Chinese new migrants in Suriname: the inevitability of ethnic performing

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The anti-Chinese sentiments following in the wake of New Chinese immigration were increasing precisely in a period when ethnic Chinese had the best chance to acquire a share of political power in Suriname. As luck would have it, the best opportunity for Chinese politics of recognition in apanjaht ethnopolitics appeared about 18 months before the legislative elections of 25 May 2005. This occasion was the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first Chinese indentured labourers on 20 October 2003. Political power-sharing goes beyond Chinese political participation (which strictly speaking meant the right to vote and stand for office of Laiap and those Tong’ap who had citizenship rights). It implies an ethnic elite using the ethnic identity created through successful politics of recognition in apanjaht multiculturalism to negotiate inclusion in a pre-election grand coalition and post-election allocation of strategic government posts. In the case of ethnic Chinese in the early 2000s, it was a Laiap elite that was fully prepared to take the apanjaht path to political power. However, this elite was also aware of the need to soothe the growing anti-Chinese and anti-establishment mood of the general population, while also mobilizing the support of ethnic Chinese regardless of citizenship rights. The challenge was to distance oneself from New Chinese migration while trying to avoid alienating potential ethnic Chinese supporters.

Any minority elite with political ambitions in Suriname needs to face the fact that apanjaht consociationalism leaves just three routes to the centre of power: join an existing apanjaht party, set up a political party with a realistic chance of being considered a potential coalition partner, or set up a special (non-political) group that will be recognized by the State as a representative of a social segment. The social stability seen as the merit of Surinamese apanjaht consociationalism requires stable apanjaht parties, and patronage rather than democratic participation makes the apanjaht parties relatively impervious to the ambitions of new members. This also limits the success of minority group representation within established apanjaht parties; the interests of other social segments remain subordinate to those of the ethnic group on which the
apanjaht party has based its legitimacy, while the interests of a minority group may conflict with the career agendas of the individuals joining the apanjaht party as minority representatives. In the context of apanjaht consociationalism, minority parties have very few prospects of reaching the centre of power, so setting up a new party or a special interest group implies the creation of a power base (real or not) that is immediately recognizable to the established apanjaht parties, which means that the outside elite must foster the impression of some type of segmental and ethnic representation to the political establishment and the general public.

### 7.1 Celebrations and Special Interest Groups

A simple announcement of the creation of a new party or organization does not make one a credible representative of a social segment which may somehow have been overlooked by established apanjaht parties. The demands of a new ethnic party or the goals of a special interest group working for a particular ethnic segment need to be articulated within the framework of the apanjaht imagining of Suriname. This means that the group, which the elite claim to represent, needs to be publicly defined. Although public contestation of group identities is common in Suriname, very few scholars have worked on this issue. França considers it in the light of national identity formation, and sees different and simultaneous representations of Suriname in the apanjaht discourse developed through public events, which typically entail the creation and contestation of spatial and temporal markers by ethnic elites to define group identity vis à vis the State and other ethnic groups.\(^1\)

At the surface such public events, which are never spontaneous outbursts of popular sentiment, but planned by limited specific groups claiming to represent segments of the population, are platforms for politics of identity, focused on resisting assimilationist nationalism and dominant ethnic groups. While it may be going too far to claim that apanjaht discourse is driving the creation of civil society, the idea that ethnic pluralism is an asset to Suriname and that all Surinamese ethnic groups should be equal and equivalent does provide ethnic elites with a context to pursue a politics of recognition aimed at achieving a share of political power.

Of course, public statements of group identities in Suriname are not utilized exclusively in service of elite politics of recogni-

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\(^1\) França 2004.
tion in apanjaht consociationalism. The need to publicly assert identities and the manner in which this is done, though surely driven and heavily influenced by politics of recognition, would very likely exist without it. Assimilation from within and globalization from without are breaking down simple ethnic identification and cultural distinctiveness. Identity that cannot be taken for granted needs to be constantly reasserted: people need to constantly remind themselves who they are, and need to constantly retell their story to others. In this narrative approach, ethnic identity is the life history of an ethnic group. Ethnic narratives therefore always include a tale of origins, as well as an evaluation of the position of the group in Surinamese history and society. One explanation for the public events noted by França is the need to tell ethnic narratives to broadest possible audiences. In any case, public performance of ethnic narratives in Suriname provides an excellent platform for individuals and groups attempting to develop a politics of recognition in view of participation in apanjaht consociationalism.

7.1.1 Ethnic Celebrations Through Fragmentation of National Celebrations

The celebrations that figure in politics of recognition are staged on meaningful dates. As the migrant background of ethnic groups was initially more relevant, these dates had transnational rather than national meaning, for example the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, the Founding of the Republic of India, or the Founding of the Republic of China. After Independence in 1975, meaningful dates were chosen to reflect the idea that ethnic groups were essential building blocks of the Surinamese nation; the entry date of the first members of various ethnic groups in Suriname became ethnic ‘birthdays’. Nationalist discourse determined the basic calendar of national celebrations, which were to be non-ethnic and reduced to a minimum. According to apanjaht logic, every Surinamese ethnic group needs to be recognized by the State, which means that the minimum of national celebrations should include at least one holiday for every ethnic and / or religious group. When the two competing discourses clashed, formally national, non-ethnic events fragmented into a proliferation of platforms for politics of recognition – contestation of temporal markers, in França’s terms.

‘National’ and basically non-ethnic events do exist in Suriname. Some are intended to promote patriotic attachment to the idea of Suriname, though State involvement is generally minimal; the
State neither fully supports these celebrations nor actively opposes their increasingly ethnic nature. One extreme is Independence Day (25 November, since 1975), the quintessential national event, which is linked to Surinamese Nationalism and therefore to Creole ethnic identity in the minds of many Surinamese, despite strict efforts by the State to use pan-ethnic symbolism. At the other extreme is the Wandelmars or Avondvierdaagse (a four-day nighttime walking trip which takes place every April immediately following Easter since 1964), which has been organized by the Bedrijven Vereniging Sport en Spel (BVSS) for the last 40 years. Originally an amateur sports event copied from the Netherlands, the Avondvierdaagse has gradually succumbed to commercial interests and the influence of cultural NGOs and become a sales promotion show and folklore manifestation with wide spectator appeal all rolled into one. The organizers never limited folkloric expressions, but they did act to curb what it considered lewd behaviour and dress, and attempted to provide moral and wholesome contexts through annual themes.2 The Kalinya Socio-Cultural Association ‘Paremuru’, the oldest Amerindian cultural group in Suriname, started using the hugely popular Avondvierdaagse as a platform for ethnic promotion during the 1990s. Creole folkloric groups now increasingly dominate the event.3

‘Ethnic’ events are intended as platforms for politics of recognition with the broadest national coverage possible. Such events are typically copied from existing ones. Ethnic beauty pageants are a good example; the national and non-ethnic Miss Suriname Contest was discontinued in 1999, apparently due to financial problems, and was replaced by a proliferation of ethnic pageants. Various groups and individuals copy the concept of pageants from other ethnic groups and organize alternative pageants within their own segment as a strategy to acquire legitimacy and status within the apanjaht narrative. Ethnic pride becomes gendered as it is channelled through young urban women who compete in the mastery of ‘authentic’ and essential folklore, and

2 The 2006 theme was ‘Het is fijn om Surinamer te zijn; een goed gezin is het begin!’ (It’s great to be Surinamese; everything starts with a healthy family!).
3 Interestingly, Surinamese Creole cultural associations in the Netherlands have attempted to transplant the wandelmars concept to promote what is basically Surinamese apanjaht multiculturalism. For example, Stichting Wi Uma in The Hague described one of its activities as an annual multicultural wandelmars: “The goal is to promote the good cooperation that is slowly arising with other ethnic groups. We aim for mutual solidarity, tolerance, respect and acceptance.” (http://www.denhaag.nl/smartsite.html?id=45714)
stereotypical racial ideals of beauty. And so by 2006, Suriname had the Misi Sery Contest for Afro-Surinamese women (the successor of the Miss Alida contest held on the evening before Emancipation Day, 1 July), the Miss India and Miss East Indian Beauty Pageants for women of East Indian extraction (the Miss India Pageant is held under the auspices of Miss India Worldwide), the Miss Indra Maju and Miss Djawa Beauty Pageants for Javanese women (organized by the Vereniging Indra Maju and Sana Budaya respectively), the Miss Amazonia Beauty Pageant for Amerindian women, the Sa Ameva Beauty Pageant for Maroon women (usually first week of October, to commemorate the 1762 peace treaty with the Maroons).4

The most obviously political ethnic events are the ‘ethnic birthdays’. The oldest of these is the commemoration of the Abolition of Slavery (Manspasi or Keti Koti, 1 July). Originally, 1 July was used as a Christian celebration ‘to discipline and control the formerly enslaved and their descendants’ for the benefit of the colonial status quo (Van Stipriaan 2004: 300). By government decree of 2 February 1960 Keti Koti was officially declared to be Dag der Vrijheden (Freedom Day), but the new name never stuck. After 1975, Independence Day proved to be less ambiguously ethnic than 1 July. In 1993, the Venetiaan I administration indicated that there were plans to restore 1 July as the commemoration of the abolition of slavery. According to Lila Gobardhan-Rambocus, a public discussion about the plans for 1 July in the Mata Gauri building on 2 June 1993 revealed both resentment about the basic Afro-Surinamese claim to 1 July as a national symbol as well as concerns about fragmentation. Nationalists disapproved of any formal recognition of ethnicity, while to intellectuals of various ethnic groups recognition of specific ethnic holidays signalled ‘emancipation’ of ethnic groups, which meant achieving development and equality as Surinamese citizens. At the meeting Max Man A Hing warned that many separate ethnic holidays might follow from apanjaht logic, if 1 July were to become a Creole holiday, and that the national production of a developing nation would be harmed by more holidays. Eventually 1 July was officially renamed ‘Keti Koti Dey’ (Day of Broken Shackles) by government decree of 28 August 1993.5

4 A number of the ethnic beauty pageants have been transplanted to the Netherlands: Miss India Holland, Sa Ameva Nederland, Miss Alida Nederland.
Fragmentation did not quite follow as expected. Moreover, although 5 June (*Hindostaanse Immigratie, Milan ka Dien*) became a national holiday in commemoration of the arrival of the first East Indian indentured labourers in 1873, no other fixed ‘ethnic birthday’ was recognized by the State. Various NGOs keep trying to have various dates recognized as special ethnic holidays, and the Surinamese State only concedes to grant once-only holiday status to special anniversaries. Some ethnic groups have more obvious ‘birthdays’, for example 9 August is Javanese Immigration Day (first arrivals from Java, 9 August 1890). Other groups have more difficulty finding equivalent dates, particularly for groups who were striving for recognition as Maroon and Indigenous People rather than Bush Negroes and Amerindians. Technically there already was a Maroon day: either 1 July, which Maroons as Afro-Surinamese could (and do) freely claim, or 10 October, which had been designated *Loweman Dei* (Day of the Runaways) in 1974 to commemorate Maroon resistance against the colonial authorities. *Loweman Dei* remained a tool of instrumental ethnicity in the hands of urban Maroon intellectuals in the 2000s, and never caught on as a popular celebration among Maroons in the tribal lands or in Paramaribo.

