression of the mid-1880s knocked the wind out of this boom and strained the Chinese community. Losses to Chinese-run revenue farms were catastrophic to the peranakan elite, many of whom lost their farms and their fortunes; this in turn provoked a partial breakdown along Java's Chinese patron-client chains. Very likely, competition among them for the spoils of the countryside also became rougher because the same years were accompanied by a rising tide of complaints by Dutch observers of Chinese cheating, usury, and racketeering. For newcomers there were no patrons, and as singkeh now scrambled to wrest a living from money-scarce Java they found the peranakan authority structure—so close to power—an impediment to survival. In Yogyakarta, in 1889, they rebelled against it.³¹ Such behavior made the "singkeh flood" visible to the Dutch. Seeing it amidst other evidence of Chinese danger to the colony, a few of them raised the flag of Yellow Peril and led an anti-Chinese campaign that resulted, a few years later, in dismantling the government revenue farms.

The full impact of all this on the Chinese community was not immediate. Java's economy recovered in the wake of the mid-1880s crisis and so did that of the peranakan. Many of the major opium farmers did not recover. The losers were replaced by competitors from within the cabang atas, the most astute and successful of whom was Oei Tiong Ham. Java's Chinese-run opium farms were dismantled gradually, beginning in 1894; by 1905 there were none on Java. The minor revenue farms were replaced more or less at the same time. These changes comported with the Ethical perception that Chinese business practices were a cause of poverty among the Javanese. In tune with this, the enforcement of residence and pass regulations was especially harsh in those years.

Java's Chinese community was, therefore, under duress as it entered the twentieth century and was deprived of an institution essential to the structure of its economy and to its social cohesion. As noted, the real power of Chinese officers rested upon their position as senior patrons of the peranakan economy. As the huge farm-based patronage pyramids headed by them fragmented and broke down in the late 1890s and early 1900s, the authority of the officers could not be sustained by Dutch-conferred titles alone. (Soon, bedecked in Dutch military-style costumes with ribbons and braids, they would become symbols of unquestioning deference.) These changes undermined the authority of the peranakan elite as cultural arbiters as well, all the more so as new waves of non-Hokkien singkeh arrived in the colony and formed local communities independent of the peranakan, communities with

²⁹See C. Baks, "De Chinezen in Oostelijk Java, een demografisch onderzoek naar de penetratie over de periode 1815–1930," Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, Typescript, 1962.

³⁰See *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1885, p. 77.

³¹See Isaac Groneman, *Uit en over Midden-Java* (Zutphen: W. J. Thieme en Cie., 1891), pp. 297–306.

wholly different standards for Chineseness. For almost the first time, Chinese women joined Chinese men in Java to form “pure” Chinese families. (A similar “pure” community was now forming among the Dutch as well. Both were called *totok*.)

In the 1880s, the *peranakan* had begun exploring new standards of Chineseness themselves—judged at least by the sudden popularity of Confucian primers and popular Chinese novels published in Malay. Alienated from and unattracted to the low-class Chineseness of the *totok*, many *peranakan* looked instead to China for models. Some joined the Confucian revival and helped to form the *Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan* in 1900 and other “modern” Chinese organizations. At the same time, *peranakan* were becoming attuned to winds of modernity blowing from the West. They began learning Dutch in earnest (and English). They cut off their braids and began to wear Western-style clothing, some of them even before it was permitted. And many of them began to gravitate to the more genteel professions, abandoning the hurly-burly of commerce, a realm that was gradually overtaken by the *totok*. Oei Tiong Ham’s legendary success was an exception among the *peranakan*.

In short, as the new century begins, we find Java’s Chinese making a new place for themselves. It was a more fragmented place, because the community itself was becoming very rapidly diverse. And it was a more ambiguous place, especially for *peranakan* now torn between the attractions of Western modernity, to be learned from the Dutch, and their self-conscious identity as Chinese. Most of all, it was a more vulnerable place, for the Chinese were no longer close to power. Even though the Chinese officer system survived officially until the early 1930s, long before then—indeed, from the turn of the century—*peranakan* and *totok* alike needed to mobilize themselves in new ways. They did so successfully. New Chinese organizations provoked important reforms—the residence and pass regulations went out; Dutch-Chinese schools came in. But the institutional context in which this transition was accomplished was wholly changed.

The Chinese now faced the state as outsiders. Even after the Dutch departed, half a century later, it remained so. The most calamitous event of the period for Java’s Chinese was not their altered status within the colonial state. It was, instead, the coincidence of a powerful wave of sinophobia—prompting the Dutch to dismantle the revenue farms and, in part, to launch the “Ethical Policy”—with the embryonic stages of the Indonesian nationalist movement, a movement whose heirs would build the *new* state and decide who, exactly, was truly Indonesian. And who was not.