

The *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* 开吧历代史记

An autonomous history of the Chinese community of Batavia/Jakarta in the VOC period

LEONARD BLUSSÉ

ABSTRACT

This essay critically examines the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* (Annals of Batavia), a Chinese history of Batavia which was written by an anonymous Chinese author around 1794 as part of the rather large corpus of Chinese archival sources about the history of the Chinese community of Batavia/Jakarta. A short introduction about earlier authors who have dealt with the text is followed by comments on the composition, structure and historical value of this unique urban history.

KEYWORDS

Batavia/Jakarta; Overseas Chinese; historiography; self-fashioning.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, is an interesting one if only because in many respects it represents the multi-layered history of Indonesia itself. Yet, it also displays some unique characteristics. During its 1,000-year-old lifetime, Jakarta has shed its various skins like a snake. The city is heir to the ancient port city of Sunda Kalapa of the Hindu kingdom of Padjadjaran, which was renamed Jayakarta when it was conquered by a Javanese Prince Fatahillah in 1527 and became a vassalage of the Islamic sultanate of Banten. Almost a hundred years later, in 1619, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) seized the port principality of Jayakarta and built on its territory a mighty fortress town with city walls and canals. It christened its new headquarters Batavia.

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In the early nineteenth century, the city dramatically changed its outlook when the government and most of the population crept out of the walls of the by-then insalubrious port and moved several miles inland, where a new colonial garden city interspersed with *kampongs* was laid out. Shortly before the transfer of sovereignty in 1949 the Dutch colonial government recognized that a new era was in the offing and named the city once again Jakarta.

The present day greater Jakarta, a large agglomeration of the original colonial city of Batavia and its surrounding countryside, the so-called *Ommelanden*, is often called Jabotabek, after Jakarta and its satellite cities Bogor, Tangerang, and Bekasi. Thus, the former colonial city and the surrounding jungle, which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was turned into fruit gardens, rice paddies, and sugar plantations, is now sprawling to all directions. Owing to its uncontrolled expansion, it has turned into an urban jungle that awaits to be tamed anew. History is not without paradoxical developments.

What distinguished the history of VOC-Batavia from most other urban settlements in Southeast Asia is that it represented the result of a curious mode of cooperation between the monopolistic Dutch East India Company and independent overseas Chinese entrepreneurship. The same phenomenon could be perceived in its predecessor, Spanish Manila. However, while the Spanish colonial administration anxiously segregated the Chinese citizens in a separate China-town called the Parian, the Dutch East India Company integrated its Chinese burghers *within* the walls and thus created a hybrid urban settlement. In the past, I have ironically styled the curious cooperation between the VOC and the emerging Chinese economic networks in the Indonesian archipelago as *strange company*. In hindsight, however, this collaboration project may perhaps be best described as a Sino-Dutch attempt at "*convivencia* in the tropics".¹ The town may have been planned and designed by the Dutch and it may have looked on first sight like a Dutch city in the tropics, but it was largely built and run with the entrepreneurship of the Chinese citizenry. Protected by Dutch laws and institutions, and in the absence of a sizable population of Dutch settlers, these Chinese immigrants took root and developed into a capitalistic middle class as businessmen and landowners. This is exactly what the founder of Batavia, Jan Pietersz Coen, had in mind when he invited, and even pressed, Chinese to move in large numbers to the newly created city. For many years, the Chinese sojourners represented the economic engine of the town and, intermarrying with Indonesian wives, created the largest ethnic group among the free people in Batavia. The same may be said about the development of the city's hinterland from a tropical forest into cultivated land. The cash-crop cultivation in the *Ommelanden* was to a large degree developed and carried out with the help of Chinese overseers and Chinese skilled labour. It is against this complex historical background that we must understand the meaning and content of the unique Chinese manuscript that will presently be introduced in this essay.

¹ See Blussé 1986.

THE CHINESE ANNALS OF BATAVIA

The *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* (开吧历代史记) - literally "A historical record through the successive generations of the opening up [and development] of the kingdom of Kelaba" - is the title of a more than two-hundred-year-old Chinese urban history of Batavia that has been preserved in at least four manuscript versions.²

Composed by an anonymous author in the final years of Dutch East India Company rule (1602–1800), these *Annals of Batavia* form part of the remarkably extensive written heritage of Jakarta's Chinese citizens. Believe it or not, no other Chinese urban population group inside or outside China has left such an extensive archival deposit of *its own* covering several centuries. Why this should be so is not hard to explain. It was the outcome of the close relationship that existed for hundreds of years between the Chinese urban elite and the Dutch colonial administration.

In October 1619, only five months after Batavia was founded on the ashes of the former Javanese town of Jayakarta, Governor-General Coen appointed a close friend and associate of his, the Chinese merchant Bencon, alias Su Minggang (苏鸣岗, 1580–1644), to the position of headman or captain (*kapitein*, 甲必丹) of the Chinese citizenry, instructing him to collect the monthly head tax that all Chinese residents had to pay, and asking him to settle henceforth all lesser civil affairs among his fellow countrymen.³ The Dutch viceroy recognized that the linguistic and cultural divide was so great that he had rather the Chinese resolved minor problems amongst themselves.

