

Java's Capitan Cina and Javanese Royal Families: Status, modernity and Power Major-titular Be Kwat Koen and Mangkunegoro VII *Some Observations*

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Introduction¹

While it is generally well-known that in the course of the 18th and 19th century Chinese families in Java tended to marry each other, forming socio-political and economic strongholds along Java's north coast and East Java. Except for Kwee (2006) very little research into the significance and the actual workings of these inter-family alliances has been done, let alone study the resilience of these family networks over a longer period of time.

The creation of elite family networks among the Chinese did not only have political or economic significance, but also had important social, cultural and symbolic meaning. Status, ethnicity and power were closely interrelated in the Netherlands East Indies; it was characteristic of Dutch colonial society, of traditional Javanese society, as well as of ethnic Chinese community life. Over time with the modernisation of colonial Indonesia, the symbols of status and power changed —sometimes merged— between different groups but also within these groups.

Whereas little is known about the forging of inter-family alliances of the *peranakan* elites and the competition and cooperation between these elite family clans, even less is known about their formal and informal alliances with the indigenous aristocracy and Dutch and/or Eurasian elite families and the significance of these external networks for sustaining *peranakan* businesses and socio-political roles over longer periods of time and under changing regimes. Local agro-industrial strongholds of the *peranakan* families seem to have rested to a large extent upon strategic alliances with members of native royalty; but the how, why and when of these alliances remains a mystery. In most historical studies on their socio-economic role, the Chinese generally appear as a nameless and faceless entity. But it looks as if these alliances, more often than not, crossed time and colonial boundaries, and stretched out even to mainland Southeast Asia (Siam/Thailand, for example). Through the native aristocratic patronage networks, the Chinese family elites were apparently able to establish a strong foothold in local society, and acquire land, recruit labour, and set-up agro-industrial undertakings. On the other hand, through concubinage and marriage alliances in the Dutch colonial bureaucracy and economic elite, the large Chinese businesses were able to acquire modern technology, capital, know-how, and legal assistance.

In the 19th century the Chinese officer system and the revenue farms evolved and

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expanded together. In Java revenue farmers and Chinese officers were drawn from a small elite of *peranakan* businessmen, and the vast hierarchies of patronage and credit that culminated in the Chinese officer's councils in the major Java cities extended throughout the island (Skinner 1996, 80–81). The position of officers tended to be hereditary and were restricted to a small number of wealthy *peranakan* families. In Semarang there were the Be, Liem, Tan, and later Oei families, and in Surabaya there were the Han, The, Tjoa and Kwee families, which produced officers and revenue farmers for generations (Onghokham 1989, 57). By the late 19th century these families had accumulated great wealth and tremendous local and regional power and they were able to consolidate their position through intermarriage and getting their sons and sons-in-laws appointed in officer positions in other towns and helping them in getting revenue farms in other districts (*ibid.*).

Since the revenue farm system produced so much wealth and power, competition between the *peranakan* elite families was severe and often ruthless, leading to family feuds which crossed generations. The opium-farm auctions in particular were important state occasions, attended by high ranking Dutch and Javanese officials, where much was at stake and bribes and corruptive 'gift giving' went hand in hand (Salmon 1991; Rush 1990). In winning favours from the Dutch colonial administration expensive gifts were sent to residents as well local native power holders, luxurious receptions, banquets and grand feasts were organised; whereby guests were usually divided in three groups (Dutch, Chinese and indigenes) and each was provided with their own food and entertainment.

With the arrival of the so-called liberal era and the implementation of the Ethical Policies in the Dutch colony, most of the monopolies the '*opium kings of Java*' enjoyed came to an end and subsequently the *peranakan* Chinese elites moved into other lines of business, e.g. trade, sugar and rubber industry, and manufacturing (The 1989). Colonial rule became more intensive and more bureaucratic and a new breed of professional civil servants came to administer the Dutch colony. With the abolition of the monopoly systems and the coming of Western capital it seemed that the Chinese were relegated to an intermediary position in the colonial economy and that also their mutual and beneficial relation with Java's native courts came to an end. These courts began producing the senior-officials of the native administration and became increasingly part of the colonial *Beambtenstaat*², whereas the Chinese *peranakan* businesses became increasingly tied to Western enterprise and integrated into the Western dominated sector of the colonial economy. In addition, the *peranakan* officer system was directly challenged by the leaders of the *singkeh* Chinese communities and the functions of these officers were in part taken over by Chinese Chambers of Commerce (Twang 1998).

In the general discourse on *peranakan* Chinese elite life in late colonial Java, the start of the 20th century marked an important turning point. Rather than continue to analyse the *peranakan* families as an integral part of Javanese (and Indies) economy and colonial society of the period after World War I, the scholarly (and popular) attention shifts to political and identity issues and to the problematic integration of *peranakan* Chinese in the Indonesian nation-state in the making, its attitudes towards China and Chinese nationalist movements in the Indies. For the period 1920s–1960s a political focus came to dominate the field.

The current project wants to readdress these issues. It is particularly interested in understanding the resilience and modern significance of *peranakan* elite networks created in the late 19th century and the long-term 'survival' of these networks under three different types of regimes, e.g. late colonial Dutch state, the Japanese regime, and the post-independence period. By looking at the changes and continuities of *peranakan* Chinese patronage networks, their strategic marriage alliances, the favouritism and nepotism, as well as of their culture, wealth and (local) power-base, it hopes to conjure important possibilities for rethinking the role and place of *peranakan* Chinese in Indonesian history.³

It will do so by studying the family histories and social networks of some of the most important *peranakan* elites from 19th century Java (Be, Kwee, Djie, Oei, and Tan) comparing these to the histories of prominent families elsewhere in the archipelago (Khoe family in Medan, the Lie, Nio and Tjoa Families in Makassar, the Thio of Menado). The potential of such an family history approach is obvious. In the modern history of Indonesia, institutionalization was often weak, and irrelevant to important sectors of the economy and society. Family networks, based on loosely defined ties of kinship and community, provided access to social capital, which was developed and deployed in changing contexts, often were trans-national in reach. In studying these networks, which include individuals of diverse occupations, orientations and levels of success, a more nuanced insight into questions of social change in modern Indonesia can be offered (Sutherland 2006).

