

CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN EASTERN JAVA: A FEW REMARKS

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In a review article of 1961 Skinner has raised some important issues on the cultural background of the Chinese in Java in the nineteenth century. Recently, I set again eyes on the question he puts forward and, as far as I know, no reactions have appeared since Skinner published his ideas.¹

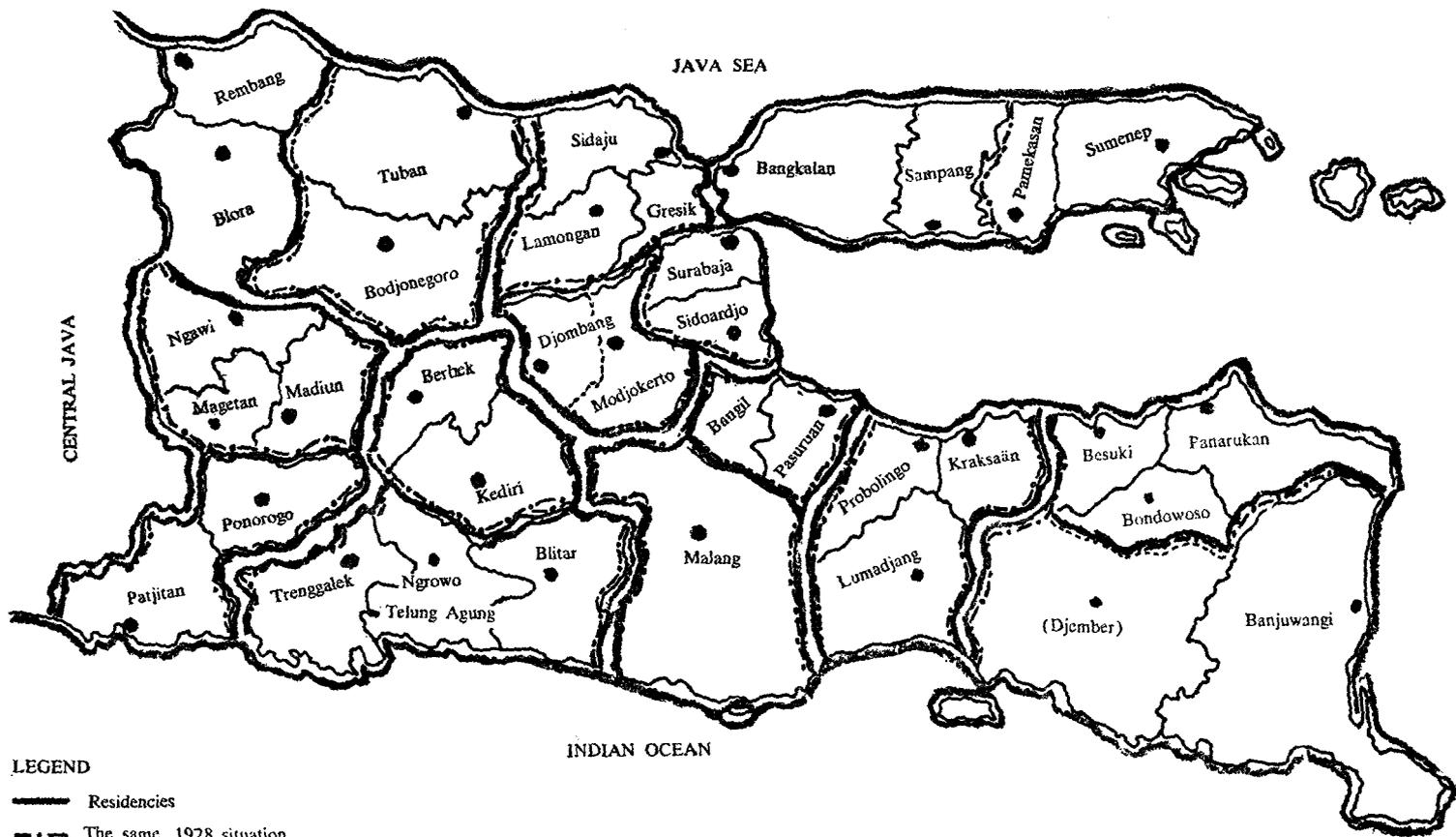
1. *Introduction*

In the review article Skinner discusses the results of two important studies; one by Willmott on the Chinese of Semarang and the other by Williams on national movements among the so-called Overseas Chinese.² I am particularly interested in Skinner's firm denial of a central thesis formulated by Willmott. The latter supposes that by the end of the nineteenth century the prospect was such that within a few generations, the Chinese in Indonesia "would become almost completely acculturated to the Indonesian way of life" (Willmott, 22). Skinner denies this process of Indonesianization and gives a version of a mono-structured Chinese society at the end of the century instead: "...that of the Peranakans, with the few unassimilated immigrant Chinese merely marginal men at its periphery" (Skinner, 357).

On the contrary, he assumes a stable Peranakan population "no longer in a process of Indonesianization" (*ibid.*, 356). Several types of evidence are given and a very important clue is demographic information: "The rate of inter-ethnic marriage dropped steadily during the century as the population of local-born Chinese *-with their equal sex ratio-* (italics mine) came increasingly to dwarf the immigrant population of China-born men" (*ibid.*, 357). Briefly the different points of view are: a Chinese society on its way to become an integral

¹The material for this article is part of the information I acquired under the supervision of Professor W.F. Wertheim some ten years ago. Due to several reasons the material was not published. Professor Wertheim's never ceasing interest in some of the results stimulated me to digest them in this article. For their valuable help in an earlier phase I wish to express my indebtedness to Mr. A. van Marle and Drs. O.D. van den Muijzenberg. Miss K. van Leeuwen was so kind to check the English text; I am very grateful to her precise way of working.

²G.W. Skinner, Java's Chinese minority: continuity and change (vide: bibliography).



LEGEND

- Residencies
- · - The same, 1928 situation
- Regencies
- - - Later partition

THE REGENCIES OF EAST JAVA or ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN EAST JAVA

Source: Koloniaal Verslag (Colonial Report) 1885