This is how the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* describes this important event:

The Company gave a golden seal and credentials as well as a platoon of Dutch soldiers [twelve men] to stand watch in front of the gate of the Captain's residence. In the official hall, Captain Su Minggang discussed administrative affairs. All of this was put in just order. All Chinese people who came to Batavia to engage in trade had to report to the Captain, who provided them with a Dutch permit. At the time, there were already 400 to 500 Chinese households. These merchants earned a living in trade. From then on all of them reaped plentiful profits. Su Minggang served as Captain, but he had no territory. Therefore, he entreated the Company to issue him a plot of land to live on. Jan Pietersz Coen gave him *Mangga Dua* to serve as the Captain's big dwelling. In front of his gate Captain Su Minggang hung a lantern and a board on which was written 'the founding father of the country.

[Commentary] *How imposing! How eminent!*⁴

² The character *Ba* in the title is not an abbreviation of *Batavia*, but refers to the Malay word *kelapa* (coconut) which gave its name to the former kingdom of Sunda Kalaba (Gelaba, 囉喇吧). Even today the Chinese name of *Ye-cheng* (椰城, coconut town) is still in use. Although since 1619 the new "kingdom" of Kelaba was ruled by a Dutch *wang* (王, king, namely, governor-general), it was in Chinese eyes as much a Sino-Dutch production, as pointed out by the text on the large paper lantern that the first Chinese Captain Su Minggang is said to have hung on the porch of his house: 开国元勋 'the pioneer of opening up the country'.

³ B. Hoetink 1917.

⁴ Commentary by the copyist of the manuscript.

Bencon's appointment was the first in a long line of Chinese captains who, assisted by other Chinese officers - the lieutenants (*luitenants*, 雷珍兰) and estate managers (*boedelmeesters*, 武直迷) - continued to officiate in the Chinese community of Batavia right until the early decades of the twentieth century. This semi-official body of Chinese public officers became known in the eighteenth century as the Kong Koan (公馆) or Kong Tong (公堂), or in Dutch as the *Chineesche Raad* (Chinese Council). It was essentially a 'self-help' institution that met once or twice a week to discuss and solve social and economic issues. Matters of great importance, however, were taken up by the Chinese officers with the city's administration, and serious crimes were handed over to the Council of Justice in Batavia's town hall. Whatever the good intentions may have been, in the long run this collaborative enterprise between the Dutch and the Chinese did not turn out to be the promised rose garden.

In October 1740, after 120 years of basically peaceful *convivencia* between the Chinese and their Dutch, Malay, *Mardijker*, and other fellow-townsmen, a gruesome massacre took place. The precipitating event was an attack on the city by Chinese outlaws and unemployed peasants who, during a period of economic downturn, had rebelled against the Batavian government's short-sighted and heavy-handed security measures, which included a scheme to ship these undesirables to Ceylon. The multi-ethnic town population of Batavia *intramuros* panicked and took revenge on their innocent Chinese fellow citizens out of fear that they might join the revolt. Within one week, approximately 8,000 Chinese men, women, and children were slaughtered in an orgy of violence.⁵

In the aftermath of this terrible pogrom, it was briefly suggested in governmental circles that, in order to avoid further problems with a quasi-uncontrollable Chinese immigration, Chinese should no longer be allowed to settle in Batavia. Yet, it soon became clear that the city could not exist without its industrious urban middle class, and within a decade the Chinese were back, albeit no longer settling *intramuros* as before, but in a separate China town, the *Chinese kamp*, on the southern perimeter of Batavia.

One reason that panic had struck was that, in a time of extreme tension, there had been a complete disruption of cross-cultural relations and information sharing. Under normal circumstances, the Chinese officers in town should have warned the colonial government of what was brewing among their fellow countrymen in the countryside. Yet, the connections between the Chinese elite in the city and the Chinese labourers in the countryside seemed to have short-circuited, and the revolt had actually been contrived at the sugar plantation of the Chinese captain without him knowing anything about it.

In order to avoid any further administrative communication problems that might lead to similar disasters in the future, the governor-general and council decided in 1742 to provide the newly elected Chinese captain and his officers with an official office, the Kong Tang, where the Chinese council

⁵ Blussé 1986.

henceforth should be based and have its weekly meetings. In this office, the minutes of the meetings as well as all the other Chinese administrative papers concerning weddings, cemeteries, temples, hospitals, and so on were to be preserved in a Chinese archival depository. It may have been locking the door after the horse had bolted, but it cannot be denied that from then onwards the Chinese Council was formally recognized as an administrative organ that had to maintain its own archive available for consultation whenever necessary. Thus, under the care of a specially appointed secretary of the Kong Koan, henceforth a Chinese archive was created that eventually would cover a period of two hundred years.

