Chinese new migrants in Suriname: the inevitability of ethnic performing

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8. THE NEW CHINESE ROUTE TO PARTICIPATION: CHINATOWN POLITICS

The establishment and subsequent activities of New Chinese organizations in 2003 demonstrate that the local positioning and identity formation of the New Chinese Migrants in Suriname follows instrumental patterns of Surinamese ethnopolitics. This chapter will provide an outline of the organizations, which have shaped Chinese political life during the past fifteen years (and even earlier), and suggest that without the influx of New Chinese Migrants and their increasing influence, the long existing Hakka organizations would have had a central and dominant role in articulating Chinese interests in Surinamese politics. The new influx however breaks with the past in various respects.

As stated in Chapter 1 and the previous chapter, elites of minority segments such as the Chinese who are aspiring to a share of political power in Suriname need to play by the rules of apanjaht consociationalist politics. This requires elites to become ethnic by creating an ethnic group, gain recognition of that group as powerful or unavoidable, and position themselves as representatives of this group. Recognition as a representative of a small ethnic group can be achieved by joining an existing apanjaht party, ideally creating a special minority wing within that party. Setting up an independent ethnic party is only an option if there is a realistic chance of being considered a coalition partner by other apanjaht parties. The last option is to set up or join a non-political and non-government group as platform for recognition by the State instead of proceeding directly through the apanjaht parties.

This is so despite the fact that there are ethnic Chinese who have citizenship rights (such as the right to vote and stand for office) in Suriname, and who therefore have the possibility of more direct personal access to political power. Non-naturalized Chinese immigrants do not have direct access to political power, but can organize themselves in the face of the Surinamese State in such a way as to be recognized as representatives of an otherwise unreachable but important (through association with existing ethnic groups and therefore political power blocs) ‘community’. This is possible as the Surinamese State tends to treat any organization
outside the government as a representation of a segment of society. This misconception is often, intentionally or not, fostered by non-government organizations (NGOs) and special interest groups; local NGOs will find themselves embracing and championing particular disadvantaged groups when striving to access national and international funds, while special interest groups will legitimize their existence by referring to the weakness of the state. NGOs and special interest groups can be and are used as personal political platforms by individuals who wish to access the apanjaht consociationalist power centre. When this happens, ethnicity becomes a political resource for these organizations; consequently ethnicity comes to be located and generated within the NGOs / special interest groups.

Chinese associations in Suriname have been migrant institutions from their historical beginnings. Their primary goal is to provide services that the State does not provide to ethnic Chinese who do not have Surinamese passports or are not fully assimilated into Surinamese society. Moreover, the leaders of these organizations are often themselves migrants who were able to overcome barriers to full participation in Surinamese society. Chinese associations in Suriname resemble NGOs (more specifically Civil Society Organizations) and special interest groups (specifically business groups) in the way they are created by citizens for the interests of citizens outside direct government control and without government funding, and in their methods of lobbying and their stated goals of development and participation. These Chinese associations are huiguan (Kejia: fuigon) traditional Overseas Chinese institutions found all over the world which are primarily intended as mutual assistance associations in a predominantly migrant community. Ideally, activities were directed from a building which would combine multiple functions of clubhouse, community centre, banking and postal centre, crisis centre, symbolic centre of Chinese life, etc. (hence the term huiguan, ‘public building for associating’). Huiguan could be organized on the basis of various ideas, such as shared qiaoxiang, language, surname, or occupation.

Huiguan functioned, and still function, as gatekeepers between Chinese migrants and their host societies and between the Chinese State and the Overseas Chinese. This is one reason why huiguan are at the centre of Chinatown politics; positions on the boards of huiguan provides individuals with the opportunity to present themselves as ethnic elites within the Overseas Chinese group (qiaoling, ‘Overseas Chinese leadership’). The larger the huiguan is, the more prestigious it is supposed to be and the more status its leadership gain. As Li Minghuan noted in her study of modern hu-
guan in the Netherlands, gaining a leadership position is the main reason for joining a huiguan; being perceived as a representative of a Chinese association provides access to the State.¹

We will first look at the older Chinese institutions, then position the emergence of the new Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui in that context and look at the consequences this has had for Chinese political representation in Suriname.

### 8.1 The Development of Chinese Migrant Associations

Chinese migrants abroad copied adaptive strategies from internal migration traditions in China, the most important strategy of which was adaptive organizations that provide migrants and some longer-term residents with housing, employment and social support. Chinese adaptive organizations stressed either fraternal bonds of loyalty (for instance in ‘secret societies’) or social hierarchy.² The last are called huiguan. In a description of the various types of Chinese community organizations between 1925 and 1974, Hendrick Serrie called the huiguan of Southeast Asia ‘contractual subsistence organizations’, meaning that different functions and grounds for membership were unified in a single organization.³ Besides providing help with the basic needs of housing, jobs, and social support, huiguan facilitate contact with the homeland, provide emergency assistance (financial, medical, etc.), and mediate in conflicts involving migrants. Huiguan also provide a link to the Chinese ethnic economy, by managing the ethnic resource of shared group identity; they provide a stage for performative ethnic identity to boost solidarity and loyalty among migrants and emphasize the differences between them and their host society. As the goal of sojourning was to generate quick income to send remittances to dependents back home, Chinese migrants gravitated towards urban business activities, and consequently by about 1900 Chinese migrant organizations were geared to adaptation of highly visible migrants (economically or physically) in urban environments.⁴

As adaptive organizations of migrants, the services which huiguan provide remain relevant depending on the level of integration in the host society and the attitude of the individual migrant or

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¹ Li 1999b.
⁴ ibid.
longer-term resident towards the host society and his or her own background. Wickberg suggests three stages in the development of the needs of Chinese migrants. As immigrants, their needs are initially very basic: housing, employment, social support, defence, and contact with the homeland (i.e. the ability to send remittances home). As they become residents, a distinction emerges between earlier and more recent migrants - sinkeh and laokeh - and with that comes the idea of a ‘Chinese community’. Successful adaptation leads to increasing integration, which provides the residents (laokeh) with new opportunities in the host society. Finally, residents become settlers, and migrants (sinkeh) have to deal with a local-born generation of ethnic Chinese. Ethnic resources need to be actively maintained (e.g. Chinese education), and reconsidered in the face of the need to acquire the social and cultural capital (e.g. relevant skills and education, non-Chinese languages, networks that expand to incorporate non-coethnics). It is clear that settlers and their local-born children have different needs for adaptive organizations such as huiguan. As there are no longer any pioneering migrants at this stage, basic needs such as housing and employment are generated within the chain migration network. In some areas, such as the Philippines, huiguan and Chinatowns have even disappeared.

Ethnic economy theory provides parallel explanations for the development of Chinatown politics through migrant institutions. As noted earlier, ethnic ownership economies make the existence of ethnic communities likely, as they provide ethnic economies with labour, loan funds, and consumers, while establishing and maintaining notions of group belonging which allow ethnic economies to exist. In this context ethnic community formation equals the development of migrant institutions, which are basically ethnic self-help organization which help to reduce dependency on external entities and control. Such migrant institutions spur the ethnic ownership community by achieving horizontal and vertical integration. In the case of Chinese migrant entrepreneurs in Suriname, ethnic Chinese institutions provide horizontal integration (by allowing Chinese business owners to cooperate in choosing store locations, avoid competitive pricing, pool information, and engage in collective buying).

5 ibid.
8 Vertical integration is when a whole package of business services (e.g. credit, wholesale, maintenance, transportation, real estate, manufacturing, import/export,
Light and Gold note that “Ethnic communities and the organizations they create often reflect numerous class, ideological, regional, religious, gender, generational, and demographic differences included in the population.”

Ethnic economies provide important support for political leadership in many ways, ranging from office holding to informal efforts to influence the political process on a group’s behalf, while financial contributions from ethnic economies indirectly facilitate political participation, as they permit immigrants who are not eligible to vote to exert influence over local political decisions. In short, bounded ethnic communities linked to ethnic ownership economies can produce significant political autonomy and power for the ethnic elites who control the migrant institutions. Accordingly, migrant elites who are usually locally successful individuals, or individuals who already had high status in the migrant hometowns, put a high value in status systems for achieving leadership positions within the ethnic community. The development of migrant institutions in the context of ethnic ownership economies described by Light and Gold fits well with the development of Chinese associations in Suriname: “...immigrant and ethnic elites often devise social settings that allow them to enjoy social prestige. In so doing, not only do they create agreeable contexts, but in addition, they use these organizations as vehicles to celebrate their accomplishments and achieve their communal goals. In some case, the number of ambitious individuals who seek notoriety through involvement in organizations outstrips available positions. When this happens, institutions may proliferate.”

In Suriname, the ethnic Chinese elite is the set of individuals whose decisions largely shape the lives of the majority of people whose livelihoods are dependent on the Chinese ethnic ownership economy in Suriname, and who are particularly, but not exclusively, Chinese migrants. As is true for any elite, the behaviour of this minority is often short-sighted and self-serving, and can be motivated by the desire to extend their control over crucial resources. Most of their power is derived locally, usually from entrepreneurial success, though their status is realized both in local terms as well in the context of Chinese culture and Chinese migrant networks. The elite is divided along lines of migrants and local-born, etc.) is provided by coethnics. This however is not really applicable in the Chinese ownership economy in Suriname.

