

# **The quest for the ultimate architecture Indonesia in the late colonial period**

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The text in Bahasa is published in the book 'Tentang Bentang', November 2008, related to the architecture exhibition under the same name

## **Introduction**

Indonesian colleagues invited me to contribute to this book, I was supposed to write about architects and architecture developments in the twentieth century, in particular how they sought the 'Indies-ness' in their works, the word Indies-ness reflect to the 'Dutch-Indies' (Nederlands-Indië), the name of the Indonesian archipelago in the colonial era. The more and more I studied this topic, I became more and more insecure if it was possible to write down an analysis to this subject.

First of all I ask the readers to bear in mind that architects who performed on a colonial stage, even if they were opposite to each other or to the system, still belonged to and members were of a colonial society; the importance of this remark will be clear as I will write about the different attitudes of architects in the late colonial period.

All leading architects in the twenties- thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, recognized that the architectural production differed from these in the Netherlands, or broader from the Western world. Then some emphasized the tropical circumstances as important which could lead to a modern tropical architecture concept; others expressed the opinion that the vernacular Indonesian architecture should have influence on the future of Indonesian (Indies, as they called it) architecture.

This article might be considered as additional to the chapter which I wrote in the book 'The Past in the Present' (2007) titled: 'Colonial architecture in Indonesia - References and developments'. **1)** In that book, I wrote a more comprehensive study about the development of architecture in Indonesia and the particular colonial background.

Now, in this article, I will present a blend between the historical facts and conclusions regarding the opinions of architects. First I describe the backgrounds and stage at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup> century and further I will come to the opinions and discussion between some well-known architects in the late colonial period.

## **The Colonial society**

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Dutch-Indies featured the character of civil servants and soldiers, there were hardly any initiatives of private enterprise; the Government monopolized all economic activities. It seemed the Colony was recognized and ruled, by the Dutch-Indies Government as an enormous agro-economic project; with the Dutch as the possessors, having the advantage on the financial profits. **2)**

Geo-demographic, the differences in the Indonesian archipelago were considerable; the

Island Java hosted in the year 1930 about 40.000.000 indigenous inhabitants and around 193.000 Europeans; this in the contrary with the rest of the Indonesian archipelago with approximately 18.000.000 Indigenous inhabitants and 48.000 Europeans.

The small minority of Europeans functioned as the ruling class. In all governmental services, industries and companies of a certain importance, education institutes and health service; indeed, almost all leading positions were in the hands of Europeans. This European group functioned as a social- and cultural elite. But we might consider it concerned as a rare sort of elite, these elite was not a natural reproduction of the indigenous society, but actually alien based.

The European group consist in several parts; there were the so called 'stayers' (blijvers in Dutch) this group was for the greatest part formed by the Eurasian inhabitants and there were the 'movers' (trekkers in Dutch), who after finishing their career in the colony turned to Holland again, the county they were born. Both groups were subservient to the interest of the colonizing country (Netherlands), but often differed in their vision and interest to the development and status of the Colony. It features the tension between the settlement- and exploitation model of the Colony.

Obviously, there was a break through in the beginning of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1870, the so called 'Cultuurstelsel' (a system of governmental exploitation of forced agriculture in the island of Java) was abolished, the Government lost her monopoly and the system of free economic enterprise was unleashed. From then on, it was possible for the private sector to obtain uncultivated land on long lease terms from the Government; also it became possible to establish private commercial business enterprises.

More then ever, in the last quarter of the 19th century, thousands of Europeans migrated to the colony, including an increasing number of women. In 1871, the first telegraph connection between Java and Europe became a reality and the first Railways were established in 1873. Inexorably the colonial society woke up and became more 'European'. The upper class of the Eurasian inhabitants focused more on The Netherlands and it seemed that the distance between the 'colonizer' and 'those who were colonized' became larger. As a result of the fast growing cities and the problems related, a decentralization Law (1903) was launched. Self-government became an issue and the first municipalities got established and City councils were set up in Batavia (Jakarta), Surabaya and Semarang, soon to be followed by others. In 1942, there were eighteen municipalities in Java and twelve others in the rest of the Archipelago.

