

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sugar and the City: The Contribution of Three Chinese-Indonesians to Architecture and Planning in the Dutch East Indies (1900–1942)

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Around 1900, the Dutch East Indies was a multicultural and international society populated by Indonesians, Europeans, British Indians, Arabs and Chinese. The Chinese, although one of the colony's ethnic minorities, contributed considerably to its economic and urban development. This article examines the professional and private lives of three Chinese-Indonesians: Tjong A Fie, Oei Tiong Ham and Liem Bwan Tjie. Tjong was a first-generation Chinese who left China and settled in Medan where he soon became one of the wealthiest citizens. Oei was a second-generation Chinese. Born into a trading family in Semarang, the fortune he accumulated in the sugar industry and his exuberant lifestyle soon earned him the nickname 'Sugar King'. Liem, the fourth-generation descendant of a successful, Semarang-based textile-business family, became a professional architect. Much of Liem's work was commissioned by Chinese-Indonesians.

What Tjong, Oei and Liem had in common was their ethnic and cultural origin, their local and supralocal prominence within Chinese communities in the Dutch East Indies and their pioneering and leading role as professionals. By focussing on Tjong, Oei and Liem as *pars pro toto* for the affluent and educated Chinese community, this article describes how these figures cut across colonial categories of culture and community. It also illustrates how their personal and professional preferences and choices were instrumental in introducing European idioms and approaches to architecture and town planning and thus in changing the appearance of cities in the Dutch East Indies.

Early 20th-Century Architecture and Planning in the Dutch East Indies

In 1923, H. P. Berlage (1856–1934), one of the doyens of modern architecture in the Netherlands, toured the Dutch East Indies. During this journey, Berlage developed a keen interest in Chinese houses and temples. However, he also observed that, while the introduction of Western civilisation had had a mainly positive effect on the Chinese, it simultaneously alienated them from their own architectural culture, since many Chinese preferred working with 'a European architect of dubious quality' to working with a Chinese architect (Cramer 1924: 78). Much to Berlage's relief, the latter undesirable development was countered by a number of younger architects who took inspiration from classical Chinese architecture and creatively applied Chinese motifs in their own modern work. The exchange between 'Chinese' and 'European' and the cultural synergy Berlage describes are intriguing, but not unique to the Dutch East Indies. For centuries, the Chinese had internalised and synthesised elements of foreign cultures (Zhu 2009). In China, the introduction of the Renaissance linear perspective in the 18th century and the Sino-Christian style, developed in Beijing around 1930 by the Dutch Benedictine monk Dom Adelbert Gresnigt, are cases

in point (Zhu 2009: 11–41; Coomans 2014). The commonalities and connections between Chinese and Europeans who steered urban development and architecture in the Dutch East Indies, however, are rarely analysed.

Absorbing ostensibly 'non-Chinese' elements into 'Chinese' culture exemplifies how different communities embraced 'external' influences in Dutch colonial society. This article examines the urban development of the cities of Medan (on Sumatra) and Semarang (on Java) to understand the synergy between Chinese and Europeans in the Dutch East Indies in the early 20th century and how this affected the development of architecture and planning in the colony. It also examines the private and professional lives of three prominent local Chinese-Indonesians: Tjong A Fie in Medan, and Oei Tiong Ham and Liem Bwan Tjie in Semarang (**Figure 1**).

Tjong, Oei and Liem each embraced and incorporated various elements – Chinese, European and Indonesian – into his life and work, from personal hairstyle to management style and from education to social and built environment. Medan and Semarang are historically significant in Indonesia because of their reputation as 'Chinese cities' and their rapid urban development since 1900. The article analyses Tjong, Oei and Liem's lives and selected planning

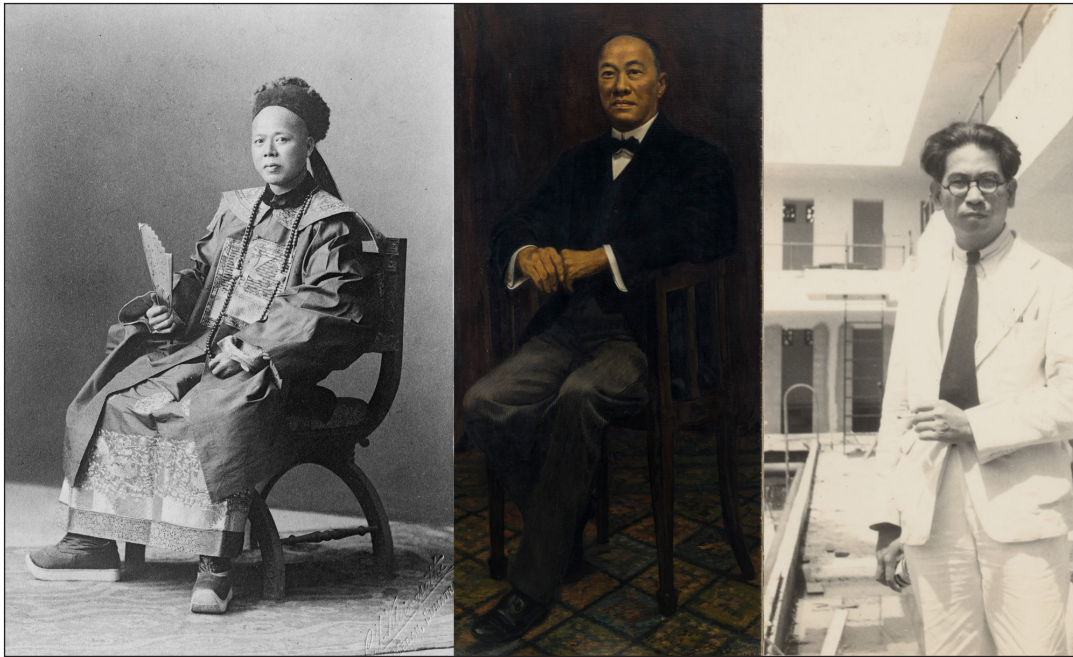


Figure 1: Left: Tjong A Fie (ca. 1902) (Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Amsterdam: Inv. No. TM-10018656). Centre: Oil painting of Oei Tiong Ham by J. P. Tydoman (1931) (Peranakan Museum, Singapore: Collection of Dr Hervey Oei Tjong Bo and Mr Stephen Lim). Right: Liem Bwan Tjie (1937) (Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam: Inv. No. LIEM f4–08a).

and building projects they were involved in, exploring how their personal and professional preferences informed building and planning projects in Medan and Semarang.

Tjong exemplifies the successful *totok* Chinese: one born in China who settled in the Dutch East Indies and maintained strong commercial and philanthropic ties with his country of origin. Conversely, Oei and Liem represent *peranakan* Chinese: those who had lived in the Dutch East Indies and the British Straits Settlements for several generations, eventually integrating various non-Chinese elements into their private and professional lives, but who maintained no special commercial or other relationships with mainland China. In their own way Tjong, Oei and Liem all acted as cultural mediators or agents who ‘established new patterns of consumption and taste’ and ‘facilitated cultural as well as economic exchanges’ that were ‘critical to the growth’ of Dutch East Indies cities (Chua 2019).

Tjong and Oei achieved this through commercial investments and building commissions; Liem did so by designing houses and offices for his often-affluent Chinese clientele, who carefully blended European and Asian design concepts. Through the contributions, efforts and visions of Tjong, Oei and Liem, Medan and Semarang developed commercially and culturally into towns of regional and even international significance. Consequently, they became important incubators for contemporary and international architecture and planning. Thus, Tjong, Oei and Liem’s presence, their efforts, investments and outlook directly or indirectly contributed to the emergence of modern, i.e. *Indisch*, planning and architecture in the Dutch East Indies.

The projects Tjong, Oei and Liem engaged in should not be seen in isolation from other cultural developments across the archipelago; in particular, the search for a contemporary, Indo-European or *Indisch* architectural style

(Van Dullemen 2010: 18–30). After the end of the 19th century, architects educated in the Netherlands or elsewhere in Europe increasingly criticised the architectural quality and arrangements of buildings commissioned and built by the colonial government and private entrepreneurs. Among the most vocal architects were Herman Thomas Karsten (1884–1945), Henri Maclaine Pont (1884–1971) and Casper Prosper Wolff Schoemaker (1882–1949). One of the main issues under discussion was whether an *Indisch* architectural style should incorporate traditional local design features, decoration, constructions and building materials, or emulate their European counterparts (Maclaine Pont 1924; Wolff Schoemaker 1923). Although the issue was never formally resolved, and designs were generally adapted to climatic and cultural conditions, and buildings and town plans designed in the Dutch East Indies during the first decades of the 20th century mostly took their cue from contemporary Western architecture styles and planning principles.