10 Light & Gold 2000: 177.
which limits the type of status that either group can derive in the context of the other, but as elites tend to communicate pragmatically in terms of accommodation rather than conflict, there is no fundamental split between the two. It is important to note that the Chinese elite - and for that matter, any of the Surinamese elites - is about power, not leadership. In fact, it can be argued that there are no individuals among the ethnic Chinese of Suriname who are accepted as leaders and representatives by a majority of the ethnic Chinese, despite the fact that the most ethnic Chinese in Suriname will admit the existence of a powerful elite centred on the Chinese organizations.

Huiguan thus persist as voluntary associations because they are a political resource. At the beginning of the twentieth century the attitude of the Chinese State towards emigrants changed, and it attempted to control emerging transnationalism by defining emigrants in terms of citizenship. Migrants officially became huaqiao ('Chinese sojourners', i.e. temporary migrants), and with the 1909 Citizenship Law the local-born children of huaqiao automatically became Chinese citizens by the principle of *ius sanguinis* regardless of any other citizenship they might acquire. Contact between these citizens abroad and the Chinese State was channelled through the huiguan, and umbrella organizations developed representing various huiguan as a unified entity to the Chinese State and the host society. Adaptive organizations became hierarchically linked institutions. The need to manage external relations through institutionalized channels meant that Chinese migrants now came to be organized as communities.

Huiguan were now the main platforms for ‘Chinatown politics’, the ultimate goal of which is the control of the institutional hierarchy. As Wickberg puts it: ‘Officers of umbrella organizations are automatically seen as Chinatown leaders, by both the community and interested outsiders.’ Chinatown politics are not transparently democratic, and skills and education do not guarantee that newcomers (the younger generation, including the local-born, and recent immigrants / *sinkeh*) rise to leadership positions. Membership of the boards of various huiguan is not exclusive and provides status, while splinter organizations readily develop as the losers.

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12 Umbrella organizations reflected different local conditions. In Singapore, where ethnic Chinese were commercially successful, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce was set up, whereas in the USA where ethnic Chinese were much less economically successful the umbrella organization was the Chinese Benevolent Society.
and newcomers in Chinatown politics create their own private platforms.\textsuperscript{15} Huiguan also proliferate through competition for community status. In 1950s Southeast Asia ‘Chinese communities’ were growing, and with more families and an increasing proportion of local-born, more schools, youth organizations, and sports clubs were created.\textsuperscript{16} There was a similar trend in Suriname during the same period, when youth organizations and sports clubs that catered to Laiap were set up. Globalization also provided huiguan with new relevance in the 1970s as networking hubs in transnational context and as channels for attracting Chinese investments, initially from Hong Kong and Taiwan since the 1970s and from the PRC since the 1990s.\textsuperscript{17}

Kuah-Pearce and Hu-DeHart also note that traditional huiguan everywhere gradually lost much of their original relevance as Chinese migrant communities matured, and that other forms of voluntary associations (collectively called \textit{shetuan}) took their place as hubs of networks and stages of identity formation.\textsuperscript{18} Shetuan are a modern take on the increasingly outdated concept of the traditional huiguan as a communal space and family in lieu of family for sojourners, and focus instead on the needs of modern Chinese migrants with regard to transnational networks and globalizing identities.\textsuperscript{19} New types of Chinese institutions are arising as newcomers (local-born and \textit{sinkeh}) are exploring new forms, such as Baptist churches.\textsuperscript{20} Currently, Chinese organizations have become too diverse for any single organization to be able to dominate Chinatown politics; the diversity reflects the diversity of Chinese migration and the fact that no organization can meet all the adaptive needs of all migrants. Recent migrant cohorts / \textit{sinkeh} are ‘...not bound by the forms of Chinese culture or the kinds of Chinese people present where they have settled.’\textsuperscript{21}

\subsection{8.2 The ‘Old Chinese’ Institutions}

The development of huiguan in Suriname closely matches the pattern established above. Fuidung’on Hakka sojourner settlement fol-

\textsuperscript{15} Wickberg 1994: 73-74.
\textsuperscript{16} Wickberg 1994: 76.
\textsuperscript{17} Wickberg 1994: 79.
\textsuperscript{18} Kuah-Pearce & Hu-DeHart 2006.
\textsuperscript{19} Liu 1998.
\textsuperscript{20} Wickberg 1994: 81.
\textsuperscript{21} Wickberg 1994: 81.
owed smoothly upon the period of indentured labour on the plantations, which meant that ethnic Chinese were initially rural. As outsiders in urban colonial society, the Chinese of Suriname followed the Overseas Chinese pattern of setting up mutual assistance associations to provide basic socio-economic support in their country of settlement. A huiguan was founded within twenty years of the arrival of the first indentured labourers from Southern China. Kong Ngie Tong, founded in 1880 and one of the oldest huiguan in Latin America, was based on common ties with the Fuidung’on qiaoxiang, though in practice members spoke the same dialect and occupied the same economic niche.

Kong Ngie Tong provided a number of services. It functioned as a reception centre for recent Fuidung’on immigrants and contained a hostel, restaurant, a folk-religion temple, as well as a shelter for elderly and destitute huaqiao (usually men). It managed a burial fund (with a cemetery at the corner of the Wanicastraat and the Steenbakkerijstraat), and facilitated informal financial and postal services for Fuidung’on migrants such as ROSCAs and money transfers to the qiaoxiang. Kong Ngie Tong Sang thus provided the basic services of a traditional huiguan: economic, political, cultural, social, and religious.22

As all Chinese in Suriname shared the same Fuidung’on Hakka qiaoxiang, the same Kejia language, and were virtually all merchants, Kong Ngie Tong was everything except a surname or lineage association.23 Right from the beginning Kong Ngie Tong

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23 Kong Ngie Tong does not seem to have been specifically set up as a hometown association (i.e. for people from the Fuidung’on area) or as an association for people with a common Chinese language or dialect (i.e. Kejia). There is some circumstantial evidence that links early 20th century Kong Ngie Tong to secret society-like ideas of non-kinship solidarity. Firstly, the choice of ‘Tong’ (hall) instead of a reference to huiguan in the name ‘Kong Ngie Tong’, is ambiguous in the sense that it could also have indicated a secret society (a ‘tong’ or Triad). Then there is the issue of the shrine to Guan Yu / Gan Di Ya that existed in Kong Ngie Tong up to 1930 (see paragraph 3.5). One of Guan Yu’s roles is that of patron of loyalty and solidarity, especially beyond the limits of kinship, which makes him a favorite deity of organizations such as military groups and secret societies. This matches, perhaps too neatly, stories of marriage taboos between Zong (PTH: Zhang 張), Liu (PTH: Liu 劉), and Gan (PTH Guan 關) in pre-WW2 Suriname, which are based upon the story of the Oath of the Peach Grove (桃園三結義) in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, the 14th century historical novel about the reunification of China in the 3rd century. In
was a platform for successful Fuidung’on Hakka entrepreneurs, who exploited their status as gatekeepers between the colonial government and the ethnic Chinese. Conflict between the entrenched leadership and younger individuals eager for a share in power precipitated the first major rift in the ethnic Chinese elite in Suriname. One group split off to form Chung Fa Foei Kon in 1928, which attempted a more transparent handling of Chinese interests. Kong Ngie Tong’s continued involvement in the illegal Chinese Piauw lottery led to open conflict with the colonial government in 1930, when the authorities closed the huiguan (see Paragraph 6.1). The huiguan was almost immediately revived as Kong Ngie Tong Sang (‘Kong Ngie Tong Reborn’). The reformed huiguan was no longer the default centre of Chinese life in Suriname or the only gateway between the Surinamese authorities and Chinese, as it shared the field with Chung Fa Foei Kon.

Chinese services in Suriname remained intact or were quickly reorganized, the one exception being the ‘temple’ in the old Kong Ngie Tang huiguan building, which was never replaced by a substantial public shrine. The temple went virtually completely undocumented, so one can only speculate on the reasons for its abandonment. One practical reason why it was not revived may have been decreasing numbers of adherents of traditional Chinese religions and increasing numbers of Tong’ap and Laiap Christians. The temple might also have played a role in Kong Ngie Tong (such as for initiation and membership rituals) which was no longer required in Kong Ngie Tong Sang. One could also speculate that the huiguan elite might have felt that avoiding anything even remotely offensive to the colonial elite such as Chinese popular religion outweighed any strategic benefits organized Chinese religion might provide; the temple, after all, was a potent symbol of the otherness of Chinese.

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the story, Liu Bei, Zhang Fei and Guan Yu pledge to become blood brothers in their mission to restore the Han dynasty under Liu Bei. This oath has been the inspiration for initiation ceremonies of many secret societies among Chinese migrants abroad. However, I heard no stories that even hint at initiation ceremonies in Kong Ngie Tong around the beginning of the 20th century.