part of the Javanese society (Willmott), and, a Chinese society with a distinctive culture no longer in a process of assimilation to Javanese society (Skinner).

For me the statements about equal sex ratio of local-born Chinese and a closed Peranakan society are important. To put it differently: inter-ethnic marriages become an exception. In presenting the arguments in this way, Skinner actually suggests a unified community. He needs a concept to strengthen his extensive discussion in order to prove that the mono-structured Peranakan community by 1900 was split up in the twentieth century.

One of the controversial points in disputes of this type is the problem of key-terms used, and the field of phenomena they encompass. In this dispute the terms at stake are: acculturation and assimilation. Or to put it in a different way: the arguments are related to the question, how far were the Chinese a de-sinified society? I don't like to get entangled in this matter and that is why I simply keep to demographic aspects. Indications upon which Skinner has thrown serious doubts, such as customs, the use of the local Javanese language, loss of ancestral values, seem to me a rather precarious way to convince one's opponent. Observations of this kind are rather scarce in literature and occasionally open to ambiguous reasoning. Although I must admit that demographic data are not very reliable, especially not in the first half of the nineteenth century. Lack of inter-ethnic marriage figures present further difficulties. Notwithstanding these shortcomings I venture to analyse Skinner's statements with the help of available demographic data.

The area of study is restricted to Eastern Java.³ The outline of my article is a historical sketch of the Chinese in the nineteenth century, followed by a demographic survey. The sources used are a census of 1802, the advantage being the availability of sex ratio information.⁴ Another source is the census of 1815 held under the British rule during the short interregnum. A disadvantage of the 1815 figures presented is that no separate information is given for the Chinese and for other foreigners, i.e. non-Javanese. The Chinese are grouped

³ This restriction is introduced because in the last century, especially before 1870, Eastern Java was economically more developed than other parts of Java. Moreover, Eastern Java consisted of a substantial number of old Chinese settlements before 1900; in 1812/13 even a quarter of all the Javanese Chinese (Raffles, vol. I, 63). In 1845 still 1/4 lived in Eastern Java (Bleeker, 39). The geographic area of Eastern Java includes the residency of Rembang and the island of Madura; in fact this is the administrative situation before the changes of 1928 (vide: Lekkerkerker, 8). Madura is given separately.

