Chinese new migrants in Suriname: the inevitability of ethnic performing

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Citation for published version (APA):

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10 CONCLUSIONS

This study has analyzed the positioning of ethnic Chinese in Surinamese society in the early 2000s, in the context of increased (and in many cases new) migration from the PRC, and the increasing dominance of the PRC as a regional geopolitical force. It has demonstrated that Chinese positioning was utterly pragmatic and relied on locally relevant notions of Chinese ethnic identity. Adaptive strategies produced an ethnic ownership economy, Chinese organizations (which at least initially were adaptive organizations of migrants), and entrepreneurial chain migration, all mutually reinforcing each other. Chinese ethnic identity in Suriname is clearly instrumental, strategic, situational, and multiple, despite constant references to local and Chinese notions of primordial and unchanging ethnicity. As a performative identity, Chineseness is a local reality that needs to be ‘performed’ on a Surinamese stage before the different audiences that exist in the Surinamese context. Ethnic Chinese elites are also pragmatic in their use of Chinese institutions as political platforms for access to the Surinamese state, and in their alliances with other elites in their attempts to reach the centre of political power. In the same way networks (of families, migrants, transnational businesses, local personal networks, etc.) are assessed and used pragmatically and instrumentally, and out of necessity with the local context in mind.

Therefore, with regard to the actual process of local positioning of Chinese migrants in Suriname, the main conclusion of this study is that the local in many ways takes precedence over the global. The meaning of ‘Chineseness’ is most strongly formed by local conditions, writes McKeown: ‘A national rather than a global perspective is most relevant to understanding the emergence of ethnic Chinese.’ Contrary to what the existing literature contends (cf. Ong & Nonini 1997), modern Chinese migration patterns are not independent of local conditions. The links and interaction between modern migrants as agents of change, their hometowns, and their host countries at various levels is conceptualized as transnationalism, which is approached as a form of globalization (cf. Schiller et al 1995). From this point of view, the transnationalism of Chinese migrants is about business networks that expand along migrant and family networks that span different locations, or, in the case of Suriname, about modern migrant networks that both follow

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1 McKeown 2001: 95.
and mediate the economic expansion of the PRC. Transnationalism as capitalist migration suggested to some writers that modern migration was reconfiguring social and physical space, becoming somehow deterritorialized, though others stressed that specific and concrete local processes were essential to understand the concept of transnationalism (cf. Smith & Guarnizo 1998). This study is in line with current discussions in Overseas Chinese studies which show that notions of monolithic Chineseness (whether or not sinocentric through models of transnationalism) are modulated by the local embedding of individual ethnic Chinese agents (cf. Louie 2000; Zhou & Tseng 2001), even if local embeddedness of Chinese identities is not recognized in the identity discourse of host societies (cf. Benton & Gomez 2001, 2008) or the Chinese homelands (cf. Tan 2006, 2009).

So Chinese ethnic identity in Suriname is also a response to local conditions, in particular the local political structures and economic niches where a specific articulation of ethnic identity as a resource is required. As a result it is subtly different from anything that could be labelled as such elsewhere in the world. However, the visibility of ‘China’ in Suriname (PRC geopolitics, economic globalization, and New Migrants) has increased, and this increase determines the image of ethnic Chinese in Suriname at the beginning of the third millennium. One could analyze this increased visibility in terms of a re-emergence of ‘Chineseness’ in Suriname between 1990 and 2005, a reacquiring, or rather reclaiming, of Chinese cultural identity, in other words resinicization.² Narrowly defined, it implies a centripetal force that realigns anything Chinese in the world with the cultural make-up of the PRC. Resinicization in this sense does occur in Suriname: established Chinese migrants in Suriname have been refocusing on the PRC and claims of the PRC on New Chinese. But the re-emergence of Chineseness in Suriname signals a wider range of realignments of Chinese group identity besides re-imagining cultural ties with the PRC and politics of identity and recognition in apanjaht ideology, and it also includes adopting transnational identity, abandoning hybridity in favour of ‘authentic Chinese culture’, and rearticulation of ‘Chineseness’ as an ascribed identity by non-Chinese Surinamese.

