

Chinese Diaspora in the Dutch East Indies during the Eighteenth Century: Religion and Custom as Roots of Identity against Assimilation and the Discrediting of Chineseness

Jiajun Zou

In his article “Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia,” the anthropologist William Skinner developed the idea of the overseas Chinese diaspora as “the creation through ‘fusion’ of a new sociocultural system that achieved autonomy and stability despite continued contact with both parent societies.” In an anthropological view, Skinner saw Java as one of the examples in which the Chinese community “yielded a wondrous array of adaptive, acculturative, and assimilative phenomena.”¹ The creolization process certainly occurred and created a new group called the Javanese Peranakan, which now has fully evolved into a distinctive ethnic community. However, I disagree on the so-called “acculturative and assimilative

¹ William G. Skinner, “Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia,” in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, ed. Anthony Reid (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 51–93, 51.

phenomena” and the idea that ethnic diasporic community becomes the product of mixed cultural systems. Although multicultural societies often provide the opportunity for interaction and socialization between different people, Skinner’s overarching argument underestimates the resilience of the old system and institutions that maintained the Chinese diasporic identity.

Skinner was limited by a lack of Chinese language sources and a reliance on the preexisting English scholarship. While not necessarily a cultural outsider since Skinner understood Fujianese dialect, he was unmindful that available archival sources on the overseas Chinese community in Batavia, as well as eighteenth-century Chinese travelers’ accounts, demonstrate a paradox in which the Chinese overseas community nurtured their distinctive cultural system and maintained a high degree of autonomy and self-regulation under the supervision of Dutch colonial authority. I argue that it is a paradox for two reasons. On the one hand, it does not conform with the anthropological studies of the Chinese in Southeast Asia, wherein mixed marriages between the Chinese and the locals was ubiquitous. On the other hand, it overrides the Chinese official record, especially of the Ming and Qing dynasties, which often alienated the Chinese diaspora as a despicable cultural other. In other words, they were orphans of their own culture and viewed by the Ming and Qing governments as barbarians because of adopting foreign culture.

I intend to demonstrate that, at least in eighteenth-century Java, the large Chinese community lived under a cultural system that was transplanted from China to Java. The community’s autonomy and stability was achieved because of the distinctive cultural background of the Fujianese Chinese. Their identity was not rooted in the land but a portable set of ideas and customs that they carried with them throughout the long history of their seafaring tradition. With a history of maritime exploration, the Fujianese brought with them practices and beliefs critical to their spiritual identity. As a people with an esoteric dialectic, they

also formed a unique solidarity based on their provincial identity. Thus, rather than being absorbed into another culture, such as Javanese culture, the Fujianese Chinese instead were cultural disseminators rather than students.

In fact, the creolization of race does not necessarily produce a distinctive cultural community; the dominant and stable cultural system that worked efficiently for the ethnic diaspora can subsume any potential budding of Peranakanization. I resist conforming with Skinner's anthropological view of the Chinese diaspora in Java because it showed a tendency of racial essentialism that assumed identity as a product of birth rather than a contingency of the particular social circumstances that happened to dominate at a given place in a given time. We know that at least throughout the eighteenth century, there was a strong Chinese cultural community in Java with a Chinese Kapitan system actively exercising the esoteric Chinese culture, religion, and customs of its community. Furthermore, the dissemination of Fujianese temples and deities to Southeast Asia demonstrated the Chinese diaspora's desire to create a cultural homeland where collective identity is honored and maintained for generations.²

This strong sense of localized Chinese identity is idiosyncratic and esoteric. The Chinese Kapitans of Batavia actively utilized their private cultural capital as an invaluable resource for a functional Chinese judiciary system. In an attempt to not heavily rely on Dutch and English sources that scholarship of the Chinese in Southeast Asia over the past century has focused on, I hope to illuminate a glimpse of the Fujianese Chinese who lived in China's maritime frontier and cultural

²I used the term Chinese and Fujianese interchangeably to underscore the considerable overlapping of these two generalizations.

borderland.³ It is a cultural borderland because whether it was the tradition of venturing overseas or staunch beliefs in ghosts and deities, the people of Fujian actively refused to conform to the desires of the central government. While they necessarily shared some of these same traditions with people of other provinces, like neighboring Guangdong, they demonstrated a particular loyalty to their historical cultural practices that produced an enduring consciousness of self-identity.

The unique Fujianese identity has often been suppressed by Chinese scholar-officials, such as Wang Dahai, who downplayed evidence of provincialism and disunity, as well as by historians like E. S. de Klerck and Bernard H. M. Vlekke, whose Dutch sources also generalized the Chinese community as a homogeneous unity. One of the goals of this article is to depart from the convention of simplifying the Chinese identity as singular and to use the plurality of Chinese identity and its place in Java to explain how details of local Chineseness, such as Fujianese and Cantonese, can strengthen the case against an assimilationist view.

Often heterogeneous, the Chinese diasporic community internally creates a complex question about identity, given its multiple layers, such as provincial identity that may be more appropriate rather than describing them all as Chinese. Provincialism, however, does not mean that Chineseness is weakened or broken down in the process of migration. Provincialism represents a part of everyday Chineseness existing in the mainland and overseas communities. By emphasizing the voices of contemporaries, I intend to provide their self-assertion of identity against Skinner's anthropological hypothesis. My

³ For examples of comprehensive volumes, see E. S. de Klerck, *History of the Netherlands East Indies*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: B. M. Israël, 1975); and Bernard H. M. Vlekke, *The Story of the Dutch East Indies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945).

approach is to find the cultural authenticity of the Fujianese Chinese in Java by comparing it with the identity present on the mainland. Skinner challenged the use of the term *Chinese*, as for the Chinese Kapitans. He argued that they were only “so-called ‘Chinese’” and were “in fact, Peranakan leaders.”⁴ Skinner is right but only in an ethnological view for it assumed that creoles formed an identity that is “in-between” the Chinese and Javanese cultures. Thus, Skinner is unaware of the fact that the durability of the Chinese Kapitan system depended on the Kapitans’ role in maintaining the old regime and supervising a people’s beliefs in their traditions and history. For the Fujianese, identity is not territorial; the act of moving overseas is not the abandonment of the past, as Chinese official sources often wrongly convey. Familiar cultural practices, rather than ethnic distinction, in the overseas community maintained their cultural roots.

Early records suggest that the Chinese population in Java can be dated back to as early as the tenth century when Fujianese settled and lived under the administration of Java’s king.⁵ The migrant population in Southeast Asia as a whole, however, remained relatively small until the Qing dynasty. One study of the genealogical records of the Fujianese migrants to Southeast Asia with a sample size of 2,385 traced 94 Fujianese migrants during the Ming dynasty. The number unprecedentedly increased to 723 during the Qing dynasty in the eighteenth century.⁶ While it provides us with a perspective of the larger trend of migration from Fujian to Southeast Asia, it is

⁴ Skinner, “Creolized Chinese,” 56.