Only part of the Kong Koan archive has withstood the onslaught of time. The tropical climate in combination with ink erosion and paper consuming vermin like silverfish and white ants have taken their toll, and thus a sizable part of the archive has turned to dust over the years. The Leiden University library, where presently the surviving documents of the archive are safely stored, nonetheless still preserves some 600 kilograms of well-preserved archival papers. Thanks to the close cooperation between the Dutch National Library (Koninklijke Bibliotheek) and the Friends of the Kong Koan Foundation and Leiden University, the remaining part of the Kong Koan archive has been restored and inventoried. All data have now been made fully accessible on the internet by dr Chen Menghong (2011).⁶ In addition, fifteen volumes of *Gonganbu*, the Chinese minutes of the weekly meetings of the Kong Koan, covering (with lacunae) the 1787-1910 have been edited, annotated, and published by Xiamen University Press. This source publication project, jointly carried out by scholars from Leiden and Xiamen, has over the past decade given rise to extensive academic research. Two PhD theses about prominent nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chinese community leaders have in recent years been defended at Leiden University, and Xiamen University Press has published a monograph about Batavia's Chinese community in the final years of the eighteenth century and a complete survey of all marital records of the Kong Koan.⁷ In addition to these book publications, countless academic articles have appeared in Chinese research journals. We are now awaiting the publication by dr Monique Erkelens of two volumes of the edited and annotated Malay-language minutes, Malay having replaced Chinese as the official language of the Kong Koan in its last decades.

If the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century are relatively well covered by the preserved Kong Koan records, what about the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? With the exception of the preserved *Gonganbu* minutes of the late 1780s and the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* (开吧历代史记) itself - the urban biography that is the subject of this contribution - few original Chinese documents or inscriptions originating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have been preserved. As has been shown by several

⁶ See www.leidenuniv.nl, library, catalogues, Kong Koan.

⁷ Chen Menghong 2011; Monique Erkelens 2013; Leonard Blussé and Wu Fengbin 2002; Wu Fengbin 2010.

excellent articles about the Chinese officers by B. Hoetink, this gap can be covered to a certain extent by various personal data on Chinese officers that can be found in the (Dutch-language) VOC archives and the rich notarial archives of VOC Batavia (now preserved in the Arsip Nasional in Jakarta). These Dutch data in fact contribute much to our better understanding of the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji*. This brings us to the heart of the matter.

A UNIQUE CHINESE URBAN HISTORY

Nowhere did the author of the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* manuscript explain what drove him to write his urban memoir or to compose it in the way he did. Nonetheless, it is clear that he set out to reconstruct which prominent Chinese individuals were involved in the administrative duties of the Kong Koan during the VOC period, whether as captain, lieutenant, or *boedelmeester*. He larded the dry data about the tenures of the Chinese officers with a mishmash of interesting anecdotes and stories about the ups and - in the case of the massacre - downs of Batavia's Chinese population. Obviously with some Dutch help, and perhaps even with a few Dutch printed sources at his disposal, the author was able to collect the correct dates about successive Dutch governors-general throughout the whole VOC period. But regarding events of in the seventeenth century, he clearly was groping in the dark and had to depend on hearsay, while collecting biographical information on the Chinese officers and their terms in office. Had he had access to the Dutch archival sources, this would not have caused any problems, but he clearly did not have them at hand. We are still left in the dark about the identity of the author, but as I shall point out below, it would seem plausible to suggest that he was the secretary of the Kong Koan.

The original manuscript had been copied and recopied several times during the course of the nineteenth century for, as far as I know, there exist at the moment at least four or five different handwritten versions. In 1953, Professor Hsu Yun-Tsiao (Hsu Yun-Ts'iao, Hsü Yün-ch'iao or Xu Yunqiao, 1905-1981), the pioneer historian of Chinese life overseas, published on the basis of two slightly different versions an excellent annotated edition in the *Nanyang Xuebao* (the academic journal of the South Seas Society).⁸ He was not able to include in his compilation the two versions now in the possession of the Sinological Institute at Leiden and the Kong Koan Foundation, both kept at the East Asian Library of the Leiden University Library.⁹ Before we take a closer look at Hsu Yun-Tsiao's contribution, which has received surprisingly little attention from the academic community, tribute should first be paid to another pioneer: Walter Medhurst (1796-1857), the man who first "discovered" the original Chinese manuscript and translated it.

Upon his arrival in Asia in 1816, Medhurst, a prospective missionary in the service of the London Missionary Society, learned to speak, read, and write

⁸ Hsu Yun-Tsiao 1953.

⁹ Both versions have been digitized and are online-view in the Kong Koan archive site of the Leiden University Library.

Chinese at the Society's missionary station in Malacca because at the time it was still impossible to study in China itself. With the exception of a few Roman Catholic priests, no Europeans were allowed to reside in China. Yet, after residing more than twenty years in Malacca, Penang, and Batavia, Medhurst was in 1842 finally able to settle in Shanghai when that port was opened up to Western enterprise in the aftermath of the Opium War. During his stay in Batavia, the Reverend Medhurst was not only involved in spreading the gospel but he also seemed to have functioned as an informal liaison between the Dutch colonial administration and the local Chinese community leaders of the Kong Koan. It was at this time that he translated the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji*, which may have been pointed out to him by one of the Chinese officers.

