

## **Image, Style and Status: A Sketch of the Role and Impact of Private Enterprise as a Commissioner on Architecture and Urban Development in the Dutch East Indies from 1870 to 1942**

Pauline K.M. van Roosmalen  
Department of Architecture, Technische Universiteit Delft

*"They only have low cottages in the Indies, don't they? So someone recently asked me who had not enjoyed the privilege of visiting the Indies. (...) An equally curious opinion to that noted above about houses in the East Indies is often met in Holland in relation to the picture people have here of office buildings in the Indies." J. Koning (1)*

### **The beginning**

Contacts between Holland and what was to become its oriental colony revolved from the outset around the production and export of colonial goods to the mother country. Owing to the nature of the contacts and the interests that were served, the Dutch government and its residents initially erected buildings that were largely pragmatic and defensive in character.

During this period, which lasted from the fifteenth century until well into the nineteenth, the government retained almost monopolistic responsibility for the production and shipping of East Indies products. But this all changed with the passing of the Agrarian Act (1870) which allowed private enterprise to establish businesses alongside the government corporations.

The opportunities that the Dutch East Indies offered to private commerce from then on attracted a substantial stream of European entrepreneurs and immigrants to the colony. It also prompted expansive economic development and social and physical changes. New, different commissioners started appearing in increasing numbers and needed and demanded new, different and in many cases distinguishing buildings. Thus a flourishing climate for urban development and architecture, notably in the period from 1905 to 1942, came about.

The still existing lack of knowledge of these developments - back then as well as today - and the

prejudice that the colony contained scarcely anything of architectural significance is unwarranted. It is this notion to which J. Koning is referring in the above mentioned quote. By that time, 1922, substantial buildings were being designed and erected on a large scale on behalf of a diversity of private clients, as they had indeed been for some twenty years. The commissions for commercial building projects (i.e. office buildings), the contribution made by private business to the development of the colony, and the growth of a distinctive East Indies architectural and town planning style, form the subject matter of this article.

### **Scope for private initiative**

The Agrarian Act of 1870 reduced the power of the national government. It no longer operated as a trading entity but was charged with the task of setting up an administrative apparatus under which the colony, and private business, could flourish. The Dutch business world responded quickly and effectively to the new situation, and started establishing industries and offices in a variety of suitable locations. (2) They went about this in the way they already knew from the Netherlands and provided amenities for housing, medical care, recreation, religion, administration and trade. (3) This resulted in a diversity of institutions previously unknown in the Dutch East Indies - and a necessity to erect buildings to accommodate them, thus producing a townscape characterized by radical architectural and urban changes.

From the early days onwards the coastal towns of the Indonesian Archipelago formed important links in the international transport chain for goods of the region. (4) The new entrepreneurs very often linked their business to these places and widened the existing variety of (commercial) activities with companies dealing with agricultural producers,



manufactured and semi-manufactured goods, insurances, transport, retail and wholesale trade, energy supply, financing, travelling, repair and assembly industry, travel agencies, insurance companies etc. Parallel to this development a considerable demand for labour arose that exerted a tremendous attraction on various population groups, foreigners as well as the indigenous. Especially large numbers of the last group concentrated in the vicinity of the establishments, hence stimulating the growth of countless secondary commercial and cultural activities in the city and accelerating the urbanization of the environs of the city.

	1890	1900	1920	1929	1938
Sugar	29,1	28,7	47,1	21,6	6,4
Coffee	21,1	13,6	2,3	4,7	2
Tea	1,1	1,6	1,8	6	8,2
Tobacco	18,3	12,4	7,6	6	5,7
Copra	1,1	3,9	4,2	8	6,4
Rubber	—	—	8,7	16,3	19,5
Tin	5,1	9,3	2,9	5,5	4,9
Petroleum and petroleum products	—	1,9	13,9	11,4	23,6
Other products	24,2	28,6	11,5	20,5	23,3

*Ill.1 Contribution of different products to the total export value of the Dutch East Indies in percentages.(32) Mining and agricultural products formed the lion's share of exports from the Dutch East Indies. The total value rose during the period 1890-1920 from 175 million to 2,228 million guilders. The crash of 1929 caused the export value to plunge to 1,443 million. The market gradually recovered during the 1930s and by 1938 goods worth 687 million guilders were exported.*