⁵ Yang Li 楊力 and Ye Xiaodun 葉小敦, *Dongnanya de fujian ren 東南亞的福建人* (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1993), 69.

⁶ Lin Jinzhi 林金枝, “Min yue qiaoxiang zupu yanjiu” 闽粤侨乡族谱研究, in *pudixue yanjiu hui bian, Pudixue yanjiu di yi ji* 谱牒学研究第一辑, ed. Zhongguo pudixue yanjiu hui 中国谱牒学研究会 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1989), 166.

statistically impossible to calculate how many Fujianese resided in Java.

One traveler from Zhangzhou, Cheng Rijie went to Batavia in 1730 and returned in 1736.⁷ He wrote that Batavia had a lot of people from “Zhangzhou, Quanzhou, and Hu Guang” and “for those who succeed in business, they traveled to there and then returned with a full ship of goods; those who had nothing sojourn from one place to another. Although they did become rich later, most of them then forgot about the hardship. There are at least hundreds of thousands of people like that.”⁸ Here Cheng was speaking from personal experience as a poor worker who later became wealthy. His estimation shows some scale of the overseas Chinese population in Java. Since the Fujianese constituted a significant part of it, it is possible to imagine the extent of migration from the Fujian province alone, which in the mid-eighteenth century had a population around 1.44 million.⁹

Reasons for Fujianese migration included chronic problems of land shortages, famine, and poverty. “The folk song of Quanzhou” (*Quanzhou ge*) began, “Quanzhou people lived in barren places. Although they were willing to farm, there was no land available.”¹⁰ This problem was endemic as the genealogy of

⁷ He is also recorded in the Qing Zhangzhou gazetteer for his filial piety to his father. Chen Ziqiang 陳自強, “Huaqiao lishi wenxian zhong de kuibao gelaba jilue” 華僑歷史文獻中的隗寶 噶喇吧紀略, in *Minnan wenhua yan jiu xia ce* 閩南文化研究下冊, ed. Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Quanzhou shi weiyuanhui 中國人民政治協商會議泉州市委員會 (Fujian sheng yanhuang wenhua yan jiu hui, 2012), 1399.

⁸ Chen Ziqiang, “Huaqiao lishi,” 1403.

⁹ Wei Yuanshu 魏元樞 and Xie Daocheng 謝道承, [*Qianlong*] *fujian tongzhi* [乾隆] 福建通志, in Qing siku quanshu ben (1773), 13:3.959, <http://hunteeq.com/ancient/ancientkm?00054FE900030101000000000000C800000003F000000C90>.

¹⁰ Lin, “Min yue,” 156.

Chen also noted that most of its clansmen considered going overseas as the only way to feed themselves.¹¹ The *Fujian Gazetteer* showed similar concerns. “Lands were scarce, and the population was so large. Farm lands were disappearing, and thus, the place has a lot of land suits.”¹² The *Xiamen Gazetteer* also echoed this theme: “The coastal prefectures of Southern Fujian had most of its soil laid barren, the people did not have enough to eat.”¹³ Thus, in response to this problem, the Fujianese acted according to their own agency. We can see this from the Zhangzhou prefecture whose people were said to “appear as hardworking but are nasty-minded at heart,” and “whenever barbarian ships came near, these sea dwellers abandon their wives and children and ships along with the barbarians.”¹⁴ This description, written by the scholar-officials compiling the gazetteer, resonates with the stigma attached to the Fujianese by the central government. The latter actively marginalized and cast doubt on the authentic Chineseness of people who decided to leave the empire. What this stigma does not take into account is that although they were leaving the country, moving from one place to another, it was often propelled by dire economic necessity. Of course, the tradition of going overseas is not only a Fujianese prerogative. Cantonese were also known for their overseas migrations. But during the eighteenth century, the scale of Fujianese migration to Southeast Asia had become a serious security concern and annoyance for the Qing central government, who viewed the Fujianese as untrustworthy and marginalized the Cantonese as unauthentic Chinese. I intend to demonstrate this alienation to reveal the perpetuation of the

¹¹ Ibid., 156.

¹² Wei and Xie, *Fujian tongzhi*, 9:2.798.

¹³ Zhou Kai, *Xiamenzhi* 厦门志 (Jizang yupin shuyuan, 1832), 8:1.143.

¹⁴ Wei and Xie, *Fujian tongzhi*, 9:10.806.

stigma attached to the act of moving overseas and to shed light on the inveterate provincialism.

The dilemma presented here is the active effort of the Qing authority to discredit the Chineseness of Fujianese migrants who left the country and the form of identity the overseas Chinese took on. I argue that it is not any abstract loyalty to the Qing's Sinocentric worldview or protonationalism but a diasporic community identity modeled upon Fujianese culture, including the religion, customs, and beliefs that they took with them during the migration and subsequently spread in the soil of new lands. The Fujianese Chineseness did not depend on the recognition of the Qing authority, nor was it limited by geographical barriers between China and Java. The subtlety here is that however disgruntled the Qing emperors and official were about the overseas Chinese, the latter did not consider practicing Chinese culture and living abroad as inherently incompatible.

The Qing alienation of the overseas Chinese as shown in court debates and official memorials reveal that the three emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, who collectively reigned from 1662 to 1795, all showed concern about Fujianese loyalty and self-identity. It is important to understand that the way in which an emperor viewed the coastal situation and issues could directly affect the policies advocated during his reign. In October 1716, the Kangxi emperor told the "Grand Secretary and others," "When I was visiting Suzhou during my southern tour and saw a shipbuilding factory, I asked and learned that every year there are thousands of merchants going overseas, and only less than a dozen of them returned...In Luzon and Java, there were Han people who disguised [themselves] as pirates since Ming dynasty...I demand a careful review of this matter with all the governors of coastal provinces like Fujian,

Guangdong...currently in Beijing.”¹⁵ When Kangxi finally lifted the sea ban after he took Taiwan in 1684, he lectured scholar-officials on the uselessness of trying to constrain the coastal people’s mobility and agency “even though we had sea bans before, have those who privately sneak out overseas for trade ever stopped?”¹⁶

Kangxi showed that he was aware of the active migration abroad, but his concern was more about security, a fear of overseas Chinese colluding with their European rulers. Kangxi thought, “I am concerned that in a matter of hundreds or a thousand years, overseas countries like those of the West are going to plague China. It is my ominous prophecy.”¹⁷ Thus, in 1717, laws prohibited the Chinese from sailing to Southeast Asia.¹⁸ Kangxi’s fear had its bearing from earlier precedents. In 1604, Fujianese merchants were courting Dutch company commanders to bribe Chinese officials in order to obtain trade privileges. The merchants ended up in jail and distressed the Ming civil officials, which the historian John Wills has summarized as “just another case of collusion between eunuchs

¹⁵ Guan Xiu 官修, *Shengzu ren huangdi shilu* 聖祖仁皇帝實錄 (Qing neifu chaoben, 1731), 270:10.5956, <http://huntenq.com/ancient/ancientkm?00054FE900050201000000000000C800000003F000001910>.

