

divergences: Emerson can spot any variant or innovation and reflect on their implications with complete assurance. Purbo Asmoro is extremely lucky to have found in Emerson such an able and discerning intermediary between him and an English-speaking world.

Emerson's attention to detail as a researcher is nothing short of jaw-dropping. To take one particularly striking, but hardly exceptional, example: late in the book she provides graphs analyzing the timing of different elements of performances by ten different contemporary puppeteers—how much time was taken up for narrative or “interpretive” sections, for comic interludes, for battle scenes, etc. We're talking *seconds* here, not just minutes. Working up these graphs has to have taken extraordinary amounts of very patient work, but the results are indeed enlightening, providing an easily legible comparison of performance practices among the most famous puppeteers of the day. Emerson appears also to have taken careful notes on every performance she has attended (over 1,500 of Purbo Asmoro's alone) and all the many interviews she has had with performers and commentators.

The contrast between this meticulously researched, highly informative, and lucidly written contribution to the field of wayang studies, on the one hand, and a great deal of what gets published in performance studies today—poorly edited, poorly copyedited, and providing only clichéd analyses—on the other, is striking.

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Strangers in the Family: Gender, Patriline, and the Chinese in Colonial Indonesia

GUO-QUAN SENG

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023.

Despite extensive scholarship on Indonesia's Chinese minority, *Strangers in the Family* offers a wholly fresh perspective. Spanning from the latter days of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to post-independence Indonesia, this elegant monograph reexamines the Chinese families of Java's northern coast through a focus on gender, sexuality, race, and the ways these aspects intersected and evolved under Dutch colonialism. While previous studies have emphasized Confucian patriliney as a defining aspect of Chineseness in Southeast Asia, Guo-Quan Seng foregrounds the women—often of Indigenous or multiracial ancestry—within creolized Sino-Southeast Asian families. By doing so, he introduces a much-needed gender dimension to the histories of overseas Chinese. The author shows that mothers, daughters, grandmothers, wives, concubines, widows,

and even enslaved women, despite their subordinate positions, actively “spoke back” and defended their interests within the constraints of a patriarchal society. Thus, he casts a novel light on the moral landscape of the Sino-Javanese community from these women’s perspectives.

Focusing on the archetype of the stranger, Seng argues that Indigenous concubines and their multiracial daughters were strangers in their own families; they were expected to raise children in a culturally Chinese patrilineal milieu in which they effectively remained outsiders. He also challenges the long-standing sinological tradition of viewing Southeast Asia’s Chinese communities through a purely Chinese lens and dismissing any discrepancies as aberrations. The book takes a different path, scrutinizing Chinese-Indonesian history through the overlapping prisms of Chinese masculinities, Indigenous Indonesian family structures, and their co-evolution under Dutch rule. It demonstrates in rich detail how VOC rule permanently altered Chinese marriage practices and how ethnic boundaries were repeatedly reconfigured during the colonial period as a result of changing policies on race management.

In addition to the introduction, the book consists of four parts, each containing two chapters. The first part discusses the formation of Java’s creolized Chinese society, highlighting the agency of Indigenous and multiracial women and the prevailing marriage systems. Part 2 examines how these women challenged patriarchy through divorce pleas and other means of protecting their interests. Part 3 focuses on reformers’ efforts to create new discourses on love, sex, and marriage. Part 4 explores Western-influenced notions of gender equality, the backlash they caused, and the introduction and aftermath of colonial birth registration. In the conclusion, the author makes broader comparisons with other Chinese-descended communities in Southeast Asia and discusses the long-term effects of this specific history in contemporary Indonesia.

Chineseness as an exclusionary racial identity traditionally pivoted around the continuation of the paternal family line and adherence to Confucian marriage traditions. However, by focusing on women’s agency, this book uncovers several unique dynamics along Java’s northern coast. Its emphasis on West Java and Batavia stems primarily from source availability, as the archive of the Chinese Council (Kong Koan 公館) of Batavia has survived while those of Semarang and Surabaya have not. Intriguingly, this archival source reveals that women in Sino-Javanese families had greater agency in initiating divorce trials than their peers in China and Europe. In contrast with China, they maintained strong ties with their natal families, practiced bilateral wealth succession strategies, and followed patterns of concubines living separately from wives. This likely reflects the influence of local Islamic practices.

By the early twentieth century, local, regional, and global developments had significantly reshaped Chinese-Indonesian family structures. While Malay had come to serve as the dominant language, most families preserved Chinese religious practices, albeit in localized forms. Under the influence of Western education, a dynamic moral discourse centered on Confucianist revival established itself in Java, aiming, among other goals, to modernize the institution of marriage.

Facilitated by print capitalism, discussions on sexology, romantic love and courtship, monogamy, and sexual liberation could now be articulated and disseminated in vernacular Malay. Reformists also attempted to bring about legal equality between Chinese people and Europeans, thereby sparking discussions about the benefits of implementing Europeanized family law and the novel concept of civil law marriages. At the same time, as the book details, the Chinese feminist movement in Java faced strong societal resistance whenever westernization seemed to advance too quickly.