In the following paragraphs I will look at the extended family network of the Be family from Central Java and the intriguing relationships of this particular *peranakan* elite family with the Thai Royalty and Mangkunegoro VII, one of the four native rulers of Java's Principalities. The research is mainly based upon a thorough analysis of private photo-albums and home-movies, genealogies, extensive interviews with the Be family members, and the private correspondence of Mangkunegoro VII. In the concluding section I want to place these findings within the broader themes of the workshop.

The Be Family in Central Java⁴

Very little is actually known about the Be family in Java and its role in politics, culture and economy. In the literature one would mainly find references to the well-known, but little researched, Be Biauwi Tjoan Bank (Brown 1995), one of the major Chinese banks in pre-war Indonesia, and there are occasional short references to Be Biauwi Tjoan 馬森泉 who by the late 19th century had become Major Cina of Semarang and was one of the wealthiest persons in Java at the time.

The first Be probably to set foot on Java's soil was Be Ing Tjoe (馬洲瀛 1803–1857) who married Tjoa Tjoe Nio (1803–1848). He was born in Fukien, residency Tjiang Tjioe, department Hay Ting, district Thjio Be. Around 1820, at the age of seventeen, Be Ing Tjoe was taken from his home-town to Java. In 1824 he married the daughter of Tan ? Nio and became an assistant of the large opium farmer Tan Tiang Tjhing, at that time Capitan Cina in Semarang. During the Java War (1825–1830) Tan Tiang Tjhing had personally led the defence of Semarang's Chinese camp against the troops of Diponegoro. Together with Tan Tiang Tjhing's son, Hong Yan, Be Ing Tjoe would developed his bosses opium trade very successfully, and through intermarriage the two families

became closely interwoven. Already in 1839 Be Ing Tjoe was himself promoted to Capitan Cina and in 1842 he became the Major Cina of Purworedjo. After moving to Batavia in 1855 he died there in 1857 at the age of 54.

Be Ing Tjoe had seven children, the eldest son was Be Biauws Tjoan (馬森泉 1826–1904), and the second son, Be Ik Sam (馬益三 1838–1890). Biauws Tjoan married Tan Ndjiang Nio, daughter of Major Tan Hong Yan, his father's business partner. In 1845 Be Biauws Tjoan became Luitenant Chinese and in 1853 was promoted to Capitan Cina of Semarang. Seven years later in 1860 he was appointed Major Cina.

Be Ik Sam (Capitan Cina in Bagelen from 1862–1864) and Be Biauws Tjoan had formed a kongsi and controlled the opium farms in their own districts. In 1864 they were found guilty of malpractice and stripped of their offices and titles (Rush 1990, 77). In 1873 were rehabilitated and reinstated to their position. Be Ik Sam 馬益三 was an established trader in Semarang owned lands in the area of Japara and held the opium farms of Bagelen and Kedu (Salmon 1991, 12). In the second half of the 19th century the Be–Tan Kongsi would operate one of the largest opium networks in Southeast Asia.⁵ In fact the Be–Tan kongsi was one of a small number of *peranakan* family clans that dominated Java's opium farms from the mid-19th century onward. A rival Semarang-based group was headed by Ho Yam Lo who by 1880s was considered to be one of the wealthiest Chinese in Java. The Ho group held the lucrative opium farms in Central Java, namely Semarang, Yogyakarta, and Kedu. A third distinct group operated in East Java. This group was headed by Han Liong Ing and had formed strategic alliances with Tan Kok Tan's Kediri farm and The Tjai King's Besuki farm (Rush 1990, 95–96). This group was generally known as the 'Kediri kongsi'. These three family business groups (Be–Tan, Ho, and the Kediri kongsi) formed the top of vast social, patronage and economic networks, which represented a complex web of economic interests, family liaisons, and cultural and contractual obligations. Each family constellation tried to dominate commercial life in as wide a regions as possible, and within each constellation smaller factions were formed and dissolved in response to circumstances and opportunity (Rush 1990, *ibid*).

Next to being a highly successful revenue (opium) farmer Be Biauws Tjoan operated a wide range of other agricultural enterprises, including sugar, and owned several ships. He moreover owned real estate in nearly every afdeeling in central Java, and invested in a large number of manufacturing industries. By the late 19th century his fame had spread all over Southeast Asia so that when in March 1895 King Chulalongkorn of Siam visited Java he also stayed in the Kebon Dalem of the Be family.⁶ On this occasion Be Biauws Tjoan received one of Siam's highest decorations, The Knight of the White Elephant. This official Siamese order gained him much respect in Java and Siam, and from that moment onwards the relations of the Be family with the Thai Royalty would stay intimate and long-lasting.

His wife Tan Ndjiang Nio gave birth to only one daughter⁷ and the couple thereupon decided to adopt three sons, *e.g.* Be Kwat Yoe⁸, Be Kwat Khing and Be Kwat Ling.

Be Kwat Khing (ca. 1860–?) was in actual fact the eldest son of Be Ik Sam (1838–1890) the second son of Be Ing Tjoe. Be Ik Sam was married to Tan Bien Nio (1837–1886) and the couple had six children (two boys and four daughters). Be Kwat Khing was given for adoption to Be Biauws Tjoan, whereas the second son *Be Kwat Koen* stayed

with his blood-parents. The eldest daughter of Be Kwat King married Kwee Yan Tjo.

On 3 October 1914 Be Kwat King and Be Soen Tjong (son of Be Kwat Ling) together with Kwat King's son-in-law Kwee Yan Tjo established the Be Biauw Tjoan Bank which would become one of the major commercial Chinese banks in the Indies. The capital was fixed at one million guilders, with forty-nine shares of 10,000 guilders owned by both Kwat King and Soen Tjong, and Kwee Yan Tjo having two shares. The latter was appointed director of the Bank, whereas Be Kwat King and Soen Tjong Be acted as commissioners. The Be Biauw Tjoan Bank was highly successful in its first decade of existence, but by the mid-twenties it would run into financial difficulties and in 1927, due collapse of the Java sugar trade, was forced to liquidate (Cornelissen 1999).