¹⁶ Chen Yixing 陈怡行, “Shunfeng xiangsong dao liuri: Ming qing shiqi fuzhou haishi huodong yu haiwai yimin (1368–1840)” 顺风相送到琉日: 明清时期福州海事活动与海外移民 (1368–1840), in *Minshangshi yanjiu diyiji* 闽商史研究 第一辑, ed. He Zhiyi and Wang Xianbin (Zhangzhou: Fujian sheng yanhuang wenhua yanjiu hui, 2013), 186.

¹⁷ Chen, “Shunfeng,” 188.

¹⁸ Feng Erkang 冯尔康, *Yongzheng zhuan* 雍正传 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1985), 346.

and seagoing Chinese desperadoes.”¹⁹ The Dutch understood that the Fujianese exercised their agency and desire for trade and migration even if the Chinese government did not. Thus, in 1622, the Dutch armed themselves and sailed to Xiamen to demand that the Chinese authorities allow the Chinese merchants to trade with them; the Dutch even gave the Fujianese passes to come and live in Batavia.²⁰ In essence, the Fujianese were acting from their agency without regard to the Qing, and the question of their loyalty and identity thus arises.

By the time of Yongzheng’s reign (r. 1723–1735), it had become clear that the new emperor inherited the same security concerns about overseas Chinese from his father Kangxi. In 1725, following famine in Fuzhou prefecture, the governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang pleaded for Yongzheng to lift the sea ban to Southeast Asia and allow the importation of food. The center of the court debate was whether the Chinese who traveled overseas were still Chinese in their identity and political loyalty. When his Han Chinese officials Gao Qizhuo, Chang Fen, and Yang Wenqian asked about the need to prevent coastal people from sneaking overseas, Yongzheng rebuked them and reiterated his father’s distrust of the overseas Chinese. “I do not really have to have such people come back. Even if they all come back, what benefit does it do to the nation? These people left their hometown for a long time, resided in foreign lands, it is equivalent to cutting-off their feelings for the homeland [*shouqiu zhi nian*]. However, if they return, who is to say that there will not be those with schemes of treachery and collusion!”²¹ Next

¹⁹ John E. Wills, *China and Maritime Europe, 1500–1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 68.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Feng, *Yongzheng*, 347. 首邱之念 (*shou qiu zhi nian*) is a Chinese idiom from the *Classic of Rites* that refers to a legend about a fox positioning its head to the direction of its birthplace when it knows it is about to die.

year, when the same officials made the same petition, Yongzheng brushed it off by saying “using all kinds of rules and laws to prevent people going out is really ludicrous, I really do not understand.”²² His suspicion was shown again in 1728, when after the return of the twelve out of twenty-one Fujianese ships that departed from Xiamen to Southeast Asia, Yongzheng demanded that local officials not trust their words and enacted supervision to ensure loyalty.²³

It is not a coincidence that the Qing attitude in the eighteenth century was consistent because Qing hostility toward overseas Chinese reached a nadir by Qianlong’s reign (r. 1735–1796). The historian Mark Elliot has argued that the new emperor had a “debt to his father and grandfather alike.” Qianlong was beloved by his grandfather Kangxi and his father Yongzheng. Elliot further argued that Qianlong sought to strike a balance between his grandfather’s magnanimity and his father’s harshness.²⁴ As he also acknowledged, however, Qianlong was an anxious person like his father and did not take challenge and disrespect lightly.

Qianlong’s court record showed two incidences of persecuting people who returned from Java, and both happened to be Fujianese. In early May 1749, the Qing court learned about the case of “Chen Yilao of Longxi, Fujian fled to Java for trade in 1736, and he bought a barbarian woman, raised barbarian children and served as a Kapitan.” He, however, resigned his post and decided to return with his wife, children, and a huge sum of foreign money and goods on the boat of

Yongzheng indicated here that he believed that the overseas Chinese are not like that.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 349.

²⁴ Mark C. Elliot, *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 21.

another Fujianese. He was then accused of colluding with foreign countries and was thus banished and beaten. His wife and children were deported.²⁵ In fact, he stayed in Batavia for over twenty years and served eight years (1742–1749) as the treasurer, the assistant to the Kapitan. His punishment sent a substantial message to the overseas Chinese. One contemporary even wrote, “henceforward, they dare not return with ease.”²⁶ This punishment is not the arbitrary whim of the emperor but was systematically ingrained in the Qing law code. Under the military border section of the code, “Any civilians who privately sneak out of the country without paperwork will receive one hundred hit of clubbing and two thousand miles of banishment.”²⁷ We are also not informed how official sources define “collusion” since Chen only served as an official in a foreign land and committed no harm to the Qing.

In another more revealing incident, the official source provides limited context for the details. In late September 1759, Qianlong was discussing his knowledge about a trial testimony (*shenju*) linked to the lives of the Chinese living in Java. The confession of the so-called barbarian merchant Hong Renhui, possibly acting as a stained witness, testified against a Fujianese named Lin Huaisuo. Qianlong’s interpretation and tone are critical in understanding the Qing government’s subjective perception of the oversea Chinese. “Lin Huaisuo resided in Gelupa. His three generations have all grown their hair [*xufa*] to become devils [*guizi*]; there is no way that he can be so well-

²⁵ Guan Xiu 官修, *Gaozong chun huangdi shilu shang* 340.31 高宗純皇帝實錄上 364.4 (Qing neifu chaoben, 1799), 10439, <http://hunteq.com/ancient/ancientkm?00054FE9000C0401000000000000C800000003F000003210>.

²⁶ Yang and Ye, *Dongnanya*, 74.

²⁷ Xu Ben, *Daqing luli* 大清律例, in *qinding siku quanshu* 欽定四庫全書 (1725), 22:1.672.

versed in Chinese characters from the look of this handwriting.”²⁸ While we lack information about the trial, it appears to be irrelevant to Qianlong given that he was likely using it to make a point. He noted that “Fujian province people are cunning and fierce [*diaohan*]” and demanded officials arrest any remaining families of those who secretly fled overseas in order to “deter the coastal people from making the same mistake.”²⁹

I argue that the highlight here is Qianlong’s shock that a Fujianese who resided in Java for three generations could still write Chinese, mainly because his three generations have all grown their hair to become “devils.” The official Chineseness during the Qing required that male Han subjects of the Qing shave their foreheads and grow a pigtail, rather than the traditional Chinese Han-styled hair.³⁰ We thus find that Lin Huaisuo was taking advantage of his migration overseas to continue his own Chineseness, leaving the Qing authority with no choice other than persecuting any of his remaining relatives. In fact, Qianlong’s anxiety may also have resulted from the Qing dynasty’s ruling house being a Manchu minority ethnic group. The refusal of Han Chinese anywhere to adopt the Manchu hairstyle was a challenge to the legitimacy of Manchu rule in China. Another scholar also noted that in the 1760s, when Han peasants in central China did the same and cut off their pigtails,

²⁸ Guan Xiu, *Gaozong*, 597.4: 16707.

