

A New Home in the East Indies

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Batavia



Street in the old part of Batavia (benedenstad)
Attributed to Jan Weissenbruch, ca. 1870

Queen of the East – that is what Batavia, today's Jakarta, was called in former times.

It is hard to believe today how generous the Dutch layout of the city was and how elegant and luxurious people there lived and partied.

How I depicted in the novel the house of the de Jongs at Koningsplein Oost, the Harmonie, the Hotel des Indes and Rouffignac corresponds to historical facts – and the patisserie of the Leroux family really existed like that, too.

In contrast to this luxurious lifestyle were the kampongs of the native population, the Chinese quarter of Glodok and the rather sobering reality waiting at the port for new arrivals; I tried to depict these faces of the city as detailed as possible, too.

With my debut novel *South Winds*, I had already spent some time in the history of Batavia. It was fascinating to see how much had changed in the almost one hundred years between the stay of the *Endeavour* under Captain Cook and Jacobina's and Floortje's day – and what had remained just the same.

There is not much left of old Batavia in present day Jakarta. But in old photographs, images, postcards and travel accounts we can visit it again – and imagine how Jacobina and Floortje experienced the city.

Arrival

What awaited Jacobina and Floortje after the *Prinses Amalia* had anchored off Batavia was exactly what every passenger saw and experienced in those days.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, smaller vessels were still able to sail through the canal of Kali Besar and to reload goods. Due to increasing size of the ships and also increasing siltation of the mouth of the canal, this became impossible. Diggers, drawn by horses and slaves, were supposed to provide a remedy, but this solution proved to be insufficient.



Canal at the port
On the right: customs house and Stadsherberg
Tan Tjie Lan, ca. 1896



Customs house and Stadsherberg, ca. 1880

Therefore, one changed over to send small vessels, so-called lighters, through the canal to its mouth, in order to transport goods, baggage and passengers into the city. A time-consuming method, that nevertheless persisted well into the late nineteenth century.

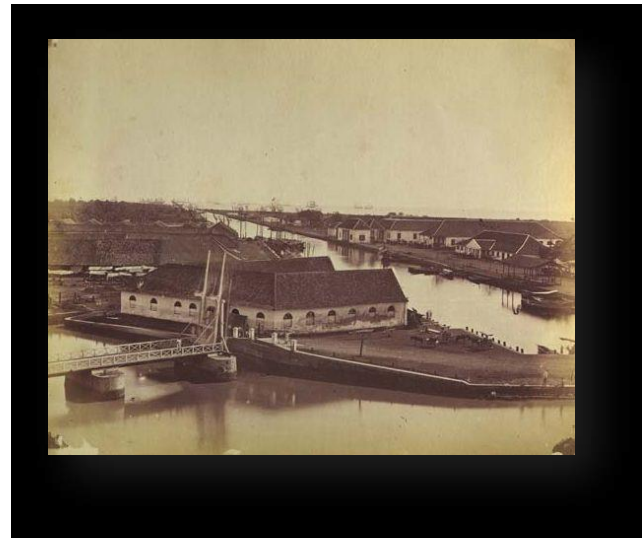
In Batavia, the authorities were meticulous with controls at entry, like depicted in the novel, especially in order to control the smuggling of raw opium.

According to the sources, European women sometimes were engaged in smuggling; many of them were caught and sentenced to prison. But authorities also held their eyes open for smuggled seeds, possibly afflicted with diseases or vermin that could mean danger for the successful plantations of Javas.

For travelers without Dutch nationality, there were particularly strict regulations, as told e.g. in the travel account of the American Eliza Scidmore, arriving about ten years after Jacobina and Floortje in Java. She also writes about further regulations concerning her stay there: as a foreigner, one had to have a special permit to leave Batavia for other parts of the island. Scidmore's planned excursion from Buitenzorg to Borobudur almost was cancelled since the necessary permit had not been granted at first.

Had Jacobina and Floortje come to Java only two years later, their arrival would have taken a completely different course. For in 1885, the larger port of Tanjung Priok was completed farther east, providing more space for larger vessels, and from this port, they would have taken the newly constructed railway to reach the city.

Up to the present day, Tanjung Priok is still the main port of Jakarta, around which a small town of the same name has developed.



Port canal - Woodbury & Page, ca. 1870

First views of the city

Just as the arrival at port for all travelers of the nineteenth century was the same till the opening of the new port of Tanjung Priok, they all took the same route into the city.

Some with the tram that changed from horse power to steam operation around the time Jacobina and Floortje came to Java. Most of them however rode in a horse or pony carriage, just like Jacobina and Floortje in the carriage of the de Jongs.



Amsterdam Poort seen from north, still with both wings
Woodbury & Page, before 1850

Budiarto functions not only as driver, but also as some sort of tourist guide, presenting and explaining at least the most important things to see on their way into the city.

