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From 'Sons of the Yellow Emperor' to 'Children of Indonesian Soil': Studying Peranakan Chinese based on the Batavia Kong Koan Archives

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After making a comparative study of the Chinese Batavia Kong Koan archives between its earlier and later periods, this article discusses what was an apparently inevitable localisation of immigrants' identities, in the context of immigration, settlement and, in particular, intermarriage.

After more than a thousand years of immigration, by the nineteenth century the ethnic Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies demonstrated a considerable degree of diversity.[1] More than anything else, those third-, fourth-, fifth-generation or more Sino-East Indians were characterised as a distinct group known as Peranakan Chinese. Regardless of whether they are in China or abroad, the Chinese are used to considering themselves – and often to being regarded by others – as the 'Sons of the Yellow Emperor' (炎黃子孫).[2] *Peranakan*, however, means locally-born children, or by extension, what could be called children of the soil.[3] Therefore, Peranakan Chinese are children of Indonesian soil.

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This article builds on an ongoing Leiden University research project using the Batavia Kong Koan archives, headed by Professor Leonard Blussé. An earlier version was presented at the conference on 'Migrating Identities and Ethnic Minorities in the Chinese Diaspora' held at the Center for the Study of the Chinese Southern Diaspora, Australian National University on 26-28 Sept. 2001. Perceptive comments by the organisers and participants at the conference and anonymous reviewers are gratefully acknowledged. Professor Zhou Nanjing of Peking University, a returned Peranakan Chinese, kindly provided help in understanding some typical terms. Professor Chen Ronglan, a linguist at Xiamen University, helped with Hokkien readings of Chinese characters. Appreciation is also due to the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden for providing research funding.

1 According to some Chinese historians, the history of Chinese immigration into today's Indonesian archipelago can be traced back to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–222 CE), although the relevant records are limited and questionable. More reliable sources suggest that at the latest Chinese immigrants in the Indonesian archipelago had become a socially visible group by the late Tang Dynasty, i.e., the ninth century; see Wen Guangyi *et al.*, *Yindunixiya Huaqiaoshi* [A history of the Chinese in Indonesia] (Beijing: Haiyang Chubanshe, 1986), and Li Xueming and Huang Kunzhang, *Yindunixiya Huaqiaoshi* [A history of the Chinese in Indonesia] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Gaodeng Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1987).

2 See Lynn Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor, a history of the Chinese diaspora* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990).

3 The word Peranakan comes from the root *anak*, which literally means 'son'. So when one says he or she is a Peranakan, the meaning is that he or she is locally born. Some scholars consider that a person does not become a Peranakan until he or she becomes Indonesian-speaking and Indonesia-oriented; Leo Suryadinata, *Pribumi Indonesians, the Chinese minority and China*, rev. edn (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1986), p. 2. It has even been argued that Peranakan status only comes with conversion to Islam; Mona

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The Archives of the Batavia Kong Koan (BKK, the Chinese Council) provide a unique historical source for studying Chinese society in nineteenth-century Batavia, when the Kong Koan was in its most active period. Starting from a general overview of the archives and making a detailed analysis of the data, this article attempts to show how Batavia's Chinese society was in transition – that is, how the 'sons of the Yellow Emperor' were gradually being localised as the 'Chinese children of Indonesian soil'. It is argued that the localisation of identities appears to be an inevitable trend, especially for the offspring of intermarriages. Moreover, instead of suffering from being 'nowhere at home' or becoming passive, assimilated objects, many of the offspring of Chinese immigrants have, consciously or unconsciously, developed their own marginal profile. The potential significance of this finding is considerable.

An overview of the Batavia Kong Koan and its Archives

In the former Netherlands Indies, one of the important policies carried out by the Dutch authority was to have a group of Chinese acting as go-betweens as well as administrators and arbitrators for the internal affairs of their community. In 1742, a building located on Jalan Pabean in Batavia was designated as the first formal office of the Chinese Council; this event came to be regarded as symbolising the official establishment of the Batavia Kong Koan.[4] The Dutch name of this organisation was Chineschen Raad te Batavia. Its formal name in Chinese was *Baguo Gongtang* [吧國公堂] as pronounced in Mandarin. Nevertheless, the local Chinese, most of them Hokkien speakers, usually called it *Kong Koan* (公館, Mand. *Gongguan*).

After the BKK's establishment and up until the early 1930s, Chinese officers named by the Dutch authorities and representatives of the community's elite worked together to manage and supervise the community. In 1750 the Kong Koan began to employ one full-time secretary; a second clerical post was added in 1766. From 1772 onward, all BKK affairs were recorded clearly and filed.[5]

According to the archives, the main tasks of the BKK during its active period can be listed as follows:[6]

Lohanda, *The Kapitan Cina of Batavia 1837-1942: A history of Chinese establishment in colonial society*, rev. edn (Jakarta: Djambatan, 2001), p. 7. This paper uses the term Peranakan in a cultural sense, that is, referring to locally-born and locally-oriented Chinese.

4 There is no clear record concerning the date of the establishment of the Chinese Council in Batavia. Some historians believe that it was first set up in 1678, when the Dutch authority appointed three Chinese officers. Myra Sidharta, however, suggests 1717, as it was in that year that Chinese officers received authority to give permission for marriages and divorces within the Chinese community; Myra Sidharta, 'On the remnants of the Gong Goan archives in Jakarta', paper presented at the International Conference on Local History of the Asia-Pacific Region, Hong Kong, 6-8 April 1989, cited in Lohanda, *Kapitan Cina*, pp. 107-9. However, according to an inscription found in the old Kong Koan hall, the Council was founded to take charge of the registry in 1742 (壬戌 in the Chinese calendar), when a majestic Chinese-style building was constructed. Therefore, the latter date has been widely accepted as the official founding year of the Batavia Kong Koan. See also *Chinese epigraphic materials in Indonesia*, ed. Wolfgang Franke with Claudine Salmon and Anthony K. K. Siu (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1997), vol. III, pp. 115-8; and 'Kai Ba lidai shiji' [Chronological history of Batavia], ed. Hsu Yun Tsiao, *Journal of the South Seas Society*, 9 (1953): 46.