²⁹ Guan Xiu, *Gaozong*, 597.8:16708.

³⁰ 束发 (*shufa*) or hairdo is the ancient Chinese hairstyle for males after age fifteen when the hair is wrapped into a bun. According to Confucius, hair is a part of the body that we inherit from our parents, and shaving hair can mean a lack of filial piety. Hairstyle and clothing are also historically considered quintessential to Chinese cultural identity.

Qianlong launched a witch hunt due to a fear of possible conspiracy.³¹

The Qianlong emperor immediately followed this with a discussion of the rebelliousness of the Fujianese customs (*minfeng*). His imagination of the overseas Chinese community was similar to those of Yongzheng and Kangxi. The overseas Chinese were imagined as barbarized, devil-like, and dangerous, which meant that they did not deserve sympathy or imperial recognition. This sense of the overseas Chinese as a cultural other was again showed when Qianlong learned about the massacre of the Chinese in Batavia in 1740.³² He said, “those victims were native born and were actually no different compared to *fanren* [barbarians].”³³ Against the anguish of the Fujianese governor, Ce Leng, who had more sympathy for the overseas Fujianese, the record continued to state that Qianlong graciously forgave the Dutch for the mistake.³⁴ Ironically, he denied the existence of Chineseness among the overseas Chinese. I argue that the indifference to the Fujianese migrants’ plight is a result of a distrust of not only their diasporic identity but also their Fujianese identity. Provincialism played a role in further alienating the Fujianese Chinese from the Qing authority—a problem that continued to exist among ordinary people of different provincial origins in the diasporic community.

³¹ Elliot, *Emperor Qianlong*, 19.

³² It is beyond the scope of this article to provide details about this massacre. For more details, see de Klerck, *History of the Netherlands East Indies*, chap. 13.

³³ Guan Xiu, *Gaozong*, 176.6:4969.

³⁴ It is important to note that this governor may not be Fujianese in origin because of the traditional practice of the “law of avoidance,” which prevents scholar-officials from assuming office in their native places in order to avoid nepotism, etc.

Qianlong's main influence may have been Wang Anguo, who was the grand coordinator (*xunfu*) of Guangdong. In a memorial to the Grand Council (*Junjichu*) in 1741 discussing the rippling effect of this Dutch colonial massacre, Wang suggested that "when Fujianese went overseas to trade...most of them refused to come back...in July of this year, two Dutch ships arrived in Canton to trade...Your servant fears that the Fujianese will take it for revenge." Wang decided to increase supervisions to quell a potential Fujianese riot. Qianlong then complimented Wang's decision.³⁵ The Cantonese governor, Qing Fu, wrote a similar memorial in 1742 lobbying for the continuation of trade with the red-haired barbarians (*hongmao fan*): "I heard that in Java, the barbarian headmen killed Han people, and Fujian governor Ce Leng feared that barbarians are ferocious and can disrupt trade. He suggested that we should immediately ban the trade with Southern Ocean."³⁶ Qing Fu then made the argument that trade with "foreign barbarians" was essential for the Guangdong province in terms of revenue, employment, and food supply. Thus, like Wang Anguo, he hoped Qianlong could set this matter to rest and ignore Fujianese governor Ce Leng's proposal on the halt of trade.

The problem with these two Cantonese officials is that they showed a deep-rooted concern for the interest of their provincial people. We lack information about how Qianlong came to his final thought, wherein he demanded that it be decided in the Deliberative Council (*Yi zhengwang dachen huiyi*). This shows, however, that there was not a view of a homogenous overseas Chinese community because the Cantonese and Fujianese officials both concerned themselves about whether their people were involved. Wang Anguo's tone

³⁵ Zhongshanshi Danganju 中山市檔案局, *Xiangshan mingqing dangan jilu* 香山明清档案集录 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006), 706.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 708–9.

conveyed a sense that he did not trouble himself to identify with the overseas Chinese being killed because they were Fujianese.

I will demonstrate later that this provincial rift also existed among ordinary people, not just the officials. In the effort of the Chinese emperors to disown the Fujianese migrants, would the latter still identify as Chinese? In Qianlong's view, the overseas Chinese were no different from the barbarians. I argue that this is an uninformed perception based on assumption. Qianlong's bewilderment about the possibility of Fujianese living in Batavia knowing how to write Chinese is a product of the myth of inevitable creolization. In fact, some overseas Chinese had to work equally hard to meet this perception for their own benefit. During the reign of Yongzheng, two migrants returning from Batavia gave an interesting confession while in jail. Both were put into prison and wrote confessions. Chen Wei was a Cantonese who lived in Batavia for three years. On his return, he emphasized that he "bought two barbarian wives, two barbarian maids, four barbarian servants," and by the time he left, "barbarian headmen Kapitans [*yimu jiabidan*]" had provided the ship.³⁷ Yang Yin was a Fujianese from Xiamen, who had a similar story of traveling to Batavia and said his brother also bought barbarian wives and servants, while it was the "barbarian headmen Kapitans [*fanmu jiabidan*]" who provided the ship for his return.³⁸ In addition, they praised the magnanimity of the Qing emperor and their feelings of glory as his subjects. It is possible that they cleverly misled the Qing officials with the words *barbarian headmen* for the Kapitans were in fact most likely Fujianese.

There was already an established Chinese community according to one traveler, Cheng Rijie, who visited around the

³⁷ Lin Derong, *Xiyanghanglu yimin mingqing minao yimin beshu dongyindu yu baixia zhimindi de yanjiu* (Jiangxi: Jiangxi gaoxiao chubanshe, 2006), 322.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 321.

same time in 1730. Locally prestigious Chinese acted as Kapitan (*jiabidan*), two lieutenants (*leizelan*), and four treasurers (*leizhenlan*).³⁹ Nevertheless, as Yongzheng thought that those who went overseas must have connived with the barbarians and had crafty ideas of treachery, I argue that the two prisoners tried to keep themselves as little related to them as possible. They thus adopted the term *barbarian* since it could mean both foreigners and overseas Chinese. They were also countering Yongzheng's belief that these people had forgotten their homeland. As Chen Wei said, "Your sinful servant really did not want to sojourn in barbarian lands... If I am someone who forget about homeland, I will not desperately want to return." Fujianese Yang Yin also claimed that "ever since the fifth year of Yongzheng [1727], the gracious emperor lifted the sea-ban, those of us in Zhangzhou and Quanzhou can go out to do business, now that we are well-fed, everyone is thankful of the country. It is not just me, those now in foreign lands all have the desire to return home."⁴⁰ Thus, the study of Chinese in Java not only has to confront Skinner's assimilationist view but also needs to overcome the Qing court's own stigma about the overseas Chinese.⁴¹