The creation of a local Government level, as a consequence of the decentralization law, endorsed the possibilities to generate municipal ordinances and the organizing of an adequate staff of public officials/ professionals. Undoubtedly, the fast growing larger Cities had to deal with an increasing number of infrastructure problems: regarding urban planning and infrastructure, or the housing needs in all categories in society. Generally there was a great lack of available building lots and a consistent vision on urban development as well. Particular on Java, the increase of the population was faster than ever; former rural villages (*desa*) were enclosed by new city extensions and became urban *kampung*. These *kampung* became crowded areas; the former social cohesion

disappeared and as consequence the collective system of mutual helps (gotong royong) as well. Nevertheless, in the initial period these *kampung* did not fall under the control of the City councils, but under the direction of the central Government. It caused many problems between the central and local Governments, financial and endless annoyances related to urban planning, including hygiene.

Around World war 1, numerous architects were settled in the Colony; frequently they combined the architectural profession with the ownership of a building company. Beside their involvement of all sort of activities, they announced them selves as architects. Those people often came out as draftsmen or superintendents, to realize a building project which was designed by an architect in Holland. Others, often young architects, came from Europe and settled them selves in the cities on Java, Sumatra and Sulawesi, further a remarkable number of architects started their career in service of the central- or local Governments some established a private office after some years. The late colonial period, was undergoing a fast changing and the building production was increasing; modernizing and the need for experts in all kind of professions was a serious issue. In 1917 the first university was established in Bandung (ITB) and opened in 1920; the architect was Henri Maclaine Pont.

### **The awaking of a new era**

As told, the abolition by law in 1870 of the Government-monopoly in agriculture brought a social- and economic renewing. Trading firms, banks and assemblage/service industries got established; the field of governmental activities expanded and more skilled employees were needed; while after 1890, the urban population increased rapidly. The building trade began to develop and the first building companies and architects arrived from the Netherlands. The needs for administration, trade- and shop buildings, housing etc... in the fast growing Cities was hard to solve, particularly on Java and the north-east coast of Sumatra (Medan).

The society changed and so their architecture; in the new developments of the Cities, architecture became in conception and expression more or less a European product. At one hand we might regard this architecture as a Western product at the other hand I borrow the opinion that the development of the modern architecture movement period between both World-wars in Indonesia cannot be strictly compared with those developments in the Western world.

Dealing with the various architectural products in the colonial era, one may recognize these products as a result from the East- and West both. The architects in the former Dutch-Indies had to deal with diverse circumstances, comparing with those in Europe. The social circumstances, the climate-, skill men ship-, building materials it all differed from the West.

Let us take a step backwards to the last decade of the nineteenth century. A break through by coincidence was the realization of the Catholic cathedral in Batavia. The first design was made up by the Catholic priest named Dijkmans. After the start, the building activities ended by finishing the foundation of the church; unfortunately there was a lack on money to continue and it is told that Dijkmans left the Indies in 1894 as a disappointed man.

It last till 1898, when the Dutch architect Marius J. Hulswit continued the building activities and finished the church building in April 1901. Hulswit built the cathedral in Jakarta in

co-operation with unskilled Indonesian workers although the roof construction was done by carpenters of Chinese origin. In the architectural history of Indonesia, the church building is obviously an outsider, a rare and unique product of Neo Gothic mannerism. In contrary to the British architecture in the Asian region, Neo Gothic architecture became never a real fashion in the Indies.

Hulswit arrived in Indonesia in 1890, one of his first activities was the supervision of the establishment of an Assurance building designed by the Dutch architect H.P. Berlage in Sura-baya. He associated him self with a building contractor named 'Scheffer'; they realized the 'Court of Justice' in Surabaya, at the Kali Besar. When Hulswit came to Indonesia there was probably no qualified architect in the country. Most designs were made up by amateur-architects, often superintendents, civil-engineers or military officers/engineers and now and then a Dutch architect in the Netherlands prepared a design, which was sent to the Colony to build there. It is like Hulswit was probably the first architect who practised the profession in Indonesia. Before in the Netherlands, Hulswit was educated in the atelier of the architect Piere Cuypers **3)** and involved to the realization of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

The Amsterdam architect Eduard Cuypers, a younger nephew of Piere Cuypers, was the founder and name giver of the most successful commercial architectural office in the first decades of the twentieth century. It was the director of the board of the Javasche Bank (later Bank Indonesia) who asked him to travel to the Indies in 1909 and he convinced him to establish a second office in Batavia. Eduard Cuypers was asked by the Bank for the design of several bank buildings. Eduard Cuypers lived and stayed in Amsterdam and in Batavia office he associated him self with Marius Hulswit and in 1910 the technical engineer A.A. Fermont joint in. The building, in Jakarta-kota, the 'Javasche Bank', was finished in 1910 and until 1929 the architectural office realized 14 buildings for this bank firm.