This article argues that Tjong, Oei and Liem’s building projects were locally adapted interpretations of contemporary Western design principles with features informed by their understanding of Chinese traditions and culture. What motivated Tjong, Oei and Liem to opt for hybrid rather than traditional Chinese designs cannot be concluded with absolute certainty; however, it is possible that, particularly for Tjong and Oei, it was a commercial imperative to project a contemporary ‘modern’ and Western image, at least in public. It is also possible, as seems to have been the case for Liem and to a lesser degree for Oei, that contemporary Western design and lifestyle were more appealing than their own Chinese identities. A possible third reason is that being modern, i.e. ‘of their time’, as well as their adoption of elements deemed to be Western, including style and etiquette, made it easier for Tjong, Oei and Liem to mingle

with the colony's European elite. Whatever their motives, the building projects and the lives of Tjong, Oei and Liem show how in the early 20th century, Chinese-Indonesians helped establish and develop locale-specific contemporary architecture and planning in the Dutch East Indies.

The terms 'modern' and 'Western' are not used interchangeably in this article. In line with the common understanding among historians, 'modern' and 'modernisation' indicate social and cultural changes and the introduction and adaptation of new technologies. 'Modern', so used, indicates not a particular architectural style but a development, a person, a preference that was contemporary or of its time. The term 'Western' here distinguishes a particular approach, feature, style or structure from 'non-Western', e.g. Chinese or other local approaches, features, styles and structures. After a brief general introduction about the Chinese in Indonesia, the stories and projects of Tjong, Oei and Liem are presented in two sections: one on Medan and another on Semarang.

The Chinese in Indonesia

Initial contacts between Chinese (*Tionghoa*) and the Indonesian archipelago date back to the 2nd century CE when Chinese seafarers established trading routes between China and India (Widodo 2006: 67).¹ Sumatra's east and south coast and Java's north coast provided practical anchorages and opportunities to establish settlements, due to their favourable geographical position in relation to the seasonal monsoons and maritime routes.

From the 10th century onwards, Chinese traders settled in these areas.² In time, they also settled on other islands in the archipelago and further inland on Java and Sumatra. Chinese merchants and craftsmen developed connections with the archipelago's indigenous population, with other regions in Asia and with Europeans who began arriving in these territories in the late 16th century. Consequently, the Chinese cemented their position as drivers of the archipelago's economic, societal and physical development.

After the Dutch secured their spice-trade monopoly and settled in parts of the archipelago, the position of and attitudes towards the Chinese gradually changed. As the Dutch gained control over the archipelago, the Chinese were gradually forced to work for them, and the Chinese community became subject to Dutch rules and regulations. In 1740, Chinese sugar mill workers on Java revolted *en masse* by burning sugar mills. The Dutch responded by killing many of the Chinese. To avoid further tension and disturbances between the Chinese and the archipelago's other ethnic groups, Chinese residents were restricted to living and working in isolated, dedicated Chinese quarters, known as *Chinese wijken*. The consequence of this decision, which was formalised by the Dutch East Indies government in 1835 and only reluctantly abandoned in the early 20th century, hindered the integration of Chinese communities in the emerging colonial cities and influenced the layout and appearance of colonial cities (Menghong 2009: 127–128).³ Yet, despite these social and spatial limitations, the Chinese became the ethnic majority and important traders and retailers in various coastal cities in the archipelago. Medan and Semarang, the two cities featured in this article, are compelling cases in point.

They are geographically far apart, and the Chinese arrived at different points in time and for different purposes. However, around 1900, Medan and Semarang were each home to a large Chinese community, and their economic and physical development was significantly influenced by the presence of the Chinese in general and one or two Chinese in particular.

The origins of Semarang's Chinese community date back to the arrival of Chinese naval admiral Zheng He in the early 15th century (Suherdjoko 2008; Widodo 2006: 67–68). While the Javanese, Malay and Arabs settled on the west bank of the Semarang River, the Chinese settled on the east bank. Two centuries later, the Dutch followed their example by also settling there. In response to the 1741 Chinese revolt, however, the Dutch burned the Chinese settlement to the ground and enacted new legislation forcing the Chinese to move to an isolated Chinese-only camp on the opposite bank (**Figure 2**). Despite their isolation, the Semarang Chinese continued to develop. By the 1860s, the Chinese district (*Pecinan*) had developed into a thriving residential and business district dotted with Chinese houses, shops and temples, ensuring the Chinese controlled a substantial part of the city's retail business sector. By the end of the 19th century, Medan was still a relatively new and modest sized town on Sumatra's east coast (**Figure 3**). Although local sultans administered the region for centuries, the city of Medan only developed when European entrepreneurs opened the region up to the cultivation of tobacco in the 1860s. To work the tobacco plantations, their owners employed coolies brought in from mainland China, notably from Fujian and Guangdong. Medan's booming business opportunities soon also lured entrepreneurial Chinese to start a business in Medan – a business which not infrequently involved trading coolies and opium. Around the turn of the century, these Chinese entrepreneurs, coolies and their descendants determined Medan's Chinese appearance and atmosphere.⁴

Modelling Medan: Tjong A Fie and Tjong Yong Hian

If you were to ask a resident of Medan to name a wealthy and influential inhabitant in Medan around 1900, chances are the answer would be Tjong A Fie (1860–1921) (Loderichs 1997: 26). The reputation of Tjong A Fie is based on two accomplishments: the fortune he and his older brother, Tjong Yong Hian (1850–1911), accumulated after their arrival in Medan from China, and their philanthropy (Buiskool 2009: 114, 118; Buiskool 2019: 123–151).⁵ The foundation of the Tjongs' wealth was their involvement in the opium trade: between 1890 and 1918 Tjong A Fie acquired several opium trade monopolies. They were involved in producing other goods such as sugar, salt, palm oil and rubber, and recruiting coolies from China. Furthermore, the Tjongs owned banks, a substantial volume of real estate in and around Medan and even a railway in China (Buiskool 2009: 115). Thanks to the profits they generated and their philanthropy in the wider Medan area, the Malay Straits and in China – they donated money to schools, bridges, Chinese temples, mosques and hospitals – the Tjongs won the respect of fellow Chinese and Indonesians, Arabs, Dutch and other Europeans alike (Loderichs 1997: 26–27).⁶ Because they were held in



Figure 2: Dutch (A) and Chinese (B) districts in Semarang (ca. 1795) (Nationaal Archief, The Hague: Inv. No. NA NL-HaNA_4.MIKO_11).



Figure 3: Medan (ca. 1895) (Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Amsterdam: Inv. No. TM-10015060).

such high esteem among local and European communities, the Tjongs could traverse ethnic and cultural barriers with relative ease. To confirm their status in the Chinese community, the Dutch Indies government granted both brothers in succession the highest honorary military rank of *majoor der Chinezen* (major of the Chinese) (Loderichs 1997: 26).⁷ By granting the Tjongs this rank, the government acknowledged them as the principal representatives of the Chinese community in the region. Furthermore, the rank qualified them to sit on Medan's local council – which, with a short interlude in 1918 and 1919, Tjong A Fie did from the moment he was appointed major in 1911, a rank he held until he passed away in 1921 (Buiskool 2019: 139–141).

The entrepreneurial, societal and philanthropic activities of the Tjong brothers coincided with Medan's early development, notably that of its commercial centre (Buiskool 2019; Loderichs 1997).⁸ Not least because of their financial interest and investment in much of the property in this part of town, the Tjong brothers fundamentally contributed to the transformation of the wider Kesawan area of Medan from a commercial but otherwise unimpressive and unsightly area into a full blown, representative business district adorned with striking office buildings, social clubs, shops and shop houses (**Figure 4**). Tjong's private building projects in Medan candidly reference the hybrid architecture of the British Straits Settlements in general and of Penang in particular. Meanwhile, his commercial



Figure 4: Land ownership in Medan (1895). Pink areas are the property of the captain and the major of the Chinese (Leiden University Libraries, Leiden: Inv. No. KK 140–06–05).

building projects, which were also influenced by developments in the British Straits Settlements, displayed a preference for full-fledged Western architecture. In so doing, they steered and stimulated the development of contemporary architecture in the archipelago.

Developing and Transforming Medan's Kesawan

The transformation of the Kesawan area of Medan started in the 1880s. While some transformations were planned, others were not. One unplanned transformation was the transition from being a Malay to a predominantly Chinese area. Following the fire of 1899, another transformation, which occurred gradually without clear direction, was the overall reconstruction of the area between Kesawan Street, Medan's thoroughfare, and the railway track. The building regulations that were in place prior to this area's reconstruction fundamentally changed its original layout and buildings. As a result of the new regulations,

the previously organically and randomly formed secondary streets, shops and houses were rebuilt in a grid pattern aligned with normalised brick shophouses whose architecture mimicked that of Chinese shophouses in the British Straits Settlements. Furthermore, entrepreneurs were grouped and regrouped according to the category of their merchandise: meat, vegetables, opium, etc. Taking their cue from these regulations, the area on the other side of the railway, south of Kesawan, was developed in a similar fashion (**Figure 5**) (Naudin ten Cate 1905: s.p.).