The first things everybody on the way from the port into the city saw was the Amsterdam Poort (actual the Amsterdamse Poort), from mid nineteenth-century the last residue of the old fort of Batavia. This gate used to be the most southern gate of the fortress of which there were still some walls and buildings left at beginning of the century.

Until Governor-general Daendels demolished everything

in 1808 /1809 – except the Amsterdam Poort and its both wings, though falling into disrepair in the years afterwards.

Towards mid-century, the Amsterdam Poort was thoroughly renovated and obtained the look Jacobina and Floortje saw on their ride: of classicistic style and with the statues of Mars, Roman god of war, and Minerva, goddess of wisdom and sponsor of arts, trade, and strategy.

The gate withstood Japanese occupation during World War II, although both of the statues disappeared in those years and the structure fell into dilapidation. Since it became also an obstacle for the increasing traffic in the city, it was torn down in December 1950.



Amsterdam Poort - Woodbury & Page, ca. 1880

The Stadhuis was maybe the most important building of Batavia. Built between 1707 and 1710 on the site of two former city halls, it was not only the principal office of Batavia's administration but also housed the court and the council.

Here contracts were finalized and notarized, marriages registered, permits granted, sailing vessels sold and bought, sentences brought down and criminals executed. And as long as there were still slaves, setting them free was only valid when this took place at the Stadhuis.

The Stadhuis still exists; after the city's administration relocated in 1913 and the temporarily use as seat of the Governor of west Java in the 1920s, it today houses the museum Sejarah Jakarta, dedicated to the history of Jakarta and its region.



The Stadhuis of Batavia, ca. 1880

At Koningsplein



Aerial image of Koningsplein with county fair, 1930

Buffelsveld, *buffalo field* – that is what the large open space outside the city was called during the era of the United East Indian Company. Except cows and buffalos grazing and regiments exercising sometimes, there was nothing else but a brickyard until the end of the eighteenth century.

In 1809, Governor-general Daendels renamed the space Champ de Mars and decided to use the muddy, uneven field as permanent drill ground for the army. But already in 1818, its name was changed again, to Koningsplein, *King's Square*. In the same year, the first residences were built around this square, although at that time, Rijswijk and shortly afterwards Nordwijk were considered preferable residential areas for the upper class.

From mid-century onwards, it became fashionable to build a spacious and airy house with an extended garden at Koningsplein.

If one could afford it - for Koningsplein (supplemented after the four cardinal directions with the affixes of Noord, Oost, West and Zuid) quickly became the best address in Batavia.

In my novel, here the de Jongs reside. With these wealthy and highly esteemed citizens of Batavia Jacobina takes up



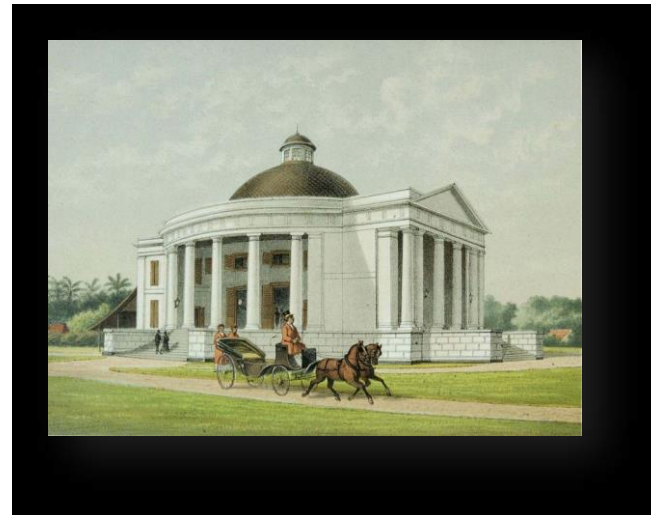
Koningsplein West, ca. 1900

her position as governess and private tutoress; in addition, Vincent de Jong is also a high-ranking officer and war hero.

The house in the novel is fictional, but modelled after residences existing here in the nineteenth century.



Residence at Koningsplein, ca. 1880



Willemskerk at Koningsplein, ca. 1880



Domestic staff in Batavia, ca. 1890

Today, the Koningsplein is called Medan Merdeka – *Freedom or Independence Square*. Numerous government buildings surround the square with the national monument in its center.

And with its size of one square kilometer, Medan Merdeka is still one of the largest squares in the world.

Hotel Des Indes

Situated at the southern end of the Molenvliet West, the Hotel Des Indes was, in the first half of the twentieth century, the best and most famous hotel in Batavia. In the nineteenth century, this title still belonged to the Hotel der Nederlanden. But whereas the Nederlanden was mainly popular with tourists, accounted for by several travel reports from those days, the guests of the Des Indes intended to stay longer, mainly for business purposes; guests who weren't able to stay with relatives or friends during their sojourn and didn't have a place of their own in Batavia.