The Chinese of Suriname are an example of an Overseas Chinese community (community in the sense of a group of coeth-

² Writing in the context of the reintegration of Hong Kong in the PRC, Ma (1999: 45) defined resinicization as ‘the recollection, reinvention and rediscovery of historical and cultural ties between Hong Kong and China.’
nics with their own institutions and elite politics, more or less defined by language and migration networks) in a Third World context. As such, their local positioning is compounded by identity issues arising from assimilation pressures and their regional origins (usually Southern Chinese), citizenship issues related to the balance between communalism and citizenship in post-colonial states, and issues relating to the rise of the PRC, in particular developments with regard to geopolitics and globalization, and New Migrants. The way these issues work out in practice naturally depends on the specific context one focuses on. In the case of Suriname, the Chinese were originally Kejia-speakers from the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province, who developed a localized, Laiap generation. They developed community institutions under the requirements of their particular ethnic economy based on retail trade, while facing the pressures of positioning as citizens under Surinamese ethnic consociationalism. They had to deal with the increasing political influence of the PRC, and the influx of cheap commodities from there, as well as the appearance of New Migrants / xin yimin which challenged established ideas of the role of ethnic Chinese in the Surinamese state. We shall examine these three themes – New Migrants, the PRC as a superpower, and the Surinamese State – separately below.

### 10.1 New Migrants

In the late 1970s, New Migrants / xin yimin began to arrive to Suriname more than a decade after the lifting of barriers to emigration by the PRC. This renewed migration revealed a gap between the established population of (assimilated) Fuidung'on Hakka and the newcomers. Although some continuity between ‘Old and New Chinese’ did exist, the new migrant cohorts differed from the established group in a wider range of regional and linguistic backgrounds, migration strategies, and adaptive strategies. Chinese migrants in Suriname were no longer Kejia-speaking shopkeepers from the Pearl River Delta, but included Manchurian contract labourers, Wenzhounese entrepreneurs, Fujianese irregular migrants, Chixi Hakka urban agriculturalists, and expat personnel.

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3 I am indebted to Prof. Walton Look Lai of the University of the West Indies, Trinidad & Tobago, for pointing out to me in discussions of Chinese in the Caribbean that these three dimensions are the basis for comparisons with other countries in the region and further afield.
Initially, ‘new Chinese migration’ referred to all migration from the PRC after the Second World War (cf. Skeldon 1994), and thus included the ethnic Chinese professionals and entrepreneurs of the 1980s and 1990s whose links to globalization gave support to the notion of Chinese transnationalism (cf. Ong & Nonini 1997). Soon the term referred specifically to migrants who left the PRC after the barriers to emigration were lowered in the late 1970s, concurrent with the introduction of economic reforms (cf. Nyíri 1999). In the early 2000s it had become clear that New Chinese Migrants were different than earlier Chinese migrants, from more diverse class, educational, and regional backgrounds, using a wide range of migration strategies, heading towards a far greater number of destinations, and more closely tied to the economic expansion of the PRC (cf. Nyíri 2000, 2001; Edwards 2002; Nieto 2003; Guerassimoff 2003; Ceccagno 2003; Pieke 2004; Barabantseva 2005). New Chinese Migration became recognized in PRC migration policy as the latest incarnation of ethnic Chinese overseas, and like the Republic of China in the past that tried to bring huaqiao under its control, the PRC uses the xin yimin category to bind the latest Chinese migrants in the service of national development (cf. Zhuang 1997; Thunø 2001; Gao 2003; Xiang 2003; Wang 2004).

New Chinese Migration was initially assumed to be focused on the West. In particular New Chinese Migration to the USA was firmly problematized as irregular migration in the 1990s (cf. DeStefano 1997; Chin 1999), and much of the New Migration was seen as headed for North America. However, the presence of large numbers of contract labourers and entrepreneurial migrants from the PRC was noted in Africa, in locations where previously there had been no ethnic Chinese (cf. Li 2000; Østbø & Carling 2005; Dobler 2008). The presence of New Chinese Migrants in Africa is strongly linked to the activities of the PRC with regard to resource extraction, as is the presence of New Chinese Migrants in Southeast Asian countries, in particular regions directly bordering the PRC. Local attitudes towards New Migrants are often ambiguous. They are often welcomed as a revitalizing agent to local economies but feared as economic competitors who might ruin local markets.