Furthermore, Chineseness may also vary from one group of Chinese to the next. Chinese scholar-officials, however, often ignore such subtleties most likely because of their Confucian

³⁹ Li Lintang 李林昌, "Qianlong guiqiao cheng rijie yu gelaba jilue" 乾隆归侨程日焮与噶喇吧纪略, in *Zhangpu wenshi ziliao 1-25 heding ben* 漳浦文史资料 1-25辑合订本, ed. Chen Guiwei 陈桂味 (Zhangpu: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Fujian sheng zhangpu xian weiyuan hui, 2007), 125.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴¹ My use of the terms *Chinese* and *Fujianese* is also a challenging one because even the Chinese emperors and travelers to Batavia did not consider them as mutually independent terms despite the Fujianese continuing to exercise their agency.

education and ideological conformity with the rest of the educated class in the empire. For example, Fujianese Wang Dahai, who dwelled in Batavia for over ten years and was familiar with its Chinese community, described the Chinese there as *Tang* people (*Tangren*) or other forms like *huaren* or *Zhonghua ren*. All of these terms denote descendants of Chinese civilization. Although the provincial and national identities inevitably overlapped at times, I suggest special attention to the particularity of the Fujianese Chineseness as evident in Batavia. Its esoteric nature made it difficult for Perenekanization to take place.

A rare source of archival evidence known as Chinese court archives (*Gong'an Bu*), preserved by the Dutch historian Leonard Blussé, detailed how the Chinese Kapitans served as unpaid officials who, on behalf of the Dutch authorities, governed the Chinese population in Batavia. Despite the earliest surviving eighteenth-century archives ranging between 1787 and 1791, Batavia had already founded the Chinese court (*Gongtang*) system in 1742, which allowed the Chinese Kapitans to assume judiciary functions for the Chinese community.⁴² Nevertheless, the Chinese Kapitan system had long been in place since 1619 when the Dutch authority made Fujianese merchant Su Minggang the first Chinese Kapitan. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) board made this decision after calculating that the dominant majority of migrants at the time were Fujianese speakers.⁴³ In fact, the *Gong'an Bu* contained Chinese records that had predominantly been transliterated from the Fujianese dialect, which testifies to the dominance of the Fujianese population.

Recorded in Chinese by an anonymous Qing traveler, *The History of Batavia (Kaiba lishi shiji)* noted that in 1775, Nankai Academy, which had been created by Kapitans Huang Yanguan,

⁴² Yang and Ye, *Dongnanya*, 72.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

was built next to the Guanyin Temple where teachers tutored children of poor background for free. The school principal, Yang Ben, wrote that “For over a hundred and fifty years from the years of *Wanli* [1572–1620] to now the fortieth year of *Qianlong* [1775], we the *Tang* people came to Batavia where it already had a Kapitan. Never had we thought that they built Buddhist temples, temples of deities...Teacher Du Ganggen lives in this barbarian land but still has not forgotten the holy religion of China and preserved the essence of Confucianism; I admire him deeply!”⁴⁴ This record has credibility because the traveler Wang Dahai also wrote in his journal that he stayed in this academy on August 2, 1791, to complete his famous *Haidao yizhi*, recording his experience in three Javanese locales: Batavia, Semarang, and Pekalongan.⁴⁵ Nankai Academy suggests that throughout most of the eighteenth century, traditional Chinese learning had roots in Batavia. The fact that Fujianese Lin Huaisuo in Batavia could write perfect Chinese suggests that those who migrated overseas kept their cultural identity despite being physically separated from China. Principal Yang’s description also highlights the longevity of cultural rule since Chinese Kapitans promoted the study of Chineseness despite them being the servants of Dutch authority.

These Chinese Kapitans also actively used Chinese religion and beliefs as instruments of governance. I argue that even though the elite classes, such as the Kapitans themselves, often referred to overseas Chinese in broad inclusive terms like *Tang* people, which does not differentiate the Chinese provincial differences, they were conscious of the particularities of Fujianese culture. The Kapitans not only identified with them but also implicitly sided with them in cases related to the

⁴⁴ Blussé and Wu, *Shiba shiji so*, 86.

⁴⁵ Wang DaHai 王大海, *Haidaoyizhi* (Zhangyuan Cangban 漳园藏板, 1791), 12.

conflict between the Cantonese and Fujianese. Xu Jiyu wrote in the mid-nineteenth century that ever since the Ming dynasty, the rich Fujianese and Cantonese in Java “bribed the Dutch to nominate them as Kapitans.”⁴⁶ An alternative view suggests that “Fujianese Chinese were always in the dominant majority, and Chinese merchants had plenty of cash”—such was the case that in all parts of Java, the Chinese Kapitans were almost always Fujianese.⁴⁷ Thus, financial resources were not enough; community representation was also key. The first Chinese Kapitan Su Minggang was appointed because of his Fujianese identity and ability to speak their language. The regional differences also matter here, especially when trials involved both Fujianese and Cantonese. In fact, Xu Jiyu also noted that “their language remained Chinese in tradition...Kapitans were all people of Zhangzhou and Quanzhou.”⁴⁸

Highly conscious of culture, the Chinese Kapitans strived to keep the community untouched by outside influence, including Chinese Muslims. The announcement of July 25, 1766, declared, “According to Chinese custom, converting to another religion is subject to death penalty. The Dutch government thinks we should not meddle with this affair especially if it is unrelated to Christianity. Normally speaking, Chinese and Muslims are not allowed to marry no matter men or women. In reality, Buddhist Chinese must not marry Muslim women. The treasurer [*wu zhimi*] must attend to this matter.”⁴⁹ We know that mixed marriages happened every day. For example, from the

⁴⁶ Xu Jiyu 徐继畲, *Yinghuanzhibilue* 瀛环志略, in Qing daoguang ershibanian fujian fushu keben (1828), 2:17.64, <http://hunteeq.com/ancient/ancientkm?00054FE9000E05010000000000000C800000003F000003E90>.

⁴⁷ Yang and Ye, *Dongnanya*, 72.

⁴⁸ Xu, *Yinghuanzhibilue*, 2.19:66.

⁴⁹ Blussé and Wu, *Shiba shiji mo*, 39–40.

Huang Lineage Genealogy, we learn that the male “Huang Wanguan was born on the ninth year of Kangxi [1670], and lived in *Sanbaolong* [north of Java], married a barbarian woman [*fan nu*] with the surname Bai, and had a baby in the eighteenth year of Kangxi [1679].”⁵⁰ While the woman is a *fan*, the surname Bai could be a Chinese one. The historian Bernard Vlekke made the argument that in Batavia, “Chinese never emigrated with their wives. They married native women or bought slave women [;] when they returned to China they took their sons—in their conception the only interest part of the family with them... They took good care of their sons as Chinese. Thus they remained culturally distinct from the mass of the native population.”⁵¹ Vlekke attempted to override Skinner’s argument that creolized culture could challenge Chinese culture.