24 Kong Ngie Tong Sang never really existed in written Chinese; the new huiguan simply remained 廣義堂, ‘Kong Ngie Tong’, in Chinese-language texts and huiguan functions such as celebrations of anniversaries remained as before. The temple, after all, was a potent symbol of the otherness of Chinese.

25 i.e. people who identified themselves as ‘Confucianist’, etc. The number of people who maintained Chinese religious practices, while identifying themselves in a different way, is unknown.
By 1943 a third organization was set up, Fa Tjauw Song Foei. Established in the pre-World War II period when the Chinese Nationalist government tried to recruit Overseas Chinese support for its cause and shape a modern Chinese identity, Fa Tjauw Song Foei hosted the Surinamese Branch of the Kuo Min Tang. Nationalist interest in Suriname was limited, and Fa Tjauw Song Foei was treated as simply another platform for the ethnic Chinese entrepreneurial elite. Limited as that elite was, Kong Ngie Tong Sang, Chung Fa Foei Kon and Fa Tjauw Song Foei soon shared board members, and in practice operated as a united block; in the Chinese-language newspapers the three huiguan are collectively called the ‘Three Organizations’ (san tuan). Rather paradoxically, pro-KMT association Fa Tjauw Song Foei was never traditionalist. Traditionalist leaders were a-politically focussed on the qiaoxiang homeland, which now happened to be in the PRC. As a hometown association, however, Kong Ngie Tong Sang was predominantly traditionalist.26

The ‘Three Organizations’ currently share responsibility for the Chinese burial ground Fa Kiauw Kung San, while the two main Chinese language newspapers Xunnan Ribao and Zhonghua Ribao are jointly published by Kong Ngie Tong Sang and Chung Fa Foei Kon, and the Chinese School (Zhongwen Xuexiao) is closely associated with Kong Ngie Tong Sang. The Chinese sports club ‘De Witte Lotus’ (The White Lotus, Bai Lian Hua) is formally independent, and is used for staging large public events by the huiguan.

Over time increasing numbers of migrants and increasing assimilation made for the establishment of more Chinese organizations. Most did not prove sustainable, such as the various youth organizations of assimilated and local-born Chinese. In fact none of the organizations founded by or specifically catering to Laiap have survived into the 2000s.27 One important reason why such organizations fail is that they lose their relevance when their members are no longer predominantly migrants or when they cannot facilitate the Chinese ethnic ownership economy. Laiap are neither migrants

26 Writing in the 1960s on the situation of ethnic Chinese, Willmott (1970: 123) recorded a similar pattern in the constitutional kingdom of Cambodia under King Norodom Sihanouk (1953-1969). However, far greater numbers, a much longer history, and greater ethno-linguistic variety among the Cambodian Chinese meant that far larger numbers of schools could reflect an increased interest in the PRC through increased focus on Mandarin via material from Hong Kong and Singapore (Willmott 1967: 85-89).

27 For instance organizations linked to Laiap: youth club Tsang Nen Foei, educational fund and networking club Moe Poen Sah, and Kooy Tjien Foei for intellectuals.
nor completely dependent on the Chinese ownership economy for their livelihoods.

In any case, links between the various institutions in Suriname became more important once the political ambitions of Chinese elites could no longer be based on leadership status within a single huiguan. In his study of Cambodian Chinese in the 1960s, Willmott describes how homeland loyalties were abandoned in favour of a more general Chineseness under the influence of the founding of PRC and a new Chinese nationalism. The importance of Cambodian huiguan (based on shared dialect, surnames, hometowns, etc.) diminished in favour of shetuan (sports clubs, schools, etc.), and “The overall pattern that emerges... is of a closely-knit network of associations, with interlocking leaders forming the links between them and arranging them into a rough hierarchy of power. [...] It should be noted that the distinction between political and administrative leaders can no longer be made.”

The development of shetuan in Suriname started before the arrival of New Chinese migrants. Kong Njie Tong Sang, the oldest Surinamese huiguan, provided the basic services of a traditional huiguan: economic, political, cultural, social, and religious. Its splinter organization in the 1930s, Chung Fa Foei Kon, focused was much more focused on Chinese culture and identity. Fa Tjauw Song Foei was strictly speaking not a traditional huiguan; its name (‘Association of Overseas Chinese Businessmen’ or even ‘Overseas Chinese Chamber of Commerce’) implied a more specialized purpose, and its link with the Taiwanese Kuo Min Tang made its focus clearly political. Shetuan now include further splinter groups in an almost biblical line of begettings, following internal conflicts within huiguan.

The ‘Old Chinese’ in Surinamese huiguan are dominated by a limited elite of generally successful entrepreneurs who could gain status in Chinese eyes as ‘leaders of the Overseas Chinese’ (qiaoling) by becoming huiguan leaders. This mirrors the situation described in the Netherlands, where the creation of new associations both provides status for the individual board members and creates opportunities for dealing with the government. In Suriname, any organization where ethnic Chinese congregate will be considered a kind of huiguan, and will be included in power negotiations of the huiguan establishment. Huiguan thus function as

28 Willmott 1967: 84.
30 Li 1999b.
gatekeepers between Chinese migrants and the Surinamese State on the one hand, and between huaqiao in Suriname and the Chinese State on the other.

This view of huiguan as representing a bounded ‘Chinese community’ is in many ways a holdover from colonial times. According to the initial bylaws of the first huiguan, Kong Ngie Tong, membership was strictly limited to Chinese (meaning Chinese nationals and thus ethnic Chinese immigrants), and access to the Kong Ngie Tong compound was forbidden to non-Chinese. The colonial authorities equated Kong Ngie Tong with the Chinese group, and assumed that segregation could confine any Chinese problem within the huiguan. Segregation is no longer acceptable in the modern Surinamese State, and no huiguan or any other socio-cultural organization in Suriname explicitly states in its Articles of Association that membership is exclusive to a particular ethnic group or that its activities bear no relation to the welfare of Surinamese society in general.

The huiguan institutionalized qiaoxiang ties between Fuidung’on Hakka huaqiao in Suriname and their hometowns, at least in the beginning. Huaqiao (i.e. Tong’ap) involvement with the qiaoxiang is increasingly a matter of individual power brokers, in their role of gatekeepers between the PRC and the migrants. Their relationship with the Fuidung’on hometowns is now less about qiaoxiang ties and is morphing into a semi-diplomatic relationship with local incarnations of the Chinese State. The two Chinese-language newspapers published by the Three Organizations (officially by Kong Ngie Tong Sang and Chung Fa Foei Kon), are an example of the development of the new relationship. As the only Chinese-language publication, the combined newspapers are the only medium available to various government levels in the PRC for reaching Surinamese huaqiao, and the only direct source of information (that is, not requiring translation) on the ‘Chinese community’ in Suriname available to them.31

All huiguan and shetuan in Suriname are elite-run organizations, but one can distinguish between organizations that function as platforms for ambitious individuals and institutions that are generally considered to be politically neutral by the ethnic Chinese public in Suriname (with regard to Chinatown politics as well as

31 The two papers are formally separate entities, though they share a board of editors. In practice, however, hardly anyone subscribes to just one, as they are published on alternating days and read as a single Chinese-language daily. Numbers of subscriptions vary around a thousand for each paper, which means that about a thousand households are subscribed to the combination of the two.
national partisan politics: the Chinese school, the Chinese burial ground fund, the ethnic Chinese churches). Though these last entities more closely resemble what one imagines community institutions should be like, one should keep in mind that the formation of a unified Chinese community in Suriname is hampered by the nature of huiguan organization as well as the pressure Chinese actors feel to avoid any suggestion of Chinese communalism in the modern Surinamese state.

Chinese texts in Suriname loosely define the local Chinese institutions, inflating or reducing the number of entities to suit their purpose, and include not only the huiguan but also anything that could pass for a shetuan, such as Chinese sections of the political parties, the two Chinese churches, the Chinese school and the Chinese Burial Ground Fund Fa Tjauw Koen Sang, and even provisional committees. While huiguan boards are either seen as community representatives or special interest groups by the Surinamese government, the boards in turn see ethnic Chinese as their ethnic constituency, to be depicted as broadly as possible in the face of the Surinamese political establishment. Huiguan boards thus have no real interest in democratic processes, which might endanger the positions of the leaders.32

However they are broadly defined, according to Surinamese law Chinese institutions were never formally set up as special interest groups or representations.33 Li notes that Chinese institutions are stichtingen (charitable foundations) under Dutch law, and operate as such in their relations with the Dutch authorities, though all parties involved portray the stichting as representing Chinese as a corporate group via its leadership board.34 Stichtingen have target groups, and verenigingen (associations) have members, and both forms allow for a measure of participation. In practice, however, there is no way to accurately gauge actual participation in the institutions – some Chinese organizations can appear to consist

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32 Li 1999b: 163.
Surinamese huiguan are increasingly intangible – some of the newest do not even actually have a guan, a public building. Instead of providing a venue for social interaction and negotiation of symbolic codes, the newer huiguan basically consist only of a leadership board.
33 Kong Ngie Tong Sang publicly, though indirectly, stated its goals and mission in its newspaper. Chairman Liu Yunping stated four main activities: facilitating ROSCA, publishing Xunnan Ribao, facilitating the Chinese school, ‘developing national diplomacy’ / organizing social activities. Representing the ‘Chinese community’ was not explicitly stated. XNRB, 23 January 2004: ‘二 0 0 二年廣義堂堂務報告’ (Report of Kong Ngie Tong activities in 2002).
34 Li 1999b: 214.
solely of a governing board. The institutions have always been dominated by entrenched Laiap and Tong’ap elites. On the one hand these elites unite in networks that link to other Surinamese elites, while on the other hand competition among elite factions for access to the State leads to fragmentation. Chairmen – there have never been any women chairpersons – derive prestige from their title, and strive to remain in office for as long as possible. There is a long tradition of huiguan board members defecting to start their own organizations, or to put it more cynically, their own boards. One result of this fragmentation was increased localization of Chinese institutions; it did not matter whether the first huiguan was transplanted or not, later institutions in Suriname were copies of earlier local institutions.