Because they owned sizeable plots of land in both areas and heavily invested in their (re)construction, the Tjong brothers were prominent stakeholders in the (re)development of these areas. Thus, even though they were not planners or architects, the Tjongs were instrumental in reorganising the town plan and architecture in this part of Medan (**Figure 6**). As a tribute to Tjong Yong Hian, a street in the southern Kesawan area initially called Majoorstraat



Figure 5: Two streets in Kesawan district in Medan: Nieuwe Markt (left, ca. 1890) and Tepekongstraat (right, 1899) (Leiden University Libraries, Leiden: Inv. Nos. 1403382, 1403381).



Figure 6: Chinese district in Medan (ca. 1920) (Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Leiden: Inv. No. RV-A440-q-162).

(Major Street) was changed to Tjong Yong Hian Street. The transformation of Kesawan Street can be characterised by two main developments. One is the reduction of the number of small individual shops in favour of fewer but considerably wider and increasingly tall buildings; the other is the use of prominent façades and interiors, a development that can be seen in most major cities of the Indies archipelago (Van Roosmalen 2003: 61–74). Adopting the architectural style of the period and the region, Kesawan Street changed from a predominantly rural to a highly sophisticated commercial locale. During the first transformation phase, the original but ordinary façades of the shops and houses were replaced by façades that resembled contemporary architecture of the British Straits Settlements, notably the cities of Penang and Melaka. The second phase commenced in 1903 when the Seng Hap department store restyled its façade as an antique temple. The architecture and size of the building were a far cry from the initial buildings and heralded a new trend of companies demanding larger buildings designed in a distinctive architecture style. In 1912, the three-storey building commissioned by British-based company Harrisons & Crosfield confirmed this trend: although the building's architecture mirrored the architecture of contemporary buildings in Penang and Melaka rather than a Roman temple, it illustrated the demand for larger buildings with a distinctive architecture.

To accommodate demands on infrastructure and confirm its rising status, Kesawan's street surface and profile were also adapted. The surface was metalled, electric lights were installed, and buildings were set back, allowing the creation of pavements and occasional galleries to protect pedestrians from sun and rain. The street's transformation affected not only its physical appearance, but also shop ownership, the products and services they offered and their clientele. Ceasing to be a street where most shops were owned and visited by Malays and Chinese, Kesawan Street gradually developed into a place where most buildings were owned or exploited by Europeans and Chinese and catered to the same groups. By the early 1930s, Kesawan Street was no longer the insignificant dirt road with practical facilities it had been around 1900, but a prestigious, high-end business street in the centre of the capital city of Sumatra's east coast (Figures 7, 8).

Tjong A Fie's China-Style Mansion (1898–1900)

One of the very few late-19th century buildings that withstood the transformation of Kesawan Street was Tjong A Fie's mansion. The mansion's plan and exterior appearance combined the architecture of the Hakka Chinese in China and the Chinese across the Straits of Malacca. It was, in fact, an almost exact copy of the house of Tjong's uncle and business partner, Thio Thiaw Siat, in Penang's capital city of George Town. Thio, who was also known by his Cantonese name, Cheong Fatt Tze, and his Mandarin name, Zhang Bishi, was a businessman, philanthropist, diplomat and politician. In addition to being the Tjongs' uncle, he was also their business partner in many of their ventures, notably in China and the British Straits

Settlements. From the street, the house was approached via a Chinese gate that led onto a formal garden. The two-storey house consisted of a front and rear building (Figure 9). The two buildings were connected to a lower and narrower building on either side. In the centre of these four buildings was a small courtyard accessible from the ground floor. On the first floor, a baluster with louvred windows opened onto the courtyard. Inside, the function and decoration of the rooms reflected the pluralistic and international nature of Tjong's personal and professional life. The ground floor accommodated a family, a prayer room reserved solely for ethnic Chinese and a room solely reserved for the sultan of Deli and his family. The large open space on the first floor was used for public gatherings and balls.

Taking its cue from Tjong's uncle's house in Penang, the mansion was an eclectic combination of Chinese and Western architecture, decoration and materials. Above all, because of its location, volume and material opulence, it was a statement about and an expression of Tjong's position and status within the Chinese community in Medan and within Medan itself (Figure 10).

Building a Landmark: Whiteaway Laidlaw Department Store (1918)

One hundred metres south of Tjong A Fie's mansion, Kesawan Street ended and continued as Paleisstraat (Palace Street). Towards the late 1910s, the physical and social transformation that initially only affected Kesawan Street also began to affect Palace road. According to a contemporary journalist, the main reason for this transformation was the anticipated development of a major new east-west thoroughfare, called Soekamoelia and Kerkstraat (Church Street), which crossed Kesawan and Palace Street (Een nieuw bouwwerk 1918: 22). What set off the transformation of Palace Street was the construction of the office building for the Algemeene Vereeniging van Rubberplanters ter Oostkust van Sumatra (AVROS, or General Association of Rubber Planters of Sumatra's East Coast) and the neighbouring office annex showroom building commissioned by Tjong.

Although the commission concerned two separate buildings, the architect G. H. Mulder was asked to design it as a single entity. In line with this brief, Mulder designed the buildings to be distinguishable as individual buildings while presenting a unified façade. To mark the entrances to the two different buildings, Mulder positioned a round tower with a green-glazed, tiled cupola over the corner entrance of the AVROS building and a two-storey-high protruding arcade with a tympanum at roof level over the centrally positioned entrance of the office building annex department store (Figure 11). Inside the neighbouring office annex showroom, a centrally positioned rectangular staircase led to the second and third floor galleries, i.e., offices. The stairs were covered with stone and the floors with wood. For structural reasons, six systematically positioned columns divided the rooms on either side of the central hallway. On the exterior, a balcony ran across the width of the façade on the second floor on either side of the central entrance. The vertical opening of the central



Figure 7: Kesawan in Medan (ca. 1898) (Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Amsterdam: Inv. No. TM-60001715).



Figure 8: Kesawan in Medan (1925) (Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Amsterdam: Inv. No. TM-10015044).

entrance, which extended to the third floor, also ended in a balcony. On the ground floor, Mulder designed a gallery along the entire building block, including the AVROS building. To differentiate the two buildings at ground level, Mulders devised different columns for each building. To emphasise the connection between the buildings, he repeated the columns of the office annex showroom building at the far end of the AVROS gallery.

The buildings Mulder created were imposing, and of dimensions that had not been seen before in Medan: a perfect emblem that propagated the importance and pioneering character of the company and its owners like nothing else. Thanks to their size and design, the buildings stood out from their surroundings (**Figure 12**). Designed by a professionally trained architect – which was not always the case – in a distinctly contemporary



Figure 9: Tjong A Fie Mansion in Medan (ca. 1910) (Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Amsterdam: Inv. No. TM-60030694).



Figure 10: Kesawan, Palace Street and Soekamoelia in Medan (ca. 1930). Tjong A Fie's Mansion is visible on the right side in the centre. (Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Amsterdam: Inv. No. TM-10015046).

European architecture with hints of Classicism, they not only opened up the area south of Kesawan Street but also set the standard for other buildings in the area.

The AVROS building and its adjacent office-showroom epitomise Tjong A Fie's entrepreneurial skills and his prominent role in Medan's development (Loderichs 1997: 32). As one of AVROS' major stakeholders and the owner of what later became the Whiteaway Laidlaw department

store, Tjong was instrumental in steering and forming this transformation. As a city council member, Tjong was invariably well informed about upcoming urban developments. He was therefore in a privileged position vis-à-vis other entrepreneurs and investors as far as investing and promoting projects were concerned – even though, to avoid conflicts of interest, Tjong left council meetings when his projects were being discussed (Gemeenteraad,



Figure 11: Palace Street in Medan (ca. 1920) (Leiden University Libraries, Leiden: Inv. No. 1403375).