In the myth of the peopling of Suriname, Amerindian peoples are not immigrants, or at least not the Arawaks. Having organized an annual ‘Amazonian Folklore Market’ in the Palmentuin in the centre of Paramaribo since 2002, the Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname (*Organisatie van Inheemsen in Suriname, OIS*) petitioned the government in May 2006 to have 9 August (proclaimed International Day of the World’s Indigenous People by the General Assembly of the UN on 23 December 1994 for the duration of the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People) declared a national holiday as the National Day of Indigenous Peoples. According to OIS, the State had not recognized the unique role of Amerindians as the ‘first people’ of Suriname with a

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6 Surinamese national holidays by 2008: New Year’s Day (1 January), Good Friday (between 20 March and 23 April), Holi Phagwa (5 Basant, which works out to different dates in March), Easter Sunday and Easter Monday (both between 22 March and 26 April), Labour Day (1 May), Commemoration of East Indian Immigration (5 June), Keti Koti Dey (1 July), Id al-Fitr / Bodo (1 Shawwal, which works out as different dates throughout the Gregorian calendar), Indigenous People Day (9 August), Independence Day (25 November), First Christmas Day and Second Christmas Day (25-26 December).

7 15th century Spanish portrayals of peaceful Arawaks versus bellicose Caribs are reflected in retellings of Surinamese history, where Arawak (autonym: Lokono) agriculturalists preceded Carib (autonym: Kari’ña) immigrants.
specific holiday, while other ethnic groups were allotted their own free days. The contested distinction between national holidays and popular ethnic celebrations ('culturele feestdagen' (cultural festivals) which always include the ‘immigration days’) also extends to religious festivals. Apanjaht logic also puts under question the apparent pro-Christian (and implicitly anti-Asian) bias of the Surinamese State, which claims to be liberal, non-ethnic and secular. Though the Pentecost and Ascension Day holidays were transferred to the Hindu festival of Holi Phagwa and Eid ul-Fitr (the only recognized Muslim holiday in Suriname), Good Friday, Easter and Christmas are still good for a total of four free days. The State resists recognizing Divali, the other widely popular Hindu festival in Suriname, as a national holiday. Lists of Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and other festivals regularly appear in Surinamese media, seemingly born out of resistance to perceived Christian / Creole domination, or as a consequence of apanjaht logic which requires all ethnic and religious groups to be equivalent.

8 The government initially stated that a special holiday was out of the question (De Ware Tijd, 28 June 2006 ‘Geen nationale vrije dag voor Inheemsen’ (No national holiday for the Indigenous segment)). Amerindian politicians within the ruling coalition (Pertjajah Luhur) and the opposition (NDP) supported the OIS. Sylvia Kajoeramari of Pertjayah Luhur stated that the Amerindians of Suriname are ‘not descendents of immigrants like the other ethnic groups’ but are ‘nations with the right to autonomy on their own land’, who contribute to cultural variety in Suriname. Though not diasporic, Amerindian elites did manage to acquire a transnational base, by allying themselves with the powerful transnational environmentalist circuit. Amerindian issues were linked to programs for protection of biodiversity and issues of land rights (Suriname being the only country in the New World without indigenous land rights). Eventually, on 26 July 2006, the Council of Ministers declared 9 August the National Day of Indigenous People (Nationale Dag van de Inheemsen) (De Ware Tijd, 26 July 2006 ‘Inheemsen krijgen nationale vrije dag’ (Indigenous segment to get national holiday)).

9 There are various lists of Hindu religious celebrations appearing on websites on Suriname, promotional calendars issued by East Indian entrepreneurs, and in other media. The lists reflect imagined transnational Hindu identity rather than the reality of local religious practice, and include festivals traditionally celebrated in Suriname as well as festivals introduced in the context of a Hindu ‘revival’. Original festivals (public as well as confined to the East Indian group) include the ceremonies and celebrations around Holi Phagwa (Standard Hindi: होली holi) including Basant Panchami (Standard Hindi: पचमी basant pañcamī) and the Holika Dahan bonfire (Standard Hindi: होलिका दाहन holikā dāhan), Divāli (Standard Hindi: दीवाली divālī, दीपावली dipāvālī), Maha Shivrātri (Standard Hindi: महाशिवरात्रि mahāśivrātrī), Navrātri (nine nights twice a year. Standard Hindi: नवरात्रि navrātrī), Raksha Bhandan (or Rakhi, Standard Hindi: रक्षाबंधन raksabandhan). Some lists include festivals that
### 7.1.2 The First Public Celebration of Chineseness

According to Zijlmans and Enser, Double Tenth Day (10 October, commemorating the Wuchang Uprising in 1911 that led to the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China) has been celebrated by the huiguan since 1923.¹⁰ Held behind the walls of the huiguan exclusively for Chinese, it was the only community celebration among ethnic Chinese in Suriname until the 1980s, when the Moon Festival and Lunar New Year began to be celebrated communally and publicly. Other Chinese festivals (most of which have roots in folk religion), if they were celebrated at all, were kept out of the public view as much as possible.¹¹

Even so, one of the first ethnic celebrations in Suriname was the first Chinese parade in October 1953. The Fa Len Sa (‘Society for Chinese Unity’) organization planned a grand parade through Paramaribo on Double Tenth Day in association with the

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¹⁰ Zijlmans & Enser 2002: 145.
¹¹ Zijlmans & Enser quote a list of eight ‘old style’ and four ‘new style’ Chinese festivals in the *Almanak voor Suriname* of 1917, which were “not all publicly or widely celebrated” (Zijlmans & Enser 2002: 145).
Lie Tsie Sa organization and the Young China basketball group, with the support of the two huiguan Kong Ngie Tong Sang and Chung Fa Foei Kon. The celebration was to be in 'mixed Western and Oriental fashion', centred on a parade with a dragon with performances in the morning and the afternoon. This first Dragon Dance (Kejia: mu liung; PTH: wu long) ever in Suriname was choreographed by a Taiwanese specialist provided by the huiguan. The dancers were locals, and many of them were not ethnic Chinese. The parade consisted of flag bearers, Chinese music, the lion dancers of Lie Tsie Sa, followed by the Fa Len Sa ‘golden dragon’, a pagoda and decorated floats, women in cheongsams, a marching band (only in the afternoon), and the Young China sports group. The programme of the 1953 celebration set the pattern of discrete elements explicitly aimed at the elite (the Surinamese authorities and the Chinese elite) and the general public. In the morning delegates from the Chinese organizations visited the governor, and in the afternoon the group would pay their respects to various important Chinese individuals. Though Fa Len Sa had stated that the celebration was for the benefit of ethnic Chinese in Suriname, non-Chinese were invited to the ‘fancy fair’ / ‘grand ball’ in Fa Tjauw Song Foei / the Surinamese Branch of the Kuomintang in the evening. The dragon was extensively photographed, but the event went basically underreported.

Except for the fact that they were ethnic Chinese youth organizations, little else is known about Fa Len Sa (‘Society for Chinese Unity’; the group claimed to ‘advocate Chinese unity’) and Lie Tsie Sa (or Lie Tse Sa). It is impossible to know with absolute certainty what precise reasons Fa Len Sa had for organizing a public spectacle of emblematic Chinese culture. The celebration was more about Laiap identity politics than recognition as a player in panajaht consociationalism. With chain migration from the Fui-dung’on Hakka qiaoxiang impeded for almost fifteen years and almost completely blocked following the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Chinese youth organizations in Suriname in 1953 were by definition Laiap. The point of the exercise was to challenge anti-

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12 De West 17 September 1953 ‘Chinezen en de draak’ (Chinese and the dragon).
13 No Chinese texts describing the event survive. De West on the evening of 10 October devoted about 20 lines to the celebration, reporting that not all Chinese shops were closed and that fireworks were lit in various locations. It also mentioned the fancy fair in Fa Tjauw Song Foei, and said that the parade was ‘really quite nice.’ De West 10 October 1953 ‘Herdenking Chinese Republiciedag’ (Commemoration of Chinese Republic Day).
14 De West 17 September 1953 ‘Chinezen en de draak’ (Chinese and the dragon).
Chinese sentiments which had peaked in Suriname during the piauw scandals twenty-five years earlier, and to present an image of Chinese that transcended the sojourner shopkeeper stereotype; Fa Len Sa hoped that there would be “...room for cultural expression in Suriname.”\textsuperscript{15} Clearly aware that public shows of Chinese folklore were new to Suriname, Fa Len Sa presented itself as an authority on Chinese culture and folklore. There is nothing more emblematically and stereotypically Chinese than a Chinese dragon, yet Fa Len Sa shrouded the symbol in mystery rather than choosing to make it accessible. The dragon was to be consecrated on 3 October, the day of the inauguration of the new Fa Len Sa club-house. In China priests would perform such a consecration in a temple, but in Suriname with neither priests nor temples, the details of the consecration would be secret. This claim to arcane knowledge could be construed as a challenge to the Tong’ap, who in any case preferred to stay in the background.

The most important question is why that particular Double Tenth Day should have been celebrated in the public eye. The 42\textsuperscript{nd} anniversary of the Republic of China on Double Tenth Day 1953 could hardly be considered a major event in itself; in neither Chinese nor Surinamese tradition is 42 a significant number. 1953 was the last year of the Korean War, a civil war which developed into a

\textsuperscript{15} De West 17 September 1953 ‘Chinezen en de draak’ (Chinese and the dragon).
Cold War-era proxy war between the USA and its allies and the PRC and the Soviet Union. Suriname had participated under the flag of the Kingdom of the Netherlands with 115 volunteers in the United Nations force. In Suriname the split between a ‘good China’ and a ‘bad China’ implied by the war meant that activities of Chinese migrants and organizations were scrutinized for any trace of communist activity, and in the Cold War atmosphere of the 1950s, any challenge to colonial authority could be labelled communist. A public celebration of Double Tenth Day in that period did have strategic benefits; Chinese could present themselves as linked to the ‘good China’, and gain sympathy through a spectacular display of folklore.