### Changes on a physical and social level

The commercial developments thus not only had consequences on a business but also on a physical level, both inside the cities and out. Factories were needed for manufacture and processing, warehouses and barns for storage, and homes for employers and employees. Contemporary office blocks and other buildings displaced older (generally traditionally Dutch in character) houses and warehouses. Large, closed edifices widely replaced small-scale, open, low-rise building patterns and adequate infrastructure was needed and constructed for the transport of goods, building materials, machines and workers.(5)

Another result of the increased business opportunities was the rapid growth of the European population which let to another explosion of building activities and even further-reaching changes in

the functions and image of the city centres and its surroundings. The Europeans tended increasingly to settle in districts out of the city centre. The departure of certain population groups (and hence customers) around 1900 induced many companies who relied on a closer, more direct contact with their clients to move their establishments from the old city centres to the vicinity of these European suburbs. This trend was particularly evident in Batavia between 1900 and 1910: "Having reached the point of choosing a new office, it is clearly better to choose a property that is sited more in the public traffic than could possibly be found in Batavia, in the so-called lower city."(6) This trend continued and eventually resulted in a gradual displacement of the residential function from the densely populated centre of the city to the periphery where spacious residential - mostly European - areas were laid out.



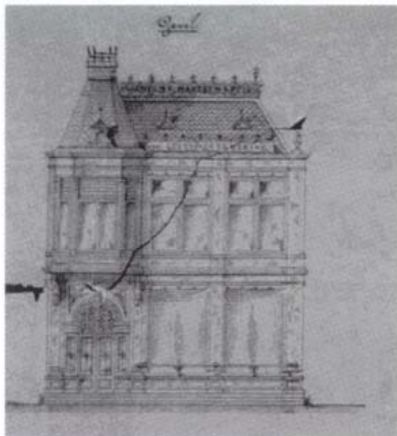
*Ills.2 Office buildings along Pintoe Besar/ jl. Asemka-Jembatan Batu, Batavia/Jakarta (1870 and 1927). These photos illustrate the effect of the trend started after 1870 of the gradual change of the former residential old city centres into a more commercial area. While building lines were inflicted streets and footpaths were laid, higher and wider buildings with more pronounced architectural facades were built. Thus catering more commercial and pleasant surroundings for the clientele.*



## Image, style and status

When commercial activities started expanding substantially at the start of the twentieth century, the demand for new and characteristic company premises boomed. One of the reasons for this was the fact that the architecture of most office buildings hitherto had been fairly undifferentiated because the (Dutch) entrepreneurs regarded commercial warehouses and office building in the East Indies as utility structures of a semi-permanent character. To pay attention to the visual design of these buildings was therefore viewed as a superfluous luxury. Until the start of the twentieth century, it was not unusual for an office building to be shared by several tenants. A shortage of workshop and office space was often solved by the remodelling of existing buildings. The clients generally regarded the architect as a 'purveyor of buildings'; the client ordered and paid for the building, and the architect was required to deliver it, preferably with as little fuss as possible. Architectural quality was subordinate to the question of whether an architect was capable of building cheaply, and the extent to which he refrained from making *soesa*.<sup>(7)</sup>

One of the first designs for a company premises to draw unequivocal praise as a 'fitting style of architecture' was the office building for the insurance firm De Algemeene Lijf- en Levensverzekeringsmaatschappij in Surabaya. The board of directors initially commissioned M.J. Hulswit to design the new building. After Hulswit presented his



Ill. 3 Design De Algemeene Lijf- en Levensverzekeringsmaatschappij, Willemskade/jl. Veteran Jembatan Merah, Surabaya. Design: M.J. Hulswit (1898). After H.P. Berlage criticised this design, the board of directors of De Algemeene assigned Berlage to design their new Surabaya office.

design to his clients in 1898, H.P. Berlage wrote the board of directors: "It is a matter of question whether it is desirable to uphold the East Indian type for a building such as that planned, or to depart from that type. There is, to me, no doubt about the choice, although this does not entail following the type in all its everyday sobriety. In general it seems to me most desirable to adhere to the general character of the East Indian building style, while making this architecture somewhat richer for the purpose. The designer is however of a different opinion, and has proposed a purely European architecture. There was perhaps a good reason for this, and if so I would be glad to hear it, but I cannot do otherwise than pass a disapproving judgement on this kind of European architecture, because the façade is that of a villa-like little shop with living quarters in a small town, designed by a small architect. It is this architecture that has made all our lovely cities and towns so ugly. The company's office premises really should be of a different character."<sup>(8)</sup> Berlage did not venture an opinion in his letter on what would be a fitting architectural style for the buildings of De Algemeene in the Dutch East Indies.