Chinese in Suriname speak of themselves as ‘visiting the huiguan’ rather than as ‘members’ of a Chinese vereniging and they certainly do not believe that the institutions represent them in any way. They turn to the organization that provides the best services, particularly the ability to facilitate fuicên (the local ‘Old Chinese’ ROSCA) as inconspicuously as possible, and the most successful and most prestigious Chinese institutions are those that are seen as the most neutral, without an overt political agenda. The huiguan establishment therefore performs a delicate balancing act; it derives status and prestige from its position as a neutral elite that is able to guarantee sustainable services, but finds influence and power in its ability to set up networks and political deals with other factions and its links to the government, the PRC embassy and the PRC resource extraction projects.

In Suriname, there has never been a united Chinese institution in which a unified Chinese position could be developed and internal conflicts could be managed outside the public view. Instead, the Chinese institutions of Suriname form loose networks of personal platforms. In 2003 the list of Chinese institutions in Suriname included Kong Ngie Tong Sang and the Chinese School and Chinese Burial Ground Fund associated with it, Chung Fa Foei Kon, Fa Tjauw Song Foei, Hua Chu Hui, Sociaal Culturele Vereniging Chung Tjauw, the Christian American Missionary Alliance church, and the Moravian Tshoeng Tjien Church. By 2005 ten huiguan had been mentioned in the Surinamese media: Kong Ngie Tong Sang, Chung

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35 Cf. Li 1999b.
36 Li (1999b) makes a similar point with regard to Dutch situation; the leadership of Dutch huiguan / shetuan derives status from their dealings with national and local government, but actual support from their ethnic constituencies is hard to quantify.
Fa Foei Kon, Fa Tjauw Song Foei, Fa Tjauw Foei Kon, Hua Cu Hui, Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui, Hainan Tongxiang Hui, Fujian Tongxiang Hui, Guangzhou Tongxiang Hui, Dongguan Tongxiang Hui. The Chinese wing of the NPS coalition partner, Fa Tjauw, functions as a huiguan in practice. Three other organizations were routinely added in list of ‘the Chinese organizations’ / shetuan: Stichting Oriental Foundation, the CAMA church, the Tshoeng Tjien Church. De Witte Lotus sports club, the Chinese school, and the Fa Tjauw Koen San burial fund are in practice subsidiaries of the san tuan.

Not unexpectedly, new organizations legitimize themselves to the Chinese public in quite different ways, as this report of the founding of Chung Tjauw Fu Li Foei shows:

The idea behind Chung Tjauw Fu Li Foei flowed from the strong demands of the average Overseas Chinese. [We] Overseas Chinese have witnessed how Suriname has become stable in many areas and circumstances have developed, indistinctly, like ‘viewing flowers in the mist’. Unfortunate accidents can strike at any time, yet many Overseas Chinese are ignorant of the law, and not too smart when it comes to exercising their legal rights. ... That is why it was recommended that a charity be set up that is legitimate, perfect, just, imbued with a strong sense of responsibility and urgency, in order to buffer insecurities which may exist and provide solutions to concrete problems, and also to engage a good and resourceful jurist to help Overseas Chinese with relevant legal issues and other complications. [...] Chung Tjauw will pay close attention to the insecurities and hardships of its members and Overseas Chinese, and actively assist any legal and good welfare activities in this city. With a mind to the upcoming parliamentary elections, Chung Tjauw will make all effort to select a Chinese entrepreneur who will actively and selflessly work for us Chinese [wo huaren], will listen to us Chinese and also understands Chinese. This entrepreneur will join the NPS for the parliamentary elections, and will then fight for the rights and interests of us Chinese, and raise our political position. Especially the old problem we Chinese have with regard to natu-

37 Stichting Oriental Foundation was primarily intended as a corporate body to facilitate the organization of the celebrations of ‘Chinese Immigration Day’, particularly with regard to permits, titles to land, etc. It is not an adaptive institution, as it was not set up by migrants to meet the requirements of migrants, and there is no membership in the sense of a huiguan. Its chairperson, Carmen Tjin A Djie, eventually claimed that Stichting Oriental Foundation was “the coordinating body that linked all Chinese organizations.” (De Ware Tijd 21 October 2008, ‘Herdenking Chinese Immigratie met veel pracht en praal’ (Chinese Immigration commemorated with much pomp and circumstance)).
ralization will then finally be resolved. This is the purpose and goal of Chung Tjauw, which is concurrently the common struggle of the goal of uniting all the Chinese organizations and all Surinamese ethnic groups that treat us as equals.

In the final analysis, Chung Tjauw is still in its infancy; to mature it needs the support of all Chinese institutions and beneficial social forces, and for its work in the future it relies on criticism and guidance from all sides.

It is hard to imagine that any Chinese audience would read the text literally and agree that there were no legal and legitimate Chinese organizations in Suriname. Chung Tjauw's purely political goal (an ethnic Chinese in the National Assembly) was not achieved in the 2000 elections, and the organization became for all intents and purposes just another huiguan.

**8.3 The Presentation of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui**

Up to 2004 there were no specific organizations for New Chinese. This allowed the Fuidung'on Hakka huiguan establishment to present itself as gatekeepers to the New Chinese while at the same time marginalizing their participation. The huiguan had been established to aid *sinkeh* in overcoming the difficulties of accessing Surinamese society and the State, and the New Chinese were simply the latest *sinkeh* cohort to become dependent upon huiguan for help. However, helping New Chinese was a dilemma for the huiguan; on the one hand it was in the interests of the leaders to limit public association with New Chinese migrants due to increasing anti-Chinese sentiments in Suriname, but then on the other hand there was the opportunity to gain influence at the highest levels as the government was desperately trying to find a gatekeeper for the New Chinese. In their turn the Fuidung'on Hakka huiguan were fostering New Chinese gatekeepers by dealing with power brokers among the emerging New Chinese entrepreneurial middle class behind the scenes.

Without adaptive organizations of their own, and with their ethnic ownership economy not yet fully developed, New Chinese migrants initially had no choice but to turn to the huiguan and shetuan of the 'Old Chinese' to obtain specific services which they

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38 ZHRB 5 August 1999, ‘中僑福利會正式成立’ (Chung Tjauw Fu Li Foei formally established)
required. However, without personal networks that included Fuding’on Hakka sponsors, New Chinese migrants who found themselves with money problems could only throw themselves at the mercy of ‘the Chinese community’. The following is an example of a call for help in Xunnan Ribao, the newspaper of the Kong Ngie Tong Sang huiguan:

Dear Chinese of Suriname, greetings!
I am a woman from Tianjin\textsuperscript{39}, my name is Z.Y. I have lived in Suriname for four years now. Last year I discovered I was in the early stages of cancer of the womb, but because there was no money I could not start timely treatment and now I’m in the late stage. The doctor said: Go back to China as soon as you can! The cancer has now spread, and I need to go back to see my family, if I wait any longer it will be too late. However, the little money I have was spent on treatment, high medical expenses have left me destitute. I have not been able to do anything for three months, my womb constantly hurts and leaks blood and pus, and I can only wait for Death to come for me. I do not have the means to buy a plane ticket to go back home.

Oh Heaven! I cast my eyes to Heaven every day and weep, who can help me! I never thought I would die young, I don't want to leave this world, I pray for life. In my moment of despair I thought of Kong Ngie Tong Sang where there is Chinese blood like mine, I thought of the Overseas Chinese whose skin is yellow and eyes and hair are black like mine, they could help me, help me and throw me a lifeline. Now that I lack the strength to manage my shop, everything in the shop has been stored in the house of a friend. There are two freezers, one refrigerator, cloth and merchandise. If anyone would be kind enough to buy them I would be eternally grateful.

Dear people, kind sirs, please present payment in cash to Y.X.X., at the Chinese School.\textsuperscript{40}

Money issues (funds for starting up business, financial help for individuals in trouble, etc.) are the most basic pragmatic reason behind the creation of specific hometown associations. New Chinese migrant cohorts with their own adaptive organizations could generate financial assistance for coregionalists in trouble and organize

\textsuperscript{39} Third largest city in the PRC after Beijing and Shanghai, one of four municipalities with provincial-level status. It borders Beijing Municipality along the Bohai Gulf.