Similarly, I argue that cultural distinctiveness was demonstrated by how the Chinese judicial system operated under the Kapitans. The Chinese Kapitans clearly classified the *Tang* people and *fan* as two distinct groups and set an impenetrable boundary by law. The sources rarely discuss *Tang* people as Peranakans since they were more often considered as members of *Zhonghua*, i.e. descendants of Chinese civilization. The Qing authority strictly forbade Chinese females from traveling abroad, and thus it makes sense that, according to the historian Charles Coppel, “most marriages in the Nanyang [Southern Ocean] tended to be ‘mixed marriages.’”⁵² My point is that the creolization of race does not necessarily mean the creolization of culture. In fact, there was a more obvious divide

⁵⁰ Lin, “Min yue,” 171.

⁵¹ Vlekke, *The Story of the Dutch East Indies*, 92.

⁵² Charles Coppel, “Mapping the Peranakan Chinese of Indonesia,” *Papers on Far Eastern History* 8 (1973): 143–67, quoted in Leonard Blussé and Menghong Chen, *The Archives of the Kong Koan of Batavia* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 10.

within the Chinese community by region than between Peranakan and *Tang* people, for the Chinese Kapitans failed to make such a distinction. It seems that to the Europeans, the Chinese were a homogeneous entity, which ignores the reality that dialect and customs can easily divide the Chinese—for example, the Fujianese and Cantonese.

The series of events beginning on February 28, 1790, when the maidservant of the Fujianese merchant Lin Mu was said to be forcefully hugged by the Cantonese wood carver Lai Nian, help demonstrate these divisions within the Chinese community. The case involved Lin Mu who gathered Fujianese support and Lai Nian who rallied the Cantonese to fight against them, although all were eventually stopped and arrested by the police (*jaga*). *Gong'an Bu* provide the accounts by each party; it appears that in the testimonies of the Fujianese, they were highly conscious of their provincial identity and the otherness of the Cantonese. The court officials may have also sided with the Fujianese both by not challenging their incomplete narrative and challenging Lai Nian in a harsher tone. Lai Nian claimed that he had no knowledge of why the girl came to hug him and stole things in his home. When he was not able to provide eyewitnesses to the court to testify about her theft, “the court condemned Lai Nian saying that without a witness, you are actually lying!”

In my view, however, the most poignant charge against Lai Nian was not the crime itself but the fact that he represented a minority Chinese community: the Cantonese. All of the remaining witnesses showed a pattern of describing Lai Nian as Cantonese. The maid of Lin Mu, who was the alleged victim, claimed, “I was about to ask the Cantonese for a wood comb, but the Cantonese hugged me tightly. When my master saw it, he immediately engaged in shouting matches with him. On that night, the Cantonese were angry and gathered their people.” Similar versions have been provided by all other witnesses testifying that the “Cantonese were angry. They gathered their knives and wanted to beat up the Fujianese” and the “Cantonese claimed they want to humiliate all the Fujianese.” The

eyewitnesses here were likely Fujianese because the records say that the only three Cantonese witnesses refused to come.⁵³ The poor Lai Nian's roommate, who was also arrested, completed the story by saying, "at night, Mu called his buddies and was planning to have Nian beaten."⁵⁴ Thus, from the view of the Fujianese witnesses and the alleged victim, they sought justice not for the individual *per se* but for their community, feeling a strong sense of community cohesion against the imagined Cantonese evildoer.

Gong'an Bu records show the disadvantaged positions of Lai Nian and his roommate, whose words were not trusted and whose defense was further weakened by his minority status as Cantonese. Not only did the many witnesses not mention Mu's role in rallying the Fujianese for the fight, but they also called Lai Nian "Cantonese." In the courtroom, Lai Nian and his roommate, however, did not accuse others because of their Fujianese identity. The consciousness of provincial identity shows that at times of internal conflict, the Chinese identity quickly succumbed to regional identity. Fujianese identity served as a source of immediate cohesion; even though Lai Nian was technically a Chinese cultural insider, he was still a cultural outsider to Fujianese Chineseness.

Chinese provincialism in Batavia is similar to the earlier discussion about Cantonese governors demanding the Qing court ignore Fujianese grievances about the massacre in 1740. I propose that desire for a united Chinese community and uniform Chineseness must not overshadow the diversity of interest and representation within the Chinese community. I argue that the migrants transplanted their provincialism to Java, and rather than this being an abnormality to authentic Chinese lives, it was indeed part of everyday Chinese lives and evidence of

⁵³ Blussé and Wu, *Shiba shiji mo*, 232.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 231.

Chineseness. Kangxi once wrote about taking advantage of Chinese disunity for the longevity of Manchu rule: “Han Chinese are not united. We, Manchu and Mongols, have hundreds of thousands of people but are united as one. I have assumed personal rule for years now; the Han Chinese are particularly hard to govern. Since they are not united, the country has been peaceful for a long time.”⁵⁵ Thus, Kangxi’s words outlined China’s deep-rooted problem of divisiveness, which was even transplanted overseas. I suggest that because of the differences in dialect, cultural variation, and history, each province inherited a tradition that is uniquely its own. Although in the view of scholar-officials Chineseness is supposed to unify all regional differences, this is not the case in the lives of most ordinary people.

Chinese Kapitans in Batavia could handle most small cases, such as family disputes and quarrels involving small sums of money, through discussing mutual concessions, and in some small cases, they creatively used Chinese culture to rule.⁵⁶ One case noted a thirsty shipper who stole oranges from a shipmaster. When he was found out by the latter, he tied up the master. The court decided that “stealing oranges is a small matter, but tying people up is really not right to do. Now we are going to punish you by having you prepare a Chinese opera as a way to apologize.”⁵⁷ The location chosen was Guanyin Temple because it housed not only Guanyin but also the Goddess of the Sea (*Mazu, Tianhou*), a deity originating in Fujian and spiritually significant to the Fujianese people. Rather than opting for a physical punishment, the symbolic embarrassment of performing for the community showed that Chinese Kapitans wanted to instill in the villain an internal self-discipline under

⁵⁵ Guan Xiu, *Shengzu*, 270.11: 5956.

⁵⁶ Blussé and Wu, *Shiba shiji mo*, 20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

the authority of Chinese deities. As a way of punishment, it shows that the accused needed to know how to perform a Chinese opera and suggests that there was an audience who was entertained by it. As an example of everyday Chineseness, the community was set to resemble the way of life in China that outsiders could not comprehend. However, not all cases can be as easily decided as stealing oranges.

Between 1787 and 1790, 10.83 percent of cases were solved by swearing a divine pledge (*Mengshen fashi*), which required the people involved to go through Chinese rituals and make promises before gods in the Guanyin Temple.⁵⁸ Wang Dahai mocked the presumed holiness of Chinese views of the temple, likely because of his scholar-official status and a disgruntled view of ghosts and spirits. He described Seng Fobin, who was a Fujianese from Zhangzhou and the master of Guanyin Temple in Semarang, as having wives, concubines, and children, often forgetting his Buddhist robe in his wife's chamber, and once saying to his wife, "sweetie [*xiaofa*], tea for the guest."⁵⁹ The Guanyin and Mazu deities that the Fujianese brought with them were their spiritual homeland, especially for the lower-class echelon Fujianese, a phenomenon consistent with their history.