After receiving the letter, the board gave the commission for the design of the Surabaya building concerned to Berlage, noting that other than Hulswit's design more account should be taken of the local climate and more contemporary features should be incorporated. The result was a design that was built in 1902(?) in Willemskade (jl. Veteran Jembatan Merah). Berlage's design shows an extensively pierced front façade, the so-called 'double front', which better met the need for the climatic requirements than Hulswit's design. In the building materials, however, Berlage took less account of the local situation: he used brick, natural stone, glazed tiles etc. which all had to be imported from the Netherlands.

Although the first commissions for the construction of large office buildings were widely regarded as 'a waste of money', the gradually rising self-confidence in the business world led around 1905 to a change in attitude on the usefulness of architecture and the position of the architect.<sup>(9)</sup> Contemporaries ascribed this change largely to private enterprise. J.F. van Hoytema wrote that it was the large institutions which, "dissatisfied with the ill-appointed warehouses that had served for years as their offices", demanded buildings that would make an impression and would project a distinctive im-



age.(10) P.A.J. Moojen shared this opinion: "Owing to the changed spirit of the times, and owing to alterations and improvements to the houses, people started demanding higher standards for offices. Forced by the expansion of their business to search for more ample accommodation, many private firms and trading companies erected new buildings which met the requirements for comfort, hygiene and aesthetics in many respects. Here too, although not everything is up to the standard one might expect, a very considerable degree of progress may be ascertained".(11)

Around 1910 a gradual but general change became more apparent. Following the departure of a number of companies from the old inner city centres, several other businesses decided to stay put and alter and modernize their existing premises. They remodelled the street fronts with façades of up to date design, thus creating a new, contemporary vitality for the old city centre and the companies that had their seat there.(12)

The terms of reference with which architects were expected to comply around that time were not simple. Office buildings were required to be designed to match the nature, character and status of the company concerned and at the same time satisfy specific tropical requirements. And more often than the architects would have liked, the clients tended to keep



III.4 Office building *De Algemeene Lijf- en Levensverzekeringsmaatschappij*. Design: H.P. Berlage (1900). The critical reactions to this building illustrate the varying opinions about an East Indies building style. Ch.E.J. Meyll considered the design a creditable specimen of modern Dutch East Indies architecture. C.P. Wolff Schoemaker, one of the leading architects in the architectural debate, considered it inefficient and totally unsuited to the tropics.

a finger in the pie.(13) It was a regular occurrence that the Netherlands-based board of directors decided on the appointment of an architect for a project in the Dutch East Indies and his subsequent design.(14) A much-used method to facilitate the exchange of information and monitoring of the work was to install a collaboration between the architect in the Netherlands and a construction supervisor in the colony. This setup made it possible to incorporate the latest techniques and materials from Europe, while responding optimally to the specific local circumstances in Asia: the climate, hygiene, construction, style, typology and material. Chs.E.J. Meyll interpreted intervention by the client as an artistic rebuke to the architect: "the obstinate meddling by 'artistic' principals (...) evidences little appreciation for the artistic capability of an independent architect" and therefore considered it unwelcome.

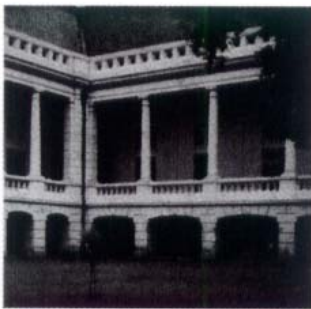
#### The debate on *Indische* architecture

Regarding climate and hygiene, the need to adapt architecture in the East Indies to the prevailing conditions was undisputed. As to the other points, the one that received most discussion was that of style. The questions of what materials and form language (indigenous or Western) and what style (modern or traditional) were most appropriate to an 'Indische architectuur' formed the subject of extensive debate from the late nineteenth century until well into the twentieth.(16)

An important aspect of the discussion concerned multi-storey buildings and the question of how suitable this building type was for application in a tropical climate. Opponents argued that the vertical façade treatment of tall buildings virtually precluded the use of the horizontal sun-blocking elements necessary in the climate and that multi-storey buildings were therefore unsuitable for tropical use. The proponents shared this reserve to a certain extent: "Declaring verticalism to be anti-tropical is going too far, but it is understandable that the requirements of a tropical climate are very difficult to reconcile with extremely vertical proportions."(17) They also were of the opinion that that it was essential to create a new urban environment. Since they were convinced this could not be achieved without monumental buildings and no monumental buildings could be build without the use of at least one or two upper floors, multi-storey building in their view was the appropriate type to use.



