Beyond the Imperial Frontier:

*Kelenteng* and the Formation of South Fujianese Community in Batavia from
Mid Seventeenth to Early Nineteenth Century

Boyi Chen

*Washington University in St. Louis*

**Abstract**

Studies of overseas Chinese and their communities in early modern Southeast Asia have attracted the attention of many scholars for a long time. However, the question of precisely how these segregated diasporic communities survived by creating their own embedding mechanisms—an institutionalized inserting of social structure and systematic intertwinement—and how they thereby helped reshape the host societies, is one needing more exploration. *Kelenteng* (or *Klenteng*), which specifically refers to the whole array of old-style Chinese temples (Daoist, Buddhist, or other folk religious shrines) in Bahasa Indonesia, played a central role during the formation of the South Fujianese community in Batavia, with a mixed function of temple, ancestral hall, and sometimes even cemetery. Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), was the base camp of the Dutch colony in the Orient. The Dutch designed an agent system in which overseas Chinese served as the ethnic community leaders and councilors under the titles Kapitan Cina and Lieutenant. In Batavia, most of the Kapitan and Lieutenant were South Fujianese, and the majority of the Chinese population came from South Fujian. Within this multiethnic context, this paper examines how twelve of the earliest *kelentengs* nourished the diasporic embedding mechanisms and reshaped the South Fujianese community in Batavia, in terms of official authority, clan and commercial competition, local accommodation, and daily ritual practices.

*Keywords: Kelenteng; South Fujianese; Kapitan; Lieutenant; ritual practice*