I found one incidence of the rhetoric about *Mengshen* from a Cantonese, who was making a promise before the Guanyin Temple in 1775. "Before you honorable Kapitan, if on this matter, I, Guo Naijin, have anything to hide...I beg the gods and deities to investigate me. The god in charge of time monitor this, [for if I lie] Guo Naijin will die without a full body, bleed from all seven holes, die in front of everyone, and upset all my ancestors and leave no descendants. What I am telling is the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁹ Wang, *Haidaoyizhi*, 2:5.

truth.”⁶⁰ Although the belief in deities is universal among Chinese, and this promise by the Cantonese certainly works equally well in deterring lies, I suggest that it works even more effectively for the Fujianese migrants, who constituted the majority of Java’s Chinese population. The Ming dynasty’s Fujian gazetteer described Fujian inhabitants as “believers of ghosts and temples, and highly value Buddhism,” and the Qing gazetteer repeated the same description.⁶¹ The Kapitans’ use of the temple for judicial functions captured an understanding of the background of the Fujianese.

As early as the Song dynasty, officials like Zhu Xi and others criticized the endemic obsession with ghosts and deities among the people of Zhangzhou and Quanzhou. As an official of Zhangzhou, Zhu Xi published an announcement with clear demands: “Temples cannot pretend to be worshipping Buddha but have men and women intermingled at night,” “cannot pretend to calm natural disaster just to take money...cannot pretend to be icons” and “a lack of understanding of rites have allowed Buddhism and *guizong* [ghost religion] to take advantage...Ghost teachings are cursing the people.”⁶² One contemporary commentator wrote, “I heard southerners are obsessed with excessive religious activities, this town’s people are especially so.”⁶³ As scholar-officials, Zhu Xi and Wang Dahai

⁶⁰ Blussé and Wu, *Shiba shiji mo*, 26.

⁶¹ On the Fujian gazetteer, see Lin Ting and Huang Cuzhao, [*Hongzhi*] *bamin tongshi* [弘治] 八闽通志, in *Ming hongzhi keben* (1490), 3:1.80, <http://hunteq.com/ancient/ancientkm?00054FE90013070100000000000000000003F000005790>; and on the Qing gazetteer, see Wei and Xie, *Fujian tongzhi*, 9.2:798.

⁶² Duan Lingping 段凌平, *Minnan yu taiwan minjian shenming miaoyu yuan liu* 闽南与台湾民间神明庙宇源流 (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2012), 26.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 27.

showed the same contempt for the indigenous worship of spirits, but they also underestimated the emotional attachment people had to the deities. Interestingly, both Zhu Xi and Wang Dahai also happened to be natives of Longxi, Fujian, suggesting that their literary education made their beliefs different from those of the local population.

One explanation for why the Fujianese have historically been described as believing in ghosts is the origin of the ethnic group *Minyue zu* who worshiped ghosts and intermarried with Han soldiers as Fujian was first conquered in 110 BC.⁶⁴ The belief in ghosts and witchery had dominated most of the official history in describing Fujian. Peng Liaofei, a scholar-official in the Southern Song, wrote that Mazu is one of those deities who became popular in Fujian first because of the Fujianese obsession with *haowushanggui* (ghosts and witchery) and the story was expanded to suggest that she answered to seafarers' calls.⁶⁵ Xie Zhaozhe, a Ming official and native of Changle, Fujian, wrote, "Now with the problem of witchery and ghost, Jiangnan [South of Yangtze river] is the source of problem, and Fujian is the worst part in Jiangnan...Rich people and women all piously worship whatever deities."⁶⁶ I argue not that the Fujianese are the sole group of people believing in divine spirits but that they are particularly influenced by it because of the long history and tradition. In fact, the Qing gazetteer of Fujian specifically organized a whole scroll titled "Beyond this World" (*fangwai*) to describe people of the province who were historically presumed

⁶⁴ Lin Guoping 林国平, *Mintai minjian xinyang yuanyuanliu* 閩臺民間信仰源流 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2003), 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

to have divine power. This was an organization that I did not find in any other Qing provinces.⁶⁷

I argue that this explains why the *Mengshen* system worked so effectively. It is said that in every one out of four incidents, there were people who dared not come to the Guanyin Temple to make the harsh promises while being watched by gods like Mazu.⁶⁸ Those who dared not come gave up their accusations or privately negotiated a resolution with the other parties. In one case in 1789, when a person allegedly refused to pay his money and refused to do *Mengshen*, the Kapitans threatened to imprison him on account that he was afraid of telling the truth before gods.⁶⁹ This shows an interesting parallel with one of the earlier confessions by two prisoners who returned from Batavia to China. As I argued earlier, the two prisoners were trying to mislead the government by obfuscating Chinese Kapitans as barbarian officials. The fear of divine punishment left the hope that someone could cheat the spirits as easily as they could the officials.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, there were always exceptions. A case in 1788 showed someone who committed thievery and adultery and went to *Mengshen*, but the stolen goods were found in his residence. As Blussé wrote, he was one of the rare villains not afraid of the divine watch.⁷¹

Indigenous Chinese religion took on the role of maintaining Chinese identity in Java. The French historian Claudine Salmon found that between 1650 and 1975, there were at least seventy-two Chinese temples and ancestral halls in Batavia alone, which

⁶⁷ Wei and Xie, *Fujian tongzhi*, 24, <http://hunteeq.com/ancient/ancientkm?@@481292836>.

⁶⁸ Blussé and Wu, *Shiba shiji mo*, 26.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁰ For similar example of the Chinese obsession with deities and fear of divine punishment, see Wu Jingzi, *Rulin Waishi* (1750).

⁷¹ Blussé and Wu, *Shiba shiji mo*, 27.

suggests a significant scale of piety among Batavian Chinese to their deities.⁷² The researcher Mo Jiali found it interesting that some Chinese deified historical figures, like Guan Gong, a Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) general known for his righteousness, which also found their way to Batavia, and argued that these deities provided moral constraints on the people.⁷³ It is also not an unusual Chinese phenomenon for the Chinese to be polytheistic, which means that Chinese perception of deities can be rather inclusive, allowing even deified heroes, Daoist gods, and Mazu to be worshiped together.⁷⁴

For the Fujianese, Mazu meant more than just another god; it was a familiar god who originated in Fujian. In 1751, the Fujianese Jiu Mulin and his brother built Batavia's Goddess of the Sea Temple (*Tianhou Gong*). In 1858, its history was then inscribed on a stone that stated "ever since the Ming, our Chinese people had traveled between Baling and Chaozhai. Your blessing benefits the merchants. The holy mother is from Meizhou [in Fujian], who is the ancestor of our people."⁷⁵ This stone suggests that the Fujianese believed deities, particularly Mazu, were omnipresent and that the Fujianese Chinese held that Mazu was with them wherever they went by virtue of them

⁷² Mo Jiali 莫嘉麗, "Yinni huaren xinyang hunhe: zhongguo minjian shisu zongjiao tese de yanxu yu wenhua shenfen de renting" 印尼華人信仰混合：中國民家世俗宗教特色的延續文化身份的認同, in *Huaqiao huaren yanjiu di wenji*, ed. Jinan daxue huaqiao huaren yanjiusuo 暨南大學華僑華人研究所 (Guangzhou: Jinan daxue huaqiao huaren yanjiusuo bian, 2001), 76.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁴ For some examples like this, see "san jiao he yi," which is a Chinese phenomenon of combining three religions.