Eduard Cuypers died in 1927, During the years the office existed in Jakarta until 1954, the year Fermont passed away. Considering the vast production of this office, we have to bear in mind that the range of architectural designs from this office are from the hand of various architects. However, regarding the buildings of the 'Javasche Bank' one will recognize the hand of the architect Eduard Cuypers. He brought the standard conception with him from the Netherlands to Indonesia, a conception which seems strongly influenced by the Empire style popular and in use by the British in India and the like. The architectural concept of the Javasche Bank buildings was probably asked and ordered by the board of the Javasche Bank; the architectural manifestation of these bank buildings created a strong and distinguishable image.

Although the architect P.A.J. Moojen already finished his design of the bank building in Makassar and the architect C. Boon just completed the office building in Medan, both had to quit; with the arriving of Eduard Cuypers both projects came in his portfolio. Moojen did not agree and protest in public against the disloyal behaviour of Eduard Cuypers. Eduard Cuypers was one of the first who made use of Asian decorations in the detailing of buildings; not really integrated but more as a decoration, which was not always very appreciated by his contemporaries, some regard is as a sort of knack, non-integrated in the architecture concept.

The Dutch architect Hendrik.P Berlage took a very critical conclusion when he visited the Indies in 1923 and took notice of the bank building in Batavia **4** , he regard it as:

'A modernized and weak renaissance, with an attempt to create a vernacular character by using Hindu-Javanese ornaments' (1931)

The Cuyper office designed a great number institutional buildings, Catholic churches and schools, hospital buildings, shops and dwelling houses and the like. The combination 'Hulswit- Fermont, Batavia and Cuypers, Amsterdam' probably became the most successful combination of architects in pre-war Indonesia. But not only as architects they act, frequently have they performed as contractors as well, like Thomas Nix, who was an architect in the Cuyper office told:

'In 1931, Siem Dikstaal a draftsman employed in the office, designed a hotel (hotel des Galleries/ author) at the junction of Molenvliet-oost/ Rijswijk (Jl Gadj Mada/ Jl/ Veteran) and our architectural office functioned as the contractor as well and built the hotel. ' **5**

It is interesting to know that the project architect Siem Dikstaal in his younger years worked in the architectural office of Willem M. Dudok in the Netherlands. Dudok was a modern and prestigious Dutch architect, who never worked in the Indies but his work influenced several architects. The work of those who were the followers of the idea modern approach, like The architect W. Lemei, he designed the office building for the Governor of East-Java (Surabaya, 1930) located south of the railway and to the east of the river Kali Mas. This building seems to be an ultimate salute to the work of Dudok.

### **The origins of modern Western architecture**

To understand the term 'modern Western' architecture, it is necessary to review its commence; after a period of re-using an historic architectural language, which was called neo-classism, empire, neo Gothic or Renaissance, etc.

The origins of modern 'Western' architecture are difficult to determine, but they are rooted somewhere in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in London (1851) is commonly seen as a stimulating and important new development in architecture. The exhibition building designed by Sir Joseph Paxton was constructed of iron and glass, and compiled of elements designed for mass production. The Exhibition was a great success; the countries of the World displayed their divergent products and there was also a large collection of objects from Asia and Africa. This confrontation with other cultures was a very surprising experience for many. The level of artistic quality and the fact that these products represented an original (non-eclectic) creativity had an enormous impact. This discovery influenced the development of various arts, including architecture, and elicited serious discussion about the attitude of the architect in a fast changing and industrializing Western world.

The philosopher John Ruskin and the designer William Morris in Britain, as well as the architect and theorist Gottfried Semper in Germany were the leaders in a discussion arguing for renewal. Gottfried Semper thought it very important to work on the

possibilities to produce simple and relevant objects for the common people. In France, it was the architect Eugène Viollet le Duc, who was extremely interested in the clearness of the technical structural construction kept in coherence with architectural design. He pronounced the architectural appearance (also in detail) to be a logical consequence of the construction. **6)**

Considering the developments in architecture in The Netherlands, the origin of the modern movement may probably be situated somewhere in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Here, the architect Pieter J.H. Cuypers became a dedicated follower of Viollet le Duc in his strive for a rational approach to architectural form. He designed the Central Railway Station and Rijksmuseum, both in Amsterdam.