⁴ Earlier population data are available but they are rough estimations (Verwijk, S. The information of the 1802-census is from *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië*, 1866).

together with 'Malayus', 'Arabs' and 'Bugis'.⁵ A third population source is the census of 1845.⁶ Finally, I used the population records in the "Koloniale Verslagen" from 1849 till 1905, but for reasons of brevity, I have mainly used the year 1905 in the demographic survey of this article.

2. *Historical background*

From an early time, important Chinese settlements have been situated along the north coast, from the town of Rembang eastwards into the area I am studying.⁷ In such places as Tuban and Gresik, and in Lasem, the majority of the Chinese population were Peranakan.⁸ Raffles has observed that the Chinese "...reside principally in the three great capitals of Batavia, Semarang, and Surabáya, but they are to be found in all the smaller capitals, and scattered over most parts of the country" (Raffles, I, 74). The interior of Java, i.e., Eastern Java, was comparatively sparsely populated as late as 1850,⁹ with the exception of the great river-valleys in Medion and Kediri. As the major function of the Chinese in the economy of Java was closely connected with commerce and crafts, one need not be surprised to find their settlements in harbours and along main traffic routes. During the period of the "Cultuurstelsel" and in the period after 1870, Eastern Java was a prominent area for agricultural products in the dealing of which the Chinese played an important part as commercial intermediaries. In this century, via the governmental monopoly-lease system, the Chinese were in another way also intermediaries between the administration and the Javanese population.¹⁰ Until 1919 there was no freedom of residence while freedom of travelling was not obtained until 1916. The Chinese lived in special quarters under their own "government" and a permit for travelling, issued at the local government office, was necessary. Since there was no effective control, and the Chinese being an indispensable link in the economy, the innumerable rules were repeatedly violated. "De Chineezzen lachten met de beperkende bepalingen van aankomst, vestiging en verblijf in

⁵ Raffles, vol. I, 63. Compare tables I and II. In Table I figures are given for Chinese and other foreigners separately for the year 1812/13. All groups together appear in Table II under the heading "Chinese, etc."

⁶ The 1845-census information was published by Bleeker who gathered figures during his tour on Java in 1846, added with 'bevolkingstaten' sources, vide: Tijdschrift voor Neerland's Indië, 40-41. From 1849 onwards the 'Koloniale Verslagen' supply demographic details and since 1885 the so-called five-yearly countings.

⁷ Groeneveldt, 47; Schricke, 18-25; Liem, 22-23; Jaspers, 318.

⁸ In the 'Brieven van Opheffer' the history of Liem Kok Sing (340-356) gives ample background information of the Chinese position in these areas.

⁹ Keyzer, 17-18; Bleeker, 39 and 115 for the region known as the 'Oosthoek'; Meyer Ranneft, 64 and 81.

¹⁰ Cator 97-99; Lauts, ch. VIII, 250 ff.; Liem, 7 ff.; Brieven van Opheffer, 230-232; Van de Pauwert, 288; De Waal, 291, 299, and 344-345.

de binnenlanden, omdat zij gesteund werden door hunne schatrijke hoofden, meestal gouvernementsspachters, die de inlandsche hoofden omkochten waar zij konden. Het binnenland moest voor hunne zendelingen open blijven, want daar was de bron voor hun fortuin" (Brokx, 34-35).¹¹

As a category of intermediaries the Chinese could not be dispensed with. One could come across Chinese as pedlars, as craftsmen, as lessees of government contracts, even in the more remote regions of Java where officially no Chinese quarters existed. Concentration of Chinese economic activities in the contiguous regions of the Chinese quarters (officially recognised quarters) could not be reconciled with the basic principles of the colonial economy. Their specific economic position has caused a migration into the interior of Java. Raffles' remark on the Chinese "scattered over most parts of the country" is correct but needs a marginal note. In that time Chinese were certainly not scattered over most parts of Eastern Java. The absence of Chinese in places of Eastern Java primarily correlates with the scanty economic opportunities in these places. For this reason, I would assume the following rule: Chinese were living there, where some type of economic activity was found.