⁷⁵ Jiang Weitan 蔣維鏞, "Qingdai shangbang huiguan yu tianhougong" 清代商幫會館與天后宮, in *Mazu yanjiu wenji* 媽祖研究文集, ed. Jiang Weitan (Fuzhou: Haifeng chubanshe, 2006), 111.

being her descendants. The construction of Mazu temples shows a pious worship that stretched across all people of Fujianese descent, allowing for an imagination of self-identity based on this familiar deity. By identifying themselves as descendants of Mazu, the Fujianese found a cultural homeland in which they maintained their Chineseness. Phrases like “Mazu...is our people” and “*Zhonghua* [Chinese] people” contradicted arguments of large-scale Fujianese assimilation. I argue that the spread of Guanyin and Mazu temples not only to Batavia but throughout Southeast Asia is evidence of a Chinese cultural dissemination.

It is also possible that the Chinese Kapitan not only used Chinese culture as a ruling strategy but also felt a sense of belonging themselves. Unlike Skinner’s argument that these “Peranakan leaders” did not think of themselves as Chinese, Claudine Salmon found and studied the gravestone one of Chinese Kapitan, Han Zhengsi, from Zhangzhou. It is said that his tombstone was specifically transported from Fujian.⁷⁶ The origin of the stone can be symbolic in that it indicated that the soul of Kapitan Han belonged to a distant place with which he culturally identified. Thus, Qianlong’s proposition that these Chinese were “actually no different comparing to barbarian” underestimates the cultural connections and self-identity the Fujianese possessed. This identity did not wither with the denial of the Qing authority but grew and spread due to the fact that the identity was rootless for a mobile people, thereby allowing the Fujianese to exercise their Chineseness anywhere they went and still be consistent with their history and traditions.

There is no doubt that some Chinese became Peranakan in culture, as Skinner emphasized. Nevertheless, I disagree about how much Peranakan culture played a role in the Chinese community in the eighteenth century and find it troubling that

⁷⁶ Yang and Ye, *Dongnanya*, 73.

Skinner inferred that Chinese Peranakans exercised proud self-assertion when evidence shows that the community viewed them as contemptuous. Wang Dahai had a rather short description about them in his long discussion of the Chinese community: “Among the *Huaren* [Chinese people], there were some for generations who have never returned to China...They practice the holy religion [Islam], speak foreign language, eat foreign food...They disliked being called *Zhaoya* [Javanese], and called themselves Muslim [C. *Xinan*, J. Selam]...be that they are no different from the Javanese.”⁷⁷

Wang’s attitude toward this group, however, can be interpreted as condescension and alienation at best. The overall context of his book suggests that the Peranakans were insignificant compared to evidence of Chineseness. In saying that they were no different from Javanese, even though they did not want to be called that, Wang implied that they relegated themselves to a lesser culture. “Javanese are hundred times more in number than the Dutch. Their nature is simple-minded, cowardly... Whenever they heard the word ‘Dutch,’ they kneel down.”⁷⁸ Also when Wang described the selling of opium by the Dutch in Batavia, he differentiated the use of opium by Javanese and *Zhonghuaren* (Chinese). Wang wrote about the use by the former, saying that “Javanese are stupid and greedy, easy to control,” and opium made them “weak and tired, uncommitted to the lands, and no longer complaining;” he sighed that “Javanese used to be just uneducated fools.”⁷⁹ He continued to say that “our Chinese people are also the victims...once they take this thing, they forget about the hometown and parents and children.”⁸⁰ His tone showed that he was condemning the Dutch

⁷⁷ Wang, *Haidaoyizhi*, 3:5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

for selling opium and the Javanese for what he thought as exercising stupidity, a term he always crowned them with throughout the book. By smearing the Javanese and comparing the Chinese Muslims as no different from them, Wang was implicitly looking down on them. This is not to say that he, like the Chinese emperors or Skinner, believed in the overall transformation of the Chinese community. On the contrary, Wang took pride in the Chineseness that he saw.

His feelings toward the overseas Chinese in Java were more inclusive than alienated. I argue that he not only recognized the Chineseness of the *Huaren* in Java but also identified with them since he was part of that community for a decade. He described a group of Chinese martial art practitioners, who he called *Wu Chishi*: “Javanese boatmen were cowardly, but our *Wu Chishi* were superior in the martial arts that these creatures all were scared and thought ‘this must be a Chinese boat from Batavia looking so solemn!’” When the bandits realized they robbed the wrong boat, “they knelt down for a long time.”⁸¹ They were in fact practicing various southern Chinese martial arts, and “men and women began practicing since the age of ten...various teachings included monkey boxing and crane boxing [*taizu dazun hou quan heshi*].”⁸² These examples suggest that Wang embraced the overseas Chinese for their culture, which included southern boxing traditions.

Chinese official sources have always assumed that Chinese moving overseas testified to their disloyalty and renouncing of Chineseness. The Fujianese with their history of migrating overseas to Southeast Asia and elsewhere, especially during the Ming and Qing dynasties, showed that their identity was maintained through a familiar culture. Batavia was not a strange land to the Fujianese but rather a familiar community where

⁸¹ Ibid., 3:5.

⁸² Ibid., 5:2.

they kept a Fujianese identity. Their conflict with the Cantonese migrants resembled the inveterate provincialism in China. Furthermore, the Chinese Kapitans not only strived to preserve this cultural community by preventing intermarriage but also identified with the Fujianese, in court, and the Fujian homeland by returning or having their souls placed in stones from Fujian.

In their history of moving abroad, the Fujianese were traditionally mobilized to search for wealth and land in response to the limited resources in Fujian province. The limited farmland and the proximity to the sea made them, and others like the Cantonese, China's earliest contacts with Southeast Asia and the Europeans. I argue that they did not do so out of a sense of loyalty to the foreigners, as Kangxi and Yongzheng suspected, but were mobile because of traditions and a familiar cultural society that they recreated wherever they went. As they set sail for their own destiny in the journey overseas, they carried with them the seeds of traditions, customs, and religions, which they sowed in each one of their new maritime frontiers.