Hotel Des Indes seen from south, Molenvliet on the right
Isidore van Kinsbergen, 1870



Dining hall at the Des Indes, ca. 1900



Antechamber of one of the hotel rooms, 1910

The grounds, on which an engineer of the United East Indian Company built his residence in the mid-seventeenth century, encompassed more than three hectares. Three quarters of a century later, the government acquired the land and established a school for girls, which relocated four years later and had to close after four more years – because one of the female teachers after the other got married on the spot.

In the possession of the Cressonnier family for some years, the hotel was owned by Theodor Louis Gallas in the 1880s, and in those years, it was known to offer some kind of second home to its guests: chic but not too elegant, comfortable and cozy.



Courtyard of the hotel, ca. 1900

Following Indonesia's independence in 1949, the hotel was renamed Hotel Duta Indonesia – allegedly in order to be able to continue using tableware and cutlery bearing the initials HDI.

After the center of the city shifted off Molenvliet West, the hotel became less important and was torn down at the beginning of the 1970s.

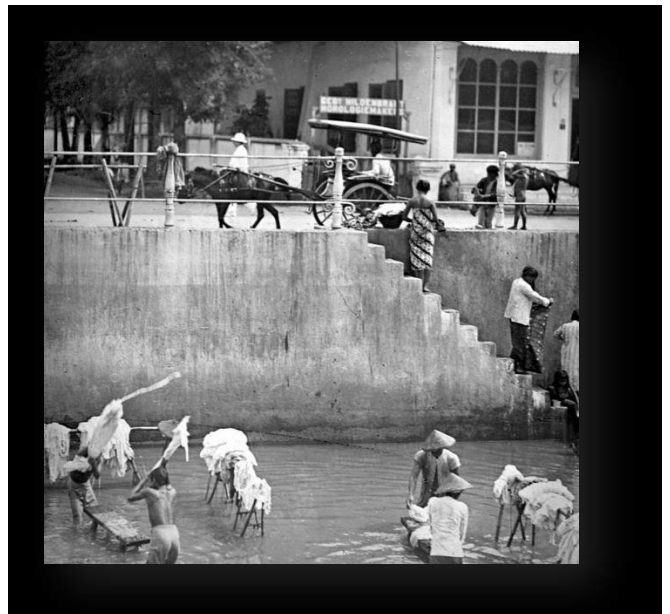
Today, this site is occupied by the shopping mall of Duta Merlin.

A day in Glodok



I love chinatowns; I could spend days wandering through streets and alleys and browsing the shops.

An experience I passed over to Jacobina when she spends a day with Jan in Glodok, the Chinese quarter of Batavia.





The first contact between the islands belonging to Indonesia today and the Chinese dates well back into the fifth century BC, and there was already a Chinese settlement in the area later belonging to Batavia when the Dutch arrived there in 1596.

Jan Pieterszoon Coen, founder and Governor-general of Batavia, placed importance on good relations to local Chinese, (as but not least because the Dutch population was very small in numbers and depended on the working power of the Chinese. Moreover, Coen mistrusted the native population of Java and therefore was looking for an alliance with the Chinese.

Relations that slowly deteriorated in the course of the eighteenth century, until, with the revolt and the subsequent massacre in 1740, they literally went up in smoke and blood.

Nevertheless the Chinese population of Batavia, on the rise again after 1740, played an important role in almost every domain of trade, traffic and transport, crafts and agriculture; a role persisting still today.

The old Chinese quarter of Glodok still exists; today, it is the core of modern Jakarta's Chinatown.



House of a wealthy Chinese family, ca. 1870
(Model for the house of Kian Gie)

Club Harmonie

It is said that the *Clubhouse of the Harmonie society* (its official name hardly anyone in Batavia ever used) was the most famous building in the whole quarter of Rijswijk.

At the very least it was the most popular gathering place in Batavia; here the beautiful, the rich, the important and the powerful of Batavia came together. And those who desired to belong to these circles tried to get access to the Harmonie – therefore comparable to a trendy nightclub today.

And yet, the initial period of the Harmonie was characterized by difficulties, already during the time of construction.



Die Harmonie seen from north, ca. 1880. On the left Molenvliet, on the right Oger Frères.

105,000 Reichsthaler was the budget for this building, commissioned by Governor-general Daendels in 1809, planned to be finished within 15 months after the contract was made on March 31st, 1810.

Politics interfered: as a consequence of the Napoleonic wars, Java became British. Daendels lost his post, and the Harmonie remained a building lot.

But the new British lieutenant-governor Sir Stamford Raffles decided in 1812 that the building should be completed. However, at a higher price: costs finally amounted to 360,000 Reichsthaler, and towards the end of 1814 the clubhouse was finished.

The upper class of Batavia though did not show, in the beginning, much interest to spend their nights here; many of them resided at that time still a bit farther north, in the old quarters of the city, and the Harmonie was simply too far away. Not until the second half of the century, when more and more of the well-to-do moved into the new elegant residential areas outside the old city, the Harmonie became attractive – and finally evolved into the glamorous meeting place for the high society as depicted in the novel.