The author has a keen eye for the ironies that marked the lives of women in Chinese families. He highlights how Indigenous concubines and their multiracial daughters ensured the continuation of Java's Chinese community, learning Confucian marriage rituals and traditional matchmaking in the process, all while remaining marginalized within the ethnopatriarchal structures they helped keep alive. In the 1890s, they suddenly lost their right to hold and transact properties. The underlying legal reforms reflected the advice of Dutch sinologists, many of whom placed greater emphasis on prescriptive Confucianist doctrines than on locally evolved practices. Colonial regulations also solidified the racial divide between Chinese and Indigenous Indonesians. For one thing, the mandatory civil registry of births in 1919 sparked an obsession with genealogies. Most Chinese fathers eventually complied with this requirement, thereby gaining official recognition of their patrilineal naming system. (Few felt the need to also register their marriage.) Paradoxically, this element of colonial bureaucracy made people of Chinese descent more identifiable as non-natives, thus perpetuating their long-standing plight of discrimination and alienization in postindependence Indonesia.

The book boasts numerous additional merits that vie for attention. It is innovative in its focus on inter-Asian colonial encounters, prioritizing them over those involving Western actors. It also utilizes a diverse array of primary sources, encompassing both archival and published materials, in Chinese, Malay, and Dutch. The author is a skilled writer with a profound grasp of the relevant literature, genealogies, lived experiences, and legal and economic conditions. The result is a comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of a frequently overlooked demographic segment, further enhanced by photographs, biographical sketches, and illuminating fictional accounts.

Several chapters draw from the Chinese minutes of the Batavia Kong Koan meetings, now published in 15 volumes by Xiamen University Press. Unfortunately, the corresponding Malay minutes (1912–64) are excluded from this extraordinary series—arguably reflecting the enduring liminality of the Sino-Malay heritage—though scans of this handwritten material are accessible through Leiden University's Digital Collections portal. Their added value to a study like this would be twofold. First, since the Chinese minutes ceased to be recorded after 1920, the Malay material is among the few available sources for later periods. Second, the colloquial Malay language better reflects the heterogeneity of Java's Chinese-descended communities. For instance, the romanized names Lie Kong Foe (August 4, 1913), Tjong Foeng Njong (September 6, 1916), and

Lie A Foeng (March 4, 1918) are immediately recognizable as belonging to Hakka individuals, whereas the corresponding Chinese minutes simply use 李光匏, 張芳娘, and 李亞鴻, without any indication of their ethnolinguistic origins.

As someone with a background in linguistics, I found the hybrid names of certain women in Sino-Javanese families particularly intriguing. The book presents several combinations of Chinese surnames, Malay nicknames, and/or the element Nio (娘), such as Jap Kapak Nio, Tjiam Molek, Tan Paginio, Certi Nio, and Nie Bales. Such gendered, translingual naming practices, also evident in the Malay Kong Koan minutes and Sino-Malay publications, hold significance for the study of Chinese-Indonesian family history and, as the author terms it, “inter-Asian intimacies” (p. 5).

I have two minor quibbles, also pertaining to linguistics. First, while the author has made efforts to maintain the original spellings of Malay words in direct quotes, many examples display a slightly awkward mix of colonial and modern orthographies, sometimes using the Malaysian rather than the Indonesian standardization. (One could no doubt argue that this orthographic diversity mirrors the plurilingual, creolized history depicted in the book.) Second, I disagree with the identification of *hartawan* as an early twentieth-century neologism (p. 122). This word already featured in classical Malay texts and was likely borrowed directly from Sanskrit (*arthavān*). This does not diminish the author’s insightful analysis of the *hartawan* as a cultural and literary archetype, representing Java’s morally corrupt economic elite whose era, according to a new generation of thinkers, had ended.

Finally, I suspect that *Strangers in the Family* could serve as a catalyst for further discussion on the paradigm of creolization within the context of multiracial families in Southeast Asia. The author employs the term “creole” as a more analytically impartial designation compared to its Malay counterpart *peranakan*. In academic discourse, this label has traditionally been applied to Chinese-descended Southeast Asian communities because they speak creole languages (cf. Skinner 1996, 59–61). However, there is a certain circularity in this reasoning, as quite some linguists in turn differentiate creole from non-creole languages on the basis of sociohistorical rather than language-internal factors. Southeast Asianists may wish to engage on a more empirical and theoretical level with “archipelagic” notions of creolization (see also Mandal 2018; Kabir 2023). One intervention might be to explore whether creolization existed in Java, the Straits of Malacca, and other parts of Southeast Asia prior to the European presence in those regions, and if so, whether this would necessitate a fine-tuning of the term. In such a discussion, Seng will certainly be an important voice.

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