

The Chinese-Indonesian collections in the National Museum of World Cultures, the Netherlands

FRANCINE BRINKGREVE AND JOHANNA LEIJFELDT

ABSTRACT

Among the more than 130,000 objects from Indonesia in the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures, many once belonged to or were used by the Chinese population of Indonesia. In this article, the authors provide an overview of these collections by presenting their collecting histories from the earliest acquisitions to the most recent collections and by highlighting a number of objects, which in their materials, techniques, motifs, colours or function show a combination of elements from both Chinese and Indonesian cultures. The authors pay particular attention to objects which play a role in the Chinese-Indonesian wedding ceremony.

KEYWORDS

Chinese Indonesians; Peranakan; National Museum of World Cultures; Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen; museum collections.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden and the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal have been merged into The National Museum of World Cultures. The museums in both Leiden and Amsterdam house extensive collections from Indonesia, most of which were acquired during colonial times, and these objects reflect historical developments and past ways of life. Recent acquisitions, on the other hand, for the most part are supposed not only to be intrinsically beautiful or interesting

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objects, but should also have a story to tell about their makers or users. The present preference is for new collections to have a more personal history. This policy has been devised to meet the need of museums to be more relevant to a present-day audience. As Nicholas Thomas (2016: 143) concludes in his most recent publication, *The return of curiosity; What museums are good for in the 21st century*, "Museums thus have the capacity to tell stories of lives and communities that are interconnected over space and time".

Since the fusion, the purpose of the new museum has been to emphasize global interconnectedness and how cultures are constantly changing and influencing one another. The collection mirrors not only cultural diversity throughout the world but also emphasizes their mutual interdependence. The collections are testimony to cultural dynamics, international relations, migration and globalization.

In the Chinese-Indonesian collections the themes of cultural dynamics, multicultural exchange and cross-cultural traditions are very well represented, because they have been formed by centuries of trade and various flows of migration of Chinese people to Indonesia. In their materials, these collections show techniques, motifs, colours, and function which are a combination of elements from both Chinese and Indonesian cultures.

In this article, the authors offer an overview of the Chinese-Indonesian collections in the National Museum of World Cultures. They do so both by presenting their collecting histories from the earliest acquisitions to the most recent collections and by highlighting a number of objects from these collections which are products of cross-cultural traditions. Although the earliest collections are almost entirely lacking any connection with particular persons, other than sometimes the name of the collector, for the more recent collections the museum has, where possible, recorded personal stories related to particular objects.

INDONESIAN COLLECTIONS WITH CHINESE ORIGINS OR CONNECTIONS

The largest part of the collections of the National Museum of World Cultures, a third of the total number of records (375,000 objects and 750,000 mainly historical photographs), that is 130,000 objects and 300,000 photographs, is registered as coming from Indonesia. However, many of these objects, for example ceramics, originated from China, but were exported to the Indonesian Archipelago where they were incorporated into its various indigenous cultures.

Situated between China and the lands bordering the Indian Ocean, the Indonesian Archipelago formed the centre of what is sometimes called the "Maritime Silk Route", although silk was not the most important commodity; ceramics were actually China's major export. Chinese high-fired stone wares and glazed and decorated porcelains were regarded as being of better quality than local earthenware ceramics and were imported on a large scale into the South-East Asian region. Here they were incorporated into indigenous cultures and often used for ceremonial purposes and kept as heirlooms.



Figure 1. Dish with peony motifs.¹ China; late-eighteenth century; 34.5 cm (diam.) x 5 cm (ht.); porcelain (*famille rose*), enamels; TM-674-62.

An example of the numerous porcelain plates and dishes, made in China but collected in Indonesia, is this *famille rose* porcelain dish with enameled decoration, collected in Aceh by F.W. Stammeshaus around 1915 (Figure 1: TM-674-62). According to the collector, the peony motif on this dish and on another similar one (TM-674-61) was called *bungong kala* in Aceh. In the Chinese tradition, the peony is the motif of spring, symbolizing feminine beauty, prosperity and nobility (Ee, Henkel, and Tan 2008: 254). A comparable porcelain dish with enamelled peony motifs (RV-1827-9) was collected in Jambi in 1912 by the district officer (*controleur*) P.E. Moolenburgh. And an almost identical dish, from Singapore, described by Barbara Harrisson as: “a polychrome dish [...] decorated with a lotus medallion in rose enamels, with yellow and blue accents, over a green ground, the rim with a multicoloured floral border”, is dated by her circa 1770-1800 (Harrisson 1995: caption plate 39).

Like Batavia, Aceh was an important trade centre for the regional distribution of Chinese ceramics (Harrisson 1995: 67). The Acehnese themselves made use of imported Chinese porcelain plates and dishes, which they called *pinggan* (Kreemer 1922: 377). According to Harrisson, in South-East Asia there was traditionally a preference for floral decoration. She explains that after the development of the rose colour on white porcelain during the reign of Qianlong (1736-95), “In the following decades the rose on dishes and bowls is again thicker and more often combined with other enamels, particularly overglaze blue and green” (Harrisson 1995: 68-69).

Although in Aceh in the 1920s, when Stammeshaus collected the dish, there lived a large community of Chinese (Kreemer 1922: 218), it is not clear if they

¹ All objects in this article were photographed by Irene de Groot and Ben Grishaaver.

used this kind of *famille rose* ware, or whether they preferred the nineteenth-century polychrome porcelain from Jingdezhen, called Nonya ware in the Straits Settlements, which had developed out of the *famille rose* tradition (Ho Wing Meng 1983: 55). Large quantities of Nonya ware were imported in the reign of Tongzhi (1862-1874) in response to the desire of families of Chinese descent in South-East Asia to have luxury porcelain to use on festive occasions (Harrisson 1995: 85). Since in the Straits Settlements Nonya ware was used at the ancestral altar on which elaborate offerings of food were made to the ancestors (Ee, Henkel, and Tan 2006: 30), it is likely that this was also the case in the Chinese communities in Indonesia. However, the National Museum of World Cultures does not have Nonya ware in its collection.

As Harrisson explains, Chinese “ceramics in South-East Asia are unique because they were produced in a form that made them appealing in South-East Asia [...] they were tangible evidence of economic and cultural interchange” (1995: 104). They served a large number of purposes. For example, in the form of porcelain jugs and water jars they were sometimes suitable as secondary burial containers, especially among the various Dayak groups of Kalimantan (Sundari 2009: 99). Interestingly, the decorative motifs on these ceramics influenced indigenous motifs with related meanings and symbolism. For instance, the *aso* or water serpent motif widely used in Kalimantan as a symbol of fertility and protection was influenced by the motif of the Chinese dragon, which is also related to rain-bearing clouds.

In many other ways, objects in the Indonesia collections of the National Museum of World Cultures show Chinese influence on indigenous Indonesian cultures. For example, the production of textiles such as *kain limar* (weft *ikat* weavings) in Palembang and Muntok (on the island of Bangka) was enriched by materials and techniques introduced from China, like silk, gold-thread and embroidery (Hanssen 2013: 96). Another example are *kepeng*, Chinese coins used in commercial exchange, but which were also used in Bali in the making of ritual objects, such as statues of deities or temple decorations, like *lamak* (long, narrow, rectangular altar hangings) (Brinkgreve 2016: 137-139).

Not only objects, products or materials were imported from China. Chinese artisans personally introduced new techniques. They travelled with the merchants, and waited in the main port towns like Batavia for the monsoon to change; some of them settled down permanently. Sometimes they were employed by the local courts, for example, in Palembang.