Cambodia provides a fairly typical example of New Chinese Migration to Third World destinations. Data on ethnic Chinese and New Migrants in Cambodia are unreliable, but there are estimates of almost a million transiting New Chinese Migrants for the 1990s, though according to Cambodian airport statistics the number of visitors from the PRC (who made up the largest group of alien visitors to Cambodia at the time) averaged 22,886 a year between
In any case, it is clear that both legal and illegal immigration strongly increased in the 1990s, and that Cambodia was a final destination as well as a transit stop to Thailand, the USA, Canada, and Australia. New Migrants mainly lived in the capital Phnom Penh, and their formal businesses include karaoke parlours, hotels, restaurants, maoyi gongsi, bookshops, etc., while informal strategies include sex work. As in Africa, the renewed influx of Chinese migrants is strongly associated with increased investment by PRC companies in Cambodia.

The result of the influx of the New Migrant has been a re-thinking of ‘Chineseness’ in Cambodia. There is a big gap between ‘Old Chinese’ and New Migrants, the reasons for which go back to the time of the Pol Pot regime. The PRC was aware of the plight of the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia, but ignored them in the context of the official anti-huaqiao discourse of the Chinese Communist Party. The 10,000-15,000 PRC experts in Cambodia consistently and conspicuously distanced themselves from the Cambodian Chinese as a capitalist exploiter class. After the repression of the Pol Pot and Vietnamese regimes (Democratic Kampuchea and the People’s Republic of Kampuchea) between the 1970s and the beginning of the 1990s, the Cambodian Chinese developed a more independent stance with regard to the PRC, which was no longer referred to as the Homeland. The strong patriotism of the New Migrants causes tensions between them and the ‘Old Chinese’, who fear the newcomers’ public displays of Sinocentric nationalism could rekindle longstanding Khmer suspicions towards ethnic Chinese. In 1999 the protest in Phnom Penh against the bombing of PRC embassy in Belgrade was mainly held by New Migrants, who were heckled by ‘Old Chinese’.

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4 Edwards 2002: 271. The substantially mixed Chinese group was never formally recognized, unlike the Peranakan of Indonesia but just like Laiap in Suriname. This makes quantifying and defining Chinese ethnicity in Cambodia virtually impossible – as in Suriname.


7 Edwards 2002: 274.

8 Edwards 2002.


10 Bertil Lintner of Global Politician described it as follows: “A smaller gathering of ethnic Chinese Cambodians, in the country for generations, held a counterdemonstration, heckling the protesters: ‘You’re not our brothers,’ one yelled, referring to the suffering of Cambodia’s Chinese during the 1975-79 Khmer Rouge regime. ‘Your
In many African countries, with the exception of South Africa, Madagascar and Mauritius, there were no significant established ethnic Chinese populations prior to the arrival of New Chinese Migrants in the 1990s. There the economic strategies of New Migrant have also triggered anti-Chinese sentiments. In the run-up to the Zambian elections of 2005, the campaign of the opposition was clothed in scathing anti-Chinese rhetoric. Though anti-Chinese sentiments in Zambia were triggered by bad labour conditions and low wages paid by PRC enterprises, as well as their use of imported Chinese labour, populist opposition candidate Michael Sata vowed to expel the companies he accused of exploiting Zambian workers. He also promised to expel the New Migrant traders and to open dialogue with Taiwan, if he won the election.  

More recently in Lesotho, where anti-Chinese sentiments are triggered by competition from the ‘baihuo business’ of New Migrants, anti-Chinese violence aimed at Chinese-owned businesses erupted in 2008, stirred up by populist politics of opposition parties.  

As it emerges from this study, the positioning of New Chinese in Suriname mirrors that in locations such as Cambodia and Lesotho, where the meaning of ‘Chineseness’ is either rearticulated under renewed immigration, or becomes a focus in political rhetoric. New Chinese Migration in the sense of post-Second World War migration from China was noticeable in Suriname from the 1950s on, in the form of irregular and legal migration via Hong Kong, which resulted in the particular Fuidung’on Hakka migrant cohorts referred to locally as ‘Hong Kong Chinese’. Xin yimin started appearing in Suriname in the early 1990s, and were soon called ‘New Chinese’ to distinguish them from the ‘Old Chinese’, i.e. the established Fuidung’on Hakka. The majority of New Chinese conti-
nued the adaptive strategy of Chinese entrepreneurial chain migration in Suriname that had led to a Chinese ethnic ownership economy based on retail trade in corner shops, were the ethnic identity of Chinese migrants was a valuable resource. With the arrival of New Chinese migrants, commercial competition challenged the image of Chinese in Suriname as a monolithic group. New Chinese are in fact one of the greatest challenges for the established Fuidung-on Hakkas, not only because of the hostility of the general Surinamese population to the perceived ‘Chinese invasion’, but because of the particular economic niche of the majority of New Chinese. From its beginnings in Zhejiangese entrepreneurial chain migration networks, Baihuo Business (the importation of cheap commodities from Yiwu, Zhejiang Province, along personal networks as an adaptive strategy to provide livelihoods and facilitate continued migration, cf. Østbø & Carling 2005) developed into an alternative Chinese ethnic ownership economy in Suriname. Unlike the retail businesses of the Fuidung’on Hakkas, Baihuo Business was primarily based on the sale of non-foods, and New Chinese entrepreneurs were able to surpass many Fuidung’on Hakka shopkeepers with regard to turnover and profit margins.