\textsuperscript{40} XNRB 26 May 2005, ‘尊敬的蘇理南的華人華僑，您們好!’ (Dear Chinese of Suriname, greetings!). Initials have been substituted for the two personal names in the original text.
ROSCAs to provide start-up capital for enterprises in Baihuo Business.

The performance of the 2003 Commemoration would seem to have settled the role of New Chinese in the Surinamese narrative of Chineseness: New Chinese were the latest incarnation of Chinese migration, and secondary to the established Fuidung’on Hakkas. In the Commemoration, the Fuidung’on Hakka huiguan elite had reaffirmed its role as interpreter and representative of things Chinese in Suriname. However, this image of Fuidung’on Hakka hegemony did not quite tally with the actual situation in the field. Wenzhounese individuals and members of the huiguan establishment had been networking behind the scenes for some time for the purpose of diplomacy towards the Surinamese authorities and the PRC embassy, as well as access to transnational business networks. Wenzhouese entrepreneurs had been discussing setting up an organization for Wenzhounese immigrants since 1998, and increasing numbers of immigrants from Zhejiang Province provided at least the illusion of a substantial power base for a budding New Chinese elite. As stated in Chapter 4, most Zhejiangese immigrants are from Wencheng, with smaller numbers from Lishui, both in Wenzhou Municipality. There are some people from other areas in Zhejiang Province (such as Hangzhou, and including Wu-speakers from the Shanghai area), but these have no stable migration networks in Suriname. Eventually *Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui* (Zhejiang Province Hometown Association) was established on 30 October 2003 as a *stichting* / Foundation under Surinamese law under the name *Stichting Zhejiang* (the Zhejiang Foundation). Its Board consisted of nine individuals, one of whom was Yu Lihong, one of the few women in the leadership of any huiguan in Suriname.

The new huiguan placed an advertisement in the Chinese papers to remind everyone of Zhejiangese extraction to attend the celebration of the Lunar New Year. In the same paper the huiguan leadership was informed of a formal invitation from the *Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui* to the event. Subsequently, on the evening of 22 January 2004, the *Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui* was launched during an event consisting of a public presentation of the new huiguan to selected guests officials, followed by a variety show. A substantial number of Zhejiangese attended (over one thousand according to

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41 Articles of Association of *Stichting Zhejiang*, composed by Mr. Jan Currie, Ll.M. Not only is Yu Lihong the only woman on the Board of *Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui*, she is also the only one of the eight members who has Surinamese nationality.
the *Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui*[^43]. The official guests were seated in a private section right in front of the stage. President Venetiaan was unable to attend, but many upper-level officials of the ‘Chinese’ Ministry of Trade and Industry were present. In Zhonghua Ribao of 29 January, *Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui* reported that besides the Minister of Trade and Industry, the Minister of Defence had also been invited, as well as members of the huiguan establishment, diplomats of the Chinese embassy, and representatives of China Zhong Heng Tai Suriname N.V.

PTH was the main language of the event, with some attempts at translation into Dutch and Sranantongo. No other varieties of Chinese were spoken. Minister Michael Jong Tjien Fa of Trade and Industry started with a salutation in Mandarin, but the main body of his speech was in Sranantongo. As a government representative he spoke of the important cultural and socio-economic contributions of ethnic Chinese to Suriname, and stressed the importance of foreign investment, not only of companies such as China Zhong Heng Tai, but also of small private enterprises such as those of New Chinese migrants. His speech matched that of the Chinese ambassador, Hu Shouqin, who restated the good relations

between the Republic of Suriname and the PRC, and praised the Chinese community in Suriname for its social organization on behalf of the people’s of both countries. Representing Kong Ngie Tong Sang, deputy chairman Ling Nget Tet spoke in Mandarin of the unity of Chinese in Suriname, and the image of Chinese as loyal Surinamese citizens. Zheng Guoqing, chairman of the Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui preparatory committee, said that “When discussing economic matters, Zhejiang Province necessarily comes to mind, and one cannot avoid speaking of Wenzhou and Yiwu, as China’s largest commodity marketplace is located there, and from there Chinese sojourners have spread over the whole world.”44 The goal of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui was to contribute to the socio-economic development of Suriname and to be of service to the Surinamese people, while striving for “unity, charity, cooperation and mutual love”.

The event was a staged performance, but it was very difficult to determine which elements of the choreography were planned for this particular event, and which were simply conventional. The formal welcome of the invited guests was a completely conventional display, staged in plain view and facing the front of the hall; the Members of the Board of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui stood in line to the left side of a red carpet, individually welcoming each government official and huiguan representative. Zhejiangese visitors (shopkeepers and their families) were not formally welcomed, but were left to find a seat at any of the tables and grab a bottle of water from a shrink-wrapped stack. This contrasted sharply with the public statement of wealth at the beginning of the event: a string of fireworks stretching the length of five cars. The Zhejiangese visitors served as a prop for the actors in their dialogue with the target audience of government officials and Hakka huiguan establishment, providing the image of a Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui constituency. However, the Zhejiangese were the targeted audience at those moments when huaqiao conventions and the particular script of the performance seemed to compel the Hakka huiguan establishment to a public reversal of dominance.

PTH was a rational choice as the language for this particular event and as the only variety of Chinese that might be considered common to all Chinese immigrants. But as such this is also a globalizing convention, a symbol of the unity of all Chinese everywhere, and the power of China. So the Kejia speakers were up on the stage doing their best to carry their speeches in PTH, betraying

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44 Speech reproduced in ZHRB 29 January 2004: ‘籌委會主席鄭國慶先生致詞’ (Speech by Mr. Zheng Guoqing, chairman of the preparatory committee).
Figure 18: Members of the board of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.

Figure 19: Dragon dance during inauguration ceremony. Photo: Ranu Abhelakh.
a certain marginality to modern Chinese culture and affirming that PTH and not Kejia was the Chinese language of Suriname. But the choice of PTH was also a part of the hidden New Chinese transcript that was becoming briefly visible and evident. A Tong’ap informant later reported how she had been approached by the preparatory committee, who were searching for interpreters who could provide live translations in Dutch and PTH. The representative had dismissed her suggestion that Kejia and Sranantongo might be more realistic and efficient. He pointed out that Kejia was not classy enough in formal Chinese situations, nor was Sranantongo good enough for formal Surinamese settings.

The most significant performance was the dragon which was originally used in the Commemorative Parade. It was carried and operated by Wenzhounese male dancers, and was accompanied

45 The language they used could better be described as ‘Mandarin’, as it was a mix between the Taiwanese (Guoyu) and PRC (PTH) standards.
46 The informant was a Hong Kong Chinese translator with whom I regularly exchanged translation work from third parties. What should have been limited to handing over text at the gate usually developed into extensive gossip sessions on Chinese matters in Suriname. On this occasion a remark about the Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui event started her into a long complaint about the haughty ‘zetgongzai’ who thought Kejia beneath them. Her reasoning with regard to the use of Kejia was flawed, however; Kejia had never been acceptable as the language of formal occasions, even during Old Chinese events (see Chapter 3).
by a *suona* shawm and percussion. The Zhejiangese Dragon Dance functioned to start the Spring Festival celebrations, but its use had wider significance. First, it was an internal marker that distinguished Zhejiangese from the older Fuidung’on Hakka migrants; though the dragon was immediately recognizable to everyone in Suriname as something ‘traditionally Chinese’, only the Chinese audience interpreted it as distinctly different from Pearl River Delta culture. Cultural events organized by the older huiguan usually start with a Kilin Dance (Kejia: *mu kilin*, ‘dancing the Unicorn’) or Lion Dance (Kejia: *mu suzai* ‘dancing the Lion’), originally a purification ritual. Hakkas in Suriname will identify Kilin Dances as originally Hakka, and Lion performances as Cantonese. They are not distinguished in the Surinamese Dutch term *drakendans* (‘dragon dance’), but an actual Dragon Dance had only been performed once before, on 10 October 1953 during Double Tenth Day (see Paragraph 7.1.2). The Dragon Dance was a marker in that particular context. However, when asked whether a Dragon Dance was Hakka or not, Tong’ap informants explained that it was a broader Chinese tradition. To them, a Dragon Dance (Kejia: *mu liung*) signalled a grander public event than the presence of a Kilin or Lion. They explained that a Dragon Dance was rare in Suriname because the dragon was more expensive and required more people to operate.