Another important and remarkable innovator was the Dutch architect Hendrik P. Berlage, a generation younger than Pieter Cuypers. Berlage studied architecture at the Polytechnic School in Zürich, where Semper had been Professor since 1855. In various publications and lectures Berlage recalled the conceptions and ideas of Gottfried Semper.

Berlage was not just an architect but also a town planner (urban designer of the Amsterdam South area) and importantly an erudite person imbued with a desire to proclaim a message. In 1911, Berlage visited the USA, where the work of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright in particular attracted his attention. In 1912, he published a study on the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, which was the first important contribution about him and introduced the work of this modern architect to the Netherlands. Berlage's relationship with Indonesia started in the year 1900, when he designed an Assurance-office in Surabaya 'De Algemeene Maatschappij voor Levensverzekering en Lijfrente'. In Batavia, later on in 1913, he designed another Assurance-building for the company 'De Algemeene Nederlanden van 1845'. However, both buildings are not really representative for the architect Berlage, after delivering the architectural design sketches, it seems he was apparently not very involved in the further process of realization of the buildings.

In 1923, on a three months journey, Berlage visited Indonesia; he travelled around Java, Bali and Sumatra. He met a great number of authorities and architects and also visited the 'Technische Hooge school' (nowadays ITB) in Bandung and where he met the Professor-architects - and brothers - Richard Schoemaker and Charles P. Wolff Schoemaker. Back in Holland he delivered several lectures and publications about 'Indisch' architecture and various movements in style-development. His book titled 'Mijn Indische reis' was published in 1931 (My Indies voyage, 1931). The extraordinary contribution of Berlage to the development of architecture in the Netherlands Indies was his promotion of the most superb architecture, as he saw it; he took this architecture out of its limited colonial isolation. And further on, he was almost certainly an instigator of what became known as the debate of architects in the mid- twenties.

In his book, he wrote:

'What are the possibilities of a European architect, even when he is established in Indonesia and how can he stimulate the development of modern Indies architecture ?'

In his time it was one of the main questions because it regards the penetration of Western culture elements in an Asiatic society and the idea that it could be possible to reach a

specific and architectural answer to the modernizing of the Indonesian society. In the twenties of the former century, the issue became a serious subject of a debate between architects; they wrote articles in magazines, discussed it and expressed it in their architectural production. Nowadays, the quest challenges regarding an Indonesian identity in modern architecture is still an actual issue. For instance, in the middle of the eighties of the former century, the new campus of the University of Indonesia (U.I.) was built in Depok (1985); the several architects were asked to design the various buildings in a 'distinct Indonesian image'. **7)**

Obviously, it is clear that Berlage was not particular a supporter of the idea to transfer the western architectural values and forms without any question to the Indonesian circumstances. He wrote (1931):

'Let me start to remember you an historic law, a colonizing elite will automatically obstruct and force their cultural baggage upon the indigenous culture.'

Berlage was an architect, with an international image and also a celebrated town planner (Amsterdam-south extension); he was an erudite person with a message to tell. The architects of the modern movement, in the twenties, looked at him as a stimulator, a pioneer and their nestor.

### **Towards a new architecture**

In the late colonial era, buildings and dwelling houses realized in the more dense urban areas, were designed by architects who lived and worked in the Dutch-Indies. The greatest part of the architectural production, in the colonial period, is done and designed by architects who received their architectural education in the Netherlands, or else in Europe, but who practised the profession the Colony. These architects has to find the answers to specific problems, related to the local- and climatologic circumstances. In a certain way, they had to re-create their professional skill and throw away the superfluous knowledge connect to the western world they came from. In the Indies they had to calculate with the possibilities of earthquakes, creating bigger roof overhangs to keep the sun and the rain away; air condition was not a common thing and double facades, combined with ventilation facilities were needed; brick facades like in Holland were impossible one had to use plaster and then Indonesian and Chinese craftsmen brought different expertises, obviously in detailing and ornament. The combination of these created sometimes moments in history, which lead to a certain architecture, which featured a hybrid Western and Indigenous character both; it is named by some as 'Indisch' architecture, by others 'Indo-European' architecture, which last term I do prefer. Keeping pace with the turbulent changes in colonial society, the architectural product changed as well. The alluring opportunity for commercial investment was the greatest stimulus behind the increase in European population and the augmentation of the architectural typology. The construction of railways and road infrastructure made the inland accessible and the expansion of cities like Bandung and Malang possible. On the northeast coast of Sumatra, an enormous agricultural industry was booming and the new City of Medan was based on it. Building contractors became more professional and the first architects from The Netherlands were arrived. New times brought new needs and

produced therefore a different style of architecture.