In Suriname, New Chinese Migrants were also welcomed as providers of affordable everyday commodities, while being distrusted as agents of a superpower (the PRC) with ulterior motives. Not only was the PRC said to be flooding the Surinamese market with cheap goods, it was also undermining the Surinamese labour market with cheap labour, and Suriname was at risk of being colonized by a new power. Media reports that associated New Chinese with illegality - irregular migration, organized crime, violence - added to the negative image of Chinese in Suriname. Anti-Chinese sentiments became a narrative within Surinamese civic discourse; the Chinese symbolized the utter failure of the government to rule. Such popular sentiments even combined with US pressure (the annual TIP reports) to shape Surinamese government policy with regard to immigration, in which Chinese symbolized illegality. Anti-Chinese sentiments were framed in long-established Chinese stereotypes, which in turn formed the basis for sub-ethnic markers that Laiap actors used to distinguish between ‘Surinamese-Chinese’ and New Chinese. As in Cambodia, the presence of New Chinese brought about a reassessment of ‘Chineseness’; a resurgence of anti-Chinese sentiments in the general population, and the articulation of ‘Surinamese-Chinese’ identity among Fuidung’on Hakka, in particular Laiap.
10.2 The PRC as a New Superpower

When this study was conceived in the late 1990s, the image of the PRC as a new superpower was not quite as controversial as it currently is in Suriname. The Chinese state is firmly linked to the activities of PRC state-owned companies and the trade in cheap PRC-made commodities by New Migrants, and it is increasingly pictured as the new colonialist and colonizer. This local view of the PRC can be compared to a wider discourse of China as a new imperialist power in the Third World, exemplified by the discourse of ‘China in Africa’. Whereas in the early 1990s scholars could still comment that “It is hard to make a case that Africa matters very much to China”13, a few years later the continent had become of crucial interest to the PRC, since its economic development needed to be fuelled with cheap natural resources. Recently in the West a discourse on China in Africa has developed which focuses on the impact of the PRC on Western interests in Africa and on denouncing PRC support for dictatorial regimes, their disregard for environmental destruction, complicity in human rights abuses, etc.14 The PRC is described as the latest colonial power in Africa, a new imperialist power out to exploit African natural resources.

Up to the late 1970s, PRC relations with African states were framed in ideological terms. The PRC presented itself as a third option in the Cold War between the US and the USSR; it would be the leader of the developing world as the ‘largest developing country’ and base its relationships with African nations on South-South cooperation.15 The late 1970s saw the start of improved relations with former Cold War rivals which ended the ideological basis for Sino-African relationships. It was also the start of ‘socialist modernization’ which gave improved relations with the developed world priority over unprofitable relations with the developing world. Africa became marginal to the PRC, and by the mid-1980s it was distancing itself from African requests for aid and socialist development dogma. The next change in PRC policy towards Africa followed the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989. Soaring western criticism of the human rights record of the PRC fed into nationalistic narratives of the ‘century of humiliation’, which held that China was cheated out of rightful place on the world stage by nineteenth century Western

imperialists. Relations with African states that also suffered condemnation by the West were rephrased as a common resistance to the hegemonic Western discourse of human rights and the post-Cold War shift of power to the West.16

As noted above, by the mid-1990s the African continent became pragmatically relevant to the development of PRC. Economic development in the PRC had been tied to the formation of multinational companies, and these now headed resource extraction projects in African countries. A strong link developed between foreign policy objectives and state-owned enterprises. In this light its quest for natural resources in the developing world is also strategic; PRC oil companies, for instance, are set to become major producers, making the PRC an important geopolitical player.17 The PRC's presence in Africa is part of its foreign policy with regard to resource-rich parts of the developing world, such as Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.18 While the PRC still presents itself to the developing world in terms of South-South cooperation, it increasingly seeks to position itself as a new, but benign global power. However, both the principles of South-South equality and Peaceful Rising (which opposes expansionism by other powers) hamper the ability of the PRC to forcefully assert itself as a superpower in the developing world. The PRC has started to change its interpretation of its non-interfering superpower role and is moving for leadership places in the UN and contributing to UN peacekeeping.