Originally the Chinese in Indonesia lived in Chinese-style houses with Chinese furniture, some imported from China and some locally made (Veenendaal 1990: 21). Chinese craftsmen specialized in particular in the making of wooden furniture, ivory carving, silversmithing and lacquerwork. Local craftsmen in Palembang worked together with the Chinese: they produced objects of plaited bamboo, rattan or wood, and the Chinese painted and lacquered them. The floral designs and motifs like the dragon and the phoenix show the influence of the Chinese artisans (see Figure 27).

The market for these kinds of objects increased when, following trade

contacts, more and more people from the southern provinces of China settled in the Indonesian Archipelago. They often married local women, since until 1860 it was forbidden for Chinese women to emigrate. Between 1860 and 1925, there was more extensive emigration from China, and Chinese women were also allowed to leave the country. In the culture of their descendants who were born in Indonesia, traces of traditions of the culture of origin have been merged with the culture of residence.

ASSEMBLING THE COLLECTION

Although by the beginning of the twentieth century millions of Chinese lived and worked in what were then the Netherlands Indies, and their important contribution to the economic development of the Dutch colony was acknowledged, for example, by J. Kreemer (1922: 218) in the case of Aceh, there was little interest in their way of life, and only a small number of objects related to their culture were collected during the early days of the National Museum of Ethnology and the Tropenmuseum, which are now part of the National Museum of World Cultures.

The National Museum of Ethnology (Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde) in Leiden was established in 1837 by Ph.F.B. von Siebold, initially as a Japanese Museum only, but soon housing collections from Indonesia as well (Van Wengen 2002). In this period following the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, marked by the expansion and systematization of science, a great need was felt to document of all kinds of phenomena. Museums were sometimes even conceived of as three dimensional "encyclopedias" (Van Wengen 2002: 81, 82). The growing importance of the colony for the mother country was reflected in the expansion of the collections, especially after 1883 when the ethnographic collections of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities were moved to the museum in Leiden (Van Wengen 2002: 84).

The history of the Tropenmuseum is even more closely related to the Dutch colonies (Van Brakel 2002). In 1864, F.W. van Eeden, secretary of the Society for the Advancement of Industry (Maatschappij ter Bevordering van Nijverheid), was asked by the society to bring together a collection of artefacts from the Netherlands' overseas colonies. King William I had founded this society in 1824, under the name of Dutch Trading Society (Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij), for the purpose of stimulating trade (Van Brakel 2002: 169). The Colonial Museum was opened in Haarlem in 1871. In 1926 the collections were moved to the Colonial Institute in Amsterdam, enriched by the collections acquired by Artis Natura Magistra, the Amsterdam zoo.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution, colonial expansion and increasing world trade led to a number of great world exhibitions, in which the Netherlands also participated. These were larger, more modern and more prestigious than national arts and crafts exhibitions (Bloembergen 2006: 11). Bloembergen argues that the International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition, which was held in Amsterdam in 1883, was indicative of a desire to gain a better understanding of the little-known

world of the Netherlands East Indies - its natural features and its history, its ethnography and its administration - and to familiarize the Dutch general public with this world (2006: 35). The museum in Leiden was a privileged beneficiary of this international exhibition, when it received a collection of more than 4,000 ethnographic objects after the exhibition closed.

Although the majority of these objects had been acquired in the Netherlands East Indies by Dutch government officials, also the “Majoor der Chinezen” in Batavia sent various objects to Amsterdam, among them three large model figures wearing different sorts of Chinese clothing (Catalogus 1883, Groep II: 44). Not only were all kinds of products and objects exhibited, there were also many models of houses, ships, bridges, and other constructions, even, for example, the model of a grave of a well-to-do Chinese, sent by the Resident of Bangka (Figure 2), together with a model of a Chinese coffin (Catalogus 1883, Groep II: 82).



Figure 2. Model of a grave of a well-to-do Chinese, Bangka; 1883; 35 x 91 x 95 cm; wood; RV-370-3348.

According to the museum catalogue (Fischer 1909: 147), similar graves were in use in the southern provinces of China from where the majority of the Chinese population in Indonesia had come. The most spectacular part of a Chinese grave was its entrance door. The Chinese texts on the different columns of this model can be translated as follows:²

Column 1 (right): Set up by imperial edict: this tomb was repaired [and re-dedicated] in the Qing [dynasty] eighth year of Guangxu, the *renwu* cyclical year, first month of summer, first morning [17 May 1882].

Column 2 (middle): Tomb of Mr Li, the emeritus official, our deceased father,

² Dr Oliver Moore kindly provided these translations.

honoured posthumously as Qinzhi Biaoyu, lived for 98 years; his personal name [during his lifetime] was Shunliu.

Column 3 (left): Our bright lord's younger cousins Shunqi, Shunba and Shunjiu; their sons Anbing, Anchen, Anguo, Anbang, Anmin, Anding, Ansheng; their grandsons Kangli, Kangzhi, Kangren, Kangtai, Kangping, Kangyi, Kangxin; great-grandsons Ningchang, Ningcheng, Ninghe.

On the outer doors are two parallel mottoes; Right: The first of all mountains has existed since the millennia of antiquity, Left: Waves of water will rise up for ten thousand years of eternity.

J.J.M. de Groot, who wrote an extensive article (1892) about the death rituals of the Chinese from Amoy, says that after their funerals which was often a very large and spectacular ceremony,³ the souls would continue to dwell in the tomb and bestow their blessings on their descendants. Some of the essence of the souls was believed to take up residence in wooden tablets which were taken home, placed on the ancestral altar and venerated by the making of offerings (De Groot 1892: 94-107).

The Amsterdam trade exhibition also exhibited a "Chinese room" with Chinese tables, chairs and an altar, together with various objects used in rituals, including a porcelain statue of Guanyin (Figure 3).⁴ All these objects were afterwards transferred to the museum in Leiden.



Figure 3. Statue of Guanyin, China; mid-nineteenth century; 22.5 x 9 x 7.5 cm; porcelain (*blanc-de-Chine*); RV-370-3800.

³ Not from this colonial exhibition, but dating from the same period, is a model of a funeral procession, TM-A-7655. The museum also has many historical photographs of Chinese funerals in Indonesia.

⁴ In the museum collections are various other Chinese Guanyin figures collected in Indonesia, for example, TM-A-7489 and TM-3404-14.

Guanyin is a much-loved Chinese deity who unites divine characters from Buddhism and Chinese folk beliefs. The Bodhisattva Guanyin, who cares for people in distress, is known in India as the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. In China since the twelfth century she has mainly been represented as a female figure. She is seated on a lotus flower which emerges out of the water, and on her left side is a vase containing the water of life. In Hokkien her name is Hood Cho. One myth claims she was a daughter of the Chinese emperor named Miao Shan. As the goddess of consolation, charity and benevolence, she was a very popular deity in Chinese religion, widely known as the goddess of mercy. She is also the protective deity of seafarers, and she is the goddess to whom people appealed for bountiful descendants. Guanyin or Hood Cho is the most commonly worshipped deity on Peranakan-Chinese household altars and supplicants seek her assistance in the full range of life's affairs (Ee, Henkel, and Tan 2006: 126).

Apart from the world exhibitions, the museum collections were also enlarged by acquisitions from individual collectors who played a variety of roles in the Netherlands East Indies. As scholars, civil servants, entrepreneurs or missionaries, they contributed to the documentation and expansion of knowledge about the daily life, customs and social development of the different ethnic groups in the colonies. Although objects from the Chinese population received relatively little attention, some individual collectors in colonial times did specialize in such objects.