Be Kwat Koen 馬厥昆 the second son of Be Ik Sam, was born in Purworedjo on 1 December 1863. He entered the wide-ranging Tan-Be family business at a young age and travelled extensively to Singapore, China, and probably Japan. Like many other men of the Be clan he was appointed in various administrative functions and besides Capitan Cina of Semarang, ultimately became Major-titulair of Surakarta. At the young age of seventeen, in 1880, he married The Siang Ling (1865–1934).

Be Kwat Koen and his wife The Siang Ling were very well-known and highly respected figures in Java's Chinese society of the 1920s and 1930s. Part of this was due to their personal misfortune. The Siang Ling gave birth to 13 children (seven daughters and six sons) of which all the sons and one daughter died at a very young age. People felt pity on them and suspected that this misfortune was caused by some spell or by some misconduct of one of them in a previous life. But six of their daughters grew up well and married into other wealthy *peranakan* families of the time. According to many informants the Be daughters were very beautiful and very much wanted by the young males of other elite families of the time. Be Kwat Koen and his wife closely oversaw the possible marriage candidates of their daughters making sure that they came from respectable, wealthy and influential families, whose work and labour reflected the 'modernising spirit' of the 1920s. Being a highly modern person himself, combining the best of traditional Chinese value and educational systems with the modern Western spirit of technology and rational economics, Be Kwat Koen only gave his blessings when he was sure that the prospective bride had the right 'modern' attitude towards the economy and social life and was well equipped to function well in both traditional Javanese society and the Western-educated administrative bureaucracy of the colony.⁹ All his daughters then married young men from well-known *peranakan* families, each of whom in their own right would become well-known figures in and outside Java in the period 1920s–1940s.

Be Soen Nio (1883–1972) 'Soen' × Goei Ing Hong (1880–1920)

Be Tie Nio 'Betty' × Liem Hong Hoen (3 children)

Be Kiong Nio 'Bertha' × Tan Tjwan Liong (11 children)

Be Kiam Nio (1893–1985) 'Jene' × Kwee Zwan Lwan (1891–1947) (3 children)

Be Wie Nio 'Wies' × Liem Hwat Soei (3 children)

Be Hien Nio¹⁰ (1906/1999) 'Hendrika' × Oei Tjong Hauw (1904–1950) (later married to Tsjang Swie Tie) (3 children)

The eldest daughter Be Soen Nio (1883–1972) married Goei Ing Hong (1880–1920) who was from one of the oldest and richest *peranakan* Chinese families from Java. His

father Goei Keh Sioe (1860–1921) ran opium farms and sugar estates.¹¹ By the early 20th century the Goei family already had extensive economic interests, both in East Asia (China and Japan) and in Central Java, and it operated the NV Handelmaatschappij Goei Keh Soei (merk Swie Wan) in Semarang. The trading company Goei Keh Soei was run by the father and his three sons and most of the time the male members of the Goei family would stay in Shanghai and Japan to conduct their Java business. Since Be Soen Nio and her husband were unable to get children, Be Kwat Koen (her father) suggested that they would adopt a daughter of her younger sister, Be Kiong Nio. This was so arranged and the daughter, Goei Kiem Lan (1919), was brought in to live with them. One year later in 1920 Goei Ing Hong passed away at the age of forty. And Mrs Goei Soen Nio and adopted daughter would live together from that moment onwards.

The fourth daughter Be Kiam Nio married to Kwee Zwan Lwan, owner-director of the Djatti Piring sugar factory at Ciledug. The Kwee family in West Java, near the border of Central Java, descended from Kwee Giok San, who was born in Lungtzi, a small town near Zhangzhou (Fukien). In the 1840s Giok San travelled to the Nanyang and by 1850 arrived in Central Java, where he established himself as a trader in Ciledug, east of Cirebon on Java's northern coast. These early years of Giok San are clouded in darkness, but in 1865, his second son, Kwee Boen Pien, was inaugurated as the *Capitan Cina* of Ciledug. Kwee Boen Pien's son, Kwee Keng Liem 郭瑗琳, founded the sugar factory Djatti Piring in 1896, and for the next forty years the fortunes of the family prospered enormously. The Kwee family belonged to the *peranakan* elite families of Java and through strategic marriage-alliances with other *peranakan* families in Central and East Java came to achieve a high social status both in the European and the Chinese communities¹².

The youngest daughter Be Hien Nio became the wife of Oei Tjong Hauw 黄忠孝, (son of Oei Tiong Ham 黄仲涵), at that time the director of the Oei Tiong Ham Bank,



Engagement announcement of Hendrika Be Kwat Koen (Be Hien Nio) and Oei Tjong Hauw, 6 December 1922

who later became president of the Oei Tiong Ham Concern. They got engaged on 6 December 1922.

Be Wie Nio, the fifth daughter, married Liem Hwat Soei also a *peranakan* family that got their fortunes in the sugar business.

All these engagements and marriages were done with much public display and splendour and many important guests from the *cabang atas* of colonial society participated in these events.

In marrying his daughters into the most wealthiest and most prominent families of Central and East Java, Be Kwat Koen as the father-in-law, became one of the most influential Chinese in the 1920s–early 1940s. His power did not derive so much from official positions held in Chambers of Commerce, Chinese associations or formal political parties, as many of the more well-known Chinese leadership of those days. On the contrary, one will look in vain to a reference to Be Kwat Koen in the many works on ethnic Chinese politics in colonial Java. His power had much to do with what G. William Skinner had termed the paradigm of the Capitan Cina, which according to him explained to a large extent the 'paradoxes' of Chinese leadership overseas (Tan 1995) In discussing the Thai case, Skinner noticed that respect and status accorded to a Thai Chinese leader by *his own community* was particularly related to the extensiveness of the leader's relations with the Thai elite and his ability to function as the linkage between internal power structure of the Chinese community and the external political authority in the larger society. The more extensive these relations were, the more power and status a Chinese leader in Thailand held (*ibid*). Be Kwat Koen certainly fitted this model. But his influence and power were not only confined to the boundaries of the Dutch colonial state, it stretched far beyond, reaching even Germany, China and Siam. To Java's Chinese community Be Kwat Koen's power and status was reflected among others in the many official decorations he received, *e.g.*