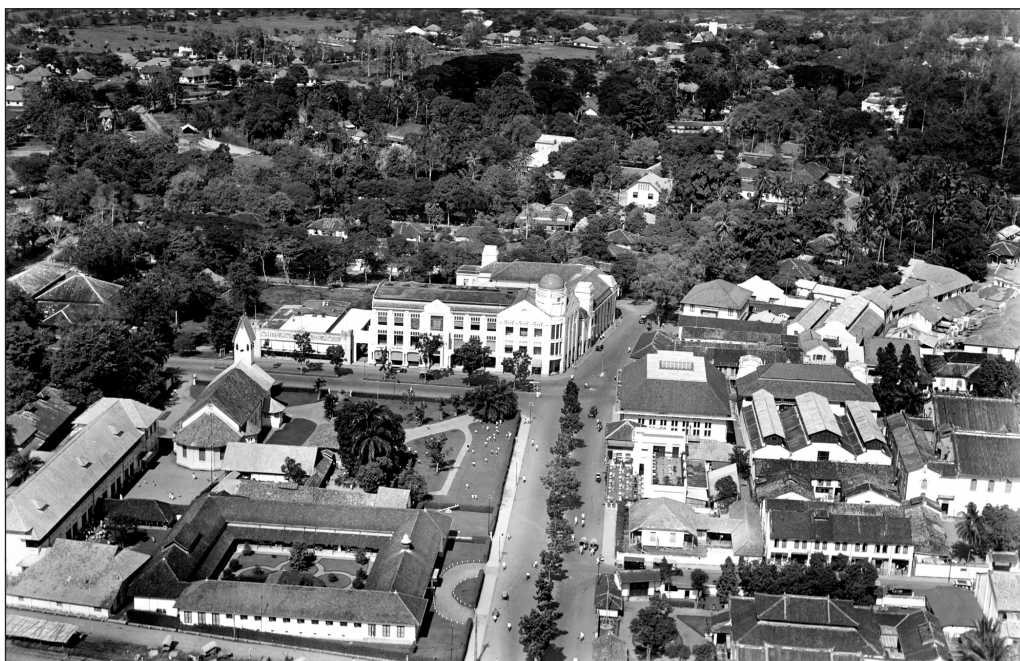


Figure 12: Soekamoelia and Palace Street in Medan (ca. 1930) (Archief Fermont-Cuypers, s.l.)

1918: 1). Tjong's decision to adopt a distinctly contemporary European architecture for the first building south of Kesawan was likely also motivated by commercial considerations.⁹ By creating buildings with a distinctly European feel to them, they tapped into the ambition of increasing numbers of Europeans in and around Medan to recreate a European lifestyle, including European facilities and a European environment (Van Roosmalen 2003: 61–74). By providing his European fellow-citizens with these commodities, Tjong once again turned his sound social antenna into a profitable business and, in so doing, generated other developments.

Not long after the construction of the impressive buildings on Palace Street, two leading Dutch East Indies

companies followed suit. In 1922, the *Nederlandsch-Indische Levensverzekering en Lijfrente Maatschappij* (NILLMY, or the Dutch-Indisch Life Insurance and Annuity Company) opened an office designed by the architect S. Snuyf adjacent to the AVROS building on Soekamoelia street (Akihary 1996: 53). In 1928, on the corner opposite the AVROS building, the *Nederlandsch-Indische Escompto Maatschappij* (Dutch-Indisch Escompto Company) opened an office designed by *Architecten- en ingenieursbureau Ed Cuypers, Hulswit en Fermont* (Architecture and Engineers' Bureau Ed. Cuypers, Hulwit and Fermont) (Norbruis 2018: 94–95). The construction of these modern office buildings confirmed and consolidated the recent transformation of this part of Medan. Tjong did not live to witness

the construction of these two buildings, which unquestionably were generated by the development south of Kesawan he had helped to generate. He passed away in 1921, only three years after the AVROS office building and the Whiteaway Laidlaw department store were built. Today, Kesawan Street, the former Whiteaway Laidlaw department store, the AVROS office building and the Tjong A Fie family mansion are manifestations of the fundamental role Tjong played in transforming Medan into an *Indisch* city.

Shaping Semarang: Oei Tiong Ham and Liem Bwan Tjie

In Semarang, the most prominent and prosperous Chinese citizen in the early 20th century was Oei Tiong Ham (1866–1924). A second-generation Chinese in Indonesia, Oei inherited the successful wholesale NV Handel Maatschappij (Trading Company Ltd) that his father, Kian Gwan, had established in 1863 (Coppel 1989: 185; Kunio 1989a: 188–220).¹⁰ However, the majority of his wealth resulted from his own international activities in trading, notably opium, banking, shipping and the production and trade of sugar. Due to the latter being by far the most profitable of his businesses, and because he lived an opulent and extravagant lifestyle, Oei was also referred to as Semarang's 'Sugar King' (Claver 2014: 260).

Whether Oei Tiong Ham built his success on the back of his father's fortune or started his own company first remains uncertain. What sources and scholars are clear about though, is that Oei Tiong Ham and his father had a different outlook on business and life: whereas his father firmly adhered to Chinese customs and philosophy, Oei Tiong Ham wholeheartedly adopted Western habits and approaches (Coppel 1989: 181–182; Kunio 1989b).¹¹ Oei Tiong Ham's requests to the Dutch Indies government in 1902, to adopt Western attire and haircut rather than Chinese costumes and a queue, and to work and live in Semarang's European rather than Chinese quarters, demonstrated this preference (Brommer 1995: 19; Coppel 1989: 183–184; Kunio 1989b).¹² Oei did not stop at dress. He also adopted European methodologies and expertise in his professional life. Thus, rather than following Chinese management principles, i.e. working exclusively with family or otherwise-related Chinese, Oei appointed staff based on their skill and expertise. As a result, Oei hired Dutch engineers and managers to build his machines and run his companies, and Dutch or Dutch-educated Chinese employees to work in his offices (Kunio 1989b; 142).

Oei's Dutch orientation contributed considerably to his financial wealth and consequently to his status in both the Chinese and Dutch community (Kunio 1989a: 188–220).¹³ The latter was confirmed when the Indies government granted him the rank of *majoer der Chinezen* (major of the Chinese) in 1898. In 1900, because his businesses were very demanding, Oei requested that the government end his position. The government honoured this request and granted Oei the rank of *honorair majoer* (honorary major) (Coppel 1989: 186). Contrary to what this title and his wealth might suggest, though, it was exactly because of his Dutch orientation that Oei was not seen as a social

leader of Semarang's Chinese community — despite his generous philanthropic donations to, for example, schools and temples (Coppel 1989: 184; Kunio 1989a: 188–220). Because Oei simultaneously did not file for 'assimilation' (*gelijkstelling*) to Dutch citizenship, spoke little or no Dutch or English, and didn't Westernise his Chinese name by reversing his surname and first names he remained an outsider in the Dutch community (Coppel 1989: 184). As such, Oei's selective pro-European stance was a double-edged sword: while it earned him great wealth and respect, it simultaneously estranged him from the Chinese community and levelled boundaries between Chinese and Dutch only to a certain degree.

Despite his social 'isolation', Oei steered Semarang's physical development through the land and buildings he owned. Although Oei did not aim to direct or contribute to Semarang's development, his assets fundamentally steered Semarang's urban planning in the early 20th century. Before illustrating why and how Oei's name is intrinsically linked to Semarang's town plan, it's worthwhile to recount Oei's long-standing dispute with the Semarang municipality about a vast plot of land at the centre of Semarang's new expansion plan (**Figure 13**).¹⁴ Likewise, to understand how Oei's preference for a Western lifestyle was reflected in his personal and professional life, his neo-Classical family home with adjacent menagerie in Gergadji and the head office of the Oei Tiong Ham Concern in Semarang's European business district are equally enlightening.

Arguments over Oei's Private Estate Pekunden (1913–1920)

The dispute over Oei's estate, Pekunden, was triggered by the municipality's 1912 plan to build a sewage system (Westerveld 1916: 613–619). Although Oei acknowledged the benefits of the sewage system — which, according to the municipality, would principally affect his estate — he rejected the municipality's proposal to share equally the cost involved between the parties involved: Oei himself, estate owner Be Kwat King and the municipality and various other smaller landowners.¹⁵ Because he was not convinced that the sewage system would affect his and Be's estates, Oei thought it would be unfair if he and Be had to contribute one third of the total cost. Instead, they proposed to share the cost proportionally. The other argument was that the municipality would not confirm either that their contribution towards the sewage system would safeguard Be and Oei from expropriation or that they would at least be compensated if the municipality decided to expropriate them. Oei and Be's concern about expropriation was not unfounded; almost from the day of its inauguration in 1906, the Semarang local council had purchased privately owned land and lobbied the national government to ease expropriation criteria (Van Roosmalen 2008: 43).