Architects who worked in the Dutch-Indies observed of the developments in Europe and the United States, wondering what kind of architecture might fit in the fast and turbulent changing colonial world. Some of them published articles in magazines, to spread the message. The Bandung architect Richard L.A. Schoemaker wrote in 1922 about the architecture in America, in particular New York and the phenomena of the Skyscrapers. Also he paid attention to the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. **8)** The Javanese architect R. Abikoeso wrote about the subject of modern architecture in the colony; he regarded Berlage as an important architect and pointed the affiliation between Berlage and Frank Lloyd Wright in their work. **9)** Abikoeso believed that the essence in the work of Berlage could be suitable in the Indies as well, he found his opponent in the person R. Schlechter, who wrote that it was too early to think about modern architecture in the colony. A lot of architects and involved engineers and even inspired non-professionals wrote about the needs and challenges of a new architecture in the context of the Dutch-Indies.

Looking at the turn of the century, it is impossible to ignore the significance of the architect-, town planner- and painter P.A.J. Moojen. He was educated at the academy in Antwerp (Belgium) and arrived in Batavia in 1903, when he was 24 years old. From the beginning, particularly in his first years, he pronounced clear statements about the quality of architecture and criticized the degeneration of the architectural product, as he saw it. He opposed the Empire style as an 'unspiritual imitation and dead Hellenism'. In a review of the products of the nineteenth century, the architect P.A.J. Moojen wrote:

'Spiritless copies of a soulless neo-Hellenism, bad copies of sad examples, those silent white witnesses of a century of tastelessness and incapacity to create.' **10)**

He adopted a critical attitude to the department of Public Works (BOW) and wrote about the lack in architectural education of the engineers who were responsible for the design of public buildings. The publication of Moojen (1907) concurred with the opinion prevalent in the BOW as well. Moojen's proposal was to establish a special BOW architectural section in 1909, the architect-engineer A. Snuyf was designated architect. Some years later (1912), the BOW reorganized and finally was given a real architectural section, the 'Afdeling Gebouwen'.

In the years 1913-1914, Moojen designed the Jakarta-enlargement Gondangdia Baru; which was developed by a private society named 'Bouwmaatschappij de Bouwploeg'. Moojen designed the office building 'de Bouwploeg' (nowadays known as Boplo, function as a mosque) near the entrance of Gondangdia, in the year 1912. The ground-plan had a very clear structure, the office rooms - on the ground- and first floor - are situated around a central hall which has a roof in the form of a dome.

Probably his most remarkable work is the building of the Kunstkring in 1914. On the ground floor was a restaurant and on the first floor an art gallery. The building is located at the entrance to the former European (residential) area, Menteng. The Kunstkring building features the clear concept of a ground plan cohering with architectural form, used in combination with 'modern' construction-material like reinforced concrete. The architecture of the building is of conspicuous quality, not connected to a certain style but



emphasizing the statement of Moojen regarding innovation and leaving behind the dead-end street of eclecticism. The characteristic front façade with the tower elements and the sensitively designed and detailed entrance define this building as a unique monument of architectural heritage and a landmark in the urban environment and entrance to the Menteng area. In the handling of the interior he showed him as the painter he was, he used calcium colours (ochre-yellow, blue-grey motifs) to decorate the walls and ceilings. The private architect Moojen manifested himself as a critical observer precisely in a period in which questions were being asked and a search for renewal was prevalent. The time was ripe for him to find a willing ear in the government and public sphere. In 1918, the central Government commissioned him to survey the condition of the culturally valuable buildings in Bali. Coincidentally, this was just after the earthquake in January 1917. He produced his report and suggestions in 1920. He became very concerned about the decline of the architectural heritage in the Dutch-Indies.