That is why the dragon also served to signal social cohesion. Not only does a Dragon Dance require more people, it also involves more complex choreography and preparation than Kilin / Lion Dances, and all the young men carrying the snaking beast rather than just two people bearing a Kilin / Lion suggested a higher level of mobilization and organization. More complex choreographies, featuring more than one animal with more agile routines, can also make Kilin / Lion dances signal social cohesion and the ability to mobilize a constituency, but no such intricacy was ever achieved in Suriname. Finally, the Dragon Dance signalled cultural authenticity. Kilin / Lion Dances in Suriname are accompanied by percussion only, and these gongs and drums are actually the only traditional Chinese musical instruments that are still played in Suriname. This particular Dragon Dance was accompanied by percussion and a *suona*—shawms that loudly and publicly call attention to some public event in a Chinese community, such as village festivals and traditional bridal parades. There is no evidence that they had ever been used in Suriname prior to this event.

The variety show that formed the second half of the event was not remarkable, in the sense that it was very much like the variety shows which took place during the annual public celebration
of the Moon Festival in De Witte Lotus Sports Club. ‘Pure traditional Chinese’ culture alternated with more modern interpretations of Chineseness from the PRC (patriotic Chinese Minority dances by students of the Chinese School, celebrations of modernity through karaoke performances of Chinese pop music, etc.). There was nothing specifically Wenzhounese about the variety show; what was apparent were Chinese patriotism, urban culture, modernization, and consumerism. The Wenzhounese audience who had patiently waited through the official first part clearly enjoyed the show. The whole event was filmed and broadcast later that evening on ATV, spreading the news beyond the confines of the Chinese language to the wider Surinamese community, and beyond the ability of the Fuidung’on Hakka establishment to control.47 A few days later two of the speeches were published in the Chinese-language media.48

The elite of the ‘Old Chinese’ organizations who had shown obvious non-verbal signs of discomfort during the event itself, initially chose to ignore the new organization in Dutch-language contexts, but were careful to include its name in Chinese-language contexts.

Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui continues to organize a Spring Festival celebration in the same location, which consistently reaches the mainstream media. In February 2005, the start of Year of the Rooster was celebrated by Chung Fa Foei Kong, Fa Tjauw Song Foei, Kong Ngie Tong Sang, Chung Tjauw / Fa Tjauw and Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui, but the Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui event in Flamboyant Park was the only one that was extensively covered in De Ware Tijd.49 Zheng Guoqing, now clearly identified as the chairman of the huiguan, said that they currently had 3,000 members, and that their main goal was to assist integration into Surinamese society, while also looking out to help non-Chinese Surinamese. Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui was legitimate from the start, not because of its leadership but by public acceptance of it as a portal to the world of the New Chinese.50 A small group of Wen-

47 ATV is a private television station, established on the ground of the Surinamese telephony provider TELESUR. The ATV broadcast was not provided with subtitles, however.


49 De Ware Tijd, 10 February 2005: ‘Zhe Jiang [sic] luidde jaar van de Haan feestelijk in’ (Zhe Jiang festively welcomed the Year of the Rooster); 11 February 2005: ‘Fotoverslag viering Chinees nieuwjaar’ (Photo-reportage of Chinese New Year).

50 There is, of course, no way to measure the actual Wenzhounese support for Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui. One indication is an advertisement published in ZHRB on 19 February 2004 to thank donors who contributed funds to the event in Flamboyant Park. Such advertisements are a proven way to mobilize financial support by mani-
zhounese entrepreneurs with the right connections and enough financial backing had successfully positioned itself as grass roots representatives of New Chinese. The message was clear: Chinese collective identity would no longer be the monopoly of Tong’ap and Laiap.

8.4 A New Order

The establishment of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui signalled another change in the way Chinatown politics would be conducted. With the arrival of New Chinese, the linguistic and cultural situation within the Chinese group in Suriname became unusually complex, a complexity that existed for much longer in, for example, Southeast Asia. The presentation of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui meant that the Wenzhounese positioned themselves as a coherent group on the basis of shared origin in the same Chinese Province, but it also placed the earlier huiguan in a Hakka / Fuidung’on / Kejia-speaking group; ethnic Chinese immigrants appeared to be developing sub-ethnic identities by defining themselves as belonging to different tongxiangbang (“coregionalist group”). People might have been aware of the new cleavages within the Chinese group (the old ones being the huaqiao distinctions between Tong’ap (sinkeh and laokeh) and Laiap), but were not used to think of Chineseness in Suriname in terms of bang. The average Chinese is not necessarily aware of different kinds of Chinese, as Constable notes.51 In any case Hakka identity as a particular type of Chinese identity was not strongly developed in Suriname in the absence of people from other Chinese backgrounds.

The bang (“group; gang; party”) concept is used by Chinese in Southeast Asia to describe the tendency of immigrants from China to organize themselves on the basis of shared language, native place, or other criteria such as surname / kinship, friendship, or occupation.52 Elsewhere the concept of bang is firmly institutionalized; it is particularly well developed in Singapore, where British colonial authorities attempted to use it to manage Chinese society

51 Constable 1994.
52 Suyama 1962.
and control the effect of the significant influx of Chinese immigrants in the 18th century. Originally based on linguistic and territorial distinctions, bang organizations became the institutional basis of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC, formed in 1906), which functions as an inter-bang forum, the ‘supreme Chinese association for consultation, cooperation and group contribution to the well-being of the Chinese society’, with its leaders recognized as community leaders.

Subtleties in the wording of advertisements and announcements in the Chinese-language media following Chinese New Year in 2004 suggest that the people behind Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui were aware of the impact of their choices. When Kong Ngie Tong Sang was established all Chinese in Suriname as we saw were coming from the Fuidung’on area, and the huiguan was a hometown association in all but name. The huiguan that ultimately derived from it, such as Chung Fa Foei Kon and Hua Cu Hui, shared its Fuidung’on cultural and linguistic roots. The Chinese organizations that were organized around a political agenda, such as Chung Tjauw / Fa Tjauw (the Chinese wing of the NPS), also operate through what are basically elite networks of established Fuidung’on Hakka immigrants and their descendents. The writers of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui texts in the Chinese newspapers followed Hakka precedent by grouping Kong Ngie Tong Sang, Chung Fa Foei Kon and Fa Tjauw Song Foei together as ‘the three huiguan’ (san qiaotuan), followed by Hua Cu Hui and Chung Tjauw Fu Li Hui. This practice originally served to distinguish the ‘original’ huiguan (mutually related through their establishments) from the upstart organizations, but now gave the distinct impression of distinguishing the Hakka organizations and their political derivatives from the Wenzhounese organization – an impression that could easily have been avoided by individually listing the various huiguan.

Other New Chinese huiguan soon followed. There already had been a number of ad hoc Fujianese organizations, for instance the Fujianese Percussion Group (Fujian Luogu Dui) which was set up in September 2003 for the Commemoration Parade (see Chapter 7). There was also the short-lived Sociaal-culturele vereniging Xin Hua Lin Liangxin (the Xin Hua Lin Liangxin Socio-Cultural Association), organized around people from Xianyou County in Fujian (see Paragraph 4.1.2). By March 2005, when the campaigns for the 2005 national elections reached the Chinese-language media, two

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new hometown associations (i.e. tongxianghui) started being mentioned. The *Fujian Tongxiang Hui* (Fujian Province Hometown Association, apparently not dominated by any particular qiaoxiang) and the *Hainan Tongxiang Hui* were also named. Neither organization could be reached at a specific address, only via telephone numbers of private individuals. Little else is known about them; their leadership preferred to remain in the shadows, and their presence was never formally or diplomatically announced to the Suri-namese public or authorities.

In April 2005 the establishment of the *Hainan Huaqiao Lianhe Hui* (Alliance of Overseas Hainanese) was formally announced in the Chinese newspapers. Its self-description (“The ‘Alliance of Overseas Hainanese’ is a charitable organization established around a core of Hainanese living in Suriname, in which organizations of new immigrant Hainanese are united.”) confirmed rumours that at least three different groups of Hainanese were attempting to set up organizations. An advertisement two months later announcing the upcoming Ninth World Conference of Hainanese Organizations suggested that the Alliance was exploring transnational linkages, and that the *Hainan Tongxiang Hui* was a member of the Alliance. The *Hainan Huaqiao Lianhe Hui* was never again mentioned in the Chinese-language media, whereas both the *Hainan Tongxiang Hui* and the *Fujian Tongxiang Hui* are consistently acknowledged by the three main Hakka huiguan in public advertisements and invitations to huiguan events.

One would expect to see more evidence of network links between New Chinese organizations in Suriname with Chinese migrant institutions abroad. Xin yimin / New Migrant organizations are usually linked to various other organisations and PRC state institutions in complex ways. In Suriname such network links are kept out of the public eye, and only rarely surface in Chinese-language media, for instance in the example of the Hainanese huiguan above. The New Chinese organizations are copies of local patterns: they are patriarchal organizations whose activities are economical (pro-
tecting and advancing the commercial interest of their shopkeeper constituencies), political (forging links to the Surinamese authorities while settling problems and conflicts out of sight of the same authorities), cultural (organizing ROSCAs, etc.), and social (organizing entertainment). 60 Like the Fuidung'on Hakka organizations, they are also shetuan because of the necessity to build and facilitate local and transnational networks; all shetuan in Suriname are responses to the needs of Chinese migrants in Suriname. The ‘Old Chinese’ huiguan have become hometown associations by default because of the way the New Chinese intruded, but qiaoxiang ties are not the primary goal of the old huiguan. Moreover, despite of being hometown associations, the New Chinese huiguan focus on the link with the ‘Chinese homeland’ – the PRC – rather than developing qiaoxiang links.