Prof. Dr J.J.M. de Groot (1854-1921) is considered one of the founding fathers of the social science approach to Sinology. According to Werblowsky (2002: 9), he owed his scholarly accomplishments to the opportunities offered to him by the colonial government; he was appointed by the government as Chinese-language interpreter in Pontianak in Kalimantan, and later in Cirebon in Java. To learn the language of the Chinese who had emigrated to Indonesia, De Groot spent a year in Fujian. There he made a study of the local religion, and in 1881 wrote an important monograph to which he gave the subtitle *Vergelijkende bijdrage tot de kennis van onze Chineesche medeburgers op Java* (Comparative contribution to the knowledge of our Chinese fellow-citizens in Java). While in Fujian, he also collected objects which became part of the collection of the National Museum of Ethnology. Although these collections are interesting to compare with the museum's other collections from the Chinese in Indonesia, De Groot himself did not collect in Kalimantan or Java.

A set of wedding garments which De Groot collected in China, RV-1092-54/59 (De Groot 1891: 182-184) can be compared to several of the other Chinese wedding garments in the museum's collections, which were collected in Indonesia. One of these sets, RV-959-155/167, the costume of a Chinese bride, was donated to the museum by Solko Walle Tromp, who was Resident of the "Westerafdeeling van Borneo", as part of a series of objects from various ethnic groups in West Kalimantan. This bridal costume had been given to Tromp in 1893 by Lim Jen Long, who was "Kapitein der Chineezzen" in Pontianak. In 1893 the same Lim Jen Long also contributed to a large collection of more

than 300 “costume dolls” (*klederdracht poppen*) representing the many different ethnic groups in the colony which were presented to Princess Wilhelmina on the occasion of her thirteenth birthday. The “Kapitein” of Pontianak donated the dolls representing a Chinese bride and groom, RV-1108-292/3.



Figure 4. Headdress of a Peranakan bride, West Kalimantan; late-nineteenth century; brass, kingfisher feathers, glass beads, textile materials; 16.5 x 19 cm (excluding fringes); RV-959-161.

This headdress (Figure 4) is part of a bridal costume. It is made of brass, ornamented with auspicious Chinese motifs, Chinese characters and numerous small red pompoms. Among the motifs in the centre is the phoenix (*feng huang*). Dragons chasing a flaming pearl are stamped on either side of the metal diadem. Attached to the headdress are strings of beads and long red fringes which would have concealed the bride's face.

The headdress is also embellished with kingfisher feathers glued on to the metal, although some of them have fallen off. These bright blue feathers were in great demand in China and were used on various female head ornaments, such as hair pins, hair combs, coronets, and earrings.

According to Valery Garrett (1994: 20), in the Ming dynasty on formal

occasions noblewomen and official's wives wore a comparable crown on which kingfisher feathers were used. It was called a phoenix crown. During the Qing dynasty Chinese brides wore an ornate headdress, imitating the phoenix crown of Ming empresses, made of gilded silver inlaid with kingfisher feathers and embellished with pearls (Garrett 1994: 134).

Another set of Chinese wedding garments in the museum's collection, RV-6227-1a/2j, also comes from West Kalimantan (see Figure 24). This set was collected in the 1930s by "Missionarissen van de Heilige Familie".

Another colonial official who was an important collector was Friedrich Wilhelm Stammeshaus. He collected the Chinese *famille rose* porcelain dish already discussed and around another 80 pieces of Chinese porcelain in Aceh. Stammeshaus was born in Sigli, Aceh, in 1881. His father, also Friedrich Wilhelm Stammeshaus, worked as military doctor in the colonial army (KNIL), and his mother, Tjit Nio, was a Chinese lady from Java. As did Th.J. Veltman, who was also a collector (see Figure 13), Stammeshaus first served in the colonial army and subsequently became a civil servant in Aceh. During those years in Aceh he collected a large number of objects, including the Chinese ceramics, which were exhibited in the Aceh Museum in Kuta Raja, now Banda Aceh. This museum was founded by General H.N.A. Swart, Governor of Aceh, in 1915, and Stammeshaus acted as curator. Before the opening of the museum, the collection had already been displayed at the Colonial Exhibition in Semarang. However, when Stammeshaus returned to the Netherlands in 1931, lack of funding meant it was impossible for the collection to remain in Aceh, and all the objects were sold to the Colonial Museum in Amsterdam where Stammeshaus as assistant-curator documented his own collection (Van Brakel 2002: 175; Shatanawi 2014: 41). On the inventory cards of the Chinese porcelain dishes, he notes that these Acehnese "*pinggan*" in the beginning of last century were already collectors' items for the embellishment of European homes.

The last collectors with a colonial background we would like to mention here are Cornelis George Vattier Kraane (1864-1954) and his wife, Françoise Jacoba Daendels (born in Semarang in 1871) whom he married in 1902. In 1896 Vattier Kraane was appointed general-manager (*administrateur*) of the N.V. Zeehaven en Kolenstation Sabang (on Pulau Weh), which he developed into a flourishing harbour. Besides being collectors of Dutch paintings, Vattier Kraane and his wife collected many other objects from Indonesia, which they donated to the Tropenmuseum. Several pieces in this collection are related to the Chinese population in Indonesia, for example, the wooden altar piece in Figure 5. The little piece of wooden altar furniture was used for the display of offerings. It is painted in red and gold, and has rather simple carvings of floral motifs on its front side, indicating that it was made locally in Indonesia. This might be a simple example but there are also richly decorated ones, either rectangular or hexagonal in shape, lacquered in black, red and gold gilt with scenes of Chinese life and landscapes. They were imported from Guangdong, and consist of several parts: a stand with a tray, which can be detachable, and

a cover. When in use on the altar, the cover was removed and placed under the stand.



Figure 5. Offering stand, Indonesia; first half twentieth century; wood, lacquer, pigments; 24.5 x 11 x 16.5 cm; TM-2381-147.

The offering stand illustrated here has neither a cover or a tray, but is made out of a single piece of wood. In Indonesia it is called a *meja cian ap* or *cenap* for short. *Meja* is Indonesian for “table”, and *cian ap* is derived from Hokkien. It is placed on the altar on festive occasions such as the ninth day of the Chinese New Year or at a wedding ceremony, and decorated as part of the offerings. There are specific rules about how to prepare and arrange the decorations which consist of bamboo skewers strung with candied fruit, which are fixed in the little holes on top of the *meja cian ap*. Among the fruits would have been a young papaya which symbolized abundance and fertility, since it has many seeds (Ee, Henkel, and Tan 2008: 79), the fruit of the sugar palm (*kolang-kaling*), and red berries. Little beaded dolls can also be added to the decorations (for examples of decorations, see Kwa and Kustara 2009: 275; Tjahyadi 2012: 209-210; Cheo Kim Ban 2009: 46).

THREE IMPORTANT COLLECTORS

As we have seen in the previous section about the historical collections in the National Museum of World Cultures, although a large numbers of objects were collected from many different ethnic groups in the Netherlands East Indies in colonial times, the number of objects from the Chinese population remained relatively small.

However, the collections of the following three passionate collectors of Indonesian art and artefacts, Georg Tillmann (TM-1772), Harmen Veldhuisen (TM-5663), and Frits Liefkes (RV-Liefkes), contain more Chinese-Indonesian

pieces. Only Veldhuisen built up part of his collection in Indonesia itself; both Tillmann and Liefkes obtained their collections mainly through dealers and at auctions.