This first public performance of Chinese ethnicity in Suriname was indeed very likely a political statement aimed at the government and the non-Chinese Surinamese public, and possibly mirrored similar initiatives among Overseas Chinese elsewhere. On 15 February of the same year, the first modern Chinese New Year’s parade was held in San Francisco. According to Ye, this parade was unmistakably the response of ethnic Chinese leaders to anti-Chinese sentiments linked to the Cold War following the establishment of the PRC in 1949 and the end of the Korean War in 1953.\(^\text{16}\) The structure of the parade (non-Chinese participants were included) signalled the local Chinese view of US multiculturalism, linking democracy and freedom to cultural diversity in the US, and claiming that ethnic Chinese were Americans, not Communist outsiders.

If it was indeed a coincidence that in October 1953 it would also be 100 years since the first Chinese indentured labourers arrived in Suriname in October 1853,\(^\text{17}\) it was an incredibly huge one. The narrative defining Asian ethnic groups in Suriname as immigrants linked to an ancestral group of indentured labourers was already established by the 1950s, so it is reasonable to assume that Fa Len Sa knew about October 1853. It seems reasonable to view the 1953 Double Tenth Day celebration as a hidden celebration of the centenary of the arrival of the first Chinese indentured labourers in Suriname. However, after more than fifty years the precise motivations and agendas of the organizers of the 1953 Double Tenth Day celebration will probably remain a mystery; what merit

\(^{16}\) Ye 2004.

\(^{17}\) The indentured labourers arrived in Suriname on the HMS Merwede on 18 October 1853 (Surinaamsche Courant en Gouvernements Advertentieblad (Surinamese Newspaper and Government Gazette), 20 October 1853, no. 126). The anniversary of their arrival is set on 20 October, which is explained as the official disembarkation of the fourteen labourers.
did ‘Chinese Immigration Day’ have in their eyes, and why did they feel that the celebration needed to be masked, if indeed it was? It might simply have been the case that with two important dates to choose from (an established and accepted annually recurring event and a one-off celebration of ethnic origins), the festival of the Republic of China was a more strategic choice in the short and long term with regard to Chinese image building. Nothing survives of any concerted ethnic Chinese presence in the 1955 election campaigns, and in any case no Chinese ethnic group was evident in the resulting coalitions.18

7.1.3 Chinese Immigration Day 1993

The next occasion to be used by ethnic Chinese elites for public Chinese identity politics was in October 1993; the 140th anniversary in 1993 of the arrival of the first Chinese indentured labourers preceded the legislative elections of 1996. Though 140 years was strictly speaking not a grand anniversary according to Surinamese conventions (it was not a bigi-yari; Sranantongo: ‘big year’, i.e. a birthday or anniversary as a plural of ten years, but increasing to plurals of 50 years in larger numbers), there was a public celebration. However, the decade following the period of military rule (1980-1987) was rife with opportunities for political power-sharing, and other apanjaht groups had already indicated their presence with public statements. Between 1953 and 1993 the three largest ethnic groups had celebrated all their Centenaries; in 1963 the abolition of slavery was 100 years old, in 1970 it had been 100 years since the arrival of the first East Indian indentured labourers, and 1990 saw the Centenary of Javanese Immigration. Minor anniversaries are usually celebrated, if at all, by various ethnic NGOs well below national level. Openly, the reason for celebrating 140 years of Chinese in Suriname – a minor anniversary – was a celebration of the apanjaht narrative of stable multiculturalism from a Surinamese Chinese point of view. The celebration was organized around a number of events, such as a photo exhibition in Chung Fa Foei Kon about Surinamese Chinese history and daily life, and huiguan

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18 Individuals of Fuidung’on Hakka descent did figure in government. The most prominent was Frederick H.R. Lim A Po, Md., mixed Creole and Fuidung’on Hakka and able to speak Kejia, who was chairman of the Colonial parliament from 1945-1947, before general suffrage (see Paragraph 9.1). None of the Ministers in the 1955 cabinet were ‘Chinese’, even in the minimal sense of carrying a Sino-Surinamese surname.
events such as a reception for State authorities. The 1993 celebration was organized by the Comité Herdenking Chinese Immigration 1853-1993 (Committee for the Commemoration of Chinese Immigration 1853-1993), which was led by a group of Laiap entrepreneurs and intelligentsia. Though the focus of the commemoration was outward rather than aimed at some perceived Chinese community, none of the events were spectacular or broadly inclusive.

At first glance 20 October 1993 was about Chinese identity politics in Suriname - raising ethnic pride through public displays of Chinese culture, challenging the image of the Chinese of Suriname as sojourners rather than full citizens, and defining who is Chinese in Suriname and why. However, as the idea for the celebration arose shortly after the second return to democracy in 1991, the organizers very likely concealed an agenda of politics of recognition in view of the 1996 elections. Ethnic Chinese did not hold official posts in the previous administration. The first free elections after the end of military rule in 1987 resulted in what was essentially an apanjaht coalition: the Front voor Democratie en Ontwikkeling (Front for Democracy and Development) consisting of the Creole NPS, the East Indian VHP, and the Javanese KTPI. Ramsewak Shankar of the VHP became president, while the post of Vice-President was filled by Henck Arron of the NPS. Unhappy about Surinamese-Dutch rapprochement through the apanjaht coalition, the military staged a coup three years into the Shankar administration. Following foreign pressure, particularly from the Netherlands, the military-backed government of Johannes Kraag consented to holding free elections the next year. The Front voor Democratie en Ontwikkeling entered the elections on 1991 as the Nieuw Front voor Democratie en Ontwikkeling (New Front for Democracy and Development, NF).

The new elections provided an opportunity for representatives of smaller social groups, such as the Chinese, and it publicly hinted at the importance of their vote and encouraged them to

19 The photo exhibition compiled by the artist Paul Woei replaced an earlier plan for an exhibition of Chinese heritage in the Surinaams Museum.
20 The first 14 Chinese indentured labourers arrived in Suriname on the transport ship Merwede on 18 October 1853. All save one who was sick in hospital were transferred to the sugar plantation Catharina Sophia on 20 October 1853. (Surinaamsche Courant en Gouvernements Advertentieblad (Surinamese newspaper and government bulletin) no. 126, 20 October 1853).
21 The ‘Telephone Coup’ of 24 December 1990, so called because the military telephoned government officials to inform them that they were ousted. The government duly complied.
lobby for inclusion in the coming round of apanjaht consociationalism behind the scenes. Political participation for Chinese in Suriname was traditionally less about acquiring a share of political power and more about protecting Chinese interests against East Indian influence. The NPS had presented itself to the Chinese elite as the vehicle for Chinese participation within the consociational system via its Chinese section. In 1993, the fact that President Venetiaan was said to have promised ‘the Chinese’ to declare 20 October of that year a once-only holiday showed that the Comité Herdenking Chinese Immigratie 1853-1993 and its supporters had been lobbying the highest echelons of the NPS. At least publicly, this lobby was not unanimously supported by all prominent Laiap in Suriname. The NF eventually won the 1996 elections, and Ronald Venetiaan became president. Once again, no one who could be called ethnic Chinese held a government post.

7.1.4 The Organizers: Fa Foe Foei

The 1993 commemoration had been organized by a small group headed by mainly Laiap entrepreneurs. In 1995 this group set up Fa Foe Foei, ‘the Chinese Mutual Assistance Association’; its formal goal was to promote the interests of Chinese in Suriname and the integration of ‘Surinamese of Chinese origin’ and ‘naturalized Surinamese-Chinese’ – basically Laiap and Tong’ap. The Fa Foe Foei group consisted of 15 members, mostly prominent Laiap with some Tong’ap representatives of the main huiguan. Fa Foe Foei was presented as a collaboration of four huiguan (Kong Ngie Tong Sang, Chung Fa Foei Kon, Fa Tjauw Song Foei and Chung Tjauw Fu Li Foei). As the huiguan were treated as representatives of the Chinese segment by the Surinamese government, the implication was that Fa Foe Foei could be considered a single representation of unified Chinese interests in Suriname. It was, however, never a grassroots organization, nor did it directly communicate with any

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22 During the meeting in the East Indian Mata Gauri community centre on 2 June 1993 about the future of Keti Koti Dey as ‘Dag der Vrijheden’ (Day of Freedoms), Max Man A Hing stated that he did not support Venetiaan’s promise to the Chinese to declare 20 October 1993 a free day. Despite his reputation as a gatekeeper, it is unlikely that he was speaking for all Chinese in Suriname or even the Laiap intellectuals. It is unclear if the plural ‘freedoms’ in the Dutch name refers to different aspects of freedom or to the emancipation of different ethnic groups, i.e. a conflation of all possible ethnic ‘birthdays’. Lila Gobardhan-Rambocus, ‘Dag der Vrijheden’ (Day of Freedoms). Paramaribo Post, 19 June 2003.
Chinese constituency. The huiguan would consistently refer to it as simply another Chinese organization, but seemed to appreciate that Fa Foe Foei could be useful in diverting attention away from them should Chinese interests prove too controversial. Fa Foe Foei was also called a think tank (*denkgroep*), and as such it conducted ‘hearings’ with various apanjaht parties such as the Creole NPS and the Javanese Pendawa Lima and anti-apanjaht parties such as DA’91 and SPA. These meetings were to officially inform ethnic Chinese voters about party programmes and to advise the ethnic Chinese electorate, while informing the political parties of specific problems of the Chinese. This is a euphemism for dangling the carrot of the ethnic vote that was inflated to 10,000 out of a Chinese segment that was supposedly 50,000 or even 70,000 persons strong.\(^{23}\) The willingness of the parties to assist in setting up a Chinese television station was apparently also gauged.

Fa Foe Foei articulated Chinese interests mainly with regard to citizenship. Naturalization and legal residence were a constant headache for Tong’ap, but the influx of New Chinese migrants since the first half of the 1990s increased the scope of the problem of legal residency for Chinese immigrants. The government failed to cope with the situation amid growing anti-Chinese sentiments, and (established) Fuidung’on Hakkas generally avoided taking up the issue of residency for non-Fuidung’on Hakka migrants. There was an idea that any group (influential individuals fluent in different varieties of Chinese as well as Dutch being exceedingly rare at that time) able to bridge the gap between Chinese migrants and the Surinamese State would have access to a relatively wealthy constituency. Chinese immigrants who acquired Surinamese nationality would also become voters, and such new voters might be happy to oblige the wishes of those who had helped them. In any case a group helping Chinese immigrants to acquire the Surinamese nationality would be greatly empowered in the eyes of the political establishment simply by the impression that it could command new votes.