After his arrival in Shanghai, Medhurst continued to carry out translation work on all kinds of topics, including the Bible and official documents, and he even composed a Chinese-English and English-Chinese dictionary. In addition, the indefatigable vicar wrote several books about China to enlighten the Western reading public about the recently opened "Middle Kingdom". Almost forgotten among his many publications is a booklet with the title *The Chinaman abroad* by Ong Tae Hae, a partial translation of the *Haidao Yizhi*, the "Island memories" of Wang Dahai, a Chinese literati who, during the 1780s, had spent several years in the Javanese port city of Pekalongan as tutor to the children of the local Chinese captain.¹⁰ This booklet is filled with Wang's vivid recollections of life in the Indies, including Batavia. Medhurst's original English translation of the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* is unfortunately no longer extant, although it has not been completely lost, because as early as 1841 the editors of the *Tijdschrift voor Neerlands Indië*, W.R. van Höevell and P. Mijer, published a Dutch re-adaptation of his English translation in their journal.¹¹ That we are dealing with a paraphrased rendering becomes clear once the Dutch text is compared with the published Chinese text edition by Professor Hsu Yun-Tsiao and the two Leiden versions. Not only have many of the lieutenants' and *boedelmeesters'* dates of tenure been removed, but also the original tales in the text seem to have been embellished, or should we say "orientalised".

When as a young student I met Professor Hsu Yun-Tsiao in Singapore, he confessed that the annotation to the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* source publication had caused him much headache because he had found it hard to extrapolate many original Dutch terms that were written down in characters in the Chinese text. Reading them out aloud in the Hokkien dialect, he was able to get close to the sound of the original words or names but still faced difficulty in explaining their meaning. In addition, Professor Hsu bemoaned the fact that he had been unable to solve many historical questions because he could not handle Dutch archival documents and printed sources. When I told him that I had participated in the annotation of a translation group at Kyoto University that had been translating Wang Dahai's *Haidao Yizhi* (1992), Professor Hsu would not let me go before I had promised him that one day I should make a new

¹⁰ W.H. Medhurst 1850.

¹¹ W.R. van Höevell and P. Meijer 1840.

annotated English translation of the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji*.

In academic life, promises and priorities do not easily mix. In the years that followed, I had to devote myself to other business, including lately the preservation and publication of the Kong Koan papers. But thanks to the Japanese “Asian Mega Cities” research project, a collaborative effort between the Universities of Tokyo and Kyoto, Professor Nie Dening of Xiamen University (my fellow editor of the *Gonganbu* source publications) and I were invited to Kyoto University in 2013 and spent half a year translating the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* into English.¹² That annotated publication, of which the present article is a preview, is scheduled to appear in 2017.

CONTENTS AND VALUE OF THE MANUSCRIPT

When fellow sinologists heard that we were devoting our time to an annotated translation of the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji*, we noticed some raising of the eyebrows. Why should one spend much time on such a vulgar text? Serious philologists evidently felt that this vernacular history of a Chinese urban community in a Dutch colonial setting fell outside their field of interest. In their eyes, the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* as a historical text could not possibly match the more representative Chinese historical texts to which they devote their own research. From the point of view of the sinologist *pur sang*, this may be a logical reaction. The *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* is in many respects an ugly duckling because it does not fit in any of the existing genres of Chinese historiography. The anonymous author wrote his historical narrative with few literary frills, freely using vocabulary from the Minnan dialect and sprinkling his text with characters that cover up original Malay and Dutch names and terms. Yet, it is exactly these syncretic features, so characteristic of the Chinese overseas experience in general, that got our attention, apart from the simple fact that almost no other old historical texts about overseas Chinese urban life written by Chinese insiders have been preserved.

What makes the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* unique is that, writing in a straightforward style, the author frankly expressed his sympathies and antipathies without any fear of censorship. Apart from the copyists who later added their comments to the text, there was not really any censor around. For all its colourful anecdotes, the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* might be called a kaleidoscopic view, but it is by no means just a pretty rendering of past events. By interpreting the past behaviour of both prominent Chinese and Dutch individuals, the anonymous historian holds a mirror up to his readers as if in an effort to keep them on the straight and narrow path. Here follow two telling examples from the text that demonstrate how bad behaviour might backfire on one’s afterlife:

In the sixth moon of Kangxi 60 [*xin'chou* (辛丑), July 1721], the estate manager (*boedelmeester*) Qiu Zuguan died. Originally he was to be buried at Krokot but when the bearers of the coffin arrived, and they were asked to bring the coffin

¹² Professor Kagotani Naoto and Professor Iwai Shigeki from Kyoto University, and Professor Shimada Ryuto from Tokyo University made our research stay possible.

to Gan-wang-shan (甘望山 or 甘夢山) to bury him there, they were unhappy. In addition, they contemplated that when he was alive he had a crooked heart, churning out plans to harm people. So the bearers increasingly took an intense dislike to him and thereupon put the coffin down on the road. Nobody was willing to carry his coffin any further. The Chinese officers who were sending him off mourned the death of their own kind. They did their best, asking the people for help speaking sweet words like: "Why should you be so angry as to put the coffin on the road. If the natives see this, it will make us Tang people lose face!"¹³

The bearers were forced to take the coffin to Dan-lan-wang [丹藍望, Tanah Abang], but there they halted again. No matter how they were implored, they were no longer willing to carry the coffin one more step. Therefore, natives had to be hired to carry the coffin to Gan-wang-shan [甘望山].