The rationale behind these land acquisitions was the local council's ambition to improve local public health and housing conditions, address the dire housing shortage and arrive at a rational approach to town planning. As the lobby for these topics and expropriation gained

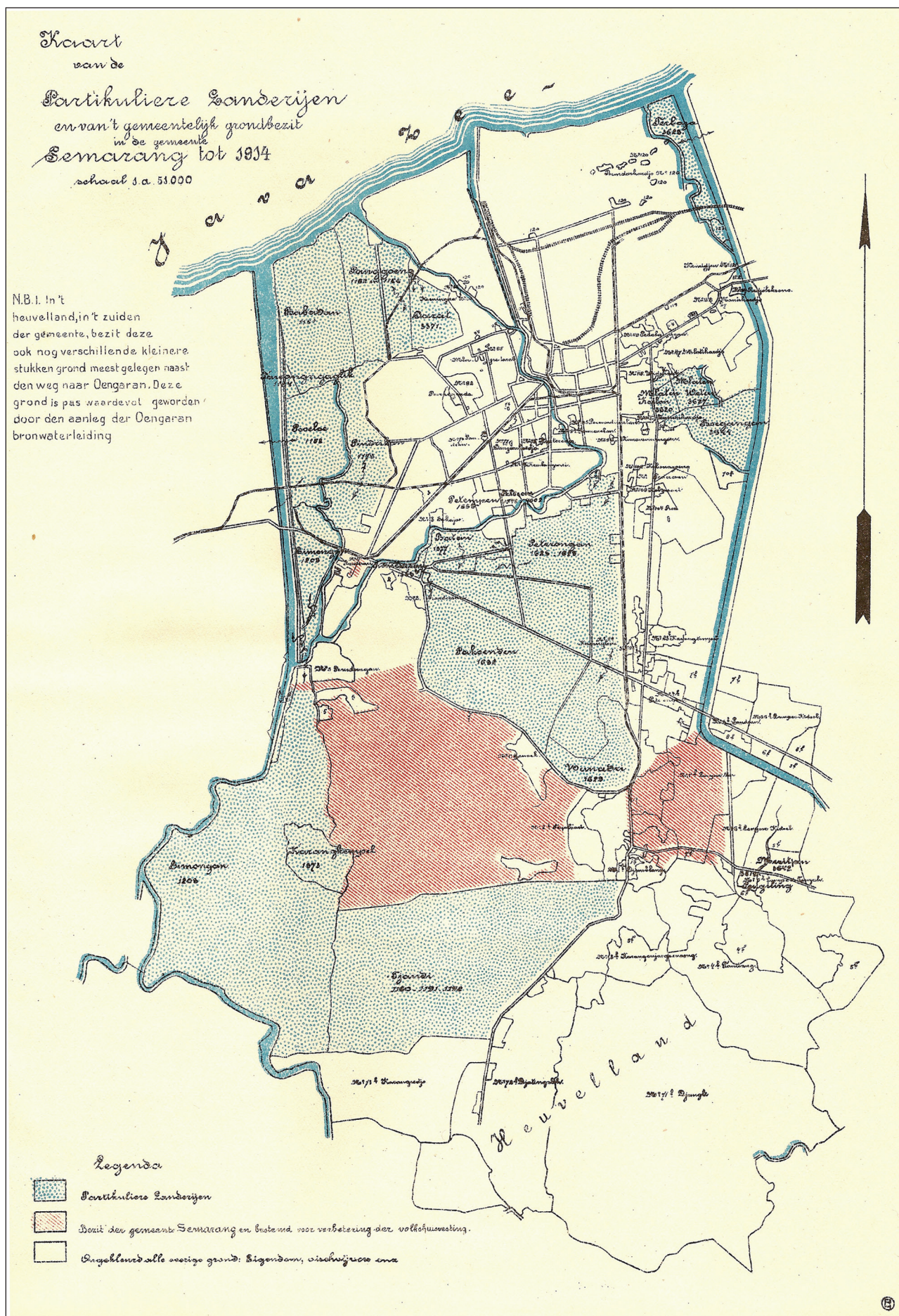


Figure 13: Land ownership in Semarang (1914). Blue is private property; red is government property allocated for social housing (Tillema 1915–1922: opposite p. 898).

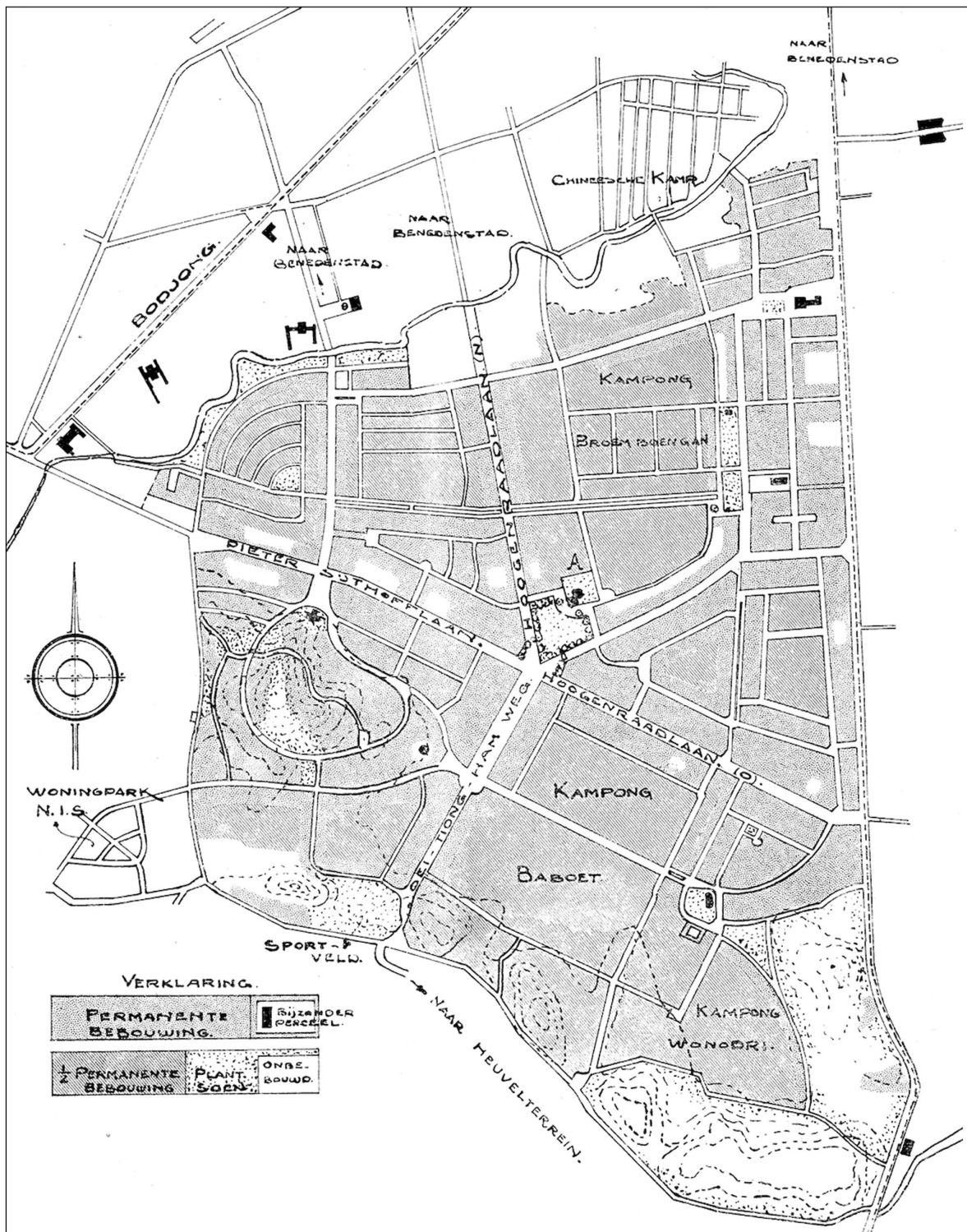


Figure 14: Design for Peterongan and Pekoenden in Semarang by H. T. Karsten (ca. 1918) (Plate 1918: p. 284).

momentum in the second half of the 1910s and because their vast and very strategically located estates were perfectly suited for Semarang's expansion plans, Oei and Be decided to maximise the value of their estates. Anticipating future developments and aware that developed land was priced higher than rural land, Oei and Be promptly ordered the construction of several houses along their estates' main roads. They also commissioned Architecture Bureau Maclaine Pont to design a housing scheme for Be's and Oei's estates, Peterongan and Pekunden respectively

(Figure 14). The housing schemes, which were part of Semarang's expansion, were designed and re-designed by Thomas Karsten in collaboration with Semarang's Department of Public Works (Figure 15). Besides enhancing the value of the land, the housing plans came with the added bonus of eradicating the estates' much-criticised substandard housing conditions along with the autocratic way in which Oei and Be ruled their land: besides paying rent, tenants were also asked to work Oei's and Be's fields and to clean their private grounds (2008: 43).