5 Leonard Blussé and Wu Fengbin, *Shiba shijimo Bataiweiya Tangren shehui* [The Chinese community of Batavia at the end of the eighteenth century] (Xiamen: Xiamen Daxue Chubanshe, 2002), pp. 2, 4-8.

6 Leonard Blussé has grouped the main tasks of the Batavia Kong Koan into five areas: (a) registration of arrivals, marriages, divorces and deaths; (b) management of real estate; (c) management of charitable

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(a) Registration of immigration and out-migration, marriages, divorces and deaths (until 1918, when municipal reforms were implemented and central registers of birth and marriage established).
(b) Arbitration for the internal affairs of the local Chinese community, exerting its juridical capacity in cases such as criminal acts, property or inheritance disputes, marital affairs, commercial entanglements, etc.
(c) Administration of Chinese cemeteries. This was the BKK's most influential function as well as its most profitable business. By the late nineteenth century, it had bought six large pieces of land to build Chinese public cemeteries. The funeral plots, differentiated by size and price, were sold on an individual basis. Moreover, after the Dutch abolished the system of ethnic chiefdom (*Kapitan Cina*)[7] in the 1930s, BKK's function could be maintained through the early 1960s – well after Independence – mainly because it was needed as an administrative office for these cemeteries.
(d) Supervision and support of charitable organisations. The relevant associations were normally named *Meisegan* or *Bingcuo* (mainly before the 1850s), *Jiaomajian* (in the 1860s) or *Lianjian* (after the 1870s).[8]
(e) Management of Chinese community affairs. For instance, the BKK established and supervised at least one Chinese temple in every cemetery it owned, and it also oversaw several community-run Chinese schools.

By the twentieth century the Batavia Kong Koan had clearly declined in importance. In 1900 a China-orientated association, Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan 中華會館, was set up in Batavia and soon established dozens of branches all over the Netherlands Indies. Unlike other *hwee koan* (*huiguan*) linked to specific localities back in China, this new association stressed its role as a modern nationalist organisation representing the Chinese as a group; its major purpose was to improve the social position of the Chinese in the colony. With the rise of the Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan, the BKK came to be seen as an old-fashioned and even backward institution that was now marginalised. By the 1930s the BKK had already ceased to exist as an institution of Chinese officers, although it was still regarded as the highest administrative office for the community's cemeteries. After Indonesia's independence, the national authorities expropriated all remaining landed property together with all other private estates in the vicinity of Jakarta. As a result, the Kong Koan was dissolved and reorganised into a series of separate temple foundations and a cremation society.

During the more than two centuries of its existence, the BKK's office was only

organisations; (d) management of local Chinese temples; and (e) supervision and support of Chinese-language education in Batavia; Leonard Blussé, 'The Kong Koan or Chinese Council of Batavia', in *Ethnic Chinese at the turn of the centuries*, ed. Zhuang Guotu (Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 1998), vol. II, pp. 220-6.

7 The Dutch authorities in the Indies appointed Chinese 'officers' to function as go-betweens, administrators and arbitrators for the internal affairs of the local Chinese community with titles such as 'Major' (of the Chinese), 'Captain', and 'Lieutenant'. In Batavia these officers functioned collectively as a Chinese Council.

8 *Meisegan* [美色甘] is a Chinese term meaning orphanage, transliterated from the Dutch word *Weeskamer*. *Bingcuo* [病厝] is a Chinese term for hospice. The origin of *jiaomajian* [腳馬間] and *lianjian* [煉間] is still awaiting further study.

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moved once.[9] Since it had been authorised as a formal institution and had accumulated considerable property, all documents were well preserved. In 1955, Mr Tan Yin Hok, the last Secretary of the BKK, transferred some 600 kilogrammes of records from the Tongkangan Street office to a private location. Until the early 1990s, these archives were covered with a thick layer of dust. Although a few historians once went to do some research, no one could protect the documents from rodents and insects. One Indonesian historian tried unsuccessfully to convince the Library of Congress in Jakarta to take these archives under its protection.

In 1995, through support provided by local historians in Jakarta, the remnants of the BKK Archives were shipped to the Netherlands, where they are now stored at Leiden University's Sinological Institute under the supervision of Leonard Blussé. A Foundation of Kong Koan Archives has been established in the Netherlands to support research using these documents. A research team headed by Blussé is in the process of formulating a large-scale research project to make the archival data accessible to researchers all over the world.

The remnants of the Batavia Kong Koan Archives, comprising almost 1,000 different manuscripts, can be divided into four important components:

(a) Proceedings of BKK board meetings and the minute books that dealt with its juridical functions, covering the era between 1787 and 1964 and comprising a total of thirty-two thick volumes.[10]
(b) Cemetery archives related to Chinese funerals in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Batavia, totalling eighty-two volumes. In addition, there are hundreds of individual documents attesting to the relevant funeral arrangements.
(c) Registers of weddings and divorces. The seventy-two volumes of neatly recorded marriage registrations, dating from 13 May 1772 to 30 April 1919, have been well preserved. There are several additional volumes of records concerning divorces and remarriages.
(d) Account books of Chinese companies. Several dozen volumes are waiting to be sorted out.]