Though its challenge to Western hegemony in Africa helps to rearticulate the relationship of the PRC with the rest of the world, the PRC is mainly interested in access to cheap natural resources, not strong long-lasting relationships with African states.19 Echoing the colonial trade relationships of the past which limited their industrialization, African countries export raw materials to, and import manufactured products from the PRC. As was the case with trade relationships with the West, African states will likely find that trade with the PRC will make it difficult to move away from exports of raw materials.20 Despite the threat of increasing dependence on the PRC, African countries see their relationship with the PRC as balancing Western exploitation.21 The PRC is an interesting partner

16 Taylor 1998.
17 Taylor 2006b.
20 Marks 2007.
to repressive regimes, as its development aid is not predicated on
democratization but on access to natural resources, and its history
suggests that development and modernization require a strong and
unopposed government.22

The primacy of resource extraction also induces local op-
opposition to economic activities of the PRC in African countries. For
instance, the model of state-owned enterprises in PRC resource
extraction projects in Africa is problematic. There is a lack of trans-
parency, high levels of corruption, low safety standards, low regard
for workers’ rights, and the recruitment of non-local labour. These
were transplanted to African operations. These adversely impact
the image of PRC companies, and by extension that of the PRC and
Chinese migrants in Africa. Popular resentment against Chinese (i.e.
the PRC, its companies, and Chinese migrants) in Africa is rising.
Chinese expats are said to be given preferential treatment and
government protection, the PRC is not seen to be respecting the
sovereignty of African states (for instance, neither the PRC or its
African partners can easily explain the logic of enclave concessions
in terms of sovereignty), and cheap commodities from PRC sold by
xin yimin are threatening local markets and manufacturers.23

As is clear from this study the development of the PRC
presence in Suriname parallels the situation on the African contin-
ent. By the late 1990s, PRC influence in Suriname had grown from
fairly straightforward prestige projects in return for periodic Suri-
namese acknowledgement of the One-China Principle and support
for PRC viewpoints in the international arena, to more extensive,
but untransparent resource extraction projects, particularly logging
enterprises. In Suriname, PRC resource extraction projects are
among the most extensive in the Caribbean, and they parallel the
same developments in African and Southeast Asian countries (albeit
at a far smaller scale, and on a temporary basis) in the controversy
and anti-Chinese hostility they engender. Many of these projects,
intentionally are not misrepresented as PRC development aid, were
carried out by PRC state-owned companies that insisted on using
imported Chinese labour. But despite the apparent parallels which
emerged from this study, there are no close matches for Suriname
in Africa. Mauritius is the one country in Africa, or in the whole

22 Goldstein et al 2006; Taylor 2006a; Alden 2007. However, non-interference on the
basis of absolute respect for national sovereignty may backfire on the PRC. Regime
changes, democratic of otherwise, in African states where the PRC is an uncritical
presence, may result in a government that associates the PRC – and ethnic Chinese –
with the elites of the previous regime.
world for that matter, that can most readily be compared to Suriname; both countries share a similar colonial history, both have comparable views to post-colonial multi-culturalism, and in both countries there is an established ethnic Chinese population dominated by (assimilated) Hakkas from Guangdong Province.

Despite these similarities, the current study also shows that there are important differences between Mauritius and Suriname, the most obvious being the absence of PRC resource extraction projects in Mauritius. In contrast to Suriname, Mauritius saw the development of local Chinese business networks that incorporated transnational Asian capitalists reminiscent of Chinese networks in Southeast Asia. Transnational Chinese enterprise encouraged local industrialization in the 1970s, using Hongkongese know-how in joint-ventures to upgrade garment manufacturing, and local Sino-Mauritian business networks have been expanding to link to PRC enterprises. Crucially, the image of the PRC as a dangerous colonialist / colonizer, which is common with regard to mainland Africa, is not relevant in Mauritius. In Suriname it never developed into a justification for anti-Chinese violence, though it has become an established theme in local civic discourse, as a selection from just one Surinamese internet discussion forum shows:

"palm789 | 27-6-2007 07:49:12
[...] Three Venetiaan administrations look more and more like Chinese colonization, even worse than Tibet. [...] (response to DWT Online 27 June 2007, ‘AC forbids Alendy to travel to Taiwan’)