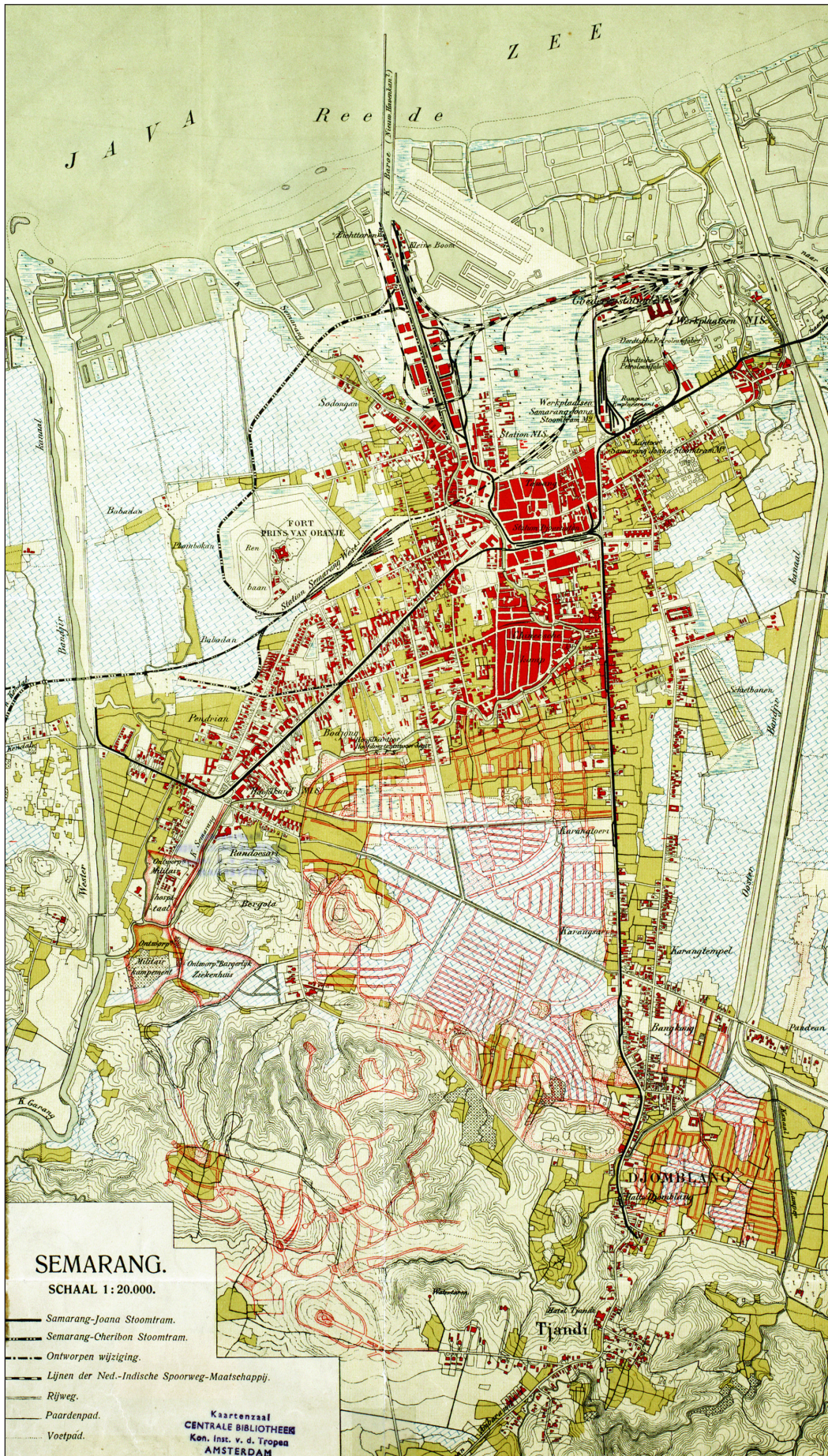


Figure 15: H. T. Karsten's Expansion Plan projected on the map of Semarang (1916) (Leiden University Libraries, Leiden: Inv. No. KK 042-01-04a).

Whether and to what extent the housing schemes Karsten designed proved to be financially in Oei's and Be's favour is obscure. What is clear is that Pekunden and Peterongan were included in the general expansion plan for Semarang that Karsten designed between 1916 and 1919. What is also clear is that, except for Oei's family mansion and grounds on Gergadji, the Semarang local council in 1920 confiscated Pekunden but not Peterongan: a remarkable decision considering Oei and Be's joint resistance to the council's plans (Coppel 1989: 182–183). Notably, this decision was taken shortly after the revised Expropriation Ordinance was passed. Making full use of the considerably broadened criteria for expropriation in this ordinance, the council argued for the expropriation on the grounds of Oei's uncooperative behaviour regarding the implementation of municipal urban improvement or other plans. Since obstructing municipal plans or refusing to contribute towards them were sufficient legal grounds for expropriation under the new Expropriation Ordinance, the municipality seized the moment and expropriated Oei (Westerveld 1916: 613–619).

As the municipality had the law on its side, Oei could not but accept his loss. In 1921, the year after he lost Pekunden, Oei moved to Singapore where he continued to live until he passed away in 1924. Coppel and Kunio attribute Oei's move to Singapore to his reluctance to pay retroactive tax 'war profits' for his businesses and to legal issues related to his children's inheritance (Coppel 1989: 180; Kunio 1989a: 191; Kunio 1989b: 144). Considering that the retroactive tax had been proclaimed in 1917 and that inheritance tax regulations were not changed for decades, I would argue that his move to Singapore was also partly, if not entirely, due to the expropriation of Pekunden in 1920.

Istana Gergadji: Oei Tiong Ham's Indo-European Mansion (Mid-19th Century)

Oei's family home in Gergadji attests to his early desire to dissociate himself from the Chinese community, its culture and its customs.¹⁶ Situated in the southwestern part of Pekunden, the mansion and its grounds were located at a considerable distance from Semarang's Chinese quarter. They were, in fact, part of the 19th century European residential neighbourhood. The terrain and the house had been purchased by Oei's father in 1883 (Brommer 1995: 19). Oei's father adhered to Chinese culture and practised Chinese customs: he wore silk jackets and trousers in public and kept his queue. Although 'wearing attire other than Chinese dress would have been illegal in those days unless government permission was obtained to do otherwise', it's unlikely Oei's father's preference was solely influenced by restrictions imposed on the Chinese. His request to the Indies' government to be allowed to live outside the Chinese quarter illustrates that Oei's father was neither unwilling nor unable to request restrictions to be lifted. His bold move to live outside the Chinese quarter justifies the conclusion that Oei's father's preference for many things Chinese came of conviction as well as convention (Coppel 1989: 183).

The 81-hectare Gergadji estate contained a villa and a variety of other buildings. The villa became the home of Oei and his seventh wife, the granddaughter of the former owner. The other dwellings were used by his previous wives and the offspring of these marriages and engagements. The buildings were set in an oriental-style garden with rock formations, pavilions, sculptures, bridges, water parties, fish ponds and a variety of animals, including tigers, snakes, monkeys, cassowaries, peacocks, deer and horses (**Figure 16**) (Brommer 1995: 19; Kunio 1989:

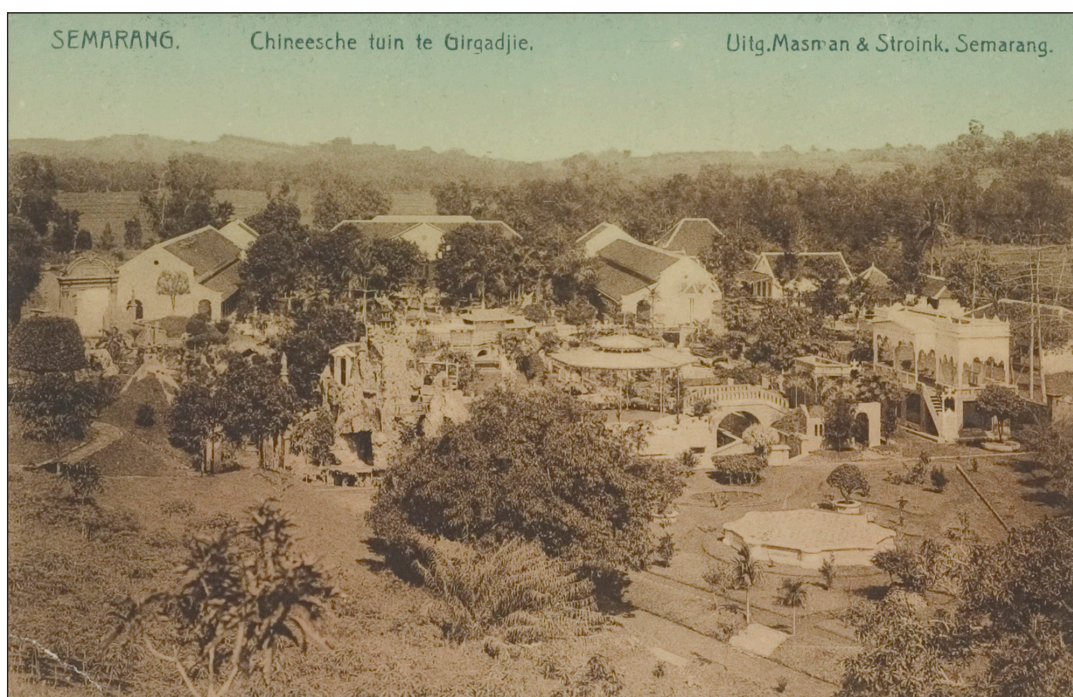


Figure 16: Oei Tiong Ham Mansion in Semarang: Back garden (ca. 1900) (Leiden University Libraries, Leiden: Inv. No. 6076).