In 1985, the building was torn down to give way to the widening of the street Jalan Majapahit.



Oger Frères, ca. 1885
In the foreground: the rails of the new steam-powered tram

Grand Hotel Java



Main building of the Grand Hotel Java, ca. 1890

Compared to the Hotel Des Indes, the Grand Hotel has only a small role within the novel - but at least not a completely unimportant one.

Opened in 1834, the name is quite deceiving: the Grand Hotel was without a doubt a good one, but not a Grand Hotel in the classical sense and a bit more modest than the Hotel der Nederlanden and the Des Indes.

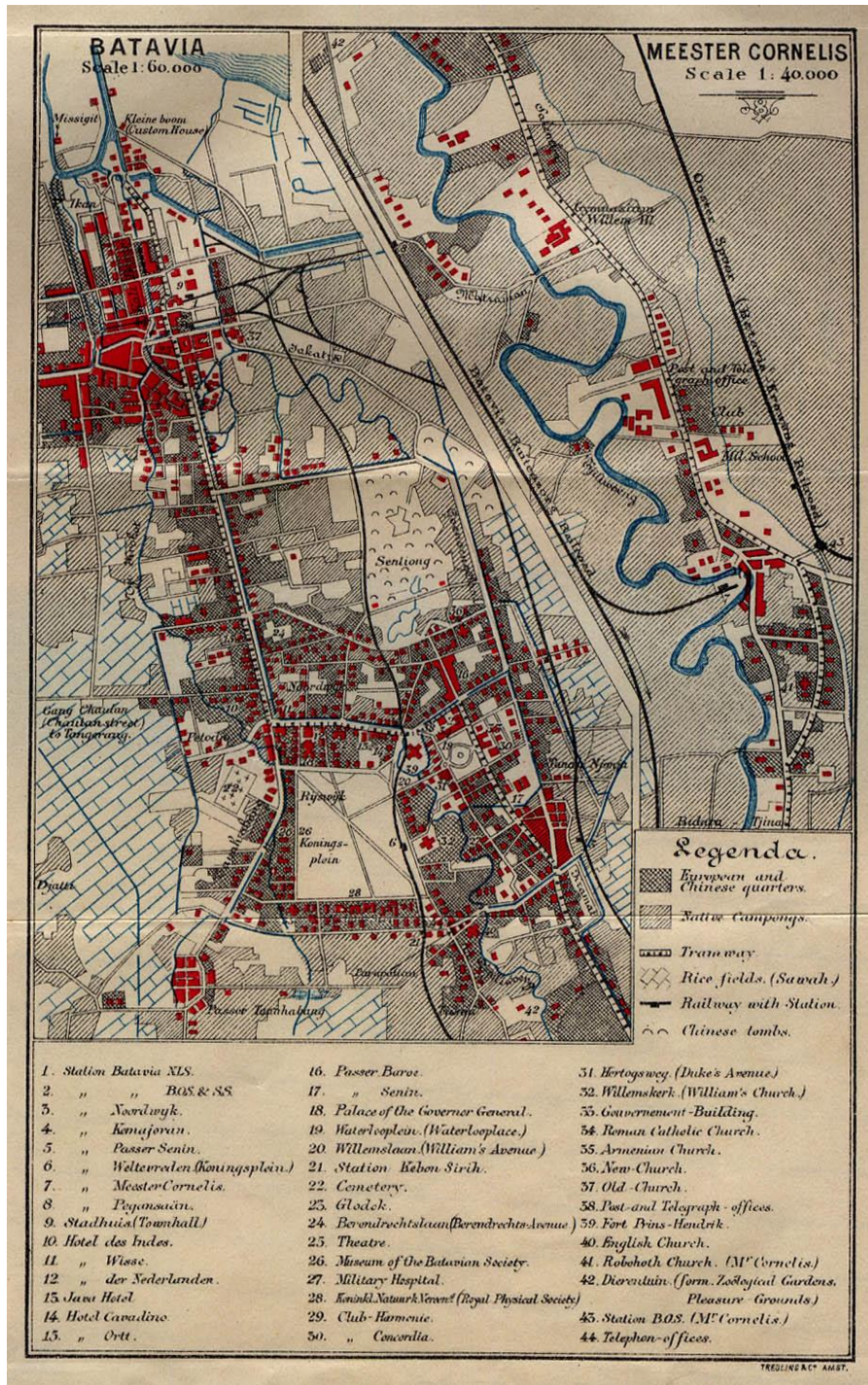
The extensive grounds were studded with small bungalows, and even with some extension buildings, the hotel still comprised only 70 rooms in 1909. Since it was situated close to the colonial administration, it was popular with administrative officers, their relatives and friends, also for its informal atmosphere. And because of its location between Rijswijk and Koningsplein Noord, there was always a refreshing cool breeze.