- Commandeur Orde Gulden Rijsthalm van China
- Ridder Orde Oranje Nassau
- Ridder Friedrichsorde van Wurttemberg
- Ridder Kroonorde van Siam
- Officier Orde van de Witte Olifant (Siam)
- Groote Gouden Ster
- Majoor-titulair van Soerakarta

These decorations show that his extraordinary leadership within Java was recognized by the Dutch colonial government, the Chinese Republic, the Thai Kingdom and the Javanese monarchy. Creating successful alliances with other elite *peranakan* families was only one part of the Be family's strategy. The Be also had close relations with Southeast Asian royal families and within these royal realms fulfilled important roles. And it was through his personalised relationship with Mangkunegoro VII that the Kwee, Liem, Tan and Oei families got access to one of the foremost rulers of Java and were introduced to the royal court.

Mangkunegoro VII and the Be Family

Mangkunegoro VII was ruler of one of the four native courts in Java. He was born in 1884 and his reign started in 1916 and lasted until his death in 1944. In 1920 he married the daughter of Sultan Hamengkubuwono VII, Ratoe Timoer. The self-ruling areas in Central Java ((Hamengkubuwono and the Pakualam of Yogya, and the Susuhunan and the Mangkunegara of Solo/Surakarta) had a different history and a different fate.¹³ Despite their different histories the four areas shared similar social organisations. At the top of the ladder was the monarch who legitimized his power by assuming a sacral position. Ideally he did not interfere with affairs-of-state; although in practice this differed from ruler to ruler, and Mangkunegoro VII in particular would interfere to a large extent with state affairs. However, the day-to-day running of the realm was generally entrusted to a chief minister (*patih*), who after 1743 was in the service of both the Javanese ruler and the Dutch.

The elite of the realm consisted of three groups, *e.g.* a knightly aristocracy (*satriya*), who were related by varying degrees of kinship with the ruler; a group of aristocratic officials (*priyayi*), which overlapped with the first group, were charged with maintaining justice and preserving order, and making sure that a fixed proportion of the proceeds from agriculture and trade, as well as a set number of statutory labourers, found their way to the capital; a religious aristocracy of Muslim clerics, who controlled the mosque in the capital, guarded the graves of kings and saints and gave religious instruction. (Houben 1994: 7)

Because of different geographical factors Surakarta during the 19th century was more oriented towards the outside world, while Yogyakarta remained much more inward looking (*ibid.*) In addition, Yogya more than Solo had suffered from the Java War (1825–1830). Furthermore, the extent of leasing of land in Solo differed somewhat from that in Yogya. Solo had twice the area of Yogya, but in 1862 leased five times as much land to private entrepreneurs, especially Chinese and Europeans.

Surakarta's inclination to maintain the status quo and to have more intensive contacts with foreigners than Yogyakarta continued in the post-1870 period. Within Solo itself the Mangkunegara provided extra support for Dutch authority and Mangkunegoro VII, keen on modernizing and developing his state, entertained close relations with Dutch intellectuals and economic policy makers.¹⁴

Besides native agriculture the Mangkunegara could boast several other important sources of income. The ruler's own enterprises, in 1916 brought under governmental supervision through the establishment of the Fonds van Mangkoenegorose Eigendommen, consisted of coffee and agave estates, and two sugar factories (Tjolomandi and Tasikmadoe). The monarch in addition owned a hotel and leisure resort at Karangpandan. In the early 1930s MN VII supplied two *pasanggrahans* (resthouse for travellers) in Tawangmangoe for the establishment of a luxury leisure resort. This leisure resort had a hotel, drainage system and running water, sport accommodations and swimming pool. In addition Mangkunegoro VII owned houses in Surakarta, Semarang and Wonogiri which were rented to Europeans and wealthy Chinese. The total population of the Mangkunegara in 1930 was 900,000 and the state was divided in three regencies, *e.g.* Wonogiri, Kota Mangkunegara, and the Enclave Ngawen (Metz 1939, 45).

Establishing the exact nature of the alliance between the ruler of the Mangkune-

gara and the Be family is an hazardous undertaking given the lack of reliable source-materials. The following discussion, is based on the private correspondence of the Mangkunegoro VII with members of the Be family. It therefore reveals only certain aspects of this alliance.

The sources

The private correspondence of Adipati Soerio Mangkunegoro VII with *peranakan* Chinese consists of more than 700 letters exchanged with some 30 Chinese. The largest number are from:

Mrs Be-Goei Ing Hong (213)—eldest daughter of Be Kwat Koen
Tjan Tjoe Siem (72), Dr Yap Hong Tjoen (68)—the famous oculist from Yogyakarta, who was also visited by King Prajahipok from Thailand,
Be Kwat Koen (51),
Oei Tjong Hauw (46),
Kwee Zwan Lwan (37),
Njoo Hong Siang (36),
Mrs. Liem-Be Kwat Koen (27)—the second daughter of Be Kwat Koen

The earliest letter in the collection, dated 21 March 1916, is written by Kwee Keng Liem (1856–1924)¹⁵, the last one, dated 11 January 1945 is from Mrs Be-Goei Ing Hong. Although this correspondence still needs to be analysed properly, a quick reading of about half of the letters, already revealed much about the relationship between the Be Family and Mangkunegoro VII.