The emergence of Peranakan Chinese: findings from the archives

The Kong Koan archives have provided extensive and detailed records concerning ordinary Chinese people in Batavia. Regardless of whether the relevant people were rich or poor, high-ranking officials or coolies, they were recorded individually: births,

9 In 1831, having been promoted from Lieutenant to Captain, Ko Tjang Tjong (高長宗) decided to build a new office for the Kong Koan. He bought a piece of land on Tongkangan Street and built a mansion there at his own expense. In the same year, the Kong Koan office was moved to the new mansion, although the building was registered as his private property. In 1861, in order to avoid unnecessary disputes between the organisation and Ko's descendants, Tan Eng Goan (陳永元), then the Major of the Chinese (the first to hold that position), decided to purchase the building from the Ko family with Kong Koan revenues for a price of 8,500 guilders. The Kong Koan remained in that building until its demolition in the early 1950s. (Information from an inscription dated 1861 in the former Kong Koan building.)

10 The first volume of Gong An Bu (Minutes of the board meetings of the Chinese Council) has been published as *Bacheng Huaren Gongguan dang'an congshu: Gong An Bu* [The Chinese Council of Batavia archives series: Gong An Bu], ed. Leonard Blussé and Wu Fengbin (Xiamen: Xiamen Daxue Chubanshe, 2002).

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marriages, funerals and sometimes business quarrels or family disputes as well. Although the archives may appear incomplete and uninteresting on cursory examination, careful analysis and comparative study provides insight into Batavia's Chinese society.

Change in language use

Throughout its existence the Kong Koan never lost its social status as the only authorised Chinese institution in Batavia. However, its archives reveal a series of interesting changes, among them changes in its working languages. Three different languages – Chinese, Malay and Dutch – can be found in the archives. The BKK had to use Dutch for communication with the relevant colonial authorities, and some formal certificates issued by the latter were in Dutch as well. The use of Dutch will not be the main subject of discussion here; the focus will be on the changing status of the other two languages.

In the earliest section of the archives –the records from the late eighteenth century when the Kong Koan had just started to function actively – it is clear that Chinese culture and identity were the prevailing characteristics of the institution. All records were written from top to bottom in traditional Chinese with a brush, although the choice of characters was influenced by the Hokkien dialect. A great number of the records show that the writers, often the BKK secretaries, were learned scholars.

The nineteenth-century archives show some change in language use. Although Chinese remained the basic working language for most documents, Malay began to appear as well; the challenge of local culture was becoming obvious. Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, especially after 1915 and up until the last note dated in 1964, Malay/Indonesian was the principal working language of all Kong Koan meetings, and it was used to record all proceedings. According to one scholar, 'the handwriting of the minutes is clear and shows a trained civil servant's hand'; he also noted that the Malay used was 'clearly influenced by Javanese and Dutch'.[11] The records indicate that all participants in the meetings and the two secretaries during this period were of Chinese descent. The fact that Kong Koan officials had changed from scholars to trained local civil servants can be seen as a collective reflection of the localisation trend that had been developing within the community whom the organisation was representing.

The languages used in the funeral records also provide interesting material for study. In total the funeral records comprise twenty-three volumes, starting with 1811 and ending with 1896. Although all original records were written in Chinese, the marginal notes that appeared here and there were written in different languages. A considerable portion of those added in the twentieth century were written in Malay with a pen instead of a brush. These notes mostly contain requests to have a newly deceased person, normally a family member or close relative, buried together with the occupants of an existing tomb. This is in itself a telling social phenomenon. The people responsible for the funeral went to the BKK to implement traditional Chinese procedures, meaning that they still wanted to arrange the funeral in a traditional way, but their very Chinese concerns could only be articulated in Malay. Meanwhile, the secretary who acted as the representative of the Chinese institution had to write down the authorisation in Malay

11 Dick van der Meij, personal communication.

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as well. Since the marginal notes were added beside the original Chinese records, the secretary must have known some Chinese, but the occasional characters they jotted down suggest that their language skills were rather poor.

Finally, it is worth noting the different sizes of the stamps used by the BKK in different periods. In the archives consulted for this article, three different stamps were used. The first two are large and square; one side of the bigger stamp is about 5 centimetres, and some documents bear a big red seal as large as 25 square centimetres. The second one is somewhat smaller, about 4 centimetres on one side. These two stamps have only Chinese characters on them, engraved from top to bottom and left to right. Those familiar with the history of imperial China will immediately associate the Kong Koan's stamps with the formal chops used by China's *yamen* (衙門, government offices). A third stamp, however, is clearly of a different size. This one was used in a purchase document dated 1882; it is oval and much smaller, less than half the size of the other two. Moreover, it is engraved in both Chinese and Dutch: the characters *Baguo Gongtang* are in the middle, surrounded by the words *Chineschen Raad te Batavia*. In China, the stamp has traditionally been regarded as the symbol of power. Once the Batavia Kong Koan stopped using a chop of normal size, there is perhaps room to explore the weakening of Chinese influence and a silent transition in the administrators' Chinese mentality.

Changes in designation for children

Changes in the terminology to refer to children provide another interesting topic for study. The funeral records reveal that every year, on average, about 35 per cent of the deaths were children younger than five years old. While converting the relevant records into an accessible computer database, I noted that many children had died before being given a formal name.[12] However, if the children died, the parents had to register with the Kong Koan and a name would be needed. The terms used to register the unnamed children include the following:

(a) *nanhai'er* [男孩兒] or *younan* [幼男]: Chinese terms meaning 'little son' or 'little boy';
(b) *nühai'er* [女孩兒] or *younü* [幼女]: Chinese terms meaning 'little daughter' or 'little girl';
(c) *baba* [峇峇]: transliterated from the Malay word *baba* (*babah*) meaning (Chinese) 'male';
(d) *nuna* [怒那], *niangna* [娘那] or *rena* [惹那]: transliterated from the Malay word *nona*, referring to (Chinese) unmarried females.

In order to simplify the description, the first two terms are labelled as 'Chinese fashion' and the other two as 'Malay fashion'.