"Armando1 | 12-12-2007 06:37:42
[...] Maybe they want to make Suriname into a Chinese colony. Suriname is an autochthonous country and can handle its own affairs if there is a good government at the helm. [...] (response to DWT Online 12 December 2007, ‘China wants to strengthen ties’. The author probably meant ‘independent’ instead of ‘autochthonous’

"Lekkerpapa | 21-2-2008 08:31:48 | 37
[...] No, the one china policy of the Gorilla [President Venetiaan] will make us slaves of the Chinese. (response to DWT Online 21 February 2008, ‘Suriname and China finalize US$ 200,000,000 “asphalt loan”’)


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**Langebaan** | 22-2-2008 11:16:39
China is busy neo-colonizing Africa and Suriname is also on the agenda. All of Suriname soon to be 'Chinatown'?
(response to DWT Online 21 February 2008, ‘Suriname and China finalize US$ 200,000,000 “asphalt loan”’)

**Suribrasser** | 27-8-2007 07:34:48
Excuse me, but I’m getting really fed up of reading China named as financier or partner in almost everything that needs to be done. Are we becoming a kind of colony or territory of China? [...] 
(response to DWT Online 27 August 2007, ‘Government hopes for Chinese support for national utilities company’)

**Trutru** | 22-4-2008 19:45:34
The Chinese INVASION has started. We need to be on guard. 1‰ of the Chinese population is more than the Suriname population.
(response to DWT Online 22 April 2008, ‘Dalian wants to import 450 Chinese’)

**Warm hart** | 22-4-2008 16:49:55 | 37
The infiltration continues. This was to be expected. China is trying to dominate the world with their China policy. Those so-called nice loans and gifts are a put-up job. I really don’t understand how the Surinamese government could ever have allowed this. How stupid can we be.
(response to DWT Online 22 April 2008, ‘Dalian wants to import 450 Chinese’)

**mel35** | 22-4-2008 09:13:12 | 37
You all don’t know what you’re talking about, let the Chinese stay in their own country. President, please, do not give permission. Look what is happening in Tibet, soon they will be talking over Suriname. They are the filthiest people on earth.
(response to DWT Online 22 April 2008, ‘Dalian wants to import 450 Chinese’)

**joy20** | 22-4-2008 09:00:03 | 37
[...] IT WON'T TAKE LONG BEFORE SURINAME BECOMES A RENEGADE PROVINCE OF CHINA, JUST LIKE THE CHINESE DID IN TIBET AND TAIWAN, AS USUAL THE SURINAMESE WANT TO BE THEIR OWN BOSS AND NOT WORK FOR THE BOSS HIMSELF AN ATTITUDE THAT REALLY NEEDS CHANGING.
(response to DWT Online 22 April 2008, ‘Dalian wants to import 450 Chinese’)

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What many are not aware of is that China has a global policy (with regard to developing nations with natural resources for its huge industry) that is aimed at colonization of parts of the world. It is mostly ex-criminals who must leave the country for other destinations...

(response to DWT Online 2 June 2008, ‘Dalian insists on extra Chinese workers’)

THE COLONIZATION OF SURINAME BY CHINA IS IN FULL SWING. VENETIAAN HAS TO ACCOMMODATE HIS CHINESE FRIENDS WHO FUND HIS PARTY. [...]"}

10.3 The Surinamese State

In attempting to engage with the issue of local positioning of Chinese migrants, this study necessarily questions the nature of the modern Surinamese State. The ideal of the postcolonial nation-state was not achievable in Suriname, which like many other former European colonies has a highly ethnically diverse population. Like many other post-colonial states, Suriname frames its national unity in a variation on the Unity in Diversity slogan. The political interpretation of this slogan has been described by Dew as a local, ethnicity-based, elite-led version of Lijphart’s consociational power-sharing system. The problem with the literature that forms the basis for the apanjaht model (Lijphart 1969; Dew 1972, 1978, 1988) is that ethnicity is posited in terms of pre-existing ‘ethnic groups’ rather than as processual, contextual, dialectical, discursive (for which concepts of agency, and consequently ethnic resources, politics of recognition and identity, civic discourses, etc. are useful).