The correspondence can be categorized in three groups:

1. Building up trust and personal relations through the exchange of gifts;
2. Information and opinion sharing
3. Invitations and favour asking

1) Ever since “The Gift” of Marcel Mauss it has been widely acknowledged in anthropological theory that the exchange of gifts is a major tool in cementing relations and establishing trust between people, families or clans. The *peranakan* Chinese families that corresponded with Mangkunegoro VII and Ratu Timur were not only great gift-givers, as can be expected, but also received many gifts from the royal couple. It was certainly not a one-way street. Probably half of the letters shared deal with the exchange of gifts. In the case of Be Kwat Koen or Oei Tjong Hauw it were often rare Chinese or Japanese items (porcelain, lacquerware, traditional handicrafts) or modern and luxury items they brought home from their trips to Singapore, China or Japan (like clocks, cigarettes). In the case of the Be sisters (Soen Nio, Hendrika, Marie Louise) it was often embroidered table-cloth, rare silk items and textiles, flowers (orchids!), paintings and photographs. The royal couple would give horses, traditional and exclusive Yogya batik, gamelans, paintings, and items they acquired from their trips abroad. Upon receiving these gifts letters of gratitude were then exchanged. These usually run like this:

Salatiga, 5 April 1937

Your Highness and Toean Ratoe,

Allow me to thank you deeply for the present you brought for us from Europe. I was deeply struck that, despite your busy schedule, you still found the time to think of us. The bottle will continue to be a permanent memory of your great friendship. Once again I thank you deeply for your much appreciated gift, I remain, after giving my best regards to Toean Ratoe, sincerely

Yours

Hendrika (PP. This letter came from Hendrika Oei Tjong Hauw)

2) Many letters deal with information and opinion sharing. This too was many-sided and differed between the men and the women. Whereas the women would generally inquire about the upbringing of the respective children, health situations, parties, weddings, and celebrations; the men would share *information* about social-economic and administrative issues. Kandjeng Goesti was very much interested in information about the local native economy and welfare in his domain, but also in other parts of Java; and about the world-political situation as witnessed by Be Kwat Koen and Oei Tjong Hauw on their trips abroad. The corresponding parties would also share information about the Dutch senior-administrators, informing each other about character of people, new upcoming Dutch colonial policies etc.

But information was also asked by the royal couple when they scheduled foreign trips. For example, in 1930 they planned a three day trip to Singapore and in an extensive letter Mangkunegoro VII approached Be Kwat Koen asking which hotels to take, what the best shopping malls were and the best tourist spots. Be Kwat Koen advised him to take either the Sea-View Hotel or the Raffles, and that he should certainly visit the former Sultan's Palace. Moreover he suggested that His Highness should make use of the services of Mr Khoo, the agent of Oei Tjong Ham Concern Singapore who was fluent in Malay and English. He would be willing to arrange this guide for him. From a later letter to Oei Tjong Hauw we know that Mangkunegoro VII actually took all the advice of Be Kwat Koen, even having Mr Khoo as his guide.

Whereas Be Kwat Koen, being of an older generation and very reluctant to give his *opinion* on certain matters, Oei Tjong Hauw—who was in his thirties—had no second-thoughts whatsoever. In his letters to the royal couple he expressed his anxiety about Dutch economic policy, criticizing severely Dutch encroachment on private enterprise, praising the Japanese for what they had achieved economically, and pointing out to Mangkunegoro VII that Java's economic future and general welfare lies particularly in a closer integration and deepening of trade relations with China.¹⁶

3) Although not often, but in quite a number of letters each partner would explicitly ask favours from the other. Usually 'favour asking' was done in a very implicit way; but in several illuminating letters favours were asked explicitly and directly. And it is these letters which actually reveal the true significance of the alliance. For the purpose of this paper only one case will be highlighted.

When on 17 March 1936 the Susuhunan was decorated by the Chinese Republican government with the "Grand Cordon blanc aux bordures rouges" of the Jade Order, the second dignitary in the Netherlands East Indies after the Governor-General to receive such an prestigious decoration, Mangkunegoro VII was disappointed and envious. In a

letter, dated 21 March 1936 to Oei Tjong Hauw he expressed his feelings as follows:

Uit de courant zal U wel reeds vernomen hebben dat aan den Soesoehoenan op den 17den dezer de “Grand Cordon blanc aux bordures rouges de l’orde du Jade” is aangeboden geworden door den Consul-Generaal, den heer T. Sung in opdracht van de Chineesche Republiek. Ook Zijne Excellentie de Gouverneur-Generaal is drager geworden dier orde; de Soesoehoenan is dus de 2^e begiftigde. (*underlining MN VII*). Ik zou het ook zeer op prijs stellen begiftigd te worden met een Chineesche orde, al was het niet de “Jade” orde.

Indien mogelijk natuurlijk een Commandeurskruis met een plague, doch als het niet kan, zou ik ook wel genoeg willen nemen met een decoratie van lagere orde.

“You undoubtedly have learned from the newspapers that the Susuhunan has been offered the “Grand Cordon blanc aux bordures rouges de l’orde du Jade on the 17th this [month] by the Consul-general, Mr T. Sung, on behalf of the Republic of China. Also his Excellency, the Governor-General, has become bearer of the ‘order’. The Susuhunan is thus the *second* person bequeathed with this order [*underlining by MN VII in the original letter*]. I also would appreciate to receive a Chinese ‘order’, although not necessarily of the ‘Jade’ order.

If possible of course a Commander’s Cross with plague, but if this is not possible, I would also be happy with a decoration of a lower order” (my translation, PP)

From this letter it is clear that Kandjeng Goesti was annoyed that his neighbour, the Susuhunan, was the second in row after the Dutch Governor-General to receive the valued order of the Chinese Republic. He could have left it there, only notifying Oei Tjong Hauw that he himself would also appreciate such a prestigious decoration, and leave it to the president-director of the Oei Tiong Ham Concern to decide what to do. But his envy and jealousy obviously got hold of him, because right after the sentence above, he continues. . . .

Door Uw verblijf in Shanghai en Uwe uitgebreide relaties, ook met instanties die hetzij rechtstreeks dan wel zijdelings daarmee bemoeienis hebben, zoudt U beter dan menig ander Uwe tusschenkomst daartoe kunnen verleen. Ik zou U zeer dankbaar zijn, indien U daartoe genegen is.

(Because of your stay in Shanghai and your extensive network of relations, also with institutions that directly or indirectly are concerned with this issue [meaning the decorations, PP], you are better positioned than others to mediate on my behalf. I would be very grateful, if you would consider this) (my translation, PP)

And that he really was eager to receive such a decoration is revealed in the following lines, right after the ones above. . . .