After Indonesia's independence in 1949, the hotel was closed; the buildings adjacent to Rijswijk were taken over by the military and those in direction of Koningsplein Noord house the ministry of interior today.



Driveway of the Grand Hotel Java, ca. 1885

Map of Batavia, 1897



Buitenzorg

Buitenzorg, modern-day Bogor, was in the nineteenth century the gateway to Preanger, especially after the opening of the railway line between Batavia and Buitenzorg.

In the period that sets the background for the novel, Buitenzorg was considered the city with the highest standard of living in Java - even compared to European standards. Noble in an unobtrusive manner, compared to the luxurious pomp of Batavia, and quiet in a restful way, contrary to the social turmoil of the capital.



The Salak, near Buitenzorg, ca. 1920

Buitenzorg is also the city where Jan Molenaar lives and works as a missionary in the surrounding region. Jacobina spends a few days in Buitenzorg and not only gets to know another side of Java but also a different side of herself.

The city



Train station of Buitenzorg, ca. 1900

The location where Buitenzorg came into being during colonial times is one with a long history.

Already in the fifth century, the region is mentioned as a part of a Javanese state called Tarumangara, from which later the Kingdom of Sunda arose, and in 669, between the rivers of Ciliwung and Cisadane the capital Pakuan Pajajaran was established: *the place between the paralleling rivers* – the immediate precursor of what later would become Buitenzorg.

During the subsequent centuries, Pakuan Pajajaran became one of the largest cities of the whole archipelago, until it was destroyed by the army of the Sultan of Banten in 1579 and then abandoned.

Bit by bit, the whole region came under the control of the United East Indian Company, dispatching a Javanese lieutenant to explore and to develop the area around Pakuan. In 1699, an eruption of the volcano Salak devastated the region, but also cleared vast stretches of forest and enabled laying out plantations

for rice and coffee. In a minimum of time, small agricultural settlements were established, combined to an administration unit in 1701.

Shortly afterwards, the first Dutchmen settled here, attracted by the favorable geographic situation and particularly by the mild climate, so agreeably different from the steamy heat in Batavia.

In 1744/1745, the residency of the governor-general was built, housing also the whole government during the summer months, and one year later, the settlement got its new name: Buitenzorg – *carefree* or *without worries*. A conscious imitation of Sanssouci, summer palace of the Prussian king Frederick the Great, near Potsdam.



Residence in Buitenzorg, ca. 1900



Hotel Bellevue, on the outskirts of Buitenzorg, ca. 1885

In the period that followed, the city grew rapidly - paradoxically even more in the years of British occupation after the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, after Sir Stamford Raffles had moved here from Batavia, together with his administration.

After another eruption of Salak in October 1834, Buitenzorg was damaged by an earthquake, and as a consequence, houses built afterwards were constructed particularly strong and solid.

In 1845, Europeans, Chinese and Arabs were by law only allowed to live in clearly segregated quarters,

and between 1860 and 1880, the biggest agricultural school of the East Indies was established.

A library, a museum of natural sciences and laboratories for biology, chemistry and veterinary medicine found their way into the city.

The administration of the East Indies was officially relocated from Batavia to Buitenzorg in 1904, although the actual work was still done in Batavia, until in the course of a large-scale administrative reform in 1924, Buitenzorg was made capital of the newly formed province of west Java.



Chinese quarter of Buitenzorg, ca. 1900

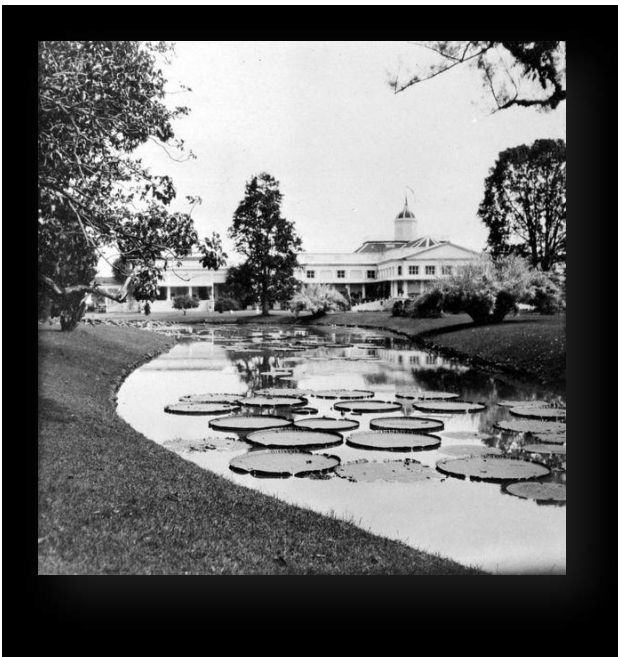
The Botanical Garden

No traveler of the nineteenth century left Buitenzorg without having visited the famous Botanical Garden.