[Commentary] The Tang People say: If you are in a superior position the people harbour expectations towards you, but if so much hate is heaped upon somebody after his death, then we may know how this person behaved during his life time. We should learn from this.

Dutch officials were not spared harsh criticism, either. Governor-General Diederik Durven is nicknamed in the text "the godless King" on account of his lewd behaviour. But, interestingly enough, in connection with the great massacre of October 1740, it is not Governor-General Adriaen Valckenier who is singled out as the "black *dalang*" but rather his unscrupulous, ambitious successor, Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff:

Van Imhoff caused the uprising of Batavia because he arbitrarily acted as a tyrant and violently rounded up the Tang people [Chinese] and massacred the innocents, and thereby caused the great disaster. If one observes his administration [as governor-general] in later days, he laid the foundations for ruling the country; one may say that he was a fine minister bringing peace and prosperity, but he had a bad conscience, and was ruthless by nature. Even if he had many stratagems, he still was the robber chief of troubled times.

CRITICAL COMMENTS

If we judge the text strictly for its value as a historical text, some critical comments have to be made. Notwithstanding the wealth of anecdotes of human interest throughout the narrative, and the remarkably even-handed treatment of the Chinese massacre of 1740, today's reader occasionally feels disappointed that he said so little about daily life in Batavia. Yet, considering that the author addressed himself to his own inner circle of the Batavia Chinese elite, it is quite possible that he must have thought that more detailed information on how daily affairs were organized and run within the community was of little interest because his readers would already know that. As a result, little is said about the family ties between the Chinese officers spread over various ports throughout the archipelago, or about their relations with their families back in their hometowns in China. We learn hardly anything about the various ways

¹³ Overseas Chinese used to refer to themselves as "People of Tang Shan", the mountains of Tang, namely China.

in which the Chinese officers themselves were involved in the shipping with China or within the archipelago, and so on. For those activities, we have to consult the *Gonganbu* of the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, it is clear that the text is frequently inaccurate when it comes to recording dates. This is rather ironic because by providing a profusion of dates, the author tried to instil in the mind of the reader that he was actually very precise. But given the fact that the text was not composed until the last decade of the nineteenth century, it is clear that the author must have encountered considerable difficulty in collecting materials for the previous two hundred years. As Hsu Yun-Tsiao has pointed out, the descriptions of the events after the 1770s are quite reliable, but the further back in time the author goes, the murkier his portrayal of the events becomes. Much of what he has written down must have been based on pure hearsay.

GENESIS OF THE TEXT

This brings up the question of the genesis of the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji*. How did the author hit upon the idea to write this history? This we will probably never be able to ascertain, but it is not impossible that he was inspired by some events or request to take up the job. This leads me to the following observation, which may also help us uncover the identity of the author himself.

When Oey Bian Kong (Huang Mianguang, 黃綿光namely黃綿公) was appointed *kapitein* in 1791, he commissioned the secretary of the Kong Koan Wu Zuanshou (吳纘綬) to provide a text for a wooden panel that he wished to hang on the wall of the office on the occasion of his accession.¹⁴ He wished to show the full pedigree of the captains who had held office before him. This tablet and four more panels ordered by Captain Oey's successors still exist and adorn the walls of the atrium of the Sinological Institute in Leiden.

The text of the tablet begins with extolling the first captain, Souw Bing Kong, because he brought prosperity to the city by sailing to his home province of Fujian to invite his fellow countrymen to come and engage in trade at the new city of Batavia. He was successful, for the following year he returned with several junks in his wake, and this was the beginning of the good relationship with the homeland. Making a big jump in time, the panel then mentions that in 1742, after the "great uproar", Lim Bing Kong was appointed captain and that the Kong Koan began its official work. Finally, Oey Bian Kong declared that, "following the examples set by his illustrious predecessors, he will devote himself to the well-being of his people". This promise of proper behavior is followed by the list with the names of all the Chinese captains until then. In later years, seven of Lim Bing Kong's successors also added their names on the list. It would only seem natural that Wu Zuanshou, the Chinese secretary who had carried out his research to gather the names of all the Chinese captains so far, afterwards felt obliged to do the same thing for all the Chinese officers that had served in the administration before and after the establishment of the Kong Koan in 1742 and that thus the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* was born.

¹⁴ Wu Zuanshou was the son of the former Chinese Lieutenant Wu Panshui.

STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

How then did the author set out to construct and compose his tale? What template did he use? He did not really have an example to follow. First of all, he had to create a basic chronological structure for his entangled narrative in which several concerns overlapped. How was he to allot space to the various individuals, institutions, physical objects, important events, and stories of human interest that he planned to deal with in his narrative? He did so by opting for a temporal, annalistic approach. By presenting his data in a chronological, year-by-year account, the calendar served as the organising factor of his narrative. He created, so to say, a genealogical tree of the administration of Chinese Batavia. Thus, he also had to decide whether he was going to use the Chinese or the Dutch calendar. This problem he solved by applying *both* the Chinese lunar calendar and the western Gregorian calendar. And, if this was not enough, for Chinese dates he gave not only the year of dynastic rule but also the cyclical characters of that particular year. To give an example, the opening lines of the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* run as follows: "In the twelfth moon of the 38th year of the Wanli (萬曆) emperor of the Great Ming (大明) dynasty, *Geng Xu* (庚戌 the year circle of the Chinese lunar calendar), the first month of 1610".

This same triple calendar is applied from the beginning to the end. The imperial calendar legitimized the rule of the reigning emperor over the *tianxia*, 天下 the "all under heaven", and the Dutch calendar Dutch rule over Batavia. Even today, events of the imperial past are still dated in China according to the dynastic calendar and not by the western calendar. The transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty, the "change of the mandate of Heaven" (革命) in 1644 therefore was a serious matter. It was not just a change of political regime but a succession of events in which nature showed that everything was in upheaval and out of balance: "In China at the time, dust storms and terrible rains raged. At night, tens of thousands of horses and wild animals fought with each other, their shrieks spread everywhere, snow and ice were almost one foot thick. It is said that footmarks of giants and elephants were observed".

If the calendars provided the backbone, or rather the tree trunk, of the story, the successive tenures of the Dutch governors-general combined with short characterisations of these fellows formed the branches on which the author conveniently hung the tenures of the various Chinese officers. The appointments of the governors-general were confirmed by a "Sovereign in the mother country" – the Chinese author clearly did not conceive that the C was run by the joint directorship of the "Gentlemen XVII".¹⁵ To show the importance of the Chinese captaincy, the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* portrays it as though the appointments of the Chinese officers were also ratified by the "Sovereign

¹⁵ By the second half of the eighteenth century, the appointments of the governors-general were indeed confirmed by the stadholders Willem IV and Willem V of Orange Nassau in their position of *Opperbewindhebber* (supreme director).

of the mother country". After this sketch of the composition of the text, let us now have a brief overview of its contents.

CONTENTS

The initial half-century period, 1619–1670, began with the appointment of Su Ming-gang (Bencon), as the first Chinese captain immediately after the foundation of the city. Many building activities and the construction of infrastructural works are mentioned, such as the digging of the (still existing) Molenvliet Canal by Captain Bingam (Pan Mingyan (潘明岩)).

At the time, all territory from the head stream of the Angke River all the way to the garden of the king consisted of jungle and grassland, bare and swampy, but from then on people began to cultivate sugar cane and vegetable gardens. They cleared off the wild grasses and the big trees. The Hollanders then built garden houses and water pavilions – a beautiful spectacle to behold! – in order to leisurely enjoy themselves along the higher reaches of the Angke River. From Senen, Kampung Melayu, to Banten and Lembang and Tanjung, the land extending to all these four directions was originally wilderness but was then developed into [cane fields with] sixty sugar mills. The men of the sugar mills cut the forest day and night until the firewood ran out. The sugar mills moved further inland closer to the forests. Starting out from nearby the city the millers planned farther and farther away.

The introduction of the physical outlay of the city is followed by an account of the introduction of the various tax farms almost all of which eventually wound up in the hands of the Chinese. The hilarious story of an improperly dressed and barefoot but rich Chinese who showed up at the warehouse where the annual action of the tax farms occurred and outbid his countrymen is told with great relish, though not without the moralistic last word that this behaviour set the tune for the moral decline of the Chinese henceforth.

At the time there was a man named Wang Wangguan (王旺觀) who recently had struck it rich, from rags to riches. Improperly dressed and without socks and shoes he barged into the warehouse. The Dutch soldiers at the gate could not stop him. He did not care, but pushed himself in and shouted that he wanted to obtain the poll tax. When the high officials asked him for *anda* [Malay, *hantar*, collateral], Wang Wangguan answered, "I don't need a guarantee; it should suffice if I can give a down payment". Thereupon he handed over the total sum of the tax farm for the whole year to clear the situation. From then on, at all tax farm auctions anybody with or without shoes and stockings could enter the ware house and tender a bid.

Complications arose in 1648 when, upon the death of Captain Yan Erguan alias Siqua (顏二觀) Governor-General Van der Lijn appointed Yan's Balinese wife as the new leader of the Chinese community. This drew the following observation in the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji*:

This Balinese lady had no wisdom and no agenda. Her customs were different from the Chinese people. Isn't it strange that she suddenly was put in charge of the Chinese? One can imagine the moral standing of the people at the time. Most curious is that Guo Xun (郭訓, Hoenko), who served as lieutenant for more than ten years, acknowledged her as captain.

The Chinese say: Given the fact that Erguan's wife served as captain, there are examples of women who ruled the country during Han and Tang dynasties. Why would it then be special for barbarian countries! But from these examples we can see that these countries were doomed to fall apart. The Shang Shu (尚書) says: The hen cackles in the morning (牝雞司晨), what does that portend? It leaves us with a foreboding. The turning upside down of the Yin (陰) and Yang (陽) principles dates from Governor-General Van der Lijn. Afterwards this was confirmed by the fighting and disasters between the Tang people and the Dutch.