The funeral registers of 1811 were the earliest yearly record among the extant Tandjoeng Cemetery data in the BKK Archives. In this volume, no age was recorded for the dead person. However, most of the deceased children can be identified as they were simply registered as *nanhai'er* or *nühai'er*. There were 248 deceased *nanhai'er* and

12 Many Batavia Chinese in earlier times had little or no education, and some would not give their children a formal name until their teenage years. The other reason may be related to an old Chinese belief that children will grow up more easily if the parents do not regard or treat them as something precious, hence the decision to delay naming them.

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nühai'er in total. In the funeral registers of 1837, three deceased little girls were referred to as *niangna* and one little boy as *baba*, while most of the other children – a total of 115 – were still designated in the Chinese fashion. The 1860s can be seen as a turning point; after that, the number of deceased children registered in the Chinese fashion clearly decreased but the usage of Malay-derived terms increased. Finally, after 1875, almost all deceased children were registered in the Malay fashion (see Table 1).

Another interesting phenomenon is how the Malay words *nyonya* and *nona* were used by the Chinese then. The exact meaning of *nyonya* is a married female while *nona* is an unmarried female. However, before 1870, when the Chinese used Malay terms to designate little girls, they did not distinguish between the two; even a one-day-old infant was recorded as *nyonya*. However, from the end of the 1870s, most of the female infants were registered as *nona*. As for the few infants who were still called *nyonya*, it can be suggested that they were child brides who had been engaged before their death.

TABLE 1
From *nanhai'er* and *nühai'er* to *baba* and *nona*

Year	Total funeral registers	Deaths of children (up to 5 years old)			
		Child funerals	Called ***nanhai'er*** **or** ***nühai'er***	Called ***baba*** **or** ***nyonya*** **or** ***nona***	Full name given
1811	1203	n.a.	248	0	n.a.
1836	352	88	41	0	47
1837	1013	225	115	4 3 *nyonya* + 1 *baba*	106
1852	662	163	96	4 3 *nyonya* + 1 *nona*	63
1857	1074	366	234	1 baba	131
1860	861	308	203	5 4 *baba* + 1 *nyonya*	100
1870	867	316	50	65 38 *baba* + 27 *nyonya*	201
1875	1206	378	0	108 80 *baba* + 23 *nona* + 5 *nyonya*	270
1879	928	371	0	169 104 *baba* + 61 *nona* + 4 *nyonya*	202
1893	1388	589	0	282 145 *baba* +135 *nona* + 2 *nyonya*	307
1896	1160	394	0	202 112 *baba* + 89 *nona* + 1 *nyonya*	192

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Over a period of several decades, a series of new terms were created that integrated local and Chinese cultures. This small but meaningful development vividly showed how Chinese immigrants effectively intervened in the acculturation process.

Changes in terminology for women

No studies focusing on Peranakan Chinese can ignore the social effects of intermarriage. Many scholars have examined early Chinese sojourners' living patterns from various perspectives. A popular recognised pattern is as follows. Newly arrived male workers would live in all-male dormitories, save as much money as possible, and send large sums of money home for the maintenance of their dependants in their home village. Their dream was to return home soon after making good, but only a few of them realised this dream, and many had to settle down in their adopted country for the rest of of their lives.[13] What, then, happened after their initial settlement?

Sooner or later, many newcomers' primary living pattern was changed by the establishment of individual families. From the BKK archives, it is obvious that such change was realised not by bringing over their wives and children from China, but by marrying locally. Given the small numbers of Chinese women among the immigrants, who were the brides? W. J. Cator commented on intermarriage between Chinese men and indigenous women:

> All sources of evidence point to the fact that from the start till the fall of the Company [i.e., the Dutch East Indies Company or VOC] the Chinese immigrants hardly ever brought their wives with them from China. … Miscegenation of Chinese with Native women slaves as well as with free women, has always taken place. Alliance by marriage with Javanese noble families is also mentioned. Balinese and Sundanese women (especially from Sumedang) seem to have been preferred by the Chinese.[14]

BKK records provide similar evidence, but with further interesting details. Before the mid-nineteenth century, it can be seen that local women married to Chinese husbands were given a special name in the archives. All deaths were recorded in the funeral registers. The registered names of some women in the early 1800s were recorded in Chinese characters, pronounced in Mandarin Chinese as *nga* (a locally created character to be discussed below), *ngamiaoli* [貓厘 or 貓裏] or *miaolinga*,[15] *fanpo* [番婆], or *fanfu* [番婦].

Ngamiaoli and *miaolinga* appear to have been normal names for many deceased women; some were also recorded as 'So-and-so's *nga*' or '*nga* So-and-so'. For instance, a total of 1,203 deaths were registered in the archives for 1811; of these, 309 were female but 113 were registered as *nühai'er* (little girl). Among the other 196 deceased women, 36 were registered as either *ngamiaoli* or *miaolinga*, and 30 as 'So-and-so's *nga*' or '*nga* So-and-so'. In other words, about one-third of the registered names included the

13 I cannot agree with the rather popular scholarly view that the Chinese in Southeast Asia basically appeared as a society of sojourners before the 1950s. For instance, in view of the crowded cemeteries in nineteenth-century Batavia, where some sites were designed for whole families, it can only be assumed that many Chinese had taken Batavia as their 'forever home'.

14 Writser Jans Cator, *The economic position of the Chinese in the Netherlands Indies* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), p. 22.

15 The term *miaoli* is written with different combinations of characters with similar Hokkien pronunciation.

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character *nga*. In the funeral records dating from 1870-2, 11 were registered as *fanpo*. Those women whose name included the characters *nga* or *fan* ranged from 20 to 81 years old.