Originally layed out only as a residency with extensive gardens in 1744, the property was redesigned by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1811 and made into a Botanical Garden in 1817. And although Olivia Raffles was buried in Batavia after her death in 1814, she was honored with a memorial stone in the Botanical Garden.

The garden was not only intended for recreation or to display the diversity of plants, but also to breed, cultivate and research plants from all over the Indonesian archipelago. With by now 15,000 plant species, 400 sorts of rare palms and roughly 3,000 species of orchids, the Botanical Garden still is one of the largest and most important centers of botanical research.

And also the descendants of the trustful roe deer Jacobina encountered during her visit of the garden are still inhabiting the grounds.

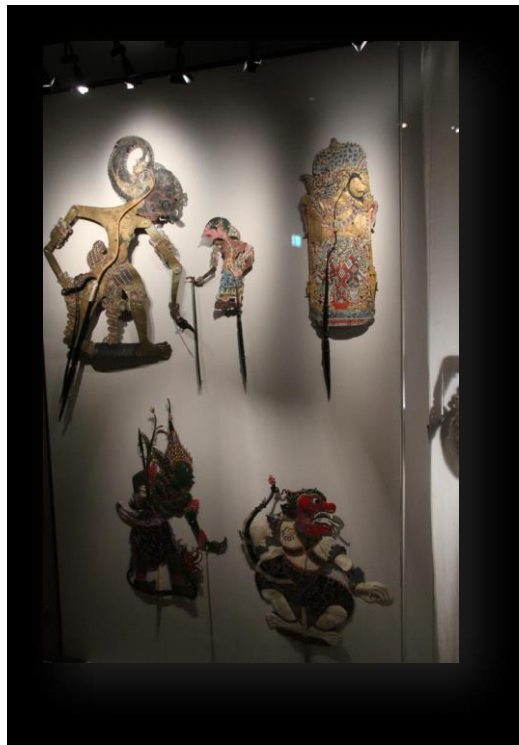


Governor's palace and water lily pond, ca. 1900



Memorial for Lady Raffles, ca. 1917

Wayang and gamelan



Puppets of wayang kulit ...

In Java, *wayang* denotes any kind of performing arts, a term derived from the Javanese word for shadow.

One of the better known forms of *wayang* is *wayang kulit*, a shadow theater performed with special puppets.

In 2003, the UNESCO declared it one of the masterworks of the oral and immaterial heritage of mankind, and today, *wayang kulit* is the oldest as well as the most popular kind of puppet show in the world.



... in the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

The Performance consists of a light source and some sort of screen, behind which the *dalang*, the puppeteer, moves the figures: artfully designed rod puppets from buffalo skin or leather and with moveable arms.



Wayang wong or wayang orang in Preanger, ca. 1890

Wayang kulit probably came with Indian traders to Indonesia, somewhere in the first century AC.

Up to the present day, the stories told are based on the classical Indian epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*; others are retellings of actual events of the region the *wayangs* are performed or of traditional tales.

Another and equally very popular form of *wayang* is *wayang wong* or *wayang orang*: human *wayang*, a dance-like theater performance, deriving its themes also from *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana*.

Both forms of *wayang* are accompanied by the music of the *gamelan*, the characteristic Indonesian orchestra, originating also from the Hindu-Buddhist past of Indonesia. The *gamelan* is as diverse as the Indonesian island world and as varied and complex as its traditions: depending on the island and region and on the occasion, it consists of different instruments. It is even said that no two *gamelans* in Indonesia ever resemble each other.



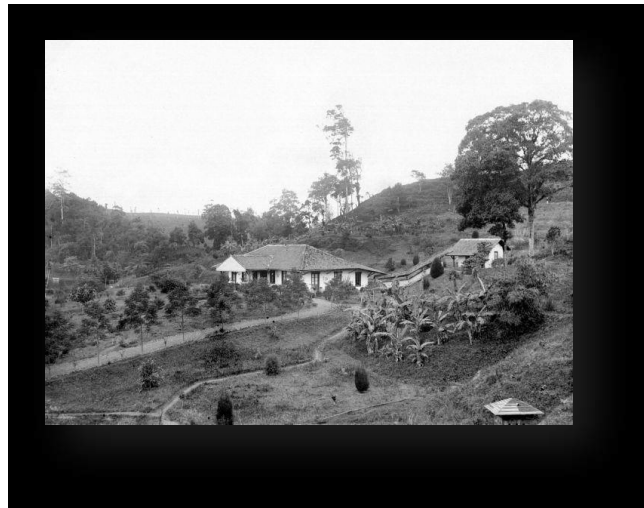
Gamelan - Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

Preanger

The mountainous region in western Java is called *Parahyangan* today – formerly known as *Priangan* and by the Dutch called *Preanger*.

Due to fertile soil and a combination of sun and regular rainfall, a region rich of valuable timber – like that of the *Rasamala* trees growing in large numbers in the area the fictional plantation of the van Hassel family is situated. I liked the name of this tree so much that I decided to name the plantation accordingly.