Georg Tillmann, born in Hamburg in 1882, left Germany in the early 1930s to settle in Amsterdam. He became fascinated with Indonesian art after his wife came home with a few keris she had bought from a dealer in that city. By the time he left the Netherlands for the United States in 1939, he had collected and studied more than 2,000 objects of Indonesian art. He left his collection in the storage of the Tropenmuseum and, after his death in 1941, the collection was loaned to the museum by the family, until in 1994 the complete collection was finally donated by W.G. Tillmann and his wife (Van Brakel, Van Duuren, and Van Hout 1996). In the Tillmann Collection a number of objects, like lacquerware and furniture from Palembang, some batik cloths, and jewellery and other objects made of silver, have a Chinese-Indonesian background. An example is the following set of containers for betel-quid ingredients, TM-1772-2033a-g (Figures 6 and 7).



Figure 6. Betel set, Java; early-twentieth century; 26 x 16.5 x 12.5 cm (box); wood, silver; TM-1772-2033a-g.

The wooden box as illustrated in Figure 6 contains six silver receptacles to hold the various ingredients for making betel-quids (see also Figure 7). These ingredients are the leaf of the betel vine (*sirih*) (*Piper bitle*), the nut of the *areca* (*pinang*) palm (*Areca catechu*) and a little slaked lime. *Gambir* (*Uncaria gambir*), a plant extract, and tobacco can both be added to the basic elements of the betel quid. To be enjoyed as a mild stimulant, the ingredients for the betel quid

were offered to guests as a sign of welcome and token of politeness. Today it is still a confirmation of relationships, particularly in ritual contexts. A betel set was often one of the most valuable inherited items, *pusaka*, because of its association with the ancestors.

The custom of betel-chewing was widespread in Indonesia, and was also widely adopted by the Chinese communities. Among the Straits Chinese, the offering of betel opened wedding negotiations and a betel set also played a role in other rituals to do with marriage. Because of its relationship with the ancestors, a betel set was kept in special places in the house, as a protection against malevolent elements which might afflict the home (Ee, Henkel, and Tan 2008: 192). Although the form of the silver containers in this betel set do not differ from a Javanese betel set, the decorative motifs in the form of the Eight Immortals and animals which represent sky, land and water, are clearly Chinese. They are auspicious motifs, related to Chinese symbols of protection and good fortune.



Figure 7. Container for betel leaves, Java; early-twentieth century; 6 × 8 × 2.8 cm; silver; TM-1772-2033g.

The second major collection, consisting of more than 1,500 pieces of batik cloth and clothing, was acquired by the Tropenmuseum from Harmen C. Veldhuisen in 1996. Born in 1943 in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, a graduate from Erasmus University majoring in sociology, he came into close contact with Indonesia and its culture through his marriage to Alit Djajasoebrata, curator for Indonesia at Rotterdam's ethnographic museum. From the moment he first set foot in Indonesia in 1971, Veldhuisen became fascinated by batik and began to collect them, especially those from the north coast of Java.



Figure 8. Altar cloth, Pekalongan, Java; circa 1950; cotton, synthetic dyes; 107 x 106 cm; TM-5663-1098.

Whereas batik cloths were originally made by Javanese women at home for use within their own family only, along the north coast of Java, especially in Lasem and Pekalongan, Peranakan Chinese entrepreneurs developed batik industries in which they produced batik for various categories of customers, all of whom had their own preferences in style of motifs and colours. These batiks were usually signed, and Harmen Veldhuisen built an impressive collection of Peranakan Chinese batiks complete with signatures. The majority of the signed batiks from the Veldhuisen Collection in the Tropenmuseum are from Pekalongan and its environs (Van Hout 2001: 31; 91). Veldhuisen also studied and published about his own collection (Veldhuisen 1993; Heringa and Veldhuisen 1996). An example from this extensive and rich collection is the altar cloth in Figure 8.

On special occasions, the front of the altar is adorned with an altar cloth, called a *tok wi*. For a funeral ceremony, a *tok wi* in blue colours on a white background is used; these are the mourning colours for Peranakan. On festive occasions, the auspicious colour red is used.

In China these altar cloths are made of silk decorated with embroidered motifs in gold-wrapped thread, depicting deities, heavenly beings and such

mythical creatures as the dragon, phoenix and *qilin*. Many of these cloths were imported into Southeast Asia from China to decorate the altars of Peranakan Chinese homes and temples. On the north coast of Java, Peranakan Chinese involved in the batik industry began to produce cotton altar cloths decorated using the batik technique, probably in the late-nineteenth century (Lee et al. 2015: 34). This change in technique offered new possibilities in both design and colour. The batik altar cloths could also satisfy local preferences. For example, a figure in a roundel in the centre of the lower section is a popular design in batik *tok wi*, but is not often encountered in the embroidered cloths (Lee et al. 2015: 36). Also, whereas in embroidered *tok wi* the top part is a separate horizontal panel attached above the main cloth and hanging over the lower part, the batik version is made out of one piece of cotton fabric, the designer clearly having the embroidered one in mind as an example or source of inspiration.

This altar cloth has two separate sections. In the lower section, a dragon is depicted in the centre. This creature is a male symbol and represents the Yang. The *feng huang* birds flying in the upper left and right sections represent the female, or the Yin. In the lower left and right *qilins* symbolize happiness and the wish for many successful sons in the family.

As a wish for good luck the Eight Immortals are depicted in the upper section. Each has his own appearance and carries his own attribute. Here the eight figures are hard to distinguish, as if the batik maker was not entirely sure how the Eight Immortals should be depicted.

The third major collection is, like Tillmann's, a more general collection and was assembled by Frits Liefkes (1930-2010), with the help of his partner, Cor Weegenaar. Born in The Hague, Frits Liefkes became interested in Indonesian art when his father gave him an ancestor statue from Nias after he had finished his final school examinations. He developed his taste for beautiful craftsmanship more deeply when he studied art history and afterwards became a curator of nineteenth-century furniture at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Frits Liefkes lived with his Indonesian art, his house in The Hague was full of it. Bought almost entirely at auctions and from art dealers over a period of four decades, at his death he bequeathed his collection of more than 1,000 objects to the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden (Brinkgreve and Stuart-Fox 2013). Although the Liefkes Collection is half the size of Tillmann's, it contains more objects related to the Chinese in Indonesia. Palembang lacquerware and furniture, silver and gold jewellery, beadwork, and beautiful batiks with *prada* are among them and are illustrated in the present article (see Figures 9, 11, and 19).



Figure 9. Pair of gold pendants in the form of a carp, (East) Java; early-twentieth century; gold, diamond; 6.2 × 3.2 × 1.5 cm ; RV-Liefkes-328.

This pair of pendants are in the shape of a fish with the head of a dragon. The fish are hollow and made from two embossed golden sheets, soldered together. The eyes of the fish are set with rose-cut diamonds. Pendants like these were attached to a chain hung around the neck as an amulet. In East Java where they were worn by girls of Chinese origin and circumcised Javanese boys and were called *kalung baderan*, carp necklaces (Jasper and Pirngadie 1927: 99).

In Chinese symbolism a carp represents endeavour, courage, and perseverance. According to a Chinese legend, carp swim upstream against the current of the Yellow River. At the upper course of the river is a waterfall called the Dragon Gate. Only a few succeed in making the final leap over the waterfall, and turn into dragons. Hence, necklaces like these were worn as a good-luck charm. Peranakan Chinese children were given such pendants so that they would be successful in life. The carp is also auspicious in that it represents a wish for advantage. The Chinese word *li* means 'carp', but if pronounced in a different tone can also mean 'advantage'.