\(^{23}\) Zijlmans & Enser (2002: 200) quote the number of 70,000 ‘Chinese and Surinamese Chinese’ people in Suriname on the basis of information spread from Fa Foe Foei and individuals with similar agendas. The number of 10,000 Chinese voters was quoted in KOMPAS of 17 April 1996 (*De Chinese Taalbarrière*, The Chinese language barrier): “The Chinese community in Suriname is said to be good for 2 seats in parliament. But more than half of the more than 10,000 voters speak no Dutch. This might be a big problem in the upcoming elections. There are initiatives in the Chinese community to inform the people of developments in the country. However, language will remain an obstacle to further integration in the foreseeable future.”
Fa Foe Foei was only partly successful with regard to citizenship for Chinese immigrants. Protests against unfair treatment of Chinese applicants for naturalization and residency permits had no resonance among a public increasingly unsympathetic to migrants in general and Chinese migrants in particular. Fa Foe Foei also had a hard time convincing the constituency it claimed (all the Chinese of Suriname) of its effectiveness. It was neither a huiguan nor a grassroots organization and could not be seen to provide immediate assistance with the concrete day-to-day problems of New Chinese Migrants, and so Fa Foe Foei’s public goal of promoting the integration of local-born and immigrant Chinese remained elusive.

Despite having won the 1996 elections again, the NF coalition did not come to power as a result of problems with two coalition members in the post-election power-sharing process. Fragmentation of the VHP delayed the formation of a government and when the VHP splinter BVD and the Javanese KTPI defected to the NDP of ex-military strongman Desi Bouterse, the opposition parties managed to form the Millennium Combinatie coalition and establish the government of the 1996-2000 Wijdenbosch Administration. The huiguan establishment had been careful to hedge their bets, making sure that they favoured no party above any other in public. One Fa Foe Foei member, the prominent Tong’ap businessman and member of the huiguan establishment Ling Nget Tet, stood candidate for the NDP in the National Assembly, albeit unsuccessfully. Acquiring a share of political power had not been a publicly declared goal of Fa Foe Foei, and none of its members held government posts in the Wijdenbosch Administration. The inflated size of the Chinese segment apparently made little impression on the winning parties, though the upper echelons of the NDP showed keen interest in increasing Chinese globalization. The new government was soon confronted with popular protests as a result of the deteriorating economic situation.

When the Wijdenbosch Administration was forced to call early elections in 2000, Fa Foe Foei remained quiet, which gave the impression that it was distancing itself from the Wijdenbosch Administration and the NDP (whose leader, ex-military strongman Bouterse, had fallen out with President Wijdenbosch). It had become clear that neither the NF coalition nor the NDP had provided ethnic Chinese with a direct share of political power. For the 2000 elections, the ethnic Chinese elite turned to the ethnic Javanese parties, which had always successfully capitalized on their ability to preserve the delicate balance between the Creole and East Indian
components in the apanjaht coalitions. The NF coalition won the elections, and the Fa Foe Foei strategy proved successful. Behind the scenes negotiations with the latest Javanese apanjaht party on the NF side resulted in an ethnic Chinese filling the crucial post of Minister of Trade and Industry.\textsuperscript{24}

7.1.5 Chinese Immigration Day 2003 as the Commemoration of 150 Years of Chinese Settlement

The next opportunity for a Chinese celebration linked to legislative elections was the 150\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the arrival of the first Chinese indentured labourers on 20 October 2003 (the elections being held on 25 May 2005). The purpose of the celebration was once again about gaining recognition within the context of apanjaht politics and mobilizing the ethnic Chinese constituency. Fa Foe Foei formed the centre of a Commemoration Committee, which included Tong’ap as well as Laiap elite. Although the symbolic capital of those who were born in China is greater than that of the Laiap, Laiap have a greater social, political and financial capital. But in order to show their loyalty to the Surinamese state, they have to take the anti-Chinese discourse into account and present themselves as ‘Surinamese-Chinese’. In presenting Chinese as legitimate citizens rather than immigrants, the Laiap intellectuals reproduced popular anti-immigrant attitudes, and portrayed mixed Chinese as proof that Chinese indentured labourers and the later Fuidung’on immigrants gladly and successfully integrated into Surinamese society. The Tong’ap agenda was not only obscured by Laiap dominance, but also because their identity politics are limited to a kind of damage control. Certain important calendrical events (Surinamese Independence Day on 25 November, Chinese Lunar New Year, etc.) are used to emphasize that Chinese in Suriname are harmless, loyal Surinamese residents and citizens.

The committee approached the Celebration as though it were a public relations project. On the one hand there would be the usual overtures to the ruling establishment in the form of re-

\textsuperscript{24} See Chapter 9. In 2000 Jacques Tjong Tjin Joe, (1931-2002) was appointed Minister of Trade and Industry. Originally a surgeon, Tjong Tjin Joe had been Minister of Health from 1980-1981 in the first period of Military Rule. Though its existence was very likely an asset in the negotiations, actual support from the ‘Chinese community’ was never a real issue. The Chinese constituency was expected to vote NF anyway, and a Chinese cabinet minister was virtually guaranteed via Pertjajah Luhur.
ceptions and speeches, on the other hand there would be entertainment aimed at a more general public of ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese Surinamese. Anticipating the 2005 elections, Chinese would be targeted with appeals to ethnic pride and ethnic loyalty. In response to the negative influence of the anti-Chinese discourse Chinese identity would be constructed to match the diasporic modality of Surinamese multicultural discourse; the Celebration would eventually be called the Commemoration of 150 Years of Chinese Settlement rather than Chinese Immigration Day 2003. In short, the 2003 Celebration would be about politics of recognition, and not primarily for the production of bridging social capital, though there would be attention for bonding within the Chinese group through the production of symbolic capital.

7.1.6 The Commemoration in the Multicultural Context

There were other pressures to organize an event around 20 October. The commemoration of 150 Years of Chinese Settlement in October 2003 was one of many public events during which segmental identities were presented that year. In May it was 130 years since the first East Indian indentured labourers arrived in Suriname, there was the 140th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in July, and then in October it was 150 years since a group of 18 Chinese men from Java arrived in Suriname to work on the state-owned sugar estate of Catharina Sophia. July 1st is a national holiday that is traditionally seen as a Creole day, but in 2003, the East Indian and Chinese days were also holidays. Ethnic celebrations persist in Suriname as platforms for politics of identity and recognition, but also emerge through the performative nature of ethnicity in Suriname.

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150週年. Ang (1993) criticizes this way of using ‘Chinese diaspora’ to describe the process of Chinese migration. According to her, the ‘Chinese diaspora’ is not natural, but an imagined community. Its transnationalism is national in its outlook, because it is defined by the category of ‘Chinese’ and the way that category develops.

26 The words used by the various organizers to describe their events were interesting. The East Indian day was ‘130 years of East Indian immigration’, 1 July was ‘140 years of slavery history’, and the Chinese day was ‘150 years of Chinese immigration’. Of these, only the Chinese day was more or less accurately described. The Lala Rookh did sail into Suriname 130 years earlier with the first East Indian indentured labourers, but there has been no 130 years of sustained immigration from India. The description of July 1st was also slightly off: it was 140 years since the abolition of slavery – slavery had existed in Suriname a good deal longer.
mese multiculturalist discourse. Though they are presented as celebra
tions of authentic and living culture, their main role is in defining
boundaries and ethnic belonging.

As usual, the 2003 ethnic celebrations were used by apana
tjah political elite and special interest groups as platforms for poli
tics of recognition and identity. Public opinion was divided over the
need to celebrate and recognize such commemorative days as pub-
lic holidays. The same naïve monarchic patriotism that focussed on
Chinese immigration in the anti-Chinese discourse surfaced in
popular resistance to the ethnic celebrations of 2003. In Surina-
mesed patriotic discourse ethnic celebrations are wrong, potential
attacks on the unity of the Surinamese State, all in the service of
political elites who strive to broaden their powerbase through mys-
tification of ethnic roots. It is impossible to gauge the size of the
naïve monarchic resistance in 2003 relative to the supporters of
ethnic celebrations and the likely majority of people who refused to
choose either extreme.

The 2003 East Indian celebration was characterized by the
use of space. The main East Indian monument in Paramaribo
turned out to be the statues of ‘Baab and Mai’, a naturalistic depic-
tion of an Indian couple disembarking. The setting for this monu-
ment was transformed into a stage, with a wooden cut-out of the
silhouette of the Lala Rookh (the ship that brought the first East
Indian indentures labourers) placed behind the statues along with
platforms and pavilions placed in front of them. Traditional
garland-hanging ceremonies became performances and the (Creole)
President, prominent Surinamese and foreign guests (participants
of the World Hindi Conference that was timed to coincide with the
celebration) were filmed and photographed honouring Baab and Mai
with garlands.27 There were some attempts to place the World
Hindi Conference in a Surinamese context; one prominent East
Indian (not a linguist) claimed – despite the lack of linguistic data –
that 38% of the Surinamese population speaks Hindi daily. This is
not accurate as not everybody who may be identified as East
Indian can speak Standard Hindi or even for that matter Sarnâmi
(the local Bhojpuri-based koine which is considered the East Indian

27 The performance was not limited to Baab and Mai. The ‘Creole’ statue of Kwakoe,
the personification of the abolition of slavery, was honoured, but the older statue of
Mahatma Gandhi was not, because it was being restored, and Mahatma Gandhi had
put an end to Indian indentured labour. Moreover, the small square where the
statue stands had been renamed ‘Kodjo, Mentor and Present Square’, after three
slaves who were said to have been burned at the stake there as a punishment for
setting the great fire of Paramaribo in the 18th century.
ethnic language). There were two transnational elements present in the ceremonies; one was partly orchestrated by the Indian embassy, consisting mainly of Indian performing arts, the other was the presentation of a book about East Indians in the Netherlands. There were of course popular celebrations, in particular a historical and folkloristic pageant through Paramaribo.

The Creole celebration was characterized by the use of symbolic objects. Traditionally, special angisa (head scarves) are designed for special celebrations, and the designs of these angisa may be read as a text. Three different angisa series were available, with nationalistic ‘texts’ tinged with nostalgic references to nineteenth century Suriname. There was a clear Dutch transnational presence, not only through substantial numbers of Dutch Creoles who had come for the celebration, but also because of two cultural products of Dutch Creole identity politics, which were centred on reinterpretation of slavery in Dutch history. One was a three-part educational TV film for use in the Netherlands about African slavery in the Dutch West Indies, which was presented as a very important feature film that would help educate Surinamese about slavery. The other event was presented as a du (a type of late nineteenth century Creole folk theatre), but which turned out to be a poor reworking of a similar project five years earlier by a Dutch Creole team. The Surinamese President was invited to both premieres. There was also a badly publicized conference about slavery. The main event, however, was the traditional annual popular festival in the centre of Paramaribo.

In August 2003 Suriname hosted Carifesta, the most important Caribbean cultural festival. Identity is a major preoccupation in

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28 The angisa were produced, marketed and sold by Palestinian and Lebanese textile stores: Jerusalem Bazaar had a series of four multicoloured designs (their own design printed in Shanghai) with the coat and arms and flag of Suriname; Aboud carried a angisa by their own designer, a simple screenprint on white cotton; Ready Tex had commissioned a angisa by the artist Rinaldo Klas, also a simple screenprint on white cotton featuring the heliconia flowers of the Surinamese coins instead of (the religious image of) palm fronds. There was one state-sponsored angisa, issued by the Directorate of Culture of the Ministry of Education. This too was a simple screenprint on white cotton, but its message was the Multiculturalism Myth; the Creole, East Indian and Chinese ‘birthdays’ were given equal space in the design.