After the death of Siqua's widow, a real Chinese captain was again appointed and, after the formal opening up of overseas trade in 1683 by the Chinese empire, one witnesses a rapid increase in the number of Chinese settlers, which is mirrored in the appointment of six lieutenants to serve under the Chinese captain, each of whom had specific tasks. A new and very important institution was added, namely, the *weeskamer* (orphanage and hospital) for the well-being of the Chinese immigrants and their families, and the appointment of the Chinese *boedelmeester*, or estate manager.¹⁶ This institution was framed upon and functioned like its Dutch colonial sister institutions, *weeshuis* and *hospitaal*, and the similar Portuguese *Casa de Misericórdia*. It became an important pillar of Chinese social security in town.

New tax farms, the extensive enlargement of cemeteries, and the establishment of schools and temples show that the community grew substantially in the 1680-1720 period. In 1699, the population of Batavia witnessed for the first time the arrival of a Chinese lady, which was unheard of because of the Qing laws forbidding women from leaving China.

A junk came to Batavia with Wang Jie (王界) with his wife on board. When they came ashore, the Tang people and the natives all came to have a look. This news spread all over Batavia, until it reached the ears of the Great King [the Dutch governor-general]. Wang Jie's wife, with the surname of Zheng (鄭氏), was graceful and dignified. Her clothing was different from that of the people of Batavia. After the Great King had acquired precise information, he decided he want to see what a woman from Tang Shan looked like. He sent people to invite her for a visit, and Wangjie and his wife came to the office of the King to meet. When the same junk returned to China, the event was exposed. The people who had taken the woman out of the country were arrested, and several of them were sentenced to death.

If the author sprinkles various anecdotes that point to a moral decline throughout his depiction of the first hundred years of Chinese life in Batavia, from the 1710s, a series of natural disasters are presented by the author as

¹⁶ The *boedelmeester* took care of the proper liquidation of the estates.

forebodings of the coming disaster of 1740. In 1718, for instance, he wrote:

At the time there occurred one catastrophe upon another: fire clouds appeared, enormous floods reached to the foot of the walls, the mountains collapsed and the earth split, sulfur flooded down. In the bay, fishes and clams floated around dead everywhere, all water creatures were poisoned. The earth tremors of Batavia continued for three days until peace was restored.

Social unrest is portrayed by the conspiracy of the mestizo Pieter Eberfelt and his Javanese henchmen in 1721 and robberies and murders by bandits in the surrounding country side in the 1730s. All this is presented as a prelude to the Chinese rebellion and the subsequent massacre in 1740.

During the reign of the Great King Valckenier, the weather was very hot, the sun burning like fire.

[Commentary] *If the weather is like this, you can know the situation of the people.*

Robbers arose from all quarters. At night they would force the doors and rob the households; during the day they robbed and murdered people. Among those arrested there were Chinese. At the time business was down, the people could not make any profits. Therefore, it became like this.

[Commentary] *If a cruel King reigns, how can peace be achieved?*

The author singled out three culprits behind the Chinese massacre, which occurred in the first week of October 1740: First of all, the pleasure-loving Chinese Captain Ni Hoekong (Lian Fuguang, 連富光) who did not show any compassion for his fellow Chinese and neglected his duties:

You stupid Captain! You administered as if you could not wield your sword and cut. The losses were very big. If you had opened your mouth to save the people, and if the Dutch officials stubbornly did not listen, then you could have diminished your responsibility for what has happened. How could you with a closed mouth be too scared to speak out? Why sat still like a dead body? This so-called life was unfortunate, because an ignorant figure was the leader of the people. How tragic! How lamentable!

Every time I see this, I have to stop writing and lament! I say that the foreigners, although they sit in the elevated position, behaved like wolves and dogs. If it is like this, the Dutch officials committed self-indulgent crimes, but you, Lian Fuguang, have also committed a great crime by ingratiating and submitting yourself.

Second, the spotlight is thrown on the irresolute Governor-General Adriaen Valckenier and his counterpart, the ambitious Director-General Gustaaf Willem, Baron Van Imhoff, whose rash decision to ship off all the indiscriminately arrested Chinese vagrants from the Ommelanden to Ceylon set off the rebellion in the countryside. That these two gentlemen profoundly hated each other and thereby impaired unity in command when it was most needed did not escape the attention of the author.

There follows a very detailed, day-by-day description of the uprising by the Chinese rebels in the Batavian hinterland, the siege and the fighting around the

city walls, which was basically fought by the Chinese against the indigenous allies of the Dutch, and finally the massacre of the Chinese in town. These last were not without concern for what might happen to them, because those Chinese who saw their lives in peril also valiantly took up arms, including a *boedelmeester* who was caught red-handed with a carriage full of hidden arms.

The account of this disaster is followed by interesting moral comments by the copyists who added their own views.