Lijphart developed the idea of consociationalism in the highly sectarian context of Dutch society, and it comes as no surprise that it works best to describe political power-sharing in other religiously divided societies such as Lebanon. Dew correctly noted that apanjaht consociationalism – the sharing of political power between political elites as well as the mobilization of constituencies in terms of ethnic rivalry by those same elites – is a form of post-colonial ethnopolitics. But Dew did not take into account how ethnicity would work as a resource in such ethnopolitics and so underestimated how the system could be a very important generator of
the ethnic identities, a web that spins itself. If ethnicity is reproduced in apanjaht consociationalism in terms of ethnic resources and thus agency, then power rather than ethnicity is the focus of agents. As Jaffe (2008) has pointed out, apanjaht consociationalism is management of diversity by political elites, and is thus first and foremost a tool for elite dominance - a very pragmatic reason for its persistence in Surinamese society.

Dew's concept of apanjaht ethnopolitics worked to describe the political developments in Suriname between the 1950s and 1980s, but cannot fully accommodate popular resistance to elite dominance and other anti-apaneseht challenges. In the 1970s, migration and anti-establishment resistance could be left out of the apanjaht equation, but basically anti-apaneseht military rule in the 1980s and the increasing importance of immigration since the 1990s have shown the need to at least modify the apanjaht model. If one extends its purely political analysis to include ideology (cf. França 2004), the narratives and myths that form the imagination of the Surinamese State (cf. Meel 1998), and Surinamese civic discourse, it becomes much clearer how articulation of ethnic identity is manipulated by elites and used by non-elites to achieve access to the centre of power, and why anti-apaneseht parties are populist rather than successfully nationalistic. The national myth of the mamio patchwork quilt enables politically ambitious elites to present themselves as representatives of an ethnic segment that is entitled to the same citizenship rights and an equal share of power as any other group represented in apanjaht consociationalism.

Socio-political participation of Chinese migrants in Suriname implies the development of ethnic Chinese elites who negotiate a share of political power with the elites of other ethnic groups. Surinamese elites are ethnic through their recognition that access to economic power, and in particular political power, is dictated by ethnic discourse - apanjaht ideology as multiculturalism legitimizing the post-colonial state as something other than a nation-state. As ethnic narratives arise and develop through politics of recognition and identity, definitions of Surinamese ethnic groups are constantly shifting. A constellation of ethnic groups exists in a certain equilibrium, with new groups slow to be admitted. Based on this image is the idea that political power-sharing should reflect pluralism: apanjaht consociationalism. Where ethnicity becomes a political resource, ethnic elites base their claims to power on the relative sizes of the segments in the constellation of ethnicities.

Chinese did not need to struggle for recognition as a legitimate member of the Surinamese ethnic constellation despite chan-
ges resulting from New Chinese migration. Renewed migration supported the claims to power of the Chinese elite in the eyes of the Surinamese State, as the size of the Chinese ethnic group was commonly assumed to have dramatically increased. The elites of the established Fuidung’on Hakka (particularly the local-born) were courted by the apanjaht consociationalist power brokers, and in turn they supported a budding New Chinese elite. Political participation in apanjaht consociationalism implies open competition and fixed allegiances between representatives of larger, established ethnic groups, with relatively few clear-cut benefits for a small entrepreneurial minority that depends on peaceful relations with all segments of Surinamese society. Ahead of the 2005 legislative elections, Fuidung’on Hakka elites promoted a politics of recognition based on the image of Chinese ethnic identity which they hoped would be accepted as an important component of Surinamese multicultural society. Strategic and performative Chinese identity was staged during a celebration of 150 Years of Chinese Settlement on 20 October 2005 to evoke the idea of Chinese ‘groupness’ – the idea of public, collective Chinese identity without an actual quantified group (cf. Brubaker 2004) – which would make Chinese elite actors legitimate players in negotiations of apanjaht consociationalism.

The Fuidung’on Hakka elites, those who were born in China (tong’ap) as well as local-born (laiap), owed much of their prestige to positions on the governing boards of Chinese institutions in Suriname. Originally adaptive organizations that catered to the specific requirements of migrants in the Surinamese context, the Chinese institutions (huiguan- and shetuan-type organizations) soon became political platforms for individuals who could exploit the tendency of the Surinamese State to view the boards of Chinese organizations as elected representatives of an otherwise unreachable ethnic Chinese community. New Chinese institutions were being established within a decade of the arrival of the first New Chinese migrants. These huiguan provided the platforms for the elites of the various New Chinese subgroups to engage in Chinatown Politics on an equal footing with the elites of the Fuidung’on Hakkas. New Chinese were no longer subjugated as merely the most recent migrant cohorts within a monolithic Chinese group dominated by Fuidung’on Hakkas, but could present themselves as gatekeepers to a hitherto unreachable and unquantifiable group of Chinese migrants, and as alternative representatives of the influential Chinese State.