Since these 'names' were repeated frequently in the records, undoubtedly they must have been transliterations of some kind of title. But what kind of title, and what did it mean? Social categorisation was based on social comparison. Marriage to a Chinese husband did not mean that the indigenous women concerned were accepted as formal members of the community by the Chinese in general. After immigrating to 'the Indies', the Chinese became a minority in an unfamiliar environment; in order to maintain their own dignity, they identified themselves as people with an advanced civilisation. Moreover, on the one hand, potential feelings of Sino-centrism or Han-centrism prevented the Chinese from integrating completely into the local culture. On the other hand, the Dutch policy of 'divide and rule' also separated the Chinese from the local people. With few Chinese women present, male immigrants were forced to find wives from amongst the indigenous population, and consequently intermarriage became a common phenomenon.

How were these indigenous wives to be treated? Could they be accepted as members of the Chinese community? Or would Chinese husbands assimilate into the local society through such intermarriage? Many immigrants, in particular the community elite, must have been afraid of the possibility that the Chinese would be absorbed into local society and disappear. They had to find a way to ensure a favorable concept of themselves, and remind all Chinese that they should maintain their 'civilised' heritage – even though most of them were uneducated. It was probably against such a historical background that the term *fan* was used, and *nga* was created as a title for indigenous wives.

First, let us turn to the terms *fanpo* and *fanfu*. The Chinese characters for *po* and *fu* refer to females, usually adult women. The word that requires attention here, however, is *fan*. In traditional Chinese records, this word was first used together with the words *man* and *yi* to designate those supposedly 'uncivilised' ethnic groups who lived in the peripheral areas of central China. In the seventeenth century, when Westerners began to appear in China, they were often referred to as *fan* in official documents. For instance, the British and Dutch were labeled as *hongmaofan* (紅毛番, *lit.*, 'the red-haired *fan*'). *Fan* is a word meaning foreign, alien or exotic with more or less negative connotations. It is clear that those *fanpo* or *fanfu* registered in the BKK Archives must have been non-Chinese or indigenous women who were married to Chinese husbands.

Following this is the word *nga*, which is more complicated. The character for *nga* that appears clearly in the archives is in fact a locally created one; it cannot be found in any official dictionaries published in China. The character is composed of two standard Chinese characters: the component on top is the character 雅, pronounced *ya* in Mandarin and *nga* in Hokkien; the lower component is the character 女, signifying 'female'. According to the normal principle of Chinese character composition, this meant that the new character was used to designate females and was pronounced *nga*.

Some scholars have suggested that *nga* may possibly stand for the Indonesian term of address *nyai*, meaning 'Mrs'. However, this explanation would appear to be too simple, and further study needs to be made. In terms of pronunciation, *nga* is close to the Malay word *nyai*. According to several Malay specialists and Peranakan Chinese intellectuals,

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nyai means 'concubine', but was usually used specifically for Malay women who became the concubines of Europeans. It should be noted that *nyai* can also be an honorific term for older women.[16] However, a great number of those '*nga*' recorded in the archives were in their twenties and thirties. Thus, it is clear that the term cannot have been used with such a connotation.

To gain a better understanding of the meaning of this character, it is perhaps necessary to study it as part of the terms *miaolinga* and *ngamiaoli*. Wolfgang Franke, in his excellent study on Chinese epigraphic materials in Indonesia, noted that on the tombstones and ancestral tablets he found in North Sumatra, occasionally a wife appears with the family name *Mao* (貓, 'cat', Hokk. *miao*), but no such surname is known in China. Franke suggests that this surname may indicate non-Chinese descent, but he does not pursue the subject further.[17] It is worth noting that after the long process of conversion to Islam which began in the thirteenth century, only the Balinese retained a relative purely form of Hinduism. It has been argued that they were the only people tolerant of the pork-eating Chinese during the latter's earlier period of settlement in the archipelago and that Balinese women were therefore regarded as ideal partners for intermarriage. Based on this fact, it is reasonable to assume that *Mao*/*Miao* is not a family name; the term *miaoli* must be a transliteration of the name 'Bali', and *miaolinga* would then refer to Balinese women married to Chinese husbands.

Like *fanpo* and *fanfu*, *nga* must also have been used to name indigenous women who were married to Chinese husbands. Yet why were they given this title? Another well-known fact is that some Chinese immigrants had already married before they left China. When they married indigenous women (i.e., when they married for the second time), the latter were undoubtedly regarded as a kind of concubine. It was not unusual for Chinese immigrants to Southeast Asian countries to keep two families at the same time – one in China and the other in their adopted country. In other cases, although an indigenous woman was the first wife of a Chinese husband, she was not regarded as his official wife because he was still expected to marry a Chinese woman in his original home village, and only the latter would be counted as a legitimate wife.[18]

The situation was sensitive and interesting. These indigenous wives were in a marginal position. Their husbands did not directly use the Chinese word *qie* (concubine) to refer to them; in all the records studied, there was only one deceased woman identified with this word. As a locally coined character, *nga* had a more or less negative connotation (being related to concubines), but was not considered to be as bad as the word *qie*. There is at least one piece of evidence to support this. The Batavia Kong Koan still contains five wooden panels that used to hang in the Council hall; the oldest is dated 1791. Amongst the names appearing on the panel is Gan Dji Nga (Yan Er Ya in Mandarin), the concubine (of Balinese origin) of a captain Gan Dji.

In fact, just like this woman, even the indigenous wives who enjoyed a rather high status could not shed the title *nga*. For instance, the funeral registers dated between 1811-23 recorded six categories of burial plots: 24-, 20-, 16-, 12- and 8-step sizes; and the 'thin

16 This was pointed out to me during a discussion at the ANU workshop. On *nyai* as 'Mrs', see Franke *et al.* eds., *Chinese epigraphic materials*, vol. III, p. xi.

17 Ibid., vol. I, p. 13.

18 Chen Da, *Nanyang Huaqiao yu Min Yue shehui* [Chinese in the South Seas and Fujian-Guangdong society] (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1938), pp. 149, 155-7.