29 I attended both the original production of Na Gowtu Du in July 1998 and the reworked version of 2003. In both performances, Creoles were depicted as slaves – not as descendents of slaves but as actual slaves, without a clear explanation of such a statement. Whites were presented as the bad guys - not only the European slave-owners in Suriname, but all Whites.
the Caribbean, and this Carifesta was an orgy of root-searching.\textsuperscript{30} One major problem was how to present Surinamese culture. Multiculturalism was never the issue, the presentation of the various stereotypical ethnic groups was. The link between Suriname as a place and the various ethnic groups got lost in the production of folders and other material: one folder contained pictures of Canadian Indians, a temple dancer from Southern India, South Africans and a Balinese dancer to represent Surinamese ethnic groups. On TV, a spokesman from the Ministry of Education said that “in order to show what we have here” there would be performances of cultural groups from Ghana, India, Indonesia and China. Surinamese groups such as the Lebanese who had never really had to show off their folklore were suddenly required to produce ethnic costumes and performances of song and dance. Though the African and Asian groups never showed up in Carifesta, and there were no local Chinese performances, Chinese in Suriname were under increasing pressure to come up with something special for 20 October. As one middle-aged Kejia-speaking Laiap man told me:

The nearer that day gets, the more ashamed I get. People keep asking me what the Chinese are going to do. They have no dances, no songs, they have nothing, what do they actually think they will be doing? At least the East Indian and Creole have things they can show, but what do the Chinese have, really?

\textbf{7.2 The Production of the Commemoration}

In the 2003, celebrations in Suriname, emblematic folklore and cultural practices, were naturalized as typical expressions of East Indian and Creole ethnic identities. Chinese culture is similarly supposed to derive from Chinese identity, but items of (emblematic) Chinese culture / folklore are limited, so there are few objects that can be used as in the Creole celebrations; there are no temples, no authentic ethnic costumes, no films. Lacking a single self-perception, there are no monuments to mark the landscape for non-Chinese in a way that is acceptable to all Chinese. The Chinese have no inclusive festivals, except maybe the Lunar New Year, but that is mainly because the huiguan establishment uses that occa-
sion for its own diplomacy and networking with individuals in Surinamese society.

The organizers of the Chinese Commemoration involved a small number of Laiap intellectuals and artists to develop the Chinese narrative for the event, basically providing content for the politics of identity and recognition. In articles and interviews produced for the Dutch-language media, they elaborated on the Laiap view of diasporic and essential Surinamese Chinese identity and listed the cultural, economic and social contributions of the ethnic Chinese segment.

However, the Committee lost control of the narrative of Chinese contribution to Surinamese society as 20 October approached. The Laiap intellectuals had developed their brand of Hakka nationalism as a reaction to the Surinamese anti-Chinese discourse and absolutist Chinese discourses of racial identity. During the Commemoration, their take on the anti-Chinese discourse closely resembled the mulatto anti-Black views. The most offensive statements were predicated on the idea that Chinese immigrants had brought culture to an uncivilized Suriname: not only were emblematic Creole cultural items (songbird competitions, kites, etc.) introduced by Chinese, but Chinese had also taught black people family life and provided basic livelihood strategies (the Creole kasmoni ROSCA, credit provided by shopkeepers, etc.).

### 7.2.1 Positionality and Multiple Discourses

Bauman speaks of people having double discursive competence, by which he means that people are able to think of their ethnic identity as essential while (unconsciously) negotiating it in everyday reality. The meetings of the Commemoration Committee provided clear examples of multiple discursive competence; people were able to pose Chineseness as primordial, essentialist, and uniform, while redefining it in the local context (‘Surinamese Chinese’ were the real ethnic Chinese) and presenting simultaneous and at times con-

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31 E.g. De Ware Tijd 20 October 2003, ‘Tolerantie van elkaars cultuur is grote kracht van Suriname’ (Tolerance of each other’s culture is Suriname’s great forte). In this article the artist Paul Woei (pseudonym of Paul Woei A Tsoi) waxes lyrically of Chinese contributions to Surinamese society. Not only does he list songbird culture and ROSCAs, but he also explicitly claims that it was the Chinese who brought family life to Suriname (suggesting that it did not exist before the arrival of the first Chinese indentured labourers in 1853).

32 Bauman 1999.
tradictory interpretations of the meanings to various audiences (typically variegated Surinamese audiences in fact being ‘audiences within audiences’). Laiap in particular proved multiple discursive competence, as they not only switched between Chinese positions, but also moved between multiculturalist, patriotic and anti-Chinese discourses. Situational identities emerged surprisingly easy during the meetings which I attended, although sometimes smooth communication was hampered by language problems.

In July 2002 I was invited by a prominent Kejia-speaking Laiap to a meeting in Kong Ngie Tong Sang, the oldest huiguan, to see if, as a sinologist, I could contribute anything. There were no minutes of the previous meeting, no clear agenda, and no obvious chairperson. About twenty people sat around a long table, the majority of whom were Tong’ap, all shopkeepers and all at one end of the table. Less than half were Laiap, including the only woman present, all of whom were prominent businesspeople. All were introduced as representatives of the various huiguan. Sitting between the two groups was I, the only moksi sneisi. There were no non-Hakkas / New Chinese. Again, language reflected ethnic variation. Laiap tended to code-switch to Sranantongo, with Laiap Kejia as the matrix language. Tong’ap spoke Dongguan Kejia, with hardly any need to supplement their vocabulary with Sranantongo. My presence was acknowledged through the use of Sranantongo and Mandarin. But as things developed, communication started breaking down. The Laiap started speaking Dutch among themselves, and Cantonese was being used among the Tong’ap. A Tong’ap who is married to a Laiap and who speaks Kejia, Cantonese, English and Dutch, was asked to translate more complex views expressed from the Laiap side of the table.

The Laiap appeared very paternalistic. One explained to me:

Yes, it’s chaotic, but that’s how those Chinese are. You must give each one the opportunity to have his say, else they won’t come back. You know what they’re like.

The Laiap clearly thought that the Tong’ap did not give enough attention to integration, and I actually got the impression that the Laiap felt integration made them legitimate and superior. The Tong’ap appeared to be tolerating the Laiap, listening politely but rather cynically. My impression was that they did not completely trust the Laiap at the table, suspecting hidden agendas. The Laiap overestimated the goals and level of organization of the huiguan: they assumed that huiguan represented all Tong’ap (“They need to
take it up with the rank and file, they have no mandate to make decisions here.”) and that their organizations were associations in the Western sense (“Of course, their membership files aren’t organized too well, you know.”). They saw their own organization as a way to guide and develop badly organized and rudderless huiguan.

Finally the issue of 20 October was raised. The Laiap explained the importance of 20 October as a form of honouring the ancestors of the Chinese of Suriname. They did say that if it were not for those first Chinese, there would be no Chinese in Suriname today, but stopped short of saying that they were the ancestors of all Hakkas in Suriname. But not only were the indentured labourers the first Chinese in Suriname, they were also the first indentured labourers as well as the first Asians in Suriname. Anybody who feels linked to those first Chinese is welcome to join in, and as many Surinamese have Chinese blood, this would show how well the Chinese belong in Suriname. The Laiap speakers consistently called it “herdenking 150 jaar Chinese immigratie” (“the commemoration of 150 years of Chinese immigration”), and stressed that Surinamese were expecting a celebration of this bigi-yari.

Then one Tong’ap raised what was apparently an old objection: why 20 October instead of Chinese Lunar New Year? Lunar New Year is embedded in Chinese culture and is being celebrated more and more among Chinese in Suriname, and more and more Surinamese are becoming familiar with it. It is also transnational, as any Chinese anywhere in the world would be celebrating at the same moment. 20 October had been celebrated just twice before, fifty and then ten years ago. The Laiap responded that 20 October was inclusive, but that the Lunar New Year could be ‘too Chinese’ to be understood by everybody. The Tong’ap wondered how that could be a problem; the issue was a ‘Chinese day’ in the Surinamese calendar, and if mixed Chinese could not identify with the Lunar New Year, then that was only natural. Both sides agreed that Chinese in Suriname should also get a ‘national day’ just like other Surinamese ethnic groups, but was this a celebration of the Chinese cultural presence or a final recognition of Chinese assimilation?

With some difficulty, everyone settled down to discuss the actual celebration. To the Laiap, the most important aspect of the celebration would have to be the unveiling of a monument, which was envisaged as a Chinese and Dutch bilingual plaque in a small park, to be set up on a piece of land that had been promised by a previous government ten years earlier. The Tong’ap did not agree. They might have not understood the need to invest in Chinese markers in the Surinamese landscape for future inter-ethnic nego-
tions, or perhaps it is a reflex to avoid any symbol of permanent settlement? One objection the Tong’ap raised was that rather than something with only symbolic value, they would have preferred something that was of use to Chinese. The Kong Ngie Tong Sang huiguan is the only building in Paramaribo other than a restaurant in (an approximation of) traditional Chinese style, with an entrance in the shape of a pailou commemorative arch. Yet none of the participants considered the Kong Ngie Tong Sang building neutral enough to be used in the presentations aimed at the Surinamese public, even though they found it neutral enough for a meeting of different Chinese factions. Nobody seemed to consider that outsiders already use Kong Ngie Tong Sang as a symbol of Chinese-ness in Suriname: its picture is included with those of churches, mosques and Hindu temples to illustrate cultural variety.

To the huiguan establishment among the Tong’ap, the most important aspect of the celebration had to be a reception. Ten years earlier (the 140th anniversary) the reception had been open to the public, but this time things would be more organized, so only prominent Surinamese politicians and members of the business community as well as the Chinese embassy would be invited to the reception in a hotel in downtown Paramaribo. These events would be accompanied by speeches from prominent Surinamese, huiguan establishment and the Chinese embassy, and the only conceivable Chinese folklore: Lion Dances (or rather ‘Unicorn Dances’ mu kilin in Kejia) and fireworks. This was diplomacy, clear and simple – the only thing that made sense to them.

They complained that the ‘Surinamese community’ did not understand ‘the Chinese’, but were unwilling to present anything other than the clichés of Chinese emblematic folklore. The Laiap proposed importing a dragon from Hong Kong. Fifty years earlier there had been a dragon dance (Kejia: mu liung), but that dragon had been constructed locally, and most of the dancers were non-Chinese, though the choreographer had been Taiwanese. This time there was no question of a locally made dragon; it had to be a ‘real’ dragon. It was also an investment, as it could be used to present ‘Chinese culture’ in future events. I suggested inviting performers of Cantonese opera – popular among the established Fuidung’on Hakkas through Karaoke DVDs – to Suriname to perform for Chinese and selected non-Chinese audiences. This would ensure controlled propagation of Laiap views and unique presentations of authentic culture. The Laiap objected, because Cantonese opera was ‘too Chinese’.