3. *Demographic aspects*

In Table I a general view of the Chinese population is given. For reasons of comparison information on the number of Malaysians, Arabs, etc. is presented in this table, for the 1815-census does not provide separate Chinese figures.

TABLE I. THE NUMBER OF CHINESE AND OTHER FOREIGNERS, i.e. NON-JAVANESE, IN EASTERN JAVA AND MADURA, 1802, 1815, 1845 AND 1905.

Year and Area	Chinese (1)	Chinese, etc. (2)	Malayans, Arabs, etc. (3)
1802 — Eastern Java (excl. Madura)	6.746	—	—
Madura	4.578	—	—
1815 — Eastern Java (excl. Madura)	—	9.121	—
Madura	—	12.923	—
1845 — Eastern Java (excl. Madura)	20.535	31.366	10.831
Madura	6.544	15.066	8.522
1905 — Eastern Java (excl. Madura)	78.484	87.292	8.808
Madura	3.085	4.752	1.667

a. *Principal areas of residence*

If more detailed figures of lower administrative units are analysed, the growth of the Eastern Java mainland Chinese (i.e., excluding Madura) turns out to be uneven. As late as 1850 a remarkable concentration of Chinese can be noticed in areas situated on the north coast from Rembang up to Surabaya. In later years, a shift in this concentration took place. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, at least 40% of all Eastern Java mainland Chinese were living in the residency of Rembang. This percentage dropped to 23 in 1905. The same can be said of the island of Madura where the absolute number even decreased. There are no data available for the majority of towns for the period under study, so figures are given for the administrative unit of either a regency or a district, in which the towns are situated. The districts adjacent to the Java Sea and the Straits of Madura (from Rembang up to Banyuwangi) have nearly 75% (i.e., 15,014 persons) of the Eastern Java mainland Chinese. These same districts counted 49% (i.e., 38,327 persons) of Eastern Java mainland Chinese in 1905. Included in this presentation is the town of Surabaya where, in contrast to harbour-towns situated to the west, a continuous growth took place during the period. If I leave Surabaya (district) out of the comparison, given above, the figures are 60% (i.e., 12,250 persons) in 1845 and 30% (i.e., 23,480 persons) in 1905. The decrease of the Chinese Madurese population can easily be seen in Table I but to some extent the picture is overdrawn, because Peranakan Chinese who are fully assimilated with the local Madurese people, are no longer categorized as Chinese from 1876 onwards (Kolonial Verslag van 1878, 3).

Corresponding with this shift in population is a difference in the rates of growth. The yearly increase was remarkably low in old settlement areas such as Rembang, Lasem, Tuban and Sidayu. New areas in Eastern Java's interior and along the coastal strip of the Straits of Madura show a much higher increase. In Table II, the growth ratios are given for some regencies, namely there, where extremely high or low results are observable.¹²

The decline in the north-west regencies after 1875 is most interesting. If I relate this information to the noticed loss of importance as a living area, I presume that a number of Chinese left the old settle-

¹¹ A free translation of the text is: The Chinese laughed at the restrictive measures concerning arrival, residence and the stay in the interior. Their wealthy chiefs (as a rule government farmers) bribed the native chiefs whenever possible. The interior had to remain open for their missionaries since it was the source of their fortune.

¹² I have used data of regencies because the census of 1845 does not give details on district level in all cases.

TABLE II. ANNUAL RATES OF GROWTH OF THE CHINESE POPULATION IN SOME REGENCIES OF EASTERN JAVA, 1845-1875 AND 1875-1905.

Regencies	1845 - 1875 (1)	1875 - 1905 (2)
Rembang	1,26	— 0,46
Tuban	2,20	— 0,44
Gresik	5,44	— 1,10
Surabaya	3,20	2,44
Panarukan	4,94	3,91
Bondowoso	8,56	3,57
Malang	4,90	3,55
Blitar	8,48	3,86
Kediri	3,47	2,38
Magetan	4,22	3,76

ments and went to new ones.¹³ Not all the regencies of Eastern Java are present in Table II, but their growth ratio lies in between the extremes during the first period, whereas for the second period they correspond with ratios of Surabaya and Kediri. As far as Madura is concerned, all data prove a population decline, even in the period 1845-1875.