Later on in 1923, as President of the Bond van 'Nederland's-Indische Kunstkringen' en 'Nederland's-Indische Headshot' (Societies of Arts and Heritage), he pleaded for legislation to protect historically and culturally important buildings by listing them as cultural heritage **11**). Eight years later, the Government issued the 'Monumenten ordonnantie' (Ordinance on Monuments) in 1931. This ordinance functioned for more than 60 years and was finally abrogated in 1992, when the Indonesian Government replaced it by a new law on 'Archaeology and Monuments' (Law 1992-5).

### **Such as Indo-European architecture**

Undoubtedly the twenties of the former century, after World war 1 and before the economic World crisis was a rousing period. The municipalities were planning the greater town extensions, there was a lack in housing and all kind of buildings and the University of Bandung was just founded. A concurrence of particular circumstances, originated a more integrated dispute, between some well-known architects, engineers, involved City-council members and governmental officers. The topic of a Western architecture approach, versus- or together, with a vernacular Indonesian architectural concept was the issue and some of the participants argument even that the future was to both; such as 'Indo-European' architecture.

It was not really a discussion regarding 'form- function and material'; in fact, the discussion concerned principally the delicate question regarding the legitimacy of future and development in a colonized society; the use of a more Western frame or to fit in the Indonesian cultural context. It was probably therefore that the spirit fades away in the beginning of the nineteen thirties; with facing the economic World crises and the possible threat of a new war. The Colonial world found them self in the last stadium, with clear and manifest signals of an awaking Indonesia; although this was understood by just a few Europeans. A genuine dispute took place between a small but involved European group of professionals, though with a positive attitude and belief. The small Indonesian elite did not really join this discussion, it all was really 'about them' and it happened 'without them'.

The most prominent architects who gave a (verbal and written) opinion in congresses,

magazines and lectures were: Herman Th(omas). Karsten, Henri Maclaine Pont and Charles P. Wolff Schoemaker and later on V.R, van Romondt.

This so-called architecture debate regarded to a certain extent the quest to an original and ultimate architectural approach, in particular concerning the new needs for specific modern and functional buildings, related to a modern fast changing society. Was it a question of duplicating the functional architecture from the Netherlands, or other parts of the Western world; or were it the specific Indonesian circumstances which created the needs for a new and specific architectural approach? More in particular, what could be used and learned from the vernacular Indonesian architecture and was it perhaps possible to reinvent a renewed Indonesian architecture concept in answer to the modern needs? These were principally questions and serious architects searched for the answers. Some debated and produced publications; other architects pointed their statements by the particular buildings they designed and realized.

Take for instance the office building for the governmental department of Public Works (Gouvernements Bedrijven) in Bandung, designed by J. Gerber in 1920 and nowadays well-known as 'Gedung Sateh'. Gerber tried to build a big office building in a tropical architectural concept, not particular making a particular relationship with vernacular Indonesian architecture.

Maclaine Pont, designed the complex of the ITB (Technische Hoogeschool) in Bandung 1918, with clear references to a vernacular concept, without really copying vernacular structural constructions. With his experimental dome of bamboo in Trawulan 1926 and later on the Catholic church in Pohsarang 1936, he owed his reputation as the most consequent researcher concerning the renewal of architecture.

The architectural work of Karsten reflected often to the traditional Javanese architecture, like his work in the Kraton of the Mangunegoro in Surakarta and the museum Sono Budoyo in Jogjakarta or the St.Elisabeth hospital in Semarang 1926 and the theatre Sobokarti in Semarang 1931, for several reasons he made now and then the choice for a vernacular architectural concept.

It is not that Maclaine Pont and Karsten, always designed their buildings in a vernacular architectural concept; but it is clear that both architects were particular involved and open minded for architectural experiments. However, the mainstream of the colonial architectural production might be qualified in terms such as more traditional- or modern architecture, both derived from Western sources and modified to the tropical climatologic conditions.

When Wolff Schoemaker designed the 'Jaarbeurs building' (annual fair building) in Bandung 1920, he just returned from a long journey in the United States; it was the ultimate and renewing answer to functional needs, which lead to a functional and modern building. His Preanger hotel 1929 in Bandung and Vila Isola 1932, were statements supporting his vision regarding new solutions in renewing circumstances in his days, a period we now recognize as the late colonial period.

The architects joining the discussion regarding the development and appearance of the

architectural product in the nineteen-twenties were obviously different in character and opinion, but they all were spirited personalities. Although, we unhesitatingly consider them leaders of opinion, it is not like they were the only renewing architects.