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The meeting ended without reaching any firm agreements or making any clear decisions. I wondered about the absence of a New Chinese view, and so I asked some of the Laiap how they thought they could get away with celebrating 150 years of Chinese immigration without involving the New Chinese. After all, they were the ones who the Surinamese public recognized as Chinese immigrants, since immigration from the Hakka qiaoxiang had stopped. It turned out that New Chinese were elusive; there were no New Chinese huiguan, and then there was the language barrier (Laiap spoke no Mandarin, New Chinese were assumed not to speak Sranantongo). But New Chinese had also been explicitly avoided because nobody wanted to communicate with zetgongzai, people who were being associated with crime and illegal immigration.

Observing the interactions, it became clear to me that Laiap positions depended on whether Laiap, Tong’ap or non-Chinese were being addressed. To a Tong’ap audience Laiap considered anyone with a Chinese ancestor a Chinese; Chinese in Suriname are unified; the huiguan, the PRC embassy and the Surinamese State are linked; though celebrating ‘150 years of Chinese Settlement’ is unavoidable in multicultural Suriname in a year when other groups have similar anniversaries, the concrete goal of the celebrations is diplomacy, not identity politics. Laiap portray themselves as the ‘real Surinamese-Chinese’ to non-Chinese audiences; they stress that the China-born – Tong’ap and New Chinese – are foreigners; to them the nineteenth century Chinese indentured labourers are the ancestors of the Surinamese-Chinese. This was a refined version of the position taken towards a Laiap audience: Laiap are legitimate ‘Surinamese-Chinese’; Tong’ap are ‘too Chinese’; New Chinese are foreigners. Tong’ap positions were equally situational, though their expression was limited during the Committee meetings. Tong’ap restricted Chineseness when addressing other Tong’ap: Chinese cannot get along; mixed Chinese are not real Chinese, and New Chinese are laoteu – outsiders; the PRC embassy is a kind of huiguan; ‘150 years of Chinese Settlement’ is an opportunity for politics of recognition, not a fixed day of remembrance.

Although I had decided not to get too closely involved with the organization of the celebrations, I still agreed to try and help a Tong’ap church group who were concerned about a memorial book that was being written by a prominent Laiap. The church group had been invited to participate in organizing the celebration, because its church is treated as a huiguan. They wanted a memorial book which would be a short, popular, a-political book that would promote acceptance of Chinese in Surname. Something the Laiap
writer said had shocked them: “A lot of people will be angry when this book is published!” It seemed that the project was a private initiative, and looked very much like a confrontational manifesto of Laiap identity politics, alienating Creoles, Tong’ap, and completely ignoring the presence of New Chinese.

The Tong’ap now planned a completely different memorial book, which I was expected to contribute to. Its goal was to enhance the image of Chinese in Suriname. Chapter 1 would be about the history of Chinese immigration, including the following subjects: milestones during the 150 years; inside the Chinese community (work, daily life, new immigrants, educating children); changes in the Chinese community; Chinese culture; religious life; contributions of Chinese to Suriname, particularly with regard to agriculture, forestry, health care, education, etc. Chapter 2 would list prominent Chinese in Suriname. Chapter 3 would cover the huiguan, not only the three main Hakka huiguan, but everything including Chinese Christian churches, making a total of at least eight organizations. Chapter 4 would consist of the views of the huiguan leaders, while chapter 5 would be an overview of Sino-Surinamese relations, to be written by the Chinese embassy. Chapter 6 would be about Chinese political participation in Suriname.

Asked what they meant by ‘prominent Chinese in Suriname’, the Tong’ap members of the memorial book committee responded that Chinese meant anybody with Chinese blood. Asked if they were sure that all such people wished to be included as Chinese, they responded that this did not matter, because being included in the list meant that those people were Chinese. As an outsider, I said, I might wonder why there are so many Chinese organizations for the relatively small number of Chinese in Suriname. The Tong’ap I was talking to laughed; of course nobody can agree about anything, but this was the first time everybody was working together. In any case, the point was that unity would be portrayed in the book. But why then describe New Chinese as ‘new immigrants’ under ‘life in the Chinese community’? And how are the New Chinese to be involved in the plans by the Tong’ap? Well, New Chinese had no huiguan, and things need to be handled via huiguan, and besides, nobody really wants to have anything to do with them, but the point is to present all Chinese as a unified group. In the meantime another group had been discussing the project of the Chinese monument. It seemed that the plot of land had finally been identified, though the deed of the grant had not been traced. The Chinese embassy was asked to mediate with the Ministry of Natural Resources, but it was not really clear what the purpose of the land
actually was; instead of a park with a plaque, there was now talk of a Chinese TV-station to be set up with support of the Chinese embassy.

Though I knew many of those present – mostly fairly decent and rational people – no discussion was possible. I was expected to shut up and do as I was told: just think of some milestones and maybe some prominent ‘Chinese’ for the purpose of our celebration. To call the notions of Chineseness around that table robust was an understatement. Remarkably, every aspect of performative Chinese identity that was planned in relation to the local and non-Chinese expectations about Chinese; no reference would be made to Chinese identities outside the framework of politics of recognition. There would be no rituals to honour Fuidung’on ancestors, no ceremonies involving deeper Chinese traditions. Tradition would be projected towards non-Chinese outsiders, modernity would be reserved for Chinese insiders, while the various performances could be expected to be predictable and unimaginative. I decided to retreat and observe developments as surreptitiously as possible. Eventually it was decided that the celebration would consist of roughly a week of events leading up to a grand parade through downtown Paramaribo.

7.2.2 The Commemoration Week

As a bigi-yari, the Commemoration would be celebrated over five days, starting on Thursday, 17 October and culminating on Monday, 20 October. The first evening was a reception funded by the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, for the opening of a photo exhibition on Chinese in Suriname (basically a reworking of an exhibition ten years earlier). The next evening was a lecture by a prominent Laiap on Surinamese culture and history. In one view which is prominent among Laiap intellectuals, Chinese ethnic pride in Suriname is based on a local adaptation of the myth of China as bringer of civilization, by proposing Chinese cultural elements as models for Creole cultural icons. Saturday evening was a reception hosted by President Venetiaan, which, like the first reception, was not really intended for the general public, and was used as a platform for networking. Sunday afternoon there was a variety show in De Witte Lotus, a Chinese sports club. Cantonese, Mandarin, English and Sranantongo were spoken onstage, but not a word of Kejia, even though the vast majority of the roughly 1,000 people present
had Hakka roots.

On Monday morning the President unveiled a memorial commemorating 20 October, basically a plaque inscribed with the names of the first Chinese indentured labourers in the Chinese and Latin scripts. At the time of the ceremony, a pavilion-like structure that was to cover the plaque had not yet been constructed. The design and realization of the memorial had been in the hands of Laiap, with Tong’ap involvement limited to funding. Many government ministers were present, they included notably Minister Jong Tjien Fa, who wore a blue silk shirt in traditional Chinese style. The speeches presented the Laiap-dominated discourse of ‘Surinamese-Chinese’: Chinese in Suriname are descendants of the Chinese indentured labourers, and are essential elements of the fabric of Surinamese society. The State representatives stuck to the official line with regard to formal recognition of ethnic rights in their speeches: the Surinamese State considers ethnicity a reflexive identification, and steers clear of recognizing collective rights of ethnic groups. It accepts the interpretation of Chineseness of the organizing committee, as long as Chinese present themselves as loyal citizens.

The climax of the Commemoration week was the big parade on Monday afternoon. This started at the Chinese School and terminated at Independence Square, the oldest part of Paramaribo and the symbolic centre of Suriname. Participants had been issued
T-shirts with the logo of the event (with the toucan now on the right, and the dragon on the left) in the four colours of the Surinamese flag: green, red, white and yellow. These T-shirts, and many other props in the parade, had been funded by the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China. The parade contained the following elements (items between parentheses could be identified in the scenario of the organizing committee):

1. **“Banner 1”**: Two young Chinese-looking men in green T-shirts carrying a yellow banner with “20 October 2003” in red.
2. **“Protocol Group”**: Minister Jong Tjien Fa, members of the organizing committee, members of the huiguan establishment, wearing red sashes with the text: “150 Years of Chinese Settlement”.
3. **“Surinamese Flag”**: Mostly young Chinese men in green T-shirts, carrying large Surinamese flags.
4. **“Marching Band”**: Creole girls in revealing African-print outfits, followed by a Creole brass band in yellow T-shirts.
5. **“Birdcage Group”**: Laiap, mixed Chinese, etc. in red T-shirts, paper coolie hats and Chinese birdcages provided by the Chinese embassy.
Figure 7: ‘Protocol Group’. (l.t.r) Ling Nget Tet, Minister Jong Tjien Fa, Carmen Tjin A Djie. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.

Figure 8: ‘Chinese Group’, acrobats from the visiting Chinese Circus. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.
6. “Float 1: the Boat (the Past)”: The ‘boat’ was not a Western sailing ship, but had a sail of red cloth suggesting the bamboo sail of a Chinese junk. Chinese men in black pyjama-type suits and yellow paper coolie hats stood waving at the public.


9. “Lion, Chinese Group from Cayenne”: A truck with Chinese banners and musicians of the Association Fa Kiao / Huaren Gongsuo, preceded by the banner of the organization in French and Chinese script. At regular intervals there were very professional performances of Lion Dances / mu su.

10. “Chinese Group”: Women acrobats of the visiting Chinese circus, led by a male colleague, playing small drums typical of the Han cultures of the loess plateau.

11. “Float 2: Chinese House (the Present). Multicultural Suriname”: The ‘house’ was suggested by an arch-like construction at the back of the float, and was decorated with large red Chinese lanterns and a birdcage. The float was populated by the folklore dance group of Marlène Lie A Ling, who were to perform onstage after arrival at Independence Square. Creole musicians played old-fashioned Creole party music. The dancers wore stereotypical and not completely authentic costumes of the ethnicities expected in the Multicultural Myth: Creole, Indian, Javanese, and Chinese.

12. “20 Girls in Chinese dresses and parasols, 40 boys carrying flowers”: Mostly Chinese boys in green T-shirts carried baskets of brightly coloured artificial flowers on their backs. The girls were all older, most were not Chinese, and wore satin cheongsam and carried Chinese parasols, with their hair in a tight bun, fixed with chopsticks.