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planking area'. Prices were differentiated according to size; burial plots of the 24-step size, for example, cost 1218.5 guilders, but the 12-step plots cost only 67.7 guilders. No price for the 'thin planking area' can be found, but it must have been the cheapest type of plot, if not free of charge. Among those deceased *nga*, one was buried in the most expensive grave, 24 steps wide and 48 long. Ten *ngamiaoli* were buried in graves of 12 steps' width, and another 24 could only be buried in a common plot located in the 'thin planking area'. Although their different economic status can be ascertained according to where they were buried, none of them could dispel the humiliation of being named a *nga*.

However, it is worth noting that after the mid-nineteenth century, first the term *nga* and then the terms *fanfu* and *fanpo* gradually disappeared from the records. For instance, in the funeral registers dated 1878-80, out of a total of 671 deceased females, about 351 were older than 15 years of age. Among them, only one was registered as *fanpo*, and only two names included the character *nga*. Instead, another phenomenon began to emerge. On the name lists from funerals that were registered in the late nineteenth century and the marriage records of the times, some non-standard Chinese names can be identified. Normally, Chinese names are composed of two or three characters; only when there is a double surname – occurring in just a few recognisable cases, such as Ouyang and Situ – would it be possible for a full name to appear with more than three characters. Within the archives, names of deceased women or registered brides are occasionally composed of four or even five characters, although their surname has only one. Some of these names are listed here with their Hokkien pronunciation (the surname is underlined):

Ng Bong Na But Guan	黃榜那佛元	34 years old; death registered in 1888
Ng Zing A Bun Lniu	黃井亚文娘	21 years old; death registered in 1888
Lim Ngo But Lo Lniu	林卧勿老娘	16 years old; marriage registered in 1825
Lim Lu Bit Lo Lniu	林如必老娘	20 years old; marriage registered in 1850
So Lu But Lo Lniu	苏如不老娘	22 years old; marriage registered in 1851
Yong Zi Le We Lniu	杨芝黎碨娘	16 years old; marriage registered in 1828
Yiap Zi Le We Lniu	叶芝黎碨娘	17 years old; marriage registered in 1849
Lim Lo Di Lniu	林老智娘	19 years old; marriage registered in 1891
Lim Lo Di Lniu	林老致娘	16 years old; marriage registered in 1893

There are several examples of different characters with the same Hokkien pronunciation being used to render non-Chinese names. Moreover, some of these non-Chinese names are frequently repeated in the records. For instance, among the 403 names of brides registered with the Kong Koan during 1891-4, a total of eight names sounded like *Lo Di Lniu*, but with different characters and different surnames (see, for example, the last two names listed above). One might make the bold but not illogical suggestion that these names were transliterations of popular local names. For instance, the third, fourth and fifth names listed in the table end with the characters '*lo lniu*' (pronounced *laoniang* in Mandarin), meaning 'old lady', yet they were young girls between 16 and 22 years old. According to Zhou Nanjing, a returned Peranakan Chinese himself, it is very possible that the term *lo lniu* is a transliteration of the Malay word *nyonya*.[19]

What indications can be drawn from these unusual names? First of all, the fact that

19 Professor Zhou Nanjing, personal communication.

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more and more indigenous women married to Chinese husbands were registered with their own names can be seen as a significant indication that such women had become accepted by the Chinese community in general to a greater degree. More precisely, this fact indicates an important transition: regardless of these women's ethnic background, their social status as first of all a wife, mother or simply a woman was acknowledged. In any case, from the official perspective of the Kong Koan — the institution representative of the Chinese community in Batavia — most indigenous wives no longer came to be viewed as nameless and negative *nga* or *fan*.

Moreover, these names, based on popular local names but with a Chinese surname and written in Chinese characters, also provide evidence concerning a change in the brides' backgrounds. In other words, an increasing number of daughters of earlier intermarriages constituted a major pool of potential brides for Chinese husbands. On this point, rich and detailed examples can be found in the marriage registers of the Kong Koan Archives. The relevant records started, at the latest, from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Although the extant marriage registers are dated 13 May 1772 to 30 April 1919, the records from only 22 years in five different periods – around 1810, 1830, 1850, 1870 and 1890 – have been transferred into an accessible digital database.[20] These data indicate the social background of the registered brides. In the marriage registers, both the groom and the bride were required to have their own witness. The identities of marriage witnesses in the five periods are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

TABLE 2
Relationship between groom/bride and witness

Period	Grand-parents	Parents	Uncle/ aunt	Cousin	Brother/ sister	Self	Others	Total
1807-12	59 (4.1%)	419 (30%)	422 (30%)	191 (13%)	138 (10%)	167 (12%)	22 (1.6%)	1418
1824-31	73 (4.5%)	453 (28%)	487 (30%)	298 (18%)	157 (10%)	147 (9.1%)	3 (0.2%)	1618
1849-51	27(2.4%)	402 (36%)	326 (29%)	186 (17%)	137 (12%)	31 (2.0%)	1 (0.1%)	1110
1869-73	57 (3.8%)	615 (40%)	418 (28%)	210 (14%)	208 (14%)	10 (0.7%)	2 (0.1%)	1520
1891-4	31 (3.8%)	375 (47%)	178 (22%)	77 (10%)	141 (17%)	1 (0.1%)	3 (0.3%)	806

TABLE 3
Parents of spouses as witnesses

Period	Total number of witnesses	Groom's parents as witnesses		Bride's parents as witnesses	
1807-12	1,418	137	10%	282	20%
1824-31	1,618	118	7%	335	21%
1849-51	1,110	164	15%	238	21%
1869-73	1,520	233	15%	382	25%
1891-4	806	150	19%	225	28%