First and foremost, the region of *Preanger* was ideal for agriculture. For indigo and sugarcane, for coffee and tea, later for quinine, extracted from *Cinchona* trees and for rubber.



Cinchona-Plantage in Preanger, ca. 1900



Cinchona calisaya

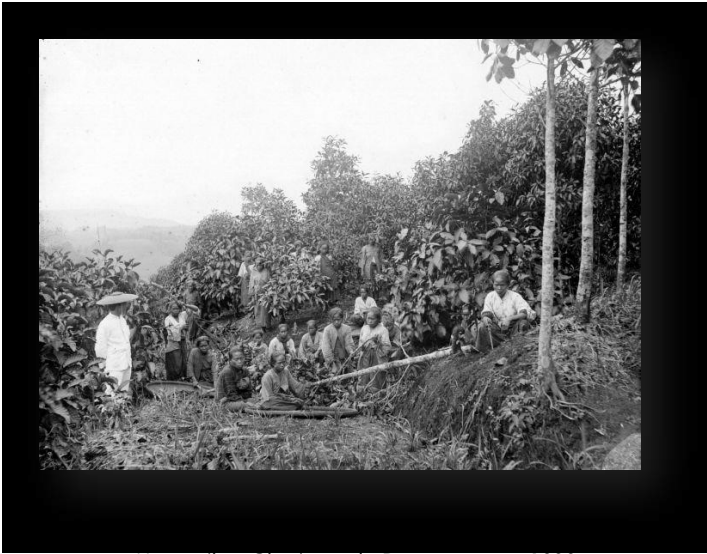
The generation of planters like James van Hassel and Edu van Tonder was the first after the end of the *cultursteeisel* in 1870 to be able to lease land from native landowners for a longer span of time.

With that, the golden era of planters in the East Indies began, reaching its heyday in the 1930s

It was a hard life, out in the Preanger, physically challenging and not without dangers, outlined in the novel with a few strokes.

And like so often – compared to sophisticated Batavia, the worldview of planter there was more conservative.

One of the key phrases to understand the way of life there in the countryside is said by James van Hassel at the evening of the king's birthday: "We planters hold our honor and that of our women in high esteem."



Harvesting Cinchona in Preanger, ca. 1900



Processing Cinchona in Preanger, ca. 1920

In the preface of E. M. Beekman to P.A. Daum's novel *Ups and Downs of Life in the Indies* I came across the hypothesis of baffling parallels between life in the Dutch East Indies and in the Southern United States in the antebellum era. This hypothesis was a good starting point for working on this novel, and the more I researched, the more conclusive this approach became.

When one thinks of the planters' way of life in *Gone With the Wind* or John Jakes' *North and South*, of their values, concepts of honor, social customs, one gets an idea of a planters' life in Javanese Preanger.

Except that this life took place in smaller and more modest houses, in altogether more simple and less luxuriant conditions.

At least still in the 1880s, and from old photographs, other images and written sources, I depicted house and life of the van Hassel family.



Residence in Preanger, ca. 1900

Sumatra

Situated in the West of the Indonesian archipelago, Sumatra is one of the largest islands of the region and the sixth largest in the world.

Shaped like a backbone, the chain of the Barisan mountains dominates the long-drawn body in the West of the island, while the East is characterized by swampy plains. Volcanic soils make the island fertile, which was in former times almost completely covered by tropical rainforests.

In the nineteenth century, Sumatra was hardly developed. In those days depicted in the novel, the first coffee plantations were established, and later rubber plantations would follow.

Then, Sumatra was indeed what Margaretha de Jong described as “wilderness”, not in the least comparable to Batavia or even only Java as a whole.

The surroundings were wilder than the landscapes of Java, which were already tamed by the Dutch, and there were no larger towns or cities, no colonial buildings, no colonial lifestyle like in Batavia or Buitenzorg.



Demon, carved into a door
Model for the cupboard in the
de Jongs' bedroom



Pier in Teluk Betung, ca. 1920



Sumatran Bay - Woodbury & Page, ca. 1870

Here, things were different from Java; different peoples were living here, with different traditions and ways of life, even with different languages. Their houses were built differently, their clothes were different and also their social structure, and although many of them were Muslims, some also adhered to other religions.

Sumatra was a world of its own.