It seems clear that the New Chinese huiguan, or in any case the Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui, is a continuation of the adaptive strategy of Chinese institutions in Suriname, but it is less clear if their activities are copies of ‘Old Chinese’ models. Fuidung’on Hakka ROSCAs are highly institutionalized and thoroughly localized ‘bidding associations’ (see Chapter 1, footnote 11). Wenzhounese migrants were already familiar with the concept of ‘bidding associations’ as one of a wide range of informal near-banking mechanisms. During the time of economic reform, local government was supportive of the private sector in Wenzhou. In the mid-1980s the vast majority of credit in Wenzhou originated from a wide range of non-governmental sources, from 95% at the high end to 80% at the informal end. Whereas ROSCAs were initially typical sources of credit, by the early 1990s the development of more capital-intensive private enterprises was matched by the appearance of financial mechanisms such as shareholding, pawnshops, pyramid schemes, underground money houses, privately owned banks, etc. 61 As a source of informal credit, ROSCAs in Wenzhou were not highly institutionalized, and did not require organizers or participants to have strong political ties. 62 Wenzhounese could therefore have transplanted any type of ROSCA to Suriname, but because those I spoke to were very reluctant to say anything about them, I

60 Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui framed its goals in humanitarian terms: mobilizing financial support for compatriots in dire straits, and providing care for the elderly, based on the “most excellent Chinese tradition of mutual cooperation and love”. ZHRB 29 January 2004: ‘籌委會主席鄭國慶先生致詞’ (Speech by Mr. Zheng Guoqing, chairman of the preparatory committee).
61 Tsai 2002: 130.
62 Tsai 2002: 163.
was unable to compare the Wenzhounese credit systems with established Fuidung'on Hakka mechanisms.

Financial assistance is the most obvious activity of the New Chinese organizations, either by providing a platform, trust and financial backing for ROSCAs, or by organizing fundraising drives. For example, on 6 January 2005, the *Fujian Tongxiang Hui* placed an advertisement in Zhonghua Ribao to acknowledge 66 contributions totalling SR$ 5,622 and US$ 650 for the cremation of a murdered shopkeeper from Jitian County in Fujian Province. In April and May 2005 *Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui* raised funds via the Xunnan Ribao and Zhonghua Ribao for a Chinese in Nickerie District whose shop was destroyed in a fire and lost almost US$20,000. In four advertisements, *Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui* acknowledged donations from 52 individuals of various Chinese regional backgrounds, along with donations from 8 businesses (of which 7 *maoyi gongsi*) and 6 huiguan totalling SR$ 19,170 and US$ 3,620. Another kind of financial service which Chinese adaptive organizations provide is help with hawala-type remittances. In the twentieth century, Fui-

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63 ZHRB, 6 January 2005, ‘訃告’ (Obituary notice). The advertisement states that the deceased was ‘murdered by a cruel non-Chinese’. The term I translate as ‘non-Chinese’ was 鬼佬 (Mandarin: guilao; more commonly known in the West in the Cantonese pronunciation gwailo). The text is also interesting because of the name heading the list of donors, usually the place reserved for the chairperson of the huiguan who is behind such an initiative. The personal name Liangxin is the same as that of Lin Liangxin of ‘Xin Hua Lin Liang Xin Socio-Cultural Association’, which might suggest a link between the Fujian Tongxiang Hui and that defunct organization.

64 Advertisements in ZHRB, 14 April 2005; XNRB, 18 April 2005, 9 May 2005, 27 May 2005, ‘浙江同鄉會’ (*Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui*). The contributing huiguan were: *Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui* (US$ 1,000), *Fujian Tongxiang Hui* (SR$ 1,000), *Hainan Tongxiang Hui* (SR$ 500), Fa Tjauw Foei Kon (Nickerie, SR$ 1,000), Fa Tjauw Song Foei (SR$ 1,000), Kong Ngie Tong Sang (SR$ 1,000), *Hainan Huaqiao Lianhe Hui* (SR$ 1,000). Contributions from these five huiguan would signal status-elevating public recognition of *Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui*.

65 Hawala (from Arabic حوالہ *hawāla*: a bill of exchange or a promissory note) is a system of remittances originating in Muslim South Asia. It is an efficient, uncomplicated, and informal (in the sense of undocumented as well as untaxed) system of legitimate remittances from migrants to their dependents back home that works by transferring money without actually moving it. Because hawala is based on trust it is a closed system that relies on ethnic resources to bind clients and brokers in a migrant network. Like any other remittance system it can play a role in money laundering. Agents in the hawala network eventually need to move the funds which is owed between them, and since many hawala transactions (legitimate and illegitimate) are conducted in the context of import/export businesses, the manipulation of invoices by hawala brokers (undervaluing and overvaluing) is a very common means of settling accounts after the transactions have been made. If the
dung’on Hakka adaptive institutions provided institutional help with regard to remittances (called qiao hui: ‘sojourners remittances’, or simply hui kuan: ‘remittances’, in written Chinese of the time). Remittances (from huāqiāo in Suriname to huājuàn in their homeland) became a marginal issue for the Fuidung’on Hakkas as time progressed. Because stakeholders rely on the informal and closed nature of migrant remittance systems, it is unclear which New Chinese migrant cohorts use them, what role the New Chinese adaptive institutions play, and if New Chinese remittance systems are in any way related to illegal activities (tax evasion, human trafficking, smuggling of goods and funds, etc.).

The legal framework of the New Chinese huīguàn is also fully local. Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui was formally registered as a stichting / foundation under the name Stichting Zhejiang (Zhejiang Foundation), simply because that has proven the easiest way to formalize an organization under Surinamese law. In that respect it resembles the organizations that have split away from the three san qiaotuān. Like those more recent Fuidung’on Hakka organizations the Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui, Hainan Tongxiang Hui and Fujian Tongxiang Hui do not carry the suggestion of an actual building (guàn) of their own and in their names.66 Any New Chinese who wished to establish a new huīguàn could be said to have little choice but to explicitly identify with such an organization as a hometown association. Thus they identify themselves as a distinct bang, if they want to be credible in the eyes of their compatriots. However, no new huīguàn legitimized itself to the general public as reflecting bang cleavages. Instead, linguistic and cultural differences were downplayed, and new huīguàn legitimized themselves to non-Chinese as representatives of ethnic Chinese; the significance of cleavages was minimized, and the vague term ‘Chinese’ was consciously employed.

The new huīguàn are hometown associations (tongxianghui) in a rather broad sense; none are named after the actual qiaoxiāng of their members. In the case of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui, almost all Zhejiangese in Suriname are from the Wenzhou area, and most of these are from Wencheng County. Why not then name the fronts are other types of enterprises such as travel agencies, funds might need to be smuggled in the form of cash or valuables.

66 In early April 2005 Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui moved from its rented premises above Restaurant Hong Kong in downtown Paramaribo to the first floor above Xinghua Supermarket (興華超市) in Meerzorg in the District of Commewijne, across the Suriname River from Paramaribo.
organization ‘Wenzhou Tongxiang Hui’ (Wenzhounese Hometown Association)? Informants proved evasive, and at times genuinely confused. A wish to keep the organization inclusive by not making it seem restricted to people from Wenzhou, would mean that ethnic resources (i.e. restricting membership to produce a closed network) are not really important. The precise qiaoxiang might not be very important, if the point of a new huiguan was to break the monopoly of the Fuidung’on Hakkas on representing things Chinese in Suriname. It might just as easily have been that the organizers did not primarily identify themselves as Wenzhounese, and identified the Fuidung’on Hakkas as people from Guangdong Province, so that contrasts between qiaoxiang would have been articulated at the provincial level. A more likely explanation is that PRC patriotism produces the image of a monolithic ‘Chinese people’. As Nyíri notes, provincial identities are derived from a single national discourse.67

Differences between the ‘Old’ and New Chinese organizations in Suriname are less obvious than the similarities, except for the fact that the ‘Old Chinese’ huiguan were definitely also communal places, while the New Chinese huiguan are not (yet). There is no reason to believe that New Chinese / New Migrant shetuan should be fundamentally different than earlier huiguan. Markéta Moore (2006) described the development of New Chinese Migrant shetuan in isolation – i.e. in the absence of earlier, ‘Old Chinese Migrants’ – in the Czech Republic during the 1990s. In the case of the first Chinese migrant organization, the controversial Association of Chinese Businessmen in the Czech Republic,68 she has noted the presence of the same issues that plague Chinese community formation elsewhere:69 low membership numbers, self-styled ‘community leaders’, the organization is seen as a personal platform of the leadership, the organization actually works against the development of a unified and stable community. Moore attributes the success of another Chinese migrant organization, the Association of Chinese in the Czech Republic,70 to its a-political stance, which made it acceptable to migrants, the Czech authorities and, once it accommodated PRC sensitivities, the Chinese embassy.