Jewellery with fish-dragons also occurs in other parts of the Indonesian Archipelago, often combined with local elements. For instance, in the Moluccas there are chains with the head of a fish-dragon at one end and its tail at the other end (Marzio 2011: 260-261; Carpenter 2011: 213; Richter and Carpenter 2011: 64).

THE EXHIBITION "CONNECTING CULTURES; CHINESE FROM INDONESIA IN THE NETHERLANDS"

The National Museum of World Cultures not only collects, studies, and keeps objects from cultures around the world, it is also eager to share the collections and their unique stories with the general public. In 2015 the museum organized a special exhibition (see Figure 10), called "Connecting Cultures; Chinese from Indonesia in the Netherlands" (*Verbinding van Culturen; Chinezen uit Indonesië*

in Nederland) on the culture of Chinese Peranakan from Indonesia who now live in The Netherlands.



Figure 10. Impression of the exhibition (photo Irene de Groot).

On display was a variety of objects which show a combination of elements from both Chinese and Indonesian cultures, in particular examples of dress and adornment and objects which play a role in the Chinese-Indonesian wedding ceremony. In the following section, we give a number of examples of objects which were part of the exhibition (including the objects discussed in the text accompanying Figures 6-8).

The silver almond-shaped lobed buckle as in Figure 11 was probably worn with a matching belt by women of Chinese descent along the Straits of Malacca. Its exact origin is difficult to determine. The motifs on the buckle are all executed in repoussé technique.⁵ It is crowded with flowers, animals and human figures which are characteristically Chinese and which embody symbolic meanings. Among these motifs are fish, representing abundance, and a crab symbolizing success and prosperity. Among the birds are feng huang, the mythical phoenix, which is considered the most beautiful of the feathered animals. It represents the five human qualities of virtue, duty, correct behaviour, humanity, and reliability. Underneath, to left and right, are qilin, another mythical animal which expresses good wishes, and is believed to bring the family many sons.

⁵ Repoussé is a technique in which the design is beaten out from the back, using a set of punches. The design is further embellished from the front by engraving, and chasing.



Figure 11. Silver buckle, Sumatra, Singapore or Malaysia; early-20th century; silver; 11.3 x 15.7 cm; RV-Liefkes-443.

The human figures on both the inner and the outer rim might possibly depict the Eight Immortals. These legendary figures attained immortality through their accumulation of knowledge and the study of the secrets of nature. The flowers in the inner rim very probably depict those of the four seasons, although it is hard to determine which flower represents which season. It is possible that their symbolic meanings have become lost or incorrectly applied during a time in which Peranakan Chinese had remained abroad for several generations without returning to their homeland (Chin 1991: 54). Even if the motifs are primarily for decorative purposes, this buckle is still an example of beautiful and refined craftsmanship.

Tiger claws (Figure 12) were regularly used in Peranakan jewellery, in this case in a waist belt. The tiger claws are polished and set in finely worked golden filigree frames. These frames alternate with gold filigree links which depict lions and birds. For added strength, the belt has been sewn onto silk fabric. A butterfly is depicted on the clasp. The butterfly (*hu die*) is a very popular motif because it symbolizes a joyful life. It also signifies a long life: the second character *die* also means 70 to 80 years of age.

Peranakan Chinese believed that, when a person left the house, he or she was no longer under the protection of the house's guardian deities. An amulet with a tiger claw gave the wearer protection, the tiger being a symbol of courage and bravery as it can drive off demons (Eberhard 1986: 290). Jewellery with tiger claws was also worn as an amulet, often discretely hidden beneath the clothing.



Figure 12. Tiger-claw belt, West Sumatra; early-20th century; gold, keratin (tiger claw); 74 x 5.8 cm; TM-1572-3.



Figure 13. Beaded belt, Aceh, Sumatra; ca 1900; gilded silver, glass beads, cotton; 7.5 x 86 cm; RV-1599-48.



Figure 14. Beaded slippers, Aceh, Sumatra; First quarter twentieth century; glass beads, leather; 5 x 7.5 x 24.5 cm (per slipper); RV-2299-111.

Whereas porcelain, woodwork, gold- and silverwork, and batik, were made by professional craftsmen, beadwork and embroidery (Figures 13 and 14) were almost exclusively the work of Peranakan girls and young women at home (Ho Wing Meng 1987: 13). Although it was possible to purchase beaded and embroidered items, no workshops or any great size are known (Cheah 2010: 117).

The bulk of the beads were imported from Europe, and the bead-worker could purchase them locally from *klontong*, peddlers, or in specialized shops (Ee, Henkel, and Tan 2008: 130). These coloured glass beads were tiny, often less than 1 mm in diameter. To complete a bead or needlework item like the pair of slippers or belt as shown here, a girl would have needed to have been gifted with great patience; this would indicate that she was a suitable marriage candidate (Cheah 2010: 106).

These slippers and belt are not ritual objects. The motifs they depict would have had no symbolic meaning in China, nor are they typically Chinese. The belt has birds and flowers in red, green and yellow beads on a blue background. These motifs might have been inspired by batiks from the north coast of Java, where birds and flowers are traditionally a common combination. The belt and buckle were made separately by different persons, the beaded belt probably by a girl at home, while the buckle has the name of the workshop of a (Peranakan) Chinese silversmith stamped on the back.

This was also the case with the pair of slippers. It was common practice that, after the uppers had been made at home, that they were taken to a shoemaker where the leather soles were added. Beaded slippers came into fashion in the 1920s, replacing velvet ones embroidered with gold thread (Ee, Henkel, and Tan 2008: 130). The motif of roses on the slippers are formed by a combination of orange, pink, red, and yellow beads with green leaves on a blue background. The inspiration for the choice of roses is more likely to have come from Europe than from China. Even though roses are also known in Chinese symbolism – they are the emblem of youth – they are not as popular as they are in Europe, where they represent love (Eberhard 1986: 255). This would have been an appropriate motif, since beaded slippers were usually part of the bride's trousseau.

Around the turn of the century, Peranakan women began wearing (Indo) European white lace blouses (*kebaya*) (Figure 15), replacing two kinds of loose fitting tunics which reached to just below the knees: the *baju panjang* and *baju kurung* (Lee 2014: 252). By the 1920s, the long tunics were considered rather old-fashioned and *kebayas* were almost universally the fashion (Lee 2014: 260). They reached to the hip, which made the sarong better visible. In the 1920s and 1930s, Peranakan women began to develop their own distinctive style in colour and design. Besides being shorter and a tighter fit, the ends of the front panels became tapered.

Synthetic dyes gave a whole range of new possibilities in the choice of colour. Peranakan women favoured a range of pastel colours rather than white. The *kebaya* was transparent as it was made from voile or organdie,

therefore wearing a cotton camisole underneath was essential. The borders along the front and neckline were machine-embroidered with flower motifs combined with cutwork, called *keranjang*. The pale lilac *kebaya* illustrated here is embroidered with European white daisies (or marguerites) and purple violets.



Figure 15. *Kebaya*, Java; 1930-1940; cotton, synthetic dyes; 78 × 140 cm; RV-6225-1.



Figure 16.



Figure 17.



Figure 18.

Figures 16, 17, 18. Set of *kebaya* brooches, Riau, Sumatra; first quarter twentieth century; gilded silver; 6.5 x 4 cm and 2.8 x 0.5 cm; TM-541-9, 8, 10.

The front of the *kebaya* - and also that of the earlier *baju panjang* - did not have buttons, so the blouse was fastened by brooches or pins. The set illustrated in Figures 16-18 consists of three gilded silver brooches. They are decorated with flowers, fish and birds in finely wrought filigree. The biggest one is heart-shaped and therefore this set is called *kerosang* or *kerongsang* in Malay, derived from the Portuguese word *coração*, meaning "heart" (Lee 2014: 209). There were also *kerosang* brooches made from gold set with diamonds. Jewellery was a way to display one's social status and wealth.