Figure 17: Oei Tiong Ham Mansion in Semarang: Front (situation in 2019). Photo by Pauline K.M. van Roosmalen.

190). According to Oei Tiong Ham's second daughter, the house and grounds were guarded by four African watchmen who were newly arrived from Africa and spoke little Malay (Coppel 1989: 185; Kunio 1989a: 189).¹⁷ The villa was designed in the neo-Classical style that was à la mode in the mid-19th century Dutch East Indies (**Figure 17**). The house consisted of three successive rectangular volumes covered with individual hipped roofs. The front of the villa was a wide and deep gallery with marble flooring. Four robust, white-plastered, paired columns with gilded capitals demarcated the border of the gallery. In front of the gallery, a deep canopy protected the gallery and arriving guests from sun and rain. The canopy was supported by four slender, single cast-iron columns. Apart from the front gallery and the canopy, the villa's exterior whitewashed walls were plain and simple. Inside, the villa consisted of 16 to 18 rooms and a large family dining room. The interior, like the façade, was designed in the neo-Classical style (Kunio 1989a: 190).¹⁸ Although the villa was not commissioned by Oei, its location, scale and architecture certainly befitted and reflected Oei's cosmopolitan character, his lifestyle and the image he fashioned of himself. As such, it sent a clear message to, and set a standard for, other Chinese in and beyond Semarang: a successful Chinese lived in European surroundings.

Liem Bwan Tjie and a New Headquarters for the Oei Tiong Ham Concern (1930–1931)

The third significant project connected to Oei Tiong Ham was the new headquarters of the Oei Tiong Ham Concern and the NV Bankvereeniging (Banking Association Ltd) Oei Tiong Ham. Although the building was built six years after Oei passed away, its design and atmosphere are the epitome of Oei's penchant for all things expensive, modern and Dutch.¹⁹ Even the building's location, at the heart of Semarang's European business district and thus not in

the Chinese area, and the fact that Dutch was the company's lingua franca, were manifestations of this inclination (Kunio 1989a: 188, 196).²⁰

Commissioned by Tjong Hauw, one of Oei's sons, the building for the Oei Tiong Ham Concern was designed by Liem Bwan Tjie (1891–1966). Liem would become one of Semarang's sought-after architects in the 1930s, particularly among affluent Chinese. In the 1930s, Liem built several iconic villas for wealthy Chinese clients in Semarang, including a villa for Tjong Hauw in Kopeng (Den Dikken 2002: 5).²¹ Because Liem was well-grounded in Western and Chinese culture, philosophy and design principles, his intricate designs were among the most sophisticated of the decade. His clever combination of all things East and West was highly valued by Liem's well-educated and well-travelled Chinese clientele.

The initial brief to Liem for the Oei Tiong Ham Concern was to adjust and modernise the existing building. However, when it became clear that it would be impossible to redesign the existing building so that all the offices would be lit by natural light, Liem was commissioned to design an entirely new building (Den Dikken 2002: 16). In response to the revised commission, Liem designed a three-storey rectangular building with a large atrium at its centre. The atrium's glass roof ensured natural light penetrated deep into the building.

Since the building was situated between two roads, Liem designed two façades. On both façades, the ground floor's upper half consisted of an almost uninterrupted shield of opaque glass set in rectangular iron frames. Through these exceptionally large glass panes an abundance of natural light flooded into the offices on the inside (**Figure 18**). The offices on the second floor were lit via smaller individual rectangular vertical windows. The centrally positioned entrance on the south façade was marked by two half-columns on either side (**Figure 19**). To mark the building's main entrance on the north façade, Liem designed



Figure 18: Oei Tiong Ham Concern in Semarang: Interior (1930) (Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam: Inv. No. LIEM f1-07).



Figure 19: Oei Tiong Ham Concern in Semarang: South façade (1930) (Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam: Inv. No. LIEM f1-05).



Figure 20: Oei Tiong Ham Concern in Semarang: North façade (1930) (Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam: Inv. No. LIEM f1-02).

a tall, slightly protruding vertical volume over the slightly recessed entry (**Figure 20**). From this entry, the representative staircase led from the main entrance hall to the first floor and from there almost directly into the director's office and meeting room. The other offices on this floor, and the office on the third floor, were accessible via staircases that were positioned in the corners of the building.

To control the climate inside the building, Liem devised two systems to allow for cross-ventilation. One system consisted of a series of ducts and vents connecting the offices and the tower that hovered over the main entrance. By opening the vents, the warm air in the rooms was extracted from the rooms while cooler outside air was inserted back into the rooms. The tower was thus simultaneously an aesthetic as well as a functional feature. The glass roof was devised along similar lines. To allow hot air developing inside the central area of the building to escape, Liem divided and positioned the glass panes in rectangular slabs. By positioning them at three

different levels, the glass ceiling was thus also turned into a climate control feature.²² Other exceptional features of the building were the bespoke furniture Liem designed (desks, chairs, cupboards and lights) and the use of exclusive and expensive materials and finishes. In particular, the teak panelling and the abundant use of Italian marbles and stones breathed an air of luxury and, above all, cosmopolitanism.

Born into a fourth-generation Chinese family in the archipelago, Liem was sent to the Netherlands in 1911 for his secondary education (Private collection and correspondence I Shan Rombout-Liem 2018; Den Dikken 2002; Kwee 1997; Zaak-Liem Bwan Tjie 1929; De voorloopige toelating van Liem Bwan Tjie, 1929; Naar Semarang, 1929).²³ After obtaining high-school degrees in building and hydraulic engineering, Liem worked as a technical draughtsman at the bureau of Michel de Klerk, one of the Netherlands' leading architects at the time, before enrolling at Delft's Polytechnic. Liem was one of the first *peranakan* Chinese to study in the Netherlands. However, after his father passed away in 1921, Liem had to break off his studies in Delft and resumed working at architecture bureaus in the Netherlands. Having done this for another three years, he then decided to move Paris in 1926.²⁴ One year later, he exchanged Paris for Beijing, thanks to a grant from the Chung Hua Hui, the student association in the Netherlands for *peranakan* Chinese from the Dutch East Indies, of which Liem had been a member and chairman since his student days in Delft. Liem obtained a degree in architecture in 1927 (Private collection and correspondence with I Shan Rombout-Liem 2018; Den Dikken 2002; Kwee 1997; Zaak-Liem Bwan Tjie 1929; De voorloopige toelating, 1929; Naar Semarang, 1929).²⁵ Upon his return to the Dutch East Indies in 1929, Liem worked for one year at Semarang's Department of Public Works (Private collection I Shan Rombout-Liem, Overveen; Den Dikken 2002: 9; Kwee 1997; Zaak-Liem Bwan Tjie 1929; De voorloopige toelating, 1929; Naar Semarang, 1929).²⁶ In 1930, he established his own bureau: Architectenbureau 'Liem Bwan Tjie'. Thanks to his cultural background, his education and professional training first in the Netherlands and subsequently in China, Liem was particularly well-equipped to serve his affluent and often cosmopolitan predominantly *peranakan* Chinese clientele. During the early post-colonial period, Liem was one of the founding fathers of the Ikatan Arsitek Indonesia (Indonesian Institute of Architects).

When Liem was invited to redesign the Oei Tjong Ham Concern's new headquarters, his career as an independent architect had thus only just started. Alternatively, maybe the possibility of being invited to redesign the Oei Tiong Ham Concern's office stimulated Liem to start his own bureau. At the core of Liem's architecture was the interaction between man and nature and the different ways in which Asia and Europe approached this interaction: whereas Asia embraced and internalised nature, Europe battled and controlled nature (Den Dikken 2002: 11). To express this concept in architecture, Liem resorted to predominantly European architectural vocabulary and building technologies.