b. Migration

Immigration of Chinese to Indonesia never stopped during the nineteenth century. The majority of them went to Java, i.e., before 1880.¹⁴ In some years severe restrictions caused a downfall in their numbers. The total number however rarely exceeded 1.000 a year until the new liberal economic policy after 1870 brought about a steep rise. The number of men was always greater than the number of women. Only after 1900 more and more Chinese women moved to Java. Most of the Chinese arrived at Batavia, but Surabaya was also an important landing-place. Not all the immigrants remained in Java but generally speaking less than 50% returned home. An exception is the last decade of the nineteenth century, when more Chinese left the country.

c. Sex Ratio

If our attention is directed to the north-west of Eastern Java again, the situation in 1802 is such that there are slightly more men than women in the regencies of Rembang, Lasem and Tuban (sex ratio is: 1041,3; m/f . 1000). The other coastal regencies have a greater

¹³ I must use the word 'presumably' as there is no information of migration data at hand.

¹⁴ vide for a general demographic view: Volkstelling 1930, deel VII, 39 ff.; compare also Raffles, vol. 1, 75.

lack of women, e.g., Surabaya with a sex ratio of 1520,3. In this year no information of interior regencies is at hand, neither for Madura. The situation in 1815 is completely the reverse of 1802; the same regencies of Rembang, Lasem and Tuban have a sex ratio of 888,8. A shortage of men in the remaining coastal regencies is also noticeable. Only in Madura men outnumber women (sex ratio is 1098,8) (Raffles, II, 272-286). How far the difference is caused by the addition of Malaysians, Bugis, etc., cannot be established. In Table III data of later records are given for the same regencies as mentioned in Table II.

TABLE III. SEX RATIOS OF CHINESE IN SOME REGENCIES OF EASTERN JAVA, 1845 AND 1905.

Regencies	1845 (1)	1905 (2)
Rembang	895,3	867,0
Tuban	955,7	906,9
Surabaya	955,4*	1611,8
Panarukan	1541,7	1250,0
Bondowoso	714,3	1342,1
Malang	1578,2	1261,0
Blitar	450,0	1097,3
Kediri	2040,3*	1149,8
Magetan	1344,8	1129,7

N.B. Figures with an asterisk refer to adults only, the other sex ratios to adults and children.

The 1845 sex ratios of the regencies of Panarukan, Bondowoso and Blitar are slightly misleading as the absolute numbers are small. For this reason and for reasons of comparison with information earlier in this section, Table IV is given.

TABLE IV. SEX RATIOS OF CHINESE FOR GROUP DISTRICTS IN EASTERN JAVA, 1845-1905.

Districts	1845 (1)	1905 (2)
North-west coast (Rembang-Gresik)	921,4	909,0
Other northern coastal districts	1265,0	1406,0
Interior	1278,8	1142,2

The distinction between north-west and the rest of Eastern Java is confirmed again. Madura partly resembles the situation in the north-west because in 1845 the sex ratio is 934,2 (relating to adults only); in 1905 an equal sex ratio is almost reached with 1031,7. When

Surabaya is kept apart from the category "other northern coastal districts" (Table IV), men still outnumber women.

	1845	1905
Surabaya (district)	S.R. 1410,0	S.R. 1618,1
Other districts	S.R. 1188,5	S.R. 1696,4

A closer study of the years between 1845 and 1905 does not alter the picture given above: a permanent surplus of women in the coastal areas from Rembang up to Tuban, with a more varying pattern up to Gresik; a decreasing surplus of women for Madura and a permanent shortage of women for the majority of the districts elsewhere in Eastern Java. I would like to formulate the following conclusion: as for the sex ratios it is not possible to speak of a normal composition, the unequal sex ratios may indicate migration between the north-west and other places. Particularly owing to the long-continued disparity, this conclusion seems justified, taking account of the general knowledge of the Chinese penetration into the interior of Eastern Java.