Figure 19. Gilded cloth (*kain prada*), Cirebon, Java; 1860-1875; cotton, natural dyes, gilding (*prada*); 107 x 271 cm; RV-Liefkes-655.

Donning luxurious clothing and expensive jewellery was a way for Peranakan women to express their social status. They also provided an insurance in times of need, as they could easily be pawned or sold (Veldhuisen and Heringa 1996: 51).

This batik cloth is in the traditional natural dye colours of the north coast of Java, red and blue (*bang biru*) on a creamy white background (indigo blue and *mengkudu* (*Morinda citrifolia*)). The black is obtained by over-dyeing red and blue. The *kain* has a design of several repeating zigzag bands with Chinese mythical animals, floral and geometrical motifs (including the Javanese *parang* motif). Three of the motifs depicted on this cloth refer to fertility (and can be seen as a wish for many children). The first of these is the row of triangles that represent *pucuk rebung*, bamboo shoots. This is a very common motif on the north coast of Java as well as on woven textiles from other parts of Indonesia. Next to it, in the rectangular part, is the second motif with connotations of fertility: pomegranates bursting with ripened seeds. The third motif is the dragons in the zigzag bands; in China the dragon is a benevolent creature that brings rain to fertilize the land.

The surface of the cloth is polished by rubbing wax scrapings onto the cloth with a shell or bottle. The *kain* was made even more sumptuous by gilding

it with liquified gold dust, *prada* (but only that part that would have been visible when the *kain* was worn) (see Figure 19). It is most likely that it was a wedding gift for an affluent Peranakan Chinese bride (Heringa 2013: 157).

The hip cloth as in Figure 20 has two designs in contrasting colours, divided by a diagonal line. This design is called *pagi sore* (morning-afternoon/early evening) and could be worn in two ways. To allow the motifs and the person to stand out, the dark or *sore* section of the hip cloth was worn during daytime. Vice-versa the light – *pagi* – section served as an evening dress. For this batik cloth synthetic dyes were used.

The main motifs on the lighter half consist of dancing peacocks and double wings on a background of small white flowers and foliage in pastel shades of pink, blue and ochre. These pastel colours were highly favoured by Peranakan Chinese ladies. With its tail feathers the peacock represents beauty and dignity, in both Chinese and European symbolism. The double wings are called *mirong* (Jasper and Pirngadie 1927: 176) and they were one of the *larangan*, the ‘forbidden’ batik patterns which were reserved for the exclusive use of the rulers of the Central Javanese courts and their close relatives (Kerlogue 2004: 76; Heringa and Veldhuisen 1996: 49).



Figure 20. Batik hip cloth “*pagi sore*”, Kedungwuni, Java; 1930-1950; cotton, synthetic dyes; 108 x 240 cm; TM-3640-1.

The dark green section depicts large bouquets (*buketan*) in European style, in the same pastel shades as the background of the lighter half. A fluttering butterfly and a bird have been added to heighten the liveliness of the pattern. In order to create a three-dimensional effect of the flowers, different hues of pink, blue and ochre were used, combined with rows of white dots (Heringa and Veldhuisen 1996: 80-81).

The origin of the cloth is indicated by the handwritten sign of (the workshop) of Oey Soe Tjoen (and his wife Kwee Tjoen Giok), a renowned batik craftsman from Kedungwuni, near Pekalongan. The name of the town, here written in the old spelling Kedoengwoeni, is followed by the number

104, referring to the address of the workshop, Jalan Raya 104. In some cases the complete address was stamped onto the white un-waxed border of the cloth in block letters (Kwa and Kustara 2009: 154). The couple used a restricted number of design templates (Lee 2014: 247). An almost identical cloth is in the A.E.D.T.A. batik collection (Geirnaert and Heringa 1989: ill. XXXXII, XXXXIIa, and XXXXIIb, p. 81), and another very similar cloth is in a private Indonesian collection (Kwa and Kustara 2009: 154). Owing to its combination of European, Javanese and Chinese design elements, the cloth would have appealed to (Indo-) Europeans, Peranakan Chinese, and urban Indonesian ladies with a modern taste (Geirnaert and Heringa 1989: 81).



Figure 21.



Figure 22.

Figure 23.



Figures 21, 22, 23. Bridal costume, China or Indonesia; 1901; silk, synthetic dyes, gold-wrapped thread; 108 × 88 cm (skirt); 108 × 70 × 20 cm (mantle); 114 × 55 × 7 cm (collar); 34.5 × 9 × 28 cm (per boot); RV-6206-1a, b, c, and f.

This silk bridal costume (Figures 21, 22, 23) consists of a skirt, long mantle, and a pair of boots. The crown is unfortunately missing. It is in an orange colour, called *kuning pinang masak* in Indonesian, the 'yellow of a ripe betel nut' (Cheo Kim Ban 2009: 54; Knight-Achjadi 2005: 100-101). Actually a ripe betel nut is more orange than yellow, very much resembling the colour of this bridal costume. It is embroidered with many Chinese motifs in pink, light blue and gold thread. Amongst these motifs are clouds, waves and a mountain, respectively representing air, sea and land.

The most prominent motif, however, is the dragon on the chest. In China the dragon is a benevolent creature which represents rain and fertility. On this bridal costume it is depicted with five claws, and therefore symbolizes the emperor. Also embroidered on the costume are several *feng huang*, the symbol of the empress. This mythical bird stands for virtue and grace. At their wedding the couple were seen as "emperor and empress" for one day (Garrett 2007: 120).

A light blue collar with embroidered motifs and flaps is worn over the mantle. These flaps represent the neck feathers of the *feng huang* (Cheo Kim Ban 2009: 57). Four long tassels hang down from the collar, two falling over the front of the body, and two over the back. Each tassel is embroidered with two human figures. Together they represent the Eight Immortals, six men and two women, who attained immortality by studying nature's secrets. In the centre at the back of the collar, a long fringe with an ornament is attached to ward off evil (Cheo Kim Ban 2009: 58). The matching boots are embroidered with *feng huang* and peonies. This bridal costume resembles the Chinese so-called dragon jacket and dragon skirt of a mandarin's wife. It was worn on special occasions, including her wedding, while her husband wore the mandarin court robe (Garrett 2007: 100, 120).

In imperial China, mandarins were divided into civil and military officials, both consisting of nine ranks. The rank of the official was indicated by the motif on a square-shaped badge, sewn onto the front and back of a surcoat. The badges of civil mandarins were decorated with birds, whereas those of military mandarins bore depictions of animals. The mandarin's rank could also be indicated by the bead on the hat (Ho Wing Meng 1987: 146).

Overseas Chinese merchants and traders who made their fortune were appointed leaders of the Peranakan Chinese community by the Netherlands Indies government, bearing the titles of "Kapitein", "Majoor", or "Luitenant". Once appointed, they were very eager to receive recognition of their new status from the imperial authorities in China and did so by applying for the mandarin title, which involved the payment of a considerable fee. Bestowal of this title meant they gained the privilege of wearing a mandarin's robe, including a rank badge (Ho Wing Meng 1987: 144-146). Historical photographs show Peranakan Chinese grooms dressed in mandarin costume for their wedding.

The surcoat illustrated in Figure 24 is made of damask silk in a dark purple colour and has the rank badge of a civil mandarin embroidered in

gold-wrapped thread. This surcoat has a separate collar and was worn over a robe. A hat and boots completed the costume.