Den avond van den plechtige aanbieding van de “Jade” orde had ik de gelegenheid om den Consul-Generaal te spreken; ik heb die gelegenheid ook benut met de Heer Moens als tolk, doch slechts voor een moment. Met voordacht heb ik dat gedaan ter voorkoming dat men mij er van zou verdenken sterk te doen opvallen dat ik ook

gaarne zou willen komen voor de toekenning van een decoratie.

(During the evening of the formal presentation of the 'Jade' order I had the opportunity to talk with the Consul-General; I also used the opportunity to meet Mr Moens the interpreter, but only for a short moment. I did this on purpose, because I did not want to give the impression that I too was anxious to receive the decoration) (my translation, PP)

This particular letter informs us a lot about the nature of the relations between Mangkunegoro VII, one of the most powerful men in Java, and Oei Tjong Hauw, the wealthiest and most influential Indonesian Chinese in China at that time.

Two months later, writing from Shanghai on 11 May 1936, Oei Tjong Hauw acknowledges the receipt of the letter and promises to mediate:

Uw wensch ten opzichte van een Chineesche decoratie heb ik genoteerd en zal zien wat hieraan te doen is. Persoonlijk geloof ik wel, dat U toch in aanmerking zoudt zijn gebracht voor een dergelijke decoratie.

(I have noted your wish in regard to the Chinese decoration and will figure out what I can do about it. Personally I think, that you will be considered to receive such a decoration) (my translation, PP)

At the same time he expresses his concern that 'royal persons' are so easily decorated, unlike (Chinese) private citizens.

Het is zoo anders dan bij ons particulieren, waar men meestal afhankelijk is van den "scherpen" blik van een bestuurs-ambtenaar. Neemt U bijv. eens mijn Vader (Oei Tiong Ham, PP), die —en dat kan ik gerust zeggen— van al de Chineezzen in Indie wel het meest gepresteerd heeft. Wat heeft hij eigenlijk gekregen. Niet eens de Oranje-Nassau, laat staan de Nederlandsche Leeuw. Zelfs nu is de Chineesche groep in deze betuigingen van waardering niet bijster gelukkig en zijn het slechts diegenen, die "dicht bij het vuur zitten", die een schijn van kans hebben aangemerkt te worden. En het komische —of moet men dit tragisch noemen— is, dat men dikwerf nog de verkeerden uitpikt. Enfin, ik mag U eigenlijk niet lastig vallen met al deze beschouwingen, maar soms wordt het mij te machtig. . . .

(It is so different with us private persons, who are mostly dependent on the 'keen' eyes of a civil administrator. Take for example my Father [Oei Tiong Ham, PP] who —and I can truly say so— of all Chinese in the Indies accomplished the most. But what did he actually receive. Not even an 'Oranje-Nassau', let alone the 'Nederlandsche Leeuw' [both high Dutch decorations, PP]. Even until today the Chinese community is not lavishly endowed with these recognitions and it are only those, who are 'close to the fire' that have a change to get one. Anyway. . . . I should actually not bother you with these thoughts, but sometimes I get overwhelmed. . . .) (my translation, PP)

This piece of evidence is quite revealing regarding his own position vis a vis Mangkunegoro VII. First of all he is highly critical of the Dutch colonial system and its

bureaucratic favouritism. Also in his other letters he often frankly expresses his critical views on the Dutch colonial system. Secondly he clearly feels that the Chinese in colonial Indonesia do not get the respect they deserve, especially the hard-working ones, since they made major contributions to the Indies economy and society. Thirdly, one would not expect such openness and frankness between a prominent member of the Chinese *peranakan* elite and native royalty. But in their letters there seems to be no distinction between superior and inferior or status differentials. Although they of course respects the proper code of conduct, this letter and others clearly shows that Mangkunegoro VII and Oei Tjong Hauw considered themselves equals.¹⁷

For about one year the 'Chinese decoration issue' is not mentioned in the letters exchanged; but then on 11 October 1937 much to his surprise, Mangkunegoro VII receives a short telegram from Oei Tjong Hauw, who is still in Shanghai, congratulating him with the Chinese decoration!

The correspondence of Mrs Be-Goei Ing Hong with Mangkunegoro VII and Ratu Timur

The correspondence between Be Soen Nio, the eldest daughter of Be Kwat Koen, and the Ruler of the Mangkunagara is particularly interesting, not only because of its number (over 200 letters) but also because this correspondence reveals much about the role of women in *peranakan* Chinese society, colonial society at large and within the Chinese family business specifically.

In her first letter, dated 11 March 1919, to the Mangkunegoro she tells him that she has received textiles from Shanghai which she would like to offer to Kandjeng Goesti. In addition she informs him that in a couple of days she and her father and mother will travel to Singapore, China and Japan, and that if Kandjeng Goesti wants her to, she can bring back goods and presents for him. From this initial offerings and gestures develops a thriving correspondence on gift-exchanges. Kandjeng Goesti is interested in a wide range of (luxury) items from China and Japan, but most specifically in Chinese medicine. The royal couple usually sends portraits of themselves and their children, vases, Yogya and Solo batik, embroidery, and occasionally he offers them horses from his military regime.

On 31 January 1923, Mrs Goei Ing Hong for the first time mentions the name of her daughter and in a the plain and simple hand-written Java-Malay she informs them 'Die sini saia en Kiem Lan ada baik'.

Mrs Goei was a very active person socially. She was involved in many cultural activities and became a highly respected social figure in Chinese life in Central Java and beyond. For all her work she was awarded "Ridder in the Orde van Oranje-Nassau" and received very prestigious Chinese decorations. In developing these activities she more than once invited the royal couple from Yogya to be the guest of honour, to which they generally agreed. But moreover her house at Plampitan 9 in Semarang was also a regular meeting place for members of the Be-Kwee-Oei family with the Mangkunegoro, Ratu Timur and his secretary Raden Mas Sajojo Soerjohadikoesomo. In addition it was a place for rest and leisure of the Mangkunegoro. On his trips to and from Batavia and other parts of West- and Central Java, whenever he would pass Semarang, he would most of the time stay in the Goei-Be house in Plampitan, where Soen Nio and her

daughter Kiem Lan would render him all kinds of services.¹⁸

Because of Soen Nio's extensive network in Semarang and Shanghai business circles, she was often asked to act as an intermediary when the Mangkunegoro wanted some more expensive goods, like a new car. In April 1937, for example, she mediated on his behalf in the purchase of a Chrysler Imperial at the price of 1,400 guilders from the Firm Fuchs in Semarang. This car was owned by Mrs Liem Lian Koe. On other times she mediated in the purchase of expensive luxury goods from China and Japan.