20 The computer inputting has been done by Menghong Chen, who kindly provided these data.

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Two points about the data in the tables are worth noting. The first point regards what we can call self-witnessed cases. Normally, elder family members or relatives, often those with respectable positions, would be invited to act as witnesses; such an invitation was considered an honour. However, the registers show that some spouses acted as witnesses for their own marriages. Chen Menghong, who has conducted research on the marriage registrations in the BKK Archives, suggests three reasons why grooms or brides acted as witnesses to their own marriages. The first would be remarriage: among the total 123 cases in which brides were remarrying, only six invited someone else to act as a witness. (Whether remarried brides did not desire to have someone else to act as a witness or simply could not find anyone is unclear.) The second case involved grooms who had been officers of the Kong Koan, though these were rare. A third situation would be a groom who was a lonely *sinkeh* (新客, *lit.*, newcomer) with no elder family member present to act as his witness.[21]

It seems, however, that these explanations are not complete. For instance, there is no explanation as to why some women marrying for the first time also acted as witnesses for their own marriages. One possible explanation relates to the background of brides at the time. Table 2 shows that the percentage of self-witnesses greatly decreased (dropping from 12 to 0.1 per cent) over the course of the nineteenth century, in tandem with the rising trend of inviting parents to act as witnesses; the number of brides who did so rose from 20 to 28 per cent. It can be reasonably suggested that a great number of the brides who witnessed their own marriages were in fact indigenous women whose family members were not willing to register with a Chinese institution. They may even have been native girls acquired on the slave market. When more daughters of settled Chinese families became available, they replaced indigenous women as brides, and their parents were available to act as witnesses.

Both grooms and brides were required to sign their names in the marriage registers. Apparently only a small number could do so in Chinese, and many others were illiterate, able only to draw a cross or a circle to represent their signature. However, it should be noted that a substantial number signed their names in the letters of the Roman alphabet, although their registered names were written in Chinese characters. There are three reasons for this phenomenon. First of all, some brides were indigenous women adopted by Chinese families; some records indicate that brides' witnesses were their *yangfu* (養父, lit., foster father). Secondly, some were indigenous women who only obtained a Chinese name for the purposes of registration. The third reason fits with the majority of cases – the bride's parents had intermarried. Being the daughter of a Chinese father, she had a formal name in Chinese; however, having grown up in a Malay cultural environment, she must have been more familiar with her Malay name. This being the case, it is clear that although the relevant signatories identified themselves as Chinese, they were strongly influenced by the local culture.

In a study of the social outcome of intermarriage between Hakka Chinese immigrants and indigenous women in rural areas of the Indonesian archipelago, Mary

21 Menghong Chen, 'Between the Chinese tradition and Dutch colonial system: Chinese marriages in Batavia in the 19th century', paper presented in at the workshop on 'Chinese Archival Sources and Overseas Chinese Communities (1775-1950)', IIAS, Leiden, 9-10 Dec. 1999, pp. 7-8. However, the author notes that many *sinkeh* of the time did in fact have certain relatives close-by as a result of the well-known habit of chain migration.

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Somers Heidhues notes that 'in Hakka settlements, at least, intermarriage was not a road to assimilation of the Chinese. Instead, native women and their offspring were integrated into the transplanted Hakka society of West Kalimantan, Bangka, or Kelantan, wearing Chinese clothes and speaking Hakka'.[22] Other scholars, however, have come to the opposite conclusion. For instance, according to Douglas Raybeck, 'early migrants were often assimilated into the local cultures owing to their relatively small numbers and the absence of Chinese women'.[23] These conclusions combine with the records of the BKK Archives to reveal a rather complex but interesting picture. The question is whether during the Batavia period indigenous wives were integrated into their Chinese husbands' society, or whether alien husbands were assimilated into local society. Taking into consideration the relevant phenomena and the social outcome of intermarriage over the long term, the answer cannot be a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

The consequences of intermarriage evolved in stages, which can be seen clearly in the long-term migration process. In the early years, there were marriages between indigenous women and Chinese immigrants, but during this period indigenous wives seem to have encountered rejection on both sides. The fact that many brides were obliged to act as witnesses for their own marriages suggests that they did not receive matrimonial blessings from their own families, at least when registering with Chinese institutions. From the point of view of their husbands' society, as long as these women were the only marriage partners available, it was impossible to stop intermarriage, although there was a strong desire to maintain a 'pure' Chinese culture and to legitimise Chinese identity. Thus, these wives were labeled as *nga* and *fan*, simply to be distinguished from wives who were 'pure Chinese'. Only after their deaths were indigenous wives accepted and allowed to stay 'home' and together with the Chinese 'forever'.[24] Generally speaking, the guiding principle in this period was that indigenous wives were integrated into Chinese society, although only to a limited degree.

When these first intermarried families became a potential source of brides, new trends began to emerge. It is interesting to note that during the same Batavia period, there were many Indo-Dutch marriages as well, and the Eurasian children of these marriages were often regarded as illegitimate offspring.[25] In contrast, the daughters of marriages between Chinese and local women were regarded as legitimate Chinese; the fact that they were the daughters of *nga* or *fan* soon became a piece of forgotten history. Marriage between a Chinese man and a locally-born girl of mixed parentage was accepted as marriage within the Chinese community. However, the social phenomenon of intermarriage cannot simply be controlled by one side's own wishful thinking.

22 Mary Somers Heidhues, 'Chinese settlements in rural Southeast Asia: Unwritten histories', in *Sojourners and settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, ed. Anthony Reid (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p. 177.

23 Douglas Raybeck, 'Chinese patterns of adaptation in Southeast Asia', in *The Chinese in Southeast Asia, identity, culture and politics*, ed. L. A. Peter Gosling and Linda Y. C. Lim (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1989), p. 15.

24 Among the Chinese it is a widespread custom to regard the cemetery as one's 'home', 'forever' for human beings. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the public cemeteries during the Batavia era were divided along ethnic and religious lines. The Dutch had their own graveyard, while all members of Muslim families were buried in a separate cemetery.