Figure 24. Mandarin surcoat and collar, Kalimantan; early-20th century; silk, gold-wrapped thread, synthetic dyes; 110.5 x 163 cm; RV-6227-1ab.

When a baby turns one month old, that is 30 days or one lunar month, it is a day of celebration among Peranakan Chinese. This day marks the end of the mother's period of recuperation and confinement at home after giving birth, and she resumes her duties as wife and housekeeper (Tan 1963: 60). More importantly, a ceremony is held for the newborn. The baby is dressed up in new, brightly coloured clothes and is formally presented to family and friends. Its hair might be cut for the first time. Prayers are held and food is offered with a supplication for blessings and a long life for the child. Among the Peranakan of Sukabumi (Tan 1963: 57-58), this ceremony, called *sembahyang pocia* or *sembahyang ranjang* (= bed), is addressed to the guardian angel of the baby known as a *pocia*. A table with food offerings, such as cone-shaped rice (*nasi tumpeng*), sweets, candles, and cooked chicken, is placed in front of the baby's bed. Relatives and friends receive red-painted eggs and red tortoise cake (Tan 1963: 57, 58), because the colour red is associated with good luck and happiness. The eggs symbolize fertility and new life, while the tortoise symbolizes longevity. Red tortoise cake, called *kue ku* or *kue ang ku*, is made

using an oval-shaped cake mould, like that illustrated in Figure 25. It is made from glutinous rice flour with a sweet mung bean filling.

Although traditionally not customary, probably because of western influence, friends and relatives give the newborn presents. It is usual to give *ang pao* (a red envelope containing money), or sometimes jewellery if it is for a girl. This baby's rattle (Figure 26), combined with whistle, might also have been a gift at a baby's one-month celebration. It is made of silver and has a mother-of-pearl handle. Although made after a European model, its Chinese manufacture is indicated by the Chinese maker's mark. Chinese characters are also written between the little bells. These can be read in two ways: *ji xiang ru yi* and as *ru yi ji xiang*.⁶ This can loosely be translated as "May all your wishes come true".



Figure 25. Cake mould, Java; first half 20th century; wood; 6.5 x 26 cm TM-1900-11.



Figure 26. Baby's rattle, Java; ca 1915; silver, mother-of-pearl; 13 x 4 cm; TM-5972-5.

⁶ Dr Oliver Moore and Christopher Ng kindly provided this information.



Figure 27. Lotus-shaped lacquer box, Palembang, Sumatra; first half 20th century; wood, lacquer, pigments; 83 × 47 × 47 cm; TM-3098-1ad.

Lotus-shaped lacquerware boxes like the one illustrated in Figure 27 were placed in the bridal chamber and were used to store the dowry. It clearly shows Chinese influences in shape as well as motifs. A large Peranakan community has lived in Palembang for centuries. This city was a major port for Chinese vessels trading in pepper in the seventeenth century (Andaya 1993: 41). Chinese artisans also migrated to Palembang to work at the royal court. They introduced the lacquerware technique during the reign of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin I (1724-1757), who had several wives of Chinese descent (Andaya 1993: 188).

The box illustrated in Figure 27 has the shape of a lotus, symbol of purity since it rises from the mud. It also represents fertility and regeneration, as the seed head of this flower contains many seeds. The lotus-shaped box is placed on an octagonal container with lid. In total, it consists of seven separate, stackable parts, all lacquered in black, and gilded with many Chinese motifs. Amongst these motifs are the flowers of the four seasons, fish, birds, and deer.

This lacquer box was probably one of a pair, and part of the furniture which was placed in a Palembang bridal chamber. Other pieces of bridal furniture

were lacquered cabinets, chests-of-drawers, a small pyramid-shaped chest of drawers, and a dressing table with mirror. Apart from displaying wealth and status, they were all decorated with auspicious motifs, referring to joy, happiness, and fertility. For Chinese it is important to have a son in order to perpetuate the family name and to take care of the ancestral altar and Chinese rituals.



Figure 28. Gong chimes; 65 × 51 × 33 cm; RV-4347-1f.



Figure 29. Stand with flutes; 77.5 × 25.5 × 37 cm; RV-4347-1j.



Figure 30. Xylophone; 98 × 37 × 70.5 cm; RV-4347-1d.



Figure 31. Fiddle; 25 × 19 × 87.5 cm and fiddle bow; 1.2 × 0.5 × 77.5 cm; RV-4347-1a.



Figure 32. Frame drum; 15.3 × 47 cm; RV-4347-1b.

Figures 28, 29, 30, 31, 32. *Gambang kromong* instruments. West Java; approx. 1875; wood, lacquer, pigments; RV-4347-1f, j, d, a, b.

These musical instruments (Figures 28-32) are called *gambang kromong*, which is also the name of the music genre. They were used to accompany songs of the Lagu Pobin repertoire. The oldest repertoire can be traced back to traditional songs from Fujian province of southern China. The musical notation is in Chinese characters (Kwa 2012: 320). A later genre, the Dalem songs, was sung in a Chinese-Malay verse form of *pantun*, in a calm and soothing rhythm (Kwa 2012: 321-322). The next repertoire which developed was much more energetic and was called Sayur songs. These melodies were suitable for dancing to, and therefore popular at weddings. Female Sundanese singers and dancers, called *wayang cokèk*, were hired to entertain the wedding guests and dance along with them.

The *gambang kromong* ensemble is a mixture of Indonesian, Chinese and, nowadays, often also European instruments, such as an electronic keyboard. The Indonesian instruments, which give the ensemble its name, are the *gambang*, a xylophone with 18 wooden keys, and *kromong*, ten kettle gongs on a wooden stand. In this ensemble the *kromong* is either missing or was never part of it. The explanation for this could be that, when this form of music was brought to Batavia from Fujian, presumably in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the instruments originally consisted of Chinese fiddles, Chinese

flutes, and Indonesian *gambang*. Only around 1880 were drums, gongs and *kromong* added (Yampolsky 1991: 3).

The other instruments in this set are clarinets, gong chimes, drums, flutes, and a two-stringed fiddle, all of Chinese origin. The wooden parts of the instruments are painted in red and gold, and are carved with dragon motifs. Of all the instruments in the *gambang kromong*, only five are illustrated here.

COLLECTIONS WITH PERSONAL STORIES



Figure 33. VOC silver plate, Batavia; first quarter eighteenth century (possibly 1713); silver; 31 x 1 cm; 7004-1.

The exhibition “Connecting Cultures; Chinese from Indonesia in the Netherlands”, organized in cooperation with the Chinese Indonesian Heritage Centre, was made possible thanks to a generous donation by Mr Kan Sioe Yao in the form of the Kan Sioe Yao Fund. He established this Fund within our museum, with the aim of helping to preserve the cultural heritage of Chinese Peranakan from Indonesia.

Moreover, the centre piece of the exhibition, the bridal costume, and a number of other objects, were also donated to the museum by Mr Kan, all of them originating from the Kan family itself who is closely related by marriage to the Han and Tan families. In colonial times, these three families were very

influential in Indonesia and had a long history there. Between 1865-1878 Mr Kan's great-grandfather, Tan Goan Piau, was "Luitenant" and then from 1878-1883 "Kapitein der Chinezen" in Buitenzorg (Bogor), and from 1883 until his death in 1890 he was "Kapitein titulair". Tan Goan Piau received from the Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies a beautiful silver plate for his services as Kapitein. For many years the plate was in the possession of the family in Jakarta, where it served as a dish for food offerings on the ancestral altar (Voskuil-Groenewegen N.d.).