Because of their common cultural background and international, cosmopolitan and contemporary outlook on life, it's understandable why the Oei Tjong Ham Concern commissioned Liem to redesign their Semarang head office. After all, what better advertisement for a company than a building that expressed everything the company stood for: a subtle but obvious blend of East and West, tradition and modernity (atrium, air-conditioning), opulence (materials) and sobriety (design). Liem's contemporary, cosmopolitan and technically state-of-the-art design for Oei Tjong Ham Concern's new headquarters was, in other words, the perfect signboard for the contemporary cosmopolitan company that was the Oei Tjong Ham Concern.

Conclusion

The article demonstrates which personal and professional preferences and choices informed the building and urban design projects Tjong A Fie, Oei Tjong Ham and Liem Bwan Tjie were involved in and how. In Medan, Tjong, who firmly adhered to Chinese customs and culture, introduced the hybrid architecture common in the British Straits Settlements: a combination of Chinese typologies clad in European, specifically British, neo-Classical architecture with hints of restrained contemporary architecture. In Semarang on the other hand, his colleague Oei, who favoured and applied Dutch culture and principles, opted for authentic European, specifically Dutch, typologies and architecture, ranging from *Indisch* to Dutch modern. Because Tjong and Oei owned or purchased and developed large plots of land, they also fundamentally steered both cities' urban development. Liem, who was well informed about historic and contemporary Chinese and European culture alike, aimed at harmoniously blending the two. The result was stylistically and technologically contemporary, European-style buildings steeped in traditional Chinese philosophy.

Thanks to the subtlety of their hybrid character, Liem's designs are the pinnacle of a development of which Tjong and Oei were prominent agents: the introduction, incorporation and adaptation of Western design vocabularies and design principles by and in the Chinese community in the late-colonial Dutch East Indies. Considering the relevance of the Chinese to the colony's economy and its subsequent physical and cultural development, the direct and indirect contributions of Tjong, Oei and Liem to this development are but a *pars pro toto* for all Chinese who adopted European architecture and in so doing shaped the development of many a city in the Dutch East Indies.

Notes

- ¹ Chinese sailed to Sumatra and Java as early as 4000 BCE. Miksic also argues that the Javanese are descendants of seafarers from China's southern coast (1991: 19).
- ² Most of the Chinese traders originated from Fujian, Guangdong and Hainan provinces. The (families of the) protagonists featured in this article all originated from Fujian and are Hakka Chinese. Chinese Indone-

sians today identify themselves with their region of origin in China and the local language of that area.

- ³ Chinese quarters were abolished in 1919 in Java and Madura and in 1926 in the so-called Outer Regions. Another tool to restrict the movement of Chinese, and Indonesians for that matter, was travel passes. The passes were formally introduced in 1816. The passes for Indonesians were abolished after 1850, and for Chinese in 1914.
- ⁴ In 1905, nearly 50% of the inhabitants of Medan city were Chinese. At the time of the 1930 Census, the Chinese accounted for nearly 35% of Medan's total population (Loderichs 1997: 36; Departement van Economische Zaken 1935: 4–5).
- ⁵ The Tjong brothers originated from Meixian in Guangdong province in China. Yong Hian arrived in Medan in 1871 after a three-year stay in Batavia with his uncle Thio Thiaw Siat. A Fie arrived in Medan in 1875.
- ⁶ Philanthropy was an accepted way to 'cool down', i.e. launder, 'hot money' (*oeang panas*) accumulated via the opium business.
- ⁷ To acknowledge and confirm the contribution and position of prominent Chinese citizens for the Chinese as well as for the wider colonial society, the Dutch East Indian government introduced the Instituut van de Chinese officieren (Institute of Chinese officers) in the early 17th century. The officers were granted honorary military ranks ranging from lieutenant to major. Because his older brother was appointed major, Tjong A Fie was initially granted the lower rank of *officier* (officer). After his brother died, Tjong A Fie was appointed major (Tjiok-Liem 2009: 41–42).
- ⁸ Although the Tjong brothers also developed other parts of Medan, this article focuses on Medan's main Chinese areas.
- ⁹ Because sources such as correspondence between Tjong A Fie and G. H. Mulder are not available, this assertion remains speculative.
- ¹⁰ Oei Tjong Ham's involvement in the opium trade between 1890 and 1903 earned him a net profit of 18 million guilders.
- ¹¹ Oei Tjong Ham's father, Oei Tjie Sien, or Soe Khiem, was born in 1835 in Xiamen (previously Amoy) in the province of Fujian in China. He moved to Semarang in 1858 where he passed away on March 8, 1900.
- ¹² Until 1911, Chinese needed special governmental permission to wear anything other than Chinese dress. Oei Tjong Ham asked for permission two years after his father passed away.
- ¹³ Oei's business empire continued its 'Dutch orientation' at least until the 1940s.
- ¹⁴ The spelling of the estate at the time was Pekoenden, or Pakoenden. By purchasing large and strategically situated plots of land, Oei followed in the footsteps of his father who, presumably in the 1880s, purchased the vast Simongan, or Semangan, estate.
- ¹⁵ Oei's property measured 227 hectare. Be's estate covered 154 hectares. The municipality, together with the national government and several smaller landowners, owned the remainder of the land that would be

- affected by the sewage system. This plot measured 180 hectares.
- ¹⁶ Alternative spellings in contemporary sources are 'Gergadjie', 'Gergaji', and 'Girgadjie'.
- ¹⁷ This description is taken from Oei Hui Lan's 1943 autobiography entitled *An Autobiography as Told to Mary van Rensselaer Thayer*.
- ¹⁸ The Oei Tiong Ham mansion was renovated in 2012. The renovation has fundamentally altered the spatial arrangements of the rooms and their decoration and therefore the style, character and atmosphere of the mansion. Likewise, the grounds have changed fundamentally: while the dimensions of the grounds have been radically reduced, most of the remaining land is occupied by buildings or used for parking.
- ¹⁹ The Oei Tiong Ham Concern was taken over by two of Oei's sons, Tjong Swan and Tjong Hauw. After Tjong Swan withdrew from the company in 1931, Tjong Hauw became its sole director. Tjong Hauw commissioned the construction of the company's new headquarter.
- ²⁰ According to Oei Tiong Ie, one of Oei's sons who became Kian Gwan's director in 1940, it was unusual for Chinese-owned companies at the time to be Dutch-oriented.
- ²¹ In 1945, Liem moved to Jakarta where he initially worked for the Dutch Indies government. In 1948 he established his private bureau. In search of a good education for his two daughters, Liem emigrated to the Netherlands in 1965.
- ²² To control the indoor climate, most buildings designed between the 1910s and 1930s were equipped with a so-called 'double façade' formed by an exterior wall with a gallery in front of it. The gallery protected the external wall from direct sun and rain and allowed for doors to be opened and thus create cross-ventilation.
- ²³ This information is taken from the curriculum vitae written by Liem in 1964. This curriculum vitae was part of a letter to the Dutch Ministry of Justice in The Hague dated March 26, 1964. The letter was part of Liem's application for Dutch citizenship. Liem's account of his formal training and working experience in the Netherlands differs considerably from the information provided by Judy den Dikken and Kwee Hin Goan. The most notable and intriguing difference is the account of Liem's whereabouts between 1925 and 1929. Although Liem states he returned to the Dutch East Indies in 1927, contemporary newspaper articles corroborate Den Dikken and Kwee's account that Liem only returned to the colony in 1929. One of Liem's daughters, I Shan Rombout-Liem, confirms that Liem probably tweaked this episode in his 1964 curriculum vitae to avoid questions about his sympathies towards and connections with China at the time. In the archipelago, in 1964 as well as in 1929, sympathies and connections with China were cause for thorough scrutiny.
- ²⁴ The Paris episode is not mentioned in Liem's curriculum vitae but is referred to by Den Dikken, Kwee and Rombout-Liem.
- ²⁵ Den Dikken asserts Liem graduated from Yenching University with a scholarship from Chung Hua Hui. Although Kwee is equally emphatic about the origin of Liem's financial support in China, he suggests Liem only worked at Yenching University. Although Den Dikken largely builds her account on the earlier research and lecture by Kwee, it's difficult to ascertain which claim is more accurate since neither author specifies the source of their information. For reasons elaborated previously, the omission of this information in Liem's personally drafted 1964 curriculum vitae is likely prompted by geopolitical considerations. Considering the personal and professional relationship between Kwee and Liem, it's not unlikely that some of Kwee's information originates from his unrecorded communications with Liem's widow.
- ²⁶ Liem's 1964 curriculum vitae states Liem worked for the Semarang Department of Housing between 1927 until 1929. Newspaper articles from 1929 relating Liem's not uncompromised return to the Dutch East Indies, strongly suggest this information to be incorrect.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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