Some concluding remarks

This preliminary essay is a first step to bring to the fore the intriguing and underestimated importance of *peranakan* Chinese elite alliances with local native royalty in the Netherlands East Indies during the late colonial, Japanese and Sukarno periods. Most studies on the local monarchs in the self-ruling areas have only focused on their relations with the Dutch coloniser, their integration in the Dutch colonial bureaucratic administration and their reactions towards (Western) Dutch modernization plans. In doing so these studies have overlooked (or denied) the 'Chinese' reality these self-ruling monarchs were also part of and which also inspired and guided them.

Mangkunegoro's intimate alliances with the Be, Oei and Kwee families should be seen as a successful attempt to gain access to a 'Chinese' world of culture and an economy that was alien, or better, inaccessible, to the Dutch coloniser. From their part, Be Kwat Koen and business leaders like Oei Tjong Hauw were very eager to guide and lead him into this world. It was through their networks that Mangkunegoro VII learned about and gained access to the highest political levels in China, Japan and Singapore. What he gained and learned is a matter of further investigation.

The alliances between the two groups were of course to a large extent instrumental. Each one needed the other and through the other gained access to capital and goods, knowledge networks, privileges and offices. But only stressing the instrumentality of their relation, is missing the point and does not do justice to the warm and personal friendships these people felt for each other. Be Kwat Koen and Mangkunegoro VII liked each other, but it was even more than that. Kandjeng Gusti viewed Be Kwat Koen as a kind of father, or a trusted uncle. At the weddings of Be Kwat Koen's daughters and grandchildren, he and Ratu Timur, were always guests of honour, giving expensive presents, offering horses and carriages, and dancers and food. The ties between the Be's and the Mangkunegoro were in essence more family-like, than business-like. A phenomenon often witnessed in aristocratic and feudal societies. They trusted and respected one another, shared the same status-mindedness, and a similar vision for Java and the Javanese, and they both wanted modern technology to be part of Java's culture. And between the women, the Be sisters, and especially Mrs Be-Goei Ing Hong and Ratoe Timur their was an equally great affection. These aspects should not be overlooked when one wants to understand the nature of the alliances.

Scholars generally agree that with the abolishment of the opium farm, the waning of the Chinese officer system (formally abolished in 1931), and the introduction of the Ethical Policy, *peranakan* elite economic power in Java diminished (Rush 1990, 242–255). The close interrelation between the opium farm and Java's rural hinterland and the extensive family clan networks of patronage and credit, had by the end of the 19th

century resulted in a social economy in which clusters of *peranakan* elite families controlled almost all sectors of Java's economy. The ending of the opium farm disrupted this integrated and interdependent economy and hence the economic power base of the *peranakan* officers. This essay has shown however that despite their apparent waning economic power, the *peranakan* elite families kept on forming strategic elite alliances with the same families to keep their fortunes running just as they did in the 18th and 19th centuries, and that whenever possible they would bring in members of new and rising elites (such as Oei Tjong Hauw) into their networks.

Be Kwat Koen, his wife and daughters, despite their prominence and important social roles in pre-war Java, have never reached post-war scholarship. Their name is only remembered in the intimate family circle in Java, at the royal Javanese courts, and in the Netherlands. One of the reasons is that he was not actively involved in politics and didn't publicly support one of the major pre-war Chinese political parties. The main reason however is that since the Indonesian Revolution nationalist history writing has dominated Western (and Indonesian) scholarship on modern Indonesia. Mangkunegoro VII died in 1944 leaving a domain which during the Revolution came under nationalist attack and soon lost its privileged status under the Sukarno regime. Be Kwat Koen died on 16 August 1945, under circumstances still unclear. In 1947 Kwee Zwan Lwan passed away and three years later, Oei Tjong Hauw died. The Be family was forced to leave Indonesia and most fled to the Netherlands. The Kwee family followed. The Oei family spread all over the world. None of these families felt the need to disclose their former alliances, their former role in society and the economy, afraid that this might cause more hardship to the loved ones that stayed behind in Indonesia. Historians had no interest in thoroughly analysing the role and function of these families in pre-war colonial Java. In the post-war debates on modernization and nation-state building simplified dichotomic frameworks ruled the dice and within these frameworks no need was felt to delve deeper into the daily life experiences of the *peranakan* Chinese elites, since they were simply seen as collaborators and profiteers of an unjust colonial order and exploiters of the indigenous populations, actually preventing their emancipation rather than supporting it.

It would seem, however, that if we want to get a better understanding of the dynamics of social change, social mobility and identity issues during the period 1920s-1960s a new and refreshing look at the role and place of *peranakan* Chinese elite families in colonial and post-colonial Indonesian society is necessary.