13. “Chinese Music Group”: Hardly anyone realized that the resulting marching band, Fujian Luogu Dui (‘Fujianese Percussion Group’), was a New Chinese element in the parade. They were roughly 50 participants, wearing yellow pyjama-type suits with red details and baseball caps and white gloves, who were mistaken for French-Guianese by Fuidung’on onlookers. The group was led by a flag, a ban-
ner with the name Fujian Luogu Dui in Chinese characters and a banner decorated with dragons. Then came a decorated cart with a drum, and two elaborate processional parasols. The participants, obviously amateurs, played simple rhythms on their cymbals, and would stop to perform more elaborate choreographies from time to time.

14. **“Float 3: Children (the Future)”**: The float was populated by small girls of many different phenotypes. Though the decorations were dominated by the image of lotus flowers, the only clearly Chinese element was the Chinese parasols the girls carried.

15. **“Extras (T-shirts in all four colours)”**: This was a group of well over fifty Chinese-looking people, not all of whom wore the official T-shirts.

16. **Flag of Hua Cu Hui**: One man bearing a flag with a dragon and the name of the organization, escorted by two men in red T-shirts.

17. **Pictures of President Venetiaan**: Banner of the Laiap dominated Hua Cu Hui socio-cultural association, followed by people carrying photographs of President Runaldo Venetiaan and brightly coloured flags with monochrome dragons. I was told that the presence of the photographs was an expression of loyalty to the State, rather than some kind of statement by Chinese stakeholders in the current governing coalition where Chinese participate via the Javanese Pertjajah Luhur party. Another prominent Laiap disagreed with my consociational viewpoint and interpreted the photographs as ‘guests thanking their host, in good Chinese fashion’.

18. **“Soeng Ngie”**: The float of the popular Laiap-owned Chinese store Soeng Ngie & Co. was a truck decorated with the head of a lion costume, red lanterns, flags and garlands. A sign with the text “150 Years of Chinese Settlers in Suriname” and a logo combining the flags of the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Suriname, was fixed to both sides of the truck. Influential and popular enough to be dissident, Soeng Ngie & Co. had produced its own T-

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Figure 9: 'Birdcage Group'. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.

Figure 10: 'Float 1: the Boat (the Past)'. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.
shirts, with an alternative text: “150 Years of Chinese Immigration”. Creole party music was played from the float, and cheap plastic mugs with the Soeng Ngie logo were distributed to onlookers. The people on the float were of many ethnic backgrounds, and one was dressed as a cook, standing behind a wok. The float was surrounded by individual participants wearing Soeng Ngie & Co. T-shirts.

19. **Dragon Dance**: Although the dragon dance (Kejia: *mu liung*) had been announced, it did not appear in the scenario. The moderately long, imported dragon was carried by a majority of non-Chinese men, without fully exploiting the possibilities of a typical traditional choreography. At one point, the dancers moved the dragon to Caribbean and Creole music.

20. “**Extras (T-shirts in all four colours)**”: Teenagers, few of whom looked Chinese, some carrying Chinese parasols.

21. **Chung Tjauw**: Banner of the Socio-Cultural Association Chung Tjauw / Zhongqiao Fuli Hui with the additional text: “150 Years of Chinese Settlement in Suriname”.

22. **Local enterprises**: Banners of prominent (Laiap) companies, such as Harry Tjin, Jong A Kiem, etc., with slogans such as: “Many cultures, one nation”, and “Together we build the future”. Most participants did not look Chinese.

23. “**Ribbon Group 2**”: Chinese-looking children wearing yellow T-shirts, twirling white ribbons.

24. “**Marching Band**”: Creole majorettes followed by a Creole brass band.

25. **Decorated float**: A decorated pick-up truck, with a yellow parasol, red banners with Chinese and Dutch text, and carrying Chinese women wearing cheongsam.

26. **The Tshjoeng Tjien Church**: Banner of the Tshoeng Tjien Church (part of the Moravian Church of Suriname), with additional text: “This is a place of praise and prayer to the Saviour, who is the eternal truth.” There were many Chinese participants, Laiap, Tong’ap and others, carrying little Surinamese flags. The end of the group was marked by a banner with the logo of the Moravian Church of Suriname.

27. **Fa Tjauw Song Foei Lion Dance**: The Xing Shi Tuan Lion Dance group of the Fa Tjauw Song Foei huiguan, with associated banners, on a truck. At set intervals the group
Figure 11: 'Chinese Music Group' / *Fujian Luogu Hui*. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.

Figure 12: Hua Cu Hui followed by pictures of President Venetiaan. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.
Figure 13: Dragon Dance. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.

Figure 14: Socio-Cultural Association Chung Tjauw. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.
Figure 15: Float with yellow parasol. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.

Figure 16: The Chinese School. Cheongsam as gendered emblem of Chinese ethnic identity. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.
would perform (Kejia: *mu su*) with their two lions and Smiling Buddha.

28. **Dalian Investment Co.**: A fairly large group (about 50 persons) of the Dalian International Investment Co., a company based in Dalian, China, involved in the long-term road repair programme. Their banner was red with white text in Chinese and English: “The best wishes to the Surinamese people from Dalian International”.34

29. **“Martial Arts Group”**: Five women in white T-shirts and baseball caps, brandishing Taijiquan swords. The leader, an older Chinese woman, would demonstrate her swordsman-ship.

30. **Whahaha Foodstuffs Factory**: Float of the Whahaha Foodstuffs Factory. A sign with the text “Congratulations with the celebration of 150 years of Chinese immigration” in Dutch and Chinese was fixed to the front of the truck.35 All text was in red, except for the Dutch word *immigratie* (“immigration”), which stood out in white. No single ethnic group dominated the float.


32. **Marching band**: Creole majorettes in green T-shirts, followed by a Creole brass band wearing yellow T-shirts.

33. **Individual participants**: Onlookers followed in the wake of the parade, producing a very effective image of total inclusiveness.

Considering that the organizing committee had not bothered to encourage New Chinese participation in the preparatory stages, numbers of (non-Fuildung’ on) New Chinese in the parade were unexpectedly large. This was in part because groups such as Dalian and the Chinese Circus could be interpreted as reflecting the New Chinese presence in Suriname, rather than specifically the economic and diplomatic influence of the PRC. However, the *Fujian Luogu Dui* percussion group (number 13 above) added significant

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34 ‘大連國際向蘇理南人民問好’ / ‘Dalian International greeting to Suriname people [sic]’.
35 ‘Gefeliciteerd met viering van 150 jaar Chinese immigratie’ / 热烈慶祝华人移居蘇理南 150 週年!’ (Congratulations on the occasion of 150 years of Chinese immigration / Celebrate the 150th anniversary of Chinese immigration in Suriname!).
weight to the image of New Chinese in the parade. It was also ‘new’ because this type of Chinese folklore had never been seen before in Suriname. Participation in the parade had not been restricted, and basically anyone was free to apply to the organizers, if they wanted to participate. In September there had been advertisements in the two Chinese newspapers to recruit people for a cultural group to walk in the parade, which resulted in the formation of the Fujianese percussion group.

The parade arrived at Independence Square after sunset, greeted by the President and the Ministers and their entourage from the balcony of the Presidential Palace. A stage had been prepared on the square for a cultural show. Chairs had been arranged in front of the stage for the government officials, members of the organizing committee and the huiguan establishment. The first part of the show consisted of Chinese acts: Lion Dances by the Fa Tjauw Song Foei Xing Shi Tuan and the French Guianese Association Fa Kiao; the female percussion group of the Chinese Circus; swordsmanship accompanied by Hong Kong pop music, performed by members of Association Fa Kiao; two girls from the Chinese Circus performing a balancing act; an "Uyghur" dance to Chinese music in an ‘oriental’ style. The second part of the show was a lengthy performance of Marlene Lie A Ling’s folkloric dance group, that rather closely followed Ganga’s typology of such events: a display of ethnic variety, each group depicted separately, hints of a storyline, and a show of unity at the end (Ganga 2004). There was little authenticity in the various displays and performances: ethnic identities of performers did not necessarily match the ethnic label of the acts, costumes were not particularly accurate, and the dances themselves had been adapted. The ‘Creole act’ developed into finale of the performance, when the dancers involved some of the guests in front of the stage. At the very end, the Moravian hymn Mi Kondre Tru, Mi Lobi Yu (“I love you, my dear country”, Suriname’s “alternative national anthem”) was sung by the whole group.36 The final event was a show of fireworks from a pontoon in the Suriname River near Independence Square. Unfortunately, one person was killed when a piece of firework exploded on the pontoon.

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36 The performance could be interpreted to mean that multiculturalism in Suriname is a process of assimilation where the final act is becoming Creole, performed by multi-ethnic dancers.
7.2.3 Performativity in the Parade

In the Parade ‘Chineseness’ – the content of the undifferentiated label ‘Chinese’ – was fully performative; it became a reality through the actions of organizers, people walking in the parade, and people watching it. Chineseness was also multi-situational; throughout the parade it was fluid, negotiable, and situational, being played out differently to different audiences and meaning different things at the same time in. But to use Brubaker’s (2004) terms, the Commemoration event also created a ‘Chinese ethnic group’ out of the Chinese ‘groupness’ that was assumed to exist in Surinamese society. It should be stressed that the props produced in the 2003 Celebration of 150 Years of Chinese Settlement are not ‘natural’ ethnic border markers; they define legitimacy, not group membership. They were designed to signal the ‘groupness’ (in Brubaker's sense of ethnic groups as a performative act) of Chineseness in the politics of identity and recognition in apanjha context.37

The Commemoration Committee and its subcontractors were not always conscious of the politics of visuality of their parade. The photographs of President Venetiaan were hardly a subtle tribute to the ruling NF-led Venetiaan II Administration, but there were no clear references to Pertjajah Luhur and its chairman Paul Somohardjo. In the parade, Minister Jong Tjien Fa could be considered a member of the ethnic Chinese elite rather than as a representative of Pertjajah Luhur. To a complete outsider, the parade would not seem to indicate that the Chinese were backing NPS rather than Pertjajah Luhur or even the NF coalition. Visual representations of Chinese stereotypes underlying the anti-Chinese discourse were central to the depiction of Surinamese Chinese identity as diasporic. There were no public protests against the massive depiction of Chinese as stereotypical coolies, and it is unclear if the designers of the parade were ever aware that the image might be offensive to local individuals or shocking to outsiders.