Curiously, the author completely misunderstood the true course of events on the Dutch side. He portrayed it as though Van Imhoff had assumed power after the rebellion and then sent Valckenier to the Netherlands to be punished. In reality, it was the other way around. On 6 December 1740, Governor-General Valckenier arrested Van Imhoff and two Councillors of the Indies for insubordination and put them under house arrest awaiting the departure of the first homeward-bound ships. Van Imhoff and his comrades left on 10 January 1741 for Holland, where they had to account for their “insubordination”. They quickly cleared themselves of Valckenier’s accusations and in turn accused him of having masterminded the massacre. Moreover, they started a lawsuit against him for defamation. Van Imhoff (who had already been appointed as Valckenier’s successor before the news of the massacre became known in Holland) returned to Batavia 26 May 1743. In the meantime, Valckenier had left Batavia after he received notice of his dismissal on 6 November 1741. Upon his arrival at Cape Town, he was arrested on the orders of the Gentlemen XVII and sent back to Batavia to face a lawsuit on account of his conduct during the Chinese massacre. Awaiting a final verdict, he remained under arrest in Batavia Castle for almost ten years before he died on 20 June 1751, several months after his great antagonist Van Imhoff’s death.

It is remarkable indeed that the generally well-informed anonymous author who gave such a detailed description of the Chinese rebellion and the massacre that ensued should so misinterpret what had happened between Valckenier and Van Imhoff in Dutch administrative circles.

The period after the 1740s is by far the best documented one, most likely because from that moment the Kong Koan was officially set up, which meant that ample archival material was at the author’s disposal. In the 1750s, an account is given showing how two Chinese *luitenants* saved the Company by deploying their private troops to beat the army of the sultan of Banten, proving after all that the Chinese could also fight and be brave, and even insinuating that if the Chinese had been as brave in 1740 events might have taken a very different turn. (At least that seems to be the purport of the story, which is a bit far-fetched, but that does not matter here). Many interesting insights on Chinese life are presented in the following pages such as for instance: Chinese financial scandals surrounding the handing out of false permits and money forgery, and religious events such as a purifying *jiao* (醮) ritual to collect and send to heaven all those wandering ghosts still roaming Batavia and the Ommelanden thirty years after the massacre. The author also comments with nostalgia about the pomp and circumstance surrounding the installation

of Captain Tan Engguan in 1775. This elaborate description shows that the author must have witnessed it himself, and he lamented that by the time of his writing, none of the heroes of that spectacle were alive anymore. Captain Tan Engguan himself died in the year of his investiture, which leads one of the Chinese commentators of the text to add the following footnote:

The Tang people say: To ride the five-mountain sedan chair carried by eight bearers, and in addition to be escorted by followers, that is grand ceremony fit for the imperial court. When native officers overstep their authority with ceremonies in defiance of Heaven and behave irrationally, slight fortune is hard to face! You should not overstep your authority and furthermore with such ostentation. Then your vitality will be drained. Therefore, the wrath of heaven did not let him (Captain Tan Engguan) enjoy his position for a long time. The later generations should learn a lesson from this.

The last twenty years of the Chinese annals of Batavia include many references to social and political unrest, such as the increasing insecurity in the Ommelanden of Batavia and the outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. But the author also gave many personal observations about the captains of the day, whom he must have known personally. This again makes us suspect that the author may have been the secretary of the Kong Koan, Wu Zuanshou.

The *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* concludes on an optimistic tone. After the author (writing in 1793) referred to the confusing events that were occurring in Europe in the aftermath of the French revolution in Europe, he dared to foretell peace on earth: "In 1800 the peoples of all colours in the world will return in the fold of one government, and will all get along like brothers, be in accord with customs and laws, and hold in awe and veneration Heaven's will". Alas! That expectation was not fulfilled.

IN CONCLUSION

Summing up the above, what does the *Kai Ba Lidai Shiji* amount to as a historical text? It cannot be denied that a large part of the narrative consists of dreary texts without a plot, bare enumerations of tenures of Chinese officers and of institutional measures that were taken by the VOC administration to regulate social and economic life in town over a period of two hundred years. Admittedly, this historical overview of Batavia's past lacks any kind of plot development, but maybe we should not expect the author to even try to provide an all-enveloping story with a message. The author has tried to enliven his text with entertaining stories, each with a simple moral of its own. Indeed, if there is an underlying idea to be found in these annals, it is that the author aimed to record the past, not just to give every Chinese officer his place in history but also in order to enable the reader to interpret the present by providing exemplary tales of the past. There is a moral undertone to many of the stories that he recorded. People who misbehaved themselves inevitably were punished either within their lifetime or after. Sly schemers who betrayed Chinese refugees after the great 1740 massacre or unreliable

recruiters of Chinese sailors for the VOC may have reaped great short-term financial profit, but in the end the severest punishment from heaven awaited them that a Chinese can imagine: they remained without offspring.

But perhaps these afterthoughts amount to subjecting the text to qualifications that it was not designed to take. Whatever its defects may be, thanks to its many characterisations of various Chinese, Indonesian, and Dutch individuals, it does provide us with unexpectedly clear insight into the mind of a learned, late eighteenth-century Chinese inhabitant of Batavia and his thoughts about the rather unique Sino-Dutch *convivencia* that existed during the era of the VOC.

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