The dispute on this point appears to have been won in favour of multi-storey building. It is not clear which arguments were of prevailing significance here, but technical aspects such as new construction methods and materials, and increasing building and land prices, must surely have contributed to the fact that multi-storey building gradually won ground and became a common sight.



*Ills.5 Headquarters Javasche Bank, Binnen Nieuwpoortstraat-Javabankstraat/jl. Pintu Besar Utara-jl. Bank, Batavia/Jakarta. Design: N.V. Architecten-Ingenieursbureau Hulswit en Fermont te Weltevreden en Ed. Cuypers te Amsterdam (1909). The new wing in Binnen Nieuwpoortstraat is perpendicular to the old façade in Javabankstraat. P.A.J Moojen described the design of the new wing as "Renaissance with religious Hindu-Javanese motifs".(33)*

Another aspect of the discussion related to the building style. Architects who championed modern building materials realized that the application of reinforced concrete and cement implied an entirely new form and detailing, compared to the building materials used hitherto. Buildings made this way would owe their quality not to a multiplicity of details but to a broad division of surfaces and generous proportions.(18)

It was recognized that the adoption of multi-storey building had consequences for the materials

to be used and hence the form and the associated construction methods. The opinions of contemporary critics on the modern, usually white-stuccoed, façades were not entirely favourable. Many argued that buildings in the Dutch East Indies called for the use of colour and of building materials with a definite texture, instead of the cold, lifeless white-plastered wall surfaces that were used.(19) Others argued: "Indies architecture is typically a shadow-architecture; contrasts of light and shade form, more than colour or materials, the main attractions of good Indies buildings."(20) J.F. van Hoytema, who realized that not all architects were in favour of these new building materials and building types, expected transitional forms to develop: "It will be difficult for us to get used to the beauty of large flat surfaces, to the tranquillity of a few large proportions and the lack of forms, that come from systematic construction."(21)

### Entrepreneurs and architects

The oldest bank in the Dutch East Indies, the Javasche Bank, was founded in 1828. Its head office was located in the old city of Batavia (Javabankstraat/jl. Bank). Already in 1829 establishments in Semarang and Surabaya followed. The bank initially concentrated solely with commercial activities on the island of Java. The first establishments outside Java were opened in Pandang and Makassar (1864), followed by a main branch in Amsterdam in 1892.

The buildings in which the Javasche Bank had its first offices were not particularly striking. They do not appear to have been designed on the basis of any stylistic or idealistic principle. This changed in 1907, when a firm named N.V. Architecten-Ingenieursbureau Hulswit & Fermont te Weltevreden & Ed. Cuypers te Amsterdam was put in charge of designing and constructing the bank's buildings throughout the archipelago.(22)

The offices the firm built for the Javasche Bank formed a substantial part of the firm's portfolio. Other clients for whom Cuypers and his associates designed and erected architecturally prominent office buildings included trading companies (Nederlandsche Handel Maatschappij, Internationale Crediet en Handelsvereeniging Rotterdam, Maatschappij voor Uitvoer en Commissiehandel, Handelsvereeniging Amsterdam) and other banks (Chartered Bank of India, Australia & China). The firm also built shops, churches, schools, cinemas and



a number of private houses.

In the period to 1942, the firm designed and built 18 buildings for the Javasche Bank in a generally abstract version of a Neo-Classical style with East Indies ornaments. The buildings were in most cases provided with sloping roofs covered in red roofing tiles.<sup>(23)</sup> Hindu-Javanese decorative elements were applied sporadically. The exteriors displayed many columns, tympani, balustrades and turrets. Most of the establishments had outside walls which were treated as cavity walls so as to provide insulation from the heat. The façades were generally given narrow, deep-set windows to temper the light.<sup>(24)</sup> The designs made for the establishments of the Javasche Bank can be roughly divided into two types: buildings with an elevation conveying strong suggestions of classical temples, and buildings of a more villa-like character. Differences in the place of the agency in the hierarchy, the location, the plot size, the ground type, the inclusion of a staff dwelling etc. ensured that every establishment of the Javasche Bank was given a somewhat individual appearance.<sup>(25)</sup>