The question remains whether the founding of New Chinese huiguan in Suriname was encouraged by the PRC embassy. It has been noted that the PRC has an interest in New Migrants orga-

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68 捷克華人工商業者協會商會.
69 Cf. Li 1999b.
70 華聯會.
nizing huiguan and shetuan as gateways to the PRC and as portals for PRC influence. Representatives of the embassy have consistently been invited to all major huiguan events. If, however, the PRC embassy was in any way instrumental in the founding of the New Chinese institutions, this has remained a well-guarded secret.

8.4.1 Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui as a Representation

Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui surely provided a new and different platform for ethnic Chinese positioning in the landscape of the Surinamese State; whether the same holds for other New Chinese organizations is less clear. Despite lacking direct access to political power, non-naturalized immigrant Wenzhounese could bypass the ‘Old Chinese’ network that linked Chinese organizations to the State, which meant that they could now negotiate on equal footing behind the scenes with the elite of the established Chinese migrants and (non-Chinese) apanjaht parties. The ‘Old Chinese’ huiguan soon accepted the New Chinese huiguan as legitimate ‘representations’ in their contact with the Surinamese state and public. For instance, following floods in the Surinamese interior in May 2006, Fa Tjauw Song Foei, Kong Ngie Tong Sang, Chung Fa Foei Kon, and Stichting Zhejiang (Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui) donated bottled water and cash to the relief effort. They were called ‘the four Chinese associations’, without any distinction made between established / Hakka and newcomers.

The presentation of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui can be seen as a public manifestation of increasingly complex Chinatown politics in Suriname, providing, on the surface, little new information other than the fact that a new huiguan had arrived. Despite the fact that the new huiguan was called a Zhejiangese organization, and the speeches clearly reflected Wenzhounese pride in their background, the speeches and the fact that they were in PTH signalled that regional differences were subordinate to the principle of global Chinese unity. By unambiguously stating that Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui would work for the common good of all in Surinamese society,

72 De Ware Tijd, 16 May 2006: ‘Chinese verenigingen bieden hulp’ (Chinese associations offer help).
the speeches implied that the Chinese of Suriname – ‘Old Chinese’ as well as New Chinese – were loyal citizens.\textsuperscript{73}

But the event afforded a glimpse of a hidden transcript of New Chinese; between the lines a New Chinese challenge emerged to the Fuidung’on Hakka-dominated discourse of Chineseness in Suriname. It implied that the ‘Old Chinese’ are not the only Chinese in Suriname; Wenzhounese are equal to the established Fuidung’on Hakkas, and will deal with Surinamese officials directly; Kejia-speakers need to understand that PTH is a world language; the ‘Old Chinese’ are cut off from authentic Chinese culture; and the ‘Old Chinese’ are ignorant of Chinese modernity. This subtly worded message was not the full hidden transcript of the Wenzhounese fantasy of resistance to the ‘Old Chinese’ majority bursting out onstage. But take into account the one sure glimpse of the hidden transcript (the remark about Kejia and Sranantongo to my translator who also participated in the research) and one could guess that the basic idea behind Wenzhounese discontent was something like the following: “Whoever told these overseas Hakkas that they are better than real Chinese?” It is impossible to say how many of the Wenzhounese present at the Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui event agreed with the message performed onstage, and to what extent they agreed with the idea that the ‘Old Chinese’ needed to accept the new order.

A hidden transcript implies a social space where a discourse of resistance can be developed, out of the view of domination.\textsuperscript{74} This implies social sites, safe locations where people talk and disseminate the views of the hidden transcript. The social spaces where the Wenzhounese subalterns speak are located in basically the same places as those of the Tong’ap: the shops, supermarkets and restaurants where they work and live and gather socially. Wenzhounese language also marks social space; as described earlier, language is an obstacle to Chinese participation in wider Surinamese society as well as a shield against outsiders, and in the case of the Wenzhounese their notoriously difficult language creates an instant seclusion, separating them from speakers of all other languages in Suriname – ethnic Chinese or otherwise. The Wenzhounese huiguan has an office, but no public building or hall where regular meetings, cultural events or rituals can take place.

\textsuperscript{73} ZHRB 29 January 2004: ‘籌委會主席鄭國慶先生致詞’ (Speech by Mr. Zheng Guoqing, chairman of the preparatory committee).

\textsuperscript{74} Scott 1990.
Is Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui a reflection of a social space where Wenzhounese are free to vent their frustrations and fantasize about an end to Old Chinese elite and non-Chinese domination (i.e. marginalization, anti-Chinese sentiments)? The question is whether the New Chinese elite who publicly emerged in the presentation of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui will be able to articulate such fantasies and whether the constituency they imagine leading can be cohesive enough to perpetuate them. Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui was set up by a limited group of Wenzhounese entrepreneurs known to be resourceful and well-connected, specifically to deal with the ‘Old Chinese’ huiguan elite and the Surinamese government. It is therefore basically an elite organization like other huiguan in Suriname, whose ‘members’ are more often treated like subordinates. With similar relationships of dependency, one would then also expect similar forms of disguised resistance among the Wenzhounese constituency as among Tong’ap and Laiap: rumour, gossip, slander, character assassination, etc.\(^{75}\)

But how effective is Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui as a representative of the Wenzhounese? The only time Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui appeared in the media, acting in the interest of its Wenzhounese target group, was in the case of the double murder of the Fu boys (see Paragraph 6.3), which as we have seen strengthened the association of New Chinese with violent crime in the public mind. When the parents received a ransom call after their children went missing, they turned to Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui, and the chairman Zheng Guoqing immediately sent two people to the Nieuwe Haven Police Station and then to the house of Chen Shaoxian, the man suspected of kidnapping them, where they picked him up and questioned him.\(^{76}\) After Chen had assured them that he did not have the boys, he was returned home. The description of the prompt actions of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui in the Surinamese media gave the impression of an organized gang following the orders of a godfather, instead of a new hands-on approach of huiguan community involvement.

\(^{75}\) Chairman Zheng Guoqing, for instance, is often mentioned in connection with organized crime and violence, in line with anti-Chinese sentiments and Old Chinese gossip that link New Chinese with crime. Old and New Chinese are extremely careful about spilling such rumours to the outside world, but stories about Zheng still surface among non-Chinese.

\(^{76}\) Times of Suriname, 23 July 2005, ‘Waarom deze man niet de moordenaar kan zijn’ (Why this man cannot be the murderer).
Different aspects of social positioning in Suriname produce different Chinese identities. Chinese positioning in economic society produced *Omu Sneisi*, the ubiquitous Chinese shopkeeper. Positioning in political society results in other identifications, such as the instrumental ‘Surinamese-Chinese’ group label that emerged in response to anti-Chinese sentiments and that was central to the politics of recognition in the 2003 Celebration. Instrumental ethnic identity also appears when there are distinct advantages to exclusive membership of social networks, for instance in huiguan and shetuan. Group membership in such migrant institutions rarely corresponds to categories or labels that outsiders accept and use. One example is Wenzhounese group identity; speaking Wenzhounese signals in-group membership, and qiaoxiang labels provide access to support networks.77

Laiap middle class elites have exploited their recognition by the Surinamese State as representatives of ‘the Chinese community’ to become ethnic power brokers via membership of the board of a huiguan. Huiguan politics started to resemble Chinatown politics more closely since New Chinese migrants started setting up their own huiguan in the late 1990s, at which point established Fuigung’on Hakka elites could no longer dictate the views of ‘the Chinese community’ to the Surinamese state and the relationship between Chinese associations in Suriname came to be reinterpreted as reflecting various subgroups. As this superficially resembles the organization of Chinese society in the Malay world, where regional, linguistic, economic and clan-based distinctions (*bang*) form the basis for sub-ethnic organization, one could consider it a form of resinicization and safely conclude that the Chinese of Suriname now resemble Overseas Chinese elsewhere.

By the end of 2003 the established Fuigung’on Hakkas and the New Chinese had both signalled that they could independently mobilize a substantial ethnic Chinese constituency and funds. In the Commemoration parade, the established Fuigung’on Hakkas quite successfully presented an image of Surinamese Chinese as an extensive, well-organized and wealthy group ready to participate, with good links to transnational investment and the rising power of the PRC. The New Chinese had managed to produce the same idea by setting up their own huiguan as special interest groups to be re-

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**Note:** But one could even argue that in this way such a ‘Wenzhounese’ identity is strictly speaking not ‘Chinese’, as it violates the assumption of monolithic Chinese unity. In Suriname Wenzhounese language is also less a symbolic boundary marker and more an access code to an obscured social space.
cognized by the government as representatives of an apparently substantial segment - in the case of Zhejiang Tongxiang Hui, with access to Asian investment. For the Chinese elites in Suriname, Old or New, the status quo to be challenged in the face of the 2005 national elections was the absence of ethnic Chinese agents where it mattered, at the centre of political power in the Surinamese State. As we will see in the next chapter, the pretence of ethnic representation that forms the basis of recognition of huiguan leadership crumbled in the aftermath of Chinese apanjaht participation.