The motifs on the silver plate illustrated in Figure 33 are Chinese. Engraved in the centre are *feng huang*, Chinese phoenixes, surrounded by blossoming peonies. Using repoussé technique, the rim has been decorated with the flowers of the four seasons: plum blossoms (winter), peonies (spring), lotuses (summer), and chrysanthemums (autumn). On the ground there are deer, lions, and monkeys. The sky is filled with birds and butterflies.

These decorations indicate that this silver plate was undoubtedly made by a Chinese silversmith. However, its back is stamped with several assay marks revealing its true identity as VOC silver. The oval-shaped mark consists of the coat-of-arms of Batavia, a sword surrounded by a laurel wreath. During the VOC period, three consecutive variants were used (Eliëns 2012: 49-50). The mark was applied by the assay-master after the silver had been tested and guaranteed to contain enough pure silver. Before 1730, the silver was tested by scraping off a row of tiny pieces of silver. After 1730 a new method of using touch needles, which did less damage to the silver, was applied. Only silver with the maker's mark was tested by the assay-master. The maker's mark on this plate is of a still unidentified Dutch silversmith with the initials "NS". Because of the motifs, this "NS" probably commissioned this plate by one or maybe even more Chinese silversmiths. Besides Chinese, Indonesian – mainly Balinese – and Indian silversmiths also worked for the VOC (Veenendaal 2014: 102).

The third mark is the letter "i". Some argue that this was a year letter, as was customary in Holland (Veenendaal 2014: 101). Following this theory, based on an incomplete list of year letters used during the VOC period, this plate could be dated 1713 (Veenendaal 2014: 229). But there is some doubt about this, since this third mark is absent between 1730 and 1785. Therefore another interpretation is that the letter relates to the assay-master's period in office. After 1730 in order to meet the demand, more than one assay-master had to be appointed. This coincides with the year when the touch needles were introduced to test the silver (Eliëns 2012: 48, 50).

In the collection of the KITLV (Images 7568-7572 and 7574) are six photographs taken around 1930 of silver plates with a very similar design. These plates belonged to the Hervormde Kerk in Depok, now called GPIB Immanuel Depok (Protestant Church Immanuel). Their present whereabouts is unknown (see also Kwisthout 2007: 116-132).

In the course of time, much VOC silverware was melted down. Fortunately this rare plate escaped the melting pot. It is the first piece of VOC silver in the collection of the National Museum of World Cultures.

The silk bridal costume was first worn by Han Tek Nio, grandmother of Mr Kan Sioe Yao, his mother's mother, when she married Tan Tjoen Lee in 1901. Since 1901 the costume has been worn by three of Mr Kan's aunts at their marriages: Clementine Tan in 1925, Lucy Kan in 1926, and Helene Tan in 1928, two daughters and one daughter-in-law of Han Tek Nio. Stemming from this same grandmother, Han Tek Nio, is also a *kebaya* embroidered with daisies and violets, which is illustrated in this article (see Figure 15). The museum has received many more objects, all related to these families and used by them when they still lived in Indonesia.



Figure 34. Portrait of Tan Goan Piau; photographer unknown; late-nineteenth century; 83 x 67 cm; 7095-5.

The most recent donation by Mr Kan, which does not yet have an inventory number, is this framed studio portrait of Tan Goan Piau, the man who had received the silver plate (see Figure 34). The photograph was framed by Boekhandel en drukkerij F.B. Smits, Noordwijk 33, Weltevreden. This donation is accompanied by other portraits of members of Mr Kan's family, some photographed and some painted, which were all hung up near the ancestral altar of the family in Batavia. Three wooden panels with Chinese texts, related to the ancestors, are also part of this recent donation.

A second example of a recent donation, still in the process of official registration, consists of a number of pieces of Chinese furniture originating from the house of Tjong A Fie, "Majoor der Chinezen" in Medan, 17 photographs of whom were already in the collection of the Tropenmuseum (see Figure 35).

Tjong A Fie was born in Guandong in 1860. He left China for Deli in 1875 and became very rich by obtaining the monopoly in opium trade from the Dutch. Through his participation in the Deli plantation economy, he became friends with Jacob Theodoor Cremer, who later became Minister of Colonies. Tjong A Fie even gave Cremer 25,000 guilders towards the foundation of the Colonial Institute in Amsterdam (Mostert and Van Campen 2015: 192).



Figure 35. Studio portrait of Tjong A Fie (1860-1921), "Majoer der Chinezen", Medan; photograph by Carl J. Kleingrothe; 1902; 14.1 x 9.8 cm; TM-60039304.

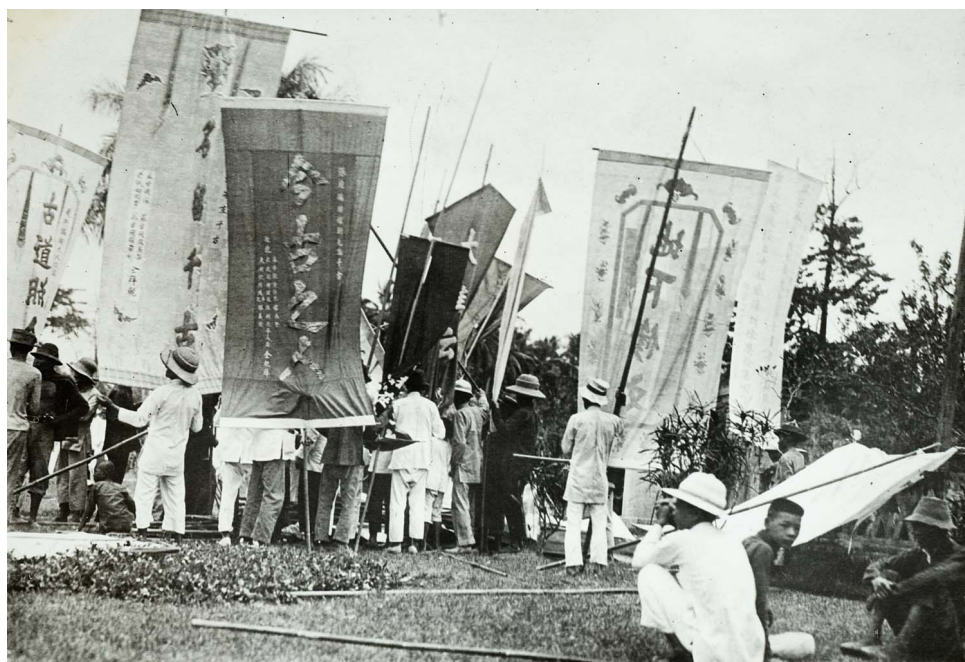


Figure 36. Traditional banners at the funeral of Tjong A Fie, Medan; photograph attributed to Karl Joseph John; 1921; 12 x 17.5 cm; TM-60040849.

Tjong A Fie also used his wealth for all kinds of projects from which the people of Medan, especially the Chinese, benefited. When he died in 1921, a very impressive funeral ceremony was held, attended by the whole Chinese

community of Medan (see Figure 36). The museum is in the possession of 13 photographs of this ritual and the procession.

These examples of recent acquisitions of objects related to the Han-Tan-Kan families and to Tjong A Fie illustrate that increasingly it is the wish of the National Museum of World Cultures to collect objects with a personal story, objects which matter to the persons or communities from which they originate. Importantly, the historical collections from Chinese who lived in Indonesia and those which were collected by the Dutch, show that global interconnectedness is not only a concept of the twenty-first century, but was also very much alive in the past.

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