Children in Lampong Bay, ca. 1900



Characteristic wooden house in the south of Sumatra, late 19th century

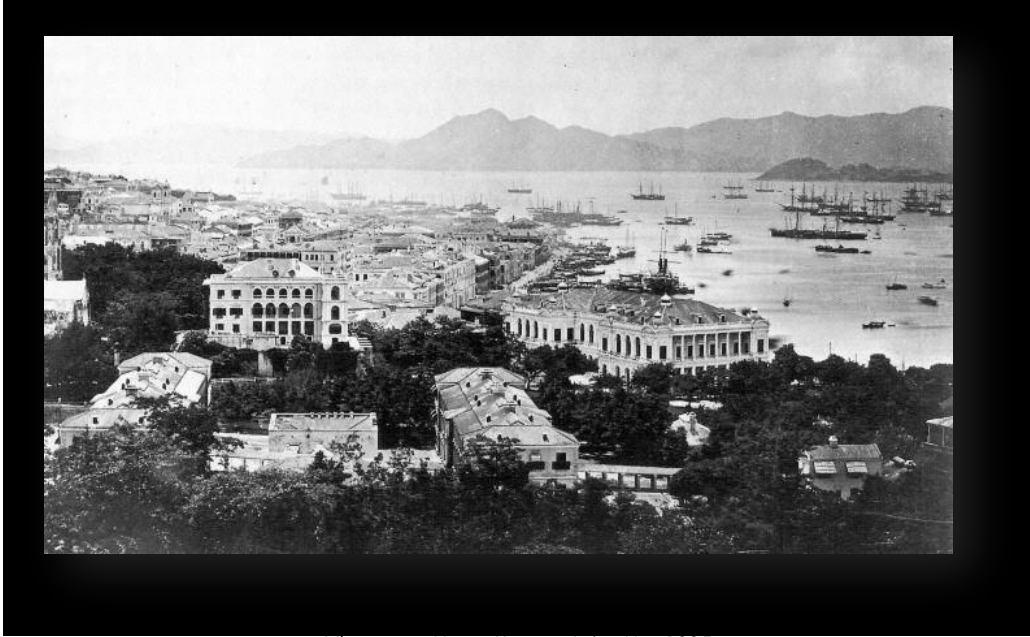


Residence in the South of Sumatra, ca. 1930



Women in the traditional costume of Lampong Bay, ca. 1900

Hong Kong



View over Hong Kong - John Ho, 1895

Hong Kong, the *fragrant harbor*, is the home of Edward Leung, having him shaped to a similar extent as his school years in England, his studies and the first years as a doctor there.

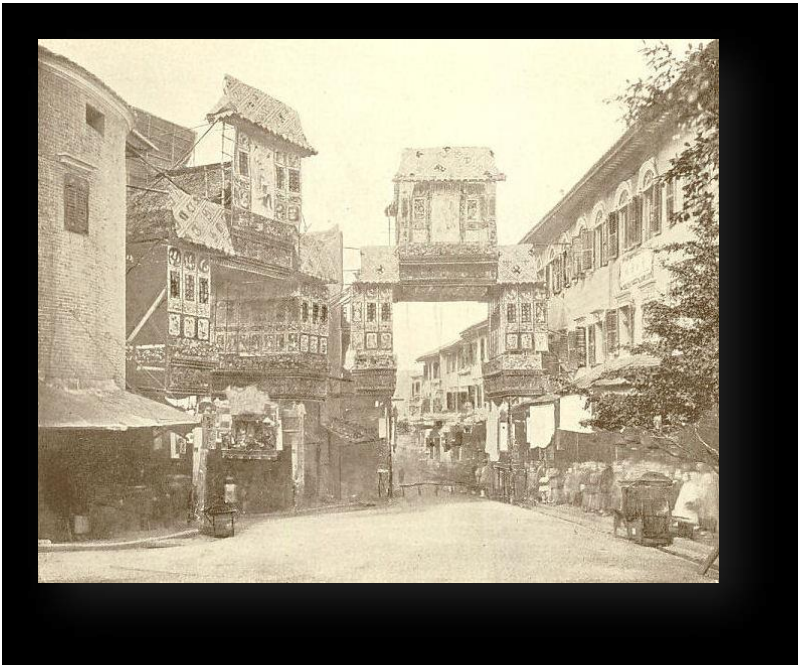
Since the end of the First Opium War (1839-1842) British crown colony, Hong Kong quickly rose to a leading commercial hub and free port. A city of extremes, where the respective ways of life, traditions and cultures of Chinese majority and the minority partly European, partly American clashed.

Besides great wealth and elegant quarters with large residences and wide streets, the city knew also immense poverty and alarming living conditions in the small and overcrowded quarters. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Hong Kong was in need of doctors, hospitals, orphanages and schools; projects depending on donations.

And also depending on the willpower and energy of men like Sir Kai Ho Kai, the historical model for Edward Leung.



Beaconsfield House, Hong Kong, 1890



Street in Hong Kong - Otto Ehrenfried Ehler, 1892



Alley in Hong Kong - Die Gartenlaube, 1895

Image sources: p. 16 below, p. 17 below, p. 18 upper left, p. 20 above: Author's collection / Jörg Brochhausen; p. 2 below, pp. 3-11, pp.13-16, p. 17 above, p. 18 upper right, p. 19, p. 20 below, p. 21: Tropenmuseum, part of the National Museum of World Cultures, via Wikimedia Commons; p. 2 above, p. 12, p. 18 below right, p. 19, pp. 22-23: Wikimedia Commons.