Take for example the Bandung architect A.F. Aalbers, he did not write articles or joined discussions, but he was definitely one of the most talented modern architects in his time. Well known is his master piece, Hotel Savoy Homann at the Jl.Asia-Afrika, Bandung (1939). He also built a remarkable number of houses, some of a superb quality. Almost superior he proved and took the opportunities to build modern architecture in the tropical conditions.

The number of qualified architects in the Netherlands Indies in the inter-war period is really remarkable. Many professional architects established their offices in the larger cities. Most of them were educated in The Netherlands, a few elsewhere in such countries as Germany or Austria. In their offices they employed draughtsmen and superintendents of Indonesian, European, Eurasian or Chinese descent.

Herman Thomas Karsten, born in 1884 in Amsterdam, was a friend of Maclaine Pont and came to Java in 1914. There he found employ in the office of Maclaine Pont in Semarang. In 1916, he was appointed advisor in urban planning to the Semarang council, the first of a range advisor ships in his career. Since the year 1917, he worked with several teams of architects and in 1933 he established an office in architecture and urban planning, joined by his fellow workers Soesilo and Abikoeno. Karsten is generally regarded as the founder of modern urban planning in Indonesia. He was the *auctor intellectualis* of the SVO 'Stadsvormingsordonnantie' or Town Planning Ordinance 1938), a national concept of urban planning. The work of Karsten as urban planner was of great significance. He was involved as advisor in the planning and enlargement of many cities in Java and Sumatra (1916-42). He was also a communicator and publicist, constantly emphasizing the essential relationship between a harmonious arrangement and the coherence between the different elements making up the town as an entity. He was aware of the constraints imposed by working as a European architect under colonial conditions. Commenting on the approach and design of public (social) housing he asserted at the 'Public Housing Congress' **12**) in 1922 (Sociaal-Technische Vereeniging, 1922):

'Satisfactory solutions concerning domestic housing in a broader sense will require Indonesian architects who are educated in Indonesia'. **13)**

The architect Charles Prosper Wolff Schoemaker warned against the expectations for domestic architecture as he argued at the same occasion (Public Housing Congress, 1922):

'At least I should warn against the tendency to refer to indigenous examples and telling us we can learn from it'. **13)**

Wolff Schoemaker, professor at the Technische Hoogeschool (nowadays, Institut Teknik Bandung), was born in 1882 in Banyu Biru and educated in the Netherlands at the military Academy in Breda. He was a strong personality and gifted as architect, painter and sculptor. He borrowed the opinion that the Javanese architecture was finished as a source of inspiration in modern times and in the questions this obsolescence raised the architect

had to be the arbiter. In 1923, short after he met Berlage in Bandung, he wrote an article in the 'Indisch Bouwkundig Tijdschrift' (Indies architectural magazine), with the promising title 'Indies architecture and the possibilities of an Indo-European style'. **14)** He draw the conclusion, there was indeed something like an Indo-European architecture, but it was a premature development; often a sort of architectural product dressed up with Hindu like ornamentation and a messy aura of exotic symbolism and the like.

Maclaine Pont, born in 1884 in Meester Cornelis (nowadays Jatinegara) and educated in the Netherlands at the Technical University in Delft, he was the exact opposite of Wolf Schoemaker, although he also displayed a characteristic colonial point of view.

He was impassioned by a deep empathy for the Javanese people, but, in his opinion, they were misled by the degenerate and weak art displayed in the implementation of their works in timber construction. In the same edition of the 'Indisch Bouwkundig Tijdschrift' he wrote an article 'Domestic architectural practices, sense and future?' **15)** Maclaine Pont pointed that architects should temper their international ambitions, because only serious study of domestic architecture might open the road for a further development. He ended his long article with a peculiar remark; he did an appeal on the people of the governmental Public works (BOW) to contribute to enlarge the knowledge regarding the particular requirements of the indigenous society; in fact he saw it as a European problem; which qualified his attitude as paternalistic.

### **Forwards an Indonesian architecture**

It seems interesting taking some distance and to notice the words of Professor V.R. van Romondt, he was the last Dutch professor designated at the University (ITB) in Bandung in 1954. In his inaugural speech (in Dutch) , he gave a review in time and a recommendation to the young Indonesian architects for the future. The speech was titled 'Forwards an Indonesian architecture' **16)** and he picked up (30 years later) the discussion issue of the debate in the roaring twenties.