Chinese participation in the 2005 Surinamese legislative elections was conducted strategically via the ethnic Javanese com-
ponent of the ruling New Front grand coalition, Pertjajah Luhur. The Ministry of Trade and Industry, of crucial importance to the Chinese ethnic economy, had been in the hands of Pertjajah Luhur since 2000, and the post of Minister had been held by a Laiap. Now Pertjajah Luhur guaranteed the election of an ethnic Chinese candidate to the General Assembly. A unique, and at times heated election campaign developed in the Chinese-language newspapers, that pitted Pertjajah Luhur’s Chinese propagandists against those of New Front coalition partner NPS and those of the (anti-apanjaht) opposition party NDP. Central to the Pertjajah Luhur campaign in the Chinese-language newspapers was an appeal to vote so that the strength of the ethnic Chinese constituency would finally be established. Eventually both an ethnic Chinese member of the Assembly and Minister were installed, but when the Chinese vote proved to be marginal, Pertjajah Luhur relinquished the ‘Chinese’ Ministry of Trade and Industry in favour of a Ministry of land allocation which was of no importance to a constituency of Chinese ethnic entrepreneurs. The Chinese participation in the 2005 elections proved that despite its success in shaping the narratives of Chineseness in Surinamese ethnic discourse, and convincing apanjaht coalition partners of their position as representatives of a significant ethnic constituency, the elites were not able to convince individual migrant households of the advantages of openly declaring their ethnic solidarity.

Tracking the positioning strategies of Chinese migrants and ethnic Chinese in Suriname has largely validated the apanjaht model of elite power negotiation and politics of identity and recognition in the context of Surinamese civic discourse; inclusion of migrants means being recognized as members of a (new or existing) ethnic component in apanjaht logic, and the ability of migrant elites to join in apanjaht consociationalist power-sharing will determine many aspects of citizenship for migrants. Apanjaht potentially justifies the Republic of Suriname as something other than a nation-state. In parallel with the individual’s daily practice of instrumental, situational, and performative identity, a logical, though positivistic consequence of apanjaht ideology would be the imagining of Suriname as kaleidoscopic rather than as a patchwork in the national Mamio Myth of ethnic diversity. Different, equally legitimate Surinamese can exist simultaneously, from any regional, linguistic, religious, ethno-racial viewpoint within the country.

The process of socio-political embedding of ethnic Chinese through apanjaht ethnopolitics might have occurred independently of the New Chinese influx or the rise of the PRC as a force to be
reckoned with in the Caribbean and Latin American region. However, these developments strongly impacted the articulation of ‘apanjaht Chineseness’. Anti-Chinese sentiments resurfaced in Suriname in the 1990s following the sudden increase in numbers of migrants from the PRC that was concurrent with the emergence of the PRC as a regional geopolitical force. While economic competition was one pragmatic factor underlying anti-Chinese sentiments, Chinese migration had also become symbolic of government failure in Surinamese civic discourse. In the face of such increasing popular patriotic, anti-immigrant sentiments focusing on New Chinese migrants, Chinese political participation had to be disentangled from the question of the inclusion / exclusion of Chinese migrants. The frame of anti-Chinese sentiments eventually formed the basis for sub-ethnic markers with which Laiap agents distinguished ‘Surinamese-Chinese’ from New Chinese. Laiap agents, representing a subgroup within a subgroup (established Fuidung’on Hakkas) of a vulnerable minority (ethnic Chinese), needed to preserve the image of monolithic Chineseness to be recognized by the apanjaht brokers and as legitimate representatives by Chinese migrants. New Chinese agents likewise could not avoid negotiating with ‘Old Chinese’, and also understood the need for local embedding as a survival strategy.

The current context of Chinese political positioning in Suriname parallels the situation of migrants and ethnic minorities elsewhere, and it is even directly impacted by them. Immigration and ethnic diversity are problematized all over the world under increasing globalisation, and despite its claims to ethnic harmony Suriname is no exception to the pattern of reimagining an Us under threat from The Outsiders. Apanjaht ideology is unsuited for such a fundamental dichotomy which would define all Surinamese in contrast with foreigners. I believe that future ethnic Chinese participation in apanjaht power-sharing negotiations will be one of many tests of ‘apanjahtism’.