The arrangement of the floor plan was to a large extent standardized. The public spaces (counters) and the offices of the staff were situated above the external ground level on a *piano nobile*. The storey beneath contained the safe, in a room built in reinforced, tamping concrete. The raising of the

main floor above ground level was expressed in the design of the façades. The main storey was generally twice as high as on the storey below - six metres as opposed to three and a half metres - and often marked on the exterior by inbedded columns and pilasters to indicate its importance. The more simply designed floor at ground level was effectively the base of the building.

The furnishing of the interiors was simple and also fairly fixed. Teak screens and panels of lacquered wire mesh separated the spaces from one another. The counters could be closed off to protect the privacy of the bank customer. A stencilled decorative border was applied to the plaster walls at the height of the wooden partitions and separated the walls into two zones which were painted in different tints. The floors were initially surfaced with wooden planking or coconut matting, later coloured tiles were used.

A client with an apparently different stylistic preference was the Nederlandsch-Indische Levensverzekering en Lijfrente-Maatschappij van 1859 (abbreviated to Nillmij). Founded with government approval in 1859, the company specialized in the insurance of Europeans working in the Dutch East Indies.<sup>(26)</sup> The first office was opened in Weltevreden, a suburb of Batavia (1909), and this was followed by agencies in Semarang (1916), Surabaya (19?) and in the lower city of Batavia (1933). Like the early office buildings of other firms, those of Nillmij were not very 'architectural' in character. This changed when it was decided to erect a new office building in Weltevreden.

Nillmij's Dutch head office installed an 'office buildings directorate' for the building project in Weltevreden, making it responsible for defining the terms of reference and for supervising construction. In seeking an architect, the directors of Nillmij concentrated on young architects with progressive views on architecture. In making this stand for young architects, which almost naturally implied a preference for contemporary architecture, the board of Nillmij very early on distinguished itself from many other companies in the Dutch East Indies. The commissions for Nillmij's office buildings went to a firm which, like Hulswit, Fermont & Cuypers, combined the functions of the architect and the construction engineers: Algemeen Ingenieurs- en Architectenbureau (AIA). The firm, founded in 1916 by F.J.L. Ghijssels and H. von Essen, had branches in Batavia, Surabaya and Bandung and several archi-



*Ills.6 Office building Nillmij, Office building Nillmij, Heerenstraat/ jl. Let. Jen. Suprpto, Semarang. Design: Th. Karsten (1916). People in the Indies spoke of 'grille architecture': concrete grilles provided ventilation which was so necessary. The buildings in Semarang, Djocja and Bandung offer particularly fine examples. Sometimes, as in this building, stained glass designs were mounted in the grilles.*



pects on its staff. By appointing a different architect for each building project, Nillmij acquired a series of office buildings each with a distinct appearance but at the same time sharing a clear corporate identity.

As well as working for Nillmij, AIA erected several other striking office buildings, many of them in Surabaya. Its first building there was located in Willemstraat (Jl. Veteran Jembatan Merah) and designed by C.P. Wolff Schoemaker for the Koloniale Bank (1927). This was followed by an office for the Internationale Crediet- en Handelsvereniging Rotterdam (Willemsplein/Jl. Taman Jayengrono, 1929), an office for the Stoomvaart Maatschappij Nederland (Aloen-aloenstraat/Jl. Pahlawan, 1931-1932), the head office of Algemeene Nederlands-Indische Electriciteits Maatschappij (Embong Woengoe/Jl. Embong Wungu, 1930) and a retail complex (Toendjoengan/Jl. Tunjungan, 1935). One of their more striking designs in Batavia is the head office for Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (Koningsplein Oost/Medan Merdeka Timur, 1923).

The firm's designs were distinguished by well-considered adaptation to the surroundings, broad lines and large surfaces, flat roofs, strongly horizontal linear features, large uninterrupted wall areas, partially closed galleries and windows, a sober use of ornamentation, detailing and materials. Local conditions were taken into account in the design, so that not all the buildings could be designed according to a uniform scheme. Except for the building in Bandung, all Nillmij office buildings were laid out on an L-shaped ground plan and had asymmetrical elevations. The office buildings were generally constructed as a multi-storey building with