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Footnotes:

- 1 This essay is written as part of the research project "Chinese elite families: status, networks and strategic alliances" which is being conducted within the framework of the international research programme "Regime Change and the Dynamics of Culture: Family, networks and representation. *New approaches to the study of Indonesian Chinese life in Southeast Asia and beyond, 1920s–1970s*". The author is grateful to Mr and Mrs Kwee Kiem Han, the Hague, and the Khoe Family and Mrs Goei Kiem Lan in Rotterdam for allowing him to make use of their private photo-albums and home movie materials, and sharing their genealogical materials with him. He is moreover highly grateful to Ms Madelon Djajadin-ingrat-Nieuwenhuis for making available the private correspondence of Mangkunegoro VII for the project. In addition he would like to thank Mr Tan Eng Swie, Keng We Koh, and Didi Kwartanada for sharing their thoughts on the project.
- 2 On the concept *Beambtenstaat* in the Javanese context see, Sutherland 1979.
- 3 Discussing the winning of favours from the Dutch under the revenue farming system, Onghokham suggested that 'These forms of "corruption" lasted as long as the revenue farming lasted and was officially tolerated. But after the revenue farm was abolished, the Dutch officialdom became generally clean and free from corruption', op. cit. Onghokham 1989, 59.
- 4 Much of the genealogical data in this section has been compiled by Khoe Liong Hoey (1950), son of Goei Kiem Lan (1919) who is the adopted daughter of Be Soen Nio, the eldest daughter of Be Kwat Koen. I am extremely grateful to Mr. Khoe for sharing his data with me.
- 5 In 1809 the Dutch appointed Tan Tjang Tjing as a Lieutenant; whereas the English under Raffles made him Capitan in 1811. Afterwards in 1829 he was promoted to Major Cina of Semarang by the Dutch.

- Tan Tjang Tjing took over his father's sugar mills and afterwards would gain opium and salt monopolies of the colonial government. See Tan 2002.
- 6 In Javanese *dalem* means residence of a Javanese prince or high official. See Houben 1994, 362.
 - 7 The daughter married to Major Liem Liong Hien
 - 8 In 1911 Be Kwat Yoe had sold his shares of the inheritance to his brothers. See Cornelissen 1999, 55.
 - 9 Interview Goei Kiem Lan, Rotterdam, November 2005
 - 10 Be Hien Nio (Hendrika). Born Solo 19 April 1906. Died Amstelveen 15 October 1999. Second husband's name Tsang Tzue Tse (Tsjang Swie Tie)
 - 11 The Goei Family was one of the eldest Chinese families in Java. The first Goei mentioned in the family's genealogy compiled by Mr Khoey, is Goei Poen Kong (1765–1806) who was married to Tjoa Tjiau Nio (1775–1800). The great-grandson of Poen Kong was Goei Yam Tjiang (1841–1900) who also married into the Tjoa family. His wife's name was Tjoa Nah Nio (1843–1903). Goei Yam Tjiang had eight children and his fourth child, a daughter by the name of Goei Bing Nio, became the first wife of *Raja Gula* Oei Tiong Ham. The eldest son of Yam Tjiang by the name of Goei Keh Sioe married Tjoa Khoo Nio (1860–1908) and had five children with her. The second son out of this marriage was named Goei Ing Hong (1880–1920) and married to the protagonist in the correspondence, Be Soen Nio, or Mrs. Goei Ing Hong. Cf. Wright 1909, p. 512.
 - 12 Kwee Zwan Lwan (1893–1947), eldest son and director of the factory Djatti Piring, married to Be Kiam Nio, daughter of Major-titular of Solo Be Kwat Koen. The Kwee-Be family primarily lived in the family house in Linggadjatti (South of Cirebon), but also had their own living quarters at Djatti Piring. Kwee Der Tjie (1894–1977), daughter, married into the well-known Han family from East Java. She and her husband, Han Tiauw Bing (1892–1974), lived in Lawang the main residence of the Han family. Kwee Zwan Liang (1896–1954), second son and head of the laboratory, married to Liem Hwat Nio of the respectable Liem family from East Java. They lived most of the time at Djatti Piring, but also stayed regularly in the so-called *Hooge Huis* in Lawang, which belonged to the Liem family. Kwee Zwan Ho (1898–1979), third son and head planting, married to Tan Ing Nio (1903–1989) of the Tan family from Buitenzorg (Bogor). They first lived at Djatti Piring, but later moved to Linggadjatti. A short introduction to the Kwee family is given in Post 2004. On the Han family see Salmon 1991.
 - 13 “The Javanese Principalities of Surakarta (Solo) and Yogyakarta were born in 1755 from the division of Mataram, the realm which in the 17th century had exercised hegemony over nearly all of Java. The wars of the 17th and 18th centuries, as a result of which Mataram was forced to cede part of its territory to the VOC and to mortgage the coastal area to the Dutch, were followed by a period of peace. In 1757 the ‘rebel’ Mas Said (later Mangkunegoro I) was accorded independent status within the territory of the Susuhunan of Surakarta. In 1813 the same occurred in the territory of the sultan of Yogyakarta with respect to the Pakualam. This increased the number of rulers in Central Java to four”. *Op. cit.* Houben 1994, 4.
 - 14 Throughout his life Mangkunegoro VII has been trying to modernise Java's economy and society by finding the right balance between Western technology and know-how and Javanese traditional culture. This life-long struggle is the central theme in the excellent and unique work of Madalon Djajadiningrat which is based on his private correspondence, letters and memoirs. See Djajadiningrat 2006.
 - 15 Kwee Keng Liem was the founder of the Djatti Piring sugar factory in Ciledug and the father of Kwee Zwan Lwan, son-in-law of Be Kwat Koen.
 - 16 Since this essay is primarily meant to be descriptive rather than analytical I will not dwell on the implications of Oei Tjong Hauw's recommendations. But from other letters it appears that MN VII was in favour of such closer economic ties between Java and China. He certainly supported and applauded Oei Tjong Hauw's investments in Shanghai and other parts of South China. On the *peranakan* business elite interests in China see Twang 1998; Lohanda 2002; Post 2009.
 - 17 One of the reasons Oei Tjong Hauw moved to Shanghai was precisely his increasing frustration with the Dutch colonial administration and the negative effects of the race-based social hierarchy on ethnic Chinese emancipation and social mobility.
 - 18 ‘I was of course very young then, and to be honest I still don't know why the Mangkunegoro visited our house so often. At times he would inform us of his plans to come. We would then go out on the veranda and waved him in when he arrived. But at times he got there quite unexpectedly, saying that he would

Peter Post

stay for the night and that he was looking forward to the excellent food my mother usually prepared. On these unexpected visits my mother and I would rush to clean her bedroom and to make it suitable for our guest; and my mother and I would sleep in my bed'. Interview with Mrs Goei Kiem Lan, Rotterdam, 22 November 2005.