In Suriname, ethnic identity is embodied through ethnic dress. Dress consists of body modifications and supplements that form a “coded sensory system of non-verbal communication that aids human interaction in space and time.”38 Individuals use ‘ethnic dress’ to mark their ethnic identity in terms of group differences; as a boundary marker, ethnic dress represents unchanging, essential

37 Brubaker 2004
ethnicity. Ethnic dress (or ‘traditional dress’) thus marks inclusion in an ‘ethnic community’, but can also mark exclusion from the mainstream for minority and migrant groups in urbanized, national, and globalized contexts, and so the use of ethnic dress is commonly restricted to specific occasions and locations (often ceremonial or ritual) and female gender, while being frozen in the past to reflect unchanging identity.40

Apanjaht performativity requires Chinese in Suriname to use ethnic dress, but the question of what exactly constituted ‘Chinese ethnic dress’ is fraught with difficulty. Rather than the *samfu* (Kejia; set of wide blouse and trousers) worn by the Hakka indentured labourers and chain migrants, the cheongsam is presented in Suriname as the quintessential and authentic Chinese ethnic costume, rather like the way the sari is promoted as the original and authentic East Indian costume, despite documentary evidence that proves otherwise.41 The cheongsam (Kejia: *congsam*), or *qipao* (in Mandarin), was the national dress of Republican China (i.e. costume that signalled belonging to the modern Chinese state), and it became part of the repertoire of emblematic culture among Overseas Chinese. The *qipao* has become accepted in the PRC as Han-Chinese ethnic dress and even national dress. It thus becomes something of a Chinese ‘transnational dress’, which signals a general Chinese identity rather than referring to the specific, often rural, ancestral background of Chinese migrants. It is rather ironic that the qipao became a cultural marker of Chineseness. The modern qipao developed in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s, during the Republican Era, and its body-hugging cut, long slits, short sleeves signalling overt femininity often made it a symbol of the wrong type of modernization and emancipation.42

The Chinese costumes in the parade embodied ‘Chineseness’ in terms of gender, age, and modernity. The prototypical Chinese in Suriname is virtually identical to the Chinese racial and cultural stereotype common everywhere else. Chinese are yellow-skinned men with buckteeth, slanted eyes, black hair who speak a language that sounds like “ching chang chong” and they can’t pronounce the ‘r’. They have long beards and moustaches and a cue, and are dressed in dark pajama suits and a coolie hat. This

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41 Remarkably, the East Indian ethnic costume presented on Float 2 (nr. 11 above) was not based on Bollywood models now current in Suriname, but on an idea of the authentic costumes worn by East Indian indentured labourers.
42 Cf. Finnane 2007: 139-175.
peasant look is more commonly used in Suriname to depict Chinese men than the stereotypical ‘Mandarin’ dress and cap, probably because there is photographic evidence of early Fuidung’ on immigrants wearing samfu (Kejia, ‘suit of unlined shirt and trousers’), the wide shirt and trousers of cotton or waxed silk common in Southern China. In the Netherlands, for instance, the Mandarin look is fostered by Chinese men wearing colourful silk congsam (Kejia, ‘long robe’) with traditional vests and caps, usually during public events aimed at a non-Chinese audience. The stereotypical Chinese is a man. Despite photographic records of early Fuidung’on immigrant women in Suriname wearing formal and casual samfu, the stereotypical image of Chinese women in Suriname is the same as in the rest of the world: a quiet young woman wearing a tight-fitting cheongsam dress (also called congsam in Kejia) with chopsticks (instead of long Chinese hairpins) in her hair.

Visual stereotypes reflected the way Chineseness is inscribed on the gendered Chinese body; the past was symbolized by men dressed as coolies, the present by women dressed in cheongsam. The cheongsam is a particularly strong cultural marker, defining Chinese women rather than describing Chinese femininity. Not enough ethnic Chinese women could be mobilized to wear the many cheongsam required in the parade. Remarkably, Laiap and Tong’ap criticized the absence of Chinese women, or rather the fact that, as in the case of the long dragon, non-Chinese were the media of important emblems of Chineseness. Interestingly, a reverse gendering (Suriname as female, Chinese as male) was central to the Commemoration. The logo of the Commemoration was an outline of the borders of the Republic of Suriname, enclosing a toucan (symbolizing Suriname, and yin) on the left and a Chinese dragon (symbolizing China and yang) to the right. The combination of both animals was supposed to produce the character hao, meaning “good”.

43 The character 好 is made up of 女 (woman) on the left and 子 (child, son) on the right.

44 The dragon and toucan echoed the black and white parts of the yinyang symbol (太極圖):

The logo was developed by a Tong’ap artist and an academically trained immigrant, who is not Fuidung’on Hakka, but operates within the Tong’ap community. The yin/yang symbolism in the logo was an easy reference to ‘deep’ Chinese culture, but could also be read as a subtle attempt to redefine the Surinamese view of Chinese
The ethnic belonging produced by the parade was not fully inclusive. The rhetoric of Hakka identity was missing, because there were no cultural markers to portray it and because to everyone involved Hakka identity is secondary to Chineseness. The experiences of New Chinese were very marginal in the narrative produced in the parade, and Tong’ap concerns about cultural survival were not addressed. The performative Chineseness induced by anti-Chinese sentiments was very much evident, though the sentiments themselves were only obliquely challenged; the image of the Chinese shopkeeper was totally absent from the parade, and despite the name of the celebration there were no clear references to modern Chinese migration. A distinct New Chinese identity was lacking in the parade; cultural expressions of New Chinese could be read by the public as defining expressions of Chinese identity in general, while different Chinese migrant cohorts related to the performances as expressions of regional backgrounds (Overseas Chinese in the case of the lion dances, the Chinese loess-plateau in the case of the women acrobat drummers, the Southeast coast in the case of the *Fujian Luogu Dui*). Unambiguous references to PRC patriotic discourse were absent. The PRC embassy had supported the commemoration in many ways, not least by providing props and donations. The only clear reference to the Chinese Motherland was the flag of the PRC which flew next to the flag of the Republic of Suriname in the Kong Ngie Tong Sang compound, over a signboard with the logo of the Commemoration.

By the start of the millennium members of the ethnic Chinese elite realized that there would soon be unique opportunities to use Chinese ethnic identity to position themselves in the centre of migration and ethnic Chinese in Suriname. In Chinese philosophy *yin* and *yang* are complementary and opposite qualities that humans may observe in phenomena. *Yin* (陰, originally meaning ‘north slope; southern bank of a river; shady place; cloudy’) describes cold, water, wet, soft, slow, tranquil, substantial, etc. *Yang* (陽, originally meaning ‘south slope; northern bank of a river; sunny place; sunshine’) qualifies hot, fire, dry, hard, rapid, restless, insubstantial, etc. In the case of humans, women are *yin*, men are *yang*. Linking Chinese migrants to *yang* would refer to the historical fact that chain migrants were mostly men, while suggesting that Chinese are active. Portraying Suriname as *yin* would refer to the local concubines of the mi-grants and make Surinamese passive. The *yin/yang* symbolism generally suggests mutual transformation, though this was not implicit in the logo or the performances of ethnic identity in the celebration; it was never explicitly stated that Chinese migrants ever transformed into Surinamese-Chinese.
power, as well as to position themselves within the established Fudung’ on Hakka group as the focus of ‘Surinamese-Chinese’ identity. This elite of well-connected (in Chinese and Surinamese spheres) and successful entrepreneurs was supported by Laiap intellectuals and artists who had always had strong opinions on Chinese and Hakka identity, and the position of ethnic Chinese in Surinamese society. The opportunities as they saw it, were as follows: in October 2003 it would be 150 years since the first Chinese indentured labourers arrived in Suriname, and in May 2005 elections were to be held for the new Assembly and government. A narrative of Surinamese Chinese identity could be developed around the ‘Chinese ethnic birthday’ to rally Chinese support and force public recognition of Chinese ethnicity by the state through the logic of the Multiculturalism Myth. Successful politics of recognition would mean that a Chinese - Laiap - elite could legitimately claim a share of power in apanjaht coalitions which would be the inevitable result of the 2005 elections. The symbolic capital which would be produced during the Commemoration would also strengthen the claims of the Laiap elite to leadership within a larger Chinese community. The articulation of Chinese ethnic identity would proceed from the renegotiation of inter- and intraethnic boundaries triggered by encounters between established and newcomers, to the level of politics of identity and recognition.

The Celebration was in many ways a clear success. The creation of a ‘Chinese ethnic group’, or at least the image of a unified, essential and important Chinese ethnic group instead of the reality of fragmented groups and undefinable ethnic labels, was a political project of the organizers of the Commemoration, and that goal had been achieved. The Celebration was also a success as a response to the anti-Chinese sentiments linked to illegal immigration and the controversial Chinese transnational construction and logging companies. There were also concrete results with regard to Chinese ‘infrastructure’ for future use in apanjaht multiculturalist discourse; the Chinese had confirmed their recognized status as one of the Surinamese ethnic groups, and had acquired the props (Chinese markers in the Surinamese landscape, and new iconic cultural items such as the dragon) to negotiate their position in the multiculturalist discourse (i.e. the Mamio Myth). Apanjaht politics of recognition are not aimed at wrenching special rights from the State, and indeed the attitude of the Surinamese state to Chinese migrants remained unchanged after the celebrations. The State supported, or at least did not oppose, the national celebration of a Chinese ethnic identity, but neither encouraged the assimilation of
Chinese migrants as citizens nor consciously discriminated against them.

The organizers had succeeded in making the Parade inclusive, inviting anybody to join in, and presenting most aspects of the Chinese presence in Suriname, from mixed Chinese, descendents of Hakka indentured labourers, the PRC, transnational Chinese companies, to New Chinese immigrants, though perhaps this was not precisely what was originally intended. An image of a unified ‘Chinese community’, or at least of a monolithic ethnic group, had been successfully projected. Outsiders were generally unaware of alternative New Chinese claims in the parade; though it was not conceived as a conscious challenge, the Fujianese cultural performance introduced new and potent cultural markers to the Surinamese ethnic landscape. Tong’ap observers at least were now acutely aware that Chinese cultural identity in Suriname was no longer exclusively Hakka, Hongkongese, or even the homogenized Chineseness of globalized Chinese culture.

The collective identity and ethnic belonging presented in the celebrations provided elements that people could make into a basic script: Chinese in Suriname are settlers, not foreigners, respectable citizens, not temporary residents; They are the descendents of the nineteenth century Chinese indentured labourers; Chinese are integrated into Surinamese society without losing their authentic Chineseness, which is reflected by the many things that are familiar in Surinamese culture that were introduced by Chinese; Chinese are also integrated because many Surinamese have Chinese ancestors, so everybody is invited to claim Chinese roots; Chinese are successful and organized, and so on. This script fits into the broader multiculturalist discourse: because Chinese in Suriname can trace their roots back to bonded labour, they too suffered under colonial rule as involuntary immigrants and so their presence in Suriname is equally legitimate as that of Afro-Surinamese (seen as descendents of slaves) or as East Indian and Javanese (also descendents of bonded labourers). However, no ethnic Chinese (however one chooses to define such a person) can afford to place ideology before the practical issues of social networking in a small country such as Suriname. So the way the members of the Chinese minority actually conceive what it means to be Chinese is paradoxically irrelevant to the larger public articulations of ethnic belonging.