25 France Gouda, *Dutch culture overseas. Colonial practice in the Netherlands Indies 1900-1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), pp. 183-4.

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Ironically, towards the close of the nineteenth century, when the Chinese in the Indies were pleased to be able to find marriage partners within their own community and when immigration from China was actually adding to this community, there was in fact a great surge in affection for local culture.

As mentioned above, the first generation of indigenous wives were potentially separated from the Chinese community. However, the important consequence of intermarriage was the birth of the first group of Peranakan Chinese. Although Peranakan girls grew up in an environment in which local culture prevailed, they were regarded as Chinese by virtue of their fathers' ancestry. Therefore, after marrying Chinese husbands, they became legitimate wives and officially, at least, could not be labelled with the terms *nga* or *fan*. Such a transition assured them a degree of social security and personal dignity. If the first generation of indigenous wives had to learn to wear Chinese clothing or to speak a Chinese dialect in order to lose the label of being 'backward', their daughters faced much less pressure to do so. Finally, as many newcomers married Peranakan wives, the process of 'Peranakanisation' accelerated in Batavia's Chinese society. Evidence of this comes from the visual record of the period, which shows that often the women's dress labelled 'Chinese' in photographs is not actually a variant of the *kain kebaya* of nineteenth-century Dutch, Eurasian and Indonesian women in the colony.[26]

An echo in the 1990s: concluding discussions

The integration of the Chinese and Indonesian cultures is thus seen clearly. Did this trend, then, result in the emergence of a completely assimilated group? The answer cannot be found in the archives alone. Nevertheless, in the 1990s the echoes of the past that have been evoked by the recovery of these archives provide interesting clues that will help to expand studies of the new generation of Peranakan Chinese. As was mentioned earlier, in 1995 the BKK Archives were transferred from Jakarta to the Netherlands. Their arrival has produced widely varying reactions among Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands, who numbered nearly 100,000 by the end of the twentieth century. The majority of these are migrants from either Hong Kong or the PRC, but a smaller and distinct group is formed by Peranakan from Indonesia.[27]

The historical relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia has facilitated the immigration of the Indonesian Chinese, especially Peranakan. Their special background of migration has made the latter a group with a noticeably higher level of education, and they have played prominent roles in Dutch society, especially in academic circles. At present, many of the first generation of Peranakan Chinese immigrants from Indonesia have retired to enjoy an easy lifestyle. Since the 1980s several volunteer associations have been organised among the Peranakan themselves to maintain interpersonal links and arrange social events.[28]

The majority of Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands have paid no attention to the Kong Koan archives, although community leaders were informed about the event. They regard the archives, although written in Chinese, as 'their' (i.e., Peranakan) business; the gap between Chinese from China and Peranakan from Indonesia is wide. In

26 I am grateful to one of the *JSEAS* referees for this helpful observation.
27 Li Minghuan, *We need two worlds: Chinese immigrant associations in a Western society* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), pp. 45-52.
28 Ibid., pp. 48-9.

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contrast, since being informed about the arrival of the archives, Peranakan groups in the Netherlands have plunged into research work with tremendous zeal, even though most of them cannot speak Mandarin or any other Chinese dialect, let alone read documents written in traditional script. A new association, the Stichting Vrienden van het Kong Koan Archives (Foundation of the Friends of Kong Koan Archives, hereafter FKKA), has been initiated, and many Peranakan Chinese in the Netherlands, most of them retired professionals and housewives, have been mobilised. In order to protect the archives and promote the research, the FKKA made several public calls for donations, and dozens of its members have volunteered to help sort the archives or translate documents.

According to this foundation, the main objective is to make the archival data accessible to researchers all over the world. Therefore, a translation team comprised of dozens of Peranakan volunteers has been formed under FKKA auspices. It is perhaps surprising that the work of this team is to translate Malay documents into Dutch rather than Chinese, thus limiting their accessibility to a relatively small audience. One leader of the FKKA explained that 'Malay and Dutch are the two languages that most of us can master.'

This devotion to researching the BKK archives is a reflection of nostalgia for the Netherlands Peranakan's roots and for being Chinese. The outcome of their efforts, however, demonstrates their characteristics as non-Chinese. On the one hand, they cannot rid themselves of the label of 'children of the soil', i.e., the soil of the country where they were born and educated, and to which they have devoted most of their lives. On the other hand, they still willingly attempt to retain their identification as Chinese. Their efforts in searching for their roots are no longer simply a means, but may be considered an end in their own right.

From the archives that were first produced more than 200 years ago and the reactions towards these materials that can be observed today, we can see that the construction of Chinese migrant identity has continued, consciously or unconsciously. There is neither a fixed 'Chinese culture' nor an invariable 'Chinese identity'. For the locally born descendants of the Chinese immigrants, becoming 'children of the local soil' is a necessary and unavoidable outcome. However, 'children of the soil' can be the 'sons of the Yellow Emperor' at the same time. The latter image does exist in the mirrors that reflect their unchangeable appearance, and it is a positive image they are cultivating.

I have discussed elsewhere the positive significance of asserted marginal identity that is cherished by transnational immigrants. Transnational migrants who have developed an integrated relationship with their receiving society, while enhancing their original cultural and social capital, also possess unique attributes to gain competitive advantage.[29] This paper is merely a case study that focuses on the Peranakan Chinese and has been based on the Batavia Kong Koan Archives. To a certain degree, however, it also reflects a meaningful long-term feature of the immigration process. Localisation appears to be unavoidable and continues with successive waves of immigration. However, instead of suffering from a 'nowhere at home' syndrome or becoming passively assimilated objects, many transnational migrants have, consciously or unconsciously, attempted to develop their marginal salient. In short, in an age of transnational migration, they have kept making efforts to benefit from their special position straddling different ethnic and cultural treasures. This development has potentially significant results.

29 Ibid., pp. 3, 26.

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