4. *Skinner's Point of View*

In his section on Java's population Raffles states that: "There are no women on Java who come directly from China... The Chinese on their arrival generally marry a Javan woman". Or they marry "the daughters of their countrymen by Javan women". The progeny he calls 'Pernakans' (Raffles, I, 74). In this presentation, in fact, a twofold development is given, namely: (a) Chinese who marry Javanese women, and, (b) Chinese who marry Peranakan women. Skinner's concept of a mono-structured community and a declining inter-ethnic marriage rate is closely connected to the second remark of Raffles. Indeed, it is his key concept. What objections can I raise against this version with the demographic material analysed? With my research I have come to five major conclusions:

- (1) Since an early time, the north-west and the island of Madura were Eastern Java's most important settlement areas for Chinese, but they lost their importance in the course of the last century;
- (2) The north-west as well as Madura retarded in growth, especially after 1875 a decrease took place;
- (3) At least since 1845 the north-west noticed a continued surplus of women; for Madura the sex ratio was almost normal in 1905;
- (4) The other areas of Eastern Java gained in importance as new Chinese settlements: they experienced growth, sometimes a rapid growth; sex ratio data show a permanent shortage of women;

- (5) Immigration: chiefly male immigrations continued with some interruptions.

A principal section in this material is the sex ratios. At face value one might be inclined to assume inter-ethnic marriages in an area with a permanent shortage of Peranakan women. Opponents immediately (and correctly) would argue that this assumption does not automatically result from the data. For this reason I would like to discuss two different possibilities, based on my demographic material and considering the special rules for Chinese to live in official quarters. It is possible that underrating took place in the north-west. Chinese men who stayed outside this territory, due to their economic activities were counted as inhabitants of non-north-western areas. As their families stayed there, the result of a census would be: fewer men in the north-west and more men elsewhere. Revised sex ratios would show a more harmonious composition of the population in both areas. An objection to this presentation is that a census rule was the counting of people based on their domiciles. I therefore assume that Chinese men who temporarily stayed outside their official quarters would have mentioned their normal residence, although their stay outside a quarter testify to a frequent transgression of their territory. Overrating is another possibility. In this type of arguing again Chinese men stayed outside the north-western areas, due to their economic activity. But they actually stayed and lived in the new area. So this is directly linked up with illegitimate ways of residence. An appraisal of this situation implies that the family should be counted in the person's place of residence. The result of this procedure is: fewer women and children in one area (north-west) and more women and children in the other.

An objection to this is that in the case of a prolonged stay a woman and her children would join the husband. Literature reveals that the preventive working of measures on living in special quarters had little effect. Time and again the "Koloniale Verslagen" and the rules in the "Indische Staatsbladen" testify the offending of the law.

Moreover, not many Chinese would worry about this law since there was no difficulty in obtaining permits for travelling. If a number of Chinese families succeeded in a prolonged stay outside an official quarter, in case of discovery by the government, the place was declared an official quarter in most of the cases.

I have not come across sufficient reasons to challenge the impression which is offered by the demographic material. After all, the typical sex ratios cover a period of over half a century. Notwithstanding the unquestionable mistakes by which each census and each of the yearly records in the "Koloniale Verslagen" is characterized, the general trend cannot be denied.

In the reality of my demographic material, Skinner's conception of a mono-structured Peranakan community means that the north-western regions and Madura functioned in a social system as bride-givers; the remaining regions with a shortage of Peranakan women as bride-takers. Simultaneously, this implies a comprehensive social system and an extensive organization. I certainly will not deny the possibility of such a relationship in a number of cases, but I deny intra-group marriage as the one and only pattern, thereby rejecting the concept of a closed Peranakan community.

With the exception of Madura in 1905 none of the areas in Eastern Java approximately had an equal sex ratio. Being one of the oldest settlements and as a consequence inhabited by many local-born Chinese, Madura might fit in the concept of Skinner. But the island's Chinese population declined manifestly because economic opportunities elsewhere were more promising. The Madura Chinese were of minor importance in 1905: less than 4% of all the Chinese (of Eastern Java mainland and Madura) lived in this island. I cannot believe that Skinner has based his conception on examples like Madura. And the north-west, another old settlement area with a great number of local-born Chinese, he could not have in view at all: no equal sex ratios occurred in those areas. My final conclusion is, that as far as Eastern Java is concerned, Skinner's concept is unconfirmed. For this part of Java, I fail to see how he could have formulated his idea of a closed Peranakan society by the end of the nineteenth century using demographic criteria.

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