He argued in his inaugural speech that:

'For a long period, Indonesia was used to following a dominant Western group. Now this group has disappeared and Indonesian society can no longer take distance itself from the original Indonesian culture, as its predecessors did. This would be regarded as completely unacceptable. But there are particular areas of conflict. Indubitably, Indonesian culture was inactive for a long time and people compromised themselves with an outlandish culture, which created the impression there was development and progress in Indonesia. But just a small number of Indonesians were allowed to involve themselves in this culture and mostly as supernumeraries.'

This was obviously a very remarkable statement. At one hand he concluded: in the colonial era, Indonesians were neglected as serious partners and European architects (predecessors) did distance themselves from the Indonesian culture; this was not a positive qualification to his former colleges. But at the other hand van Romondt asserted the inactivity of the Indonesian culture and the penchant for an outlandish culture. Still in

the present time, it seems this observation is an interesting statement.

## Notes

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1. Cor Passchier  
The Past in the Present. Architecture in Indonesia.  
Colonial architecture in Indonesia. References and developments, P.97-112.  
NAI Publishers, edit by Peter Nas, Rotterdam 2007. ISBN 978 90 5662 572 6.
2. J.A.A. van Doorn.  
De laatste eeuw van Indië. Ontwikkeling en ondergang van een koloniaal project.  
Publisher Bert Bakker, Amsterdam 1994. ISBN 90 351 1351 9.
3. Piere J.H. Cuypers (1827-1921) was an important architect, in his time. He was the architect of the 'Rijksmuseum (national museum) in 1876-85 and the Central Railway station in 1881-89, both in Amsterdam.
4. Hendrik.P. Berlage  
Mijn Indische reis.  
Publisher G.J. Thieme, Nijmegen, 1931.  
All quotes, of Berlage in this article, are derived from this book.
5. Correspondence between Thomas Nix and the author, Cor Passchier, 1985.  
Comparing the architectural appearance of this hotel building, there were remarkable references to Dudok, particular in de handling of the volumes and detailing. Unfortunately this building became very obstructed in the middle of the nineties, this obstruction of the street facades gave the building a manifestation of a 'fancy fair' character.
6. Instead the remark of the German architect Mies von der Rohe, who pronounced in the 20th century: 'form follows function'; one might conclude the French architect Violet le Duc believed actually 'form follows engineering'. In the broader spectrum of the 21th century architecture, both opinions still influenced the work of architects.
7. Mirah Miyatta Bianpoen  
Contemporary Indonesian architecture in Jakarta  
Technical University, Delft, 1993.
8. Richard L.A. Schoemaker  
Bouwkunst in Amerika.  
Indisch Bouwkundig Tijdschrift, 24-1922, p.226-228.
9. R. Abikoeshno  
Iets over moderne architectuur.  
Indisch Bouwkundig Tijdschrift, 24-1921, p.477-480.
10. P.A.J. Moojen  
Bouwkunst.  
Weekblad voor Indië, 2-1907, p.33-35.
11. P.A.J.Moojen  
De Bond van Nederland's-Indische Kunstkringen.

- Gedenkboek van Nederland's-Indië, 1898-1923, p.282-284.  
G. Kolff, Batavia/ Leiden, 1923.
12. Congress regarding public housing (Volkshuisvestingscongres) 1922. Sociaal Technische Vereeniging, an association founded by P.J.S. Cramer, chairman (1917-23) of the 'Indische Sociaal-Democratische partij'.
  13. Flieringa, G.  
De zorg voor de volkshuisvesting in de stadsgemeenten van Nederland's Oost-Indië in het bijzonder in Semarang.  
N.V. Rotterdamsche Boek- en Kunst drukkerij, Rotterdam, 1930, p.95.
  14. C.P. Woff Schoemaker  
Indische bouwkunst en de ontwikkelingsmogelijkheid van een Indo-Europeeschen architectuurstijl.  
Indisch Bouwkundig Tijdschrift, 10-1923, p.188-194.
  15. H. Maclaine Pont  
Het Inlandsch bouwambacht zijn beteekenis..... en toekomst?  
Indisch Bouwkundig Tijdschrift, 10-1923, p.215-225.
  16. V.R. van Romondt  
Naar een Indonesische architectuur.  
Inaugural speech, at the assignment as professor in architecture at the technical faculty of the University of Indonesia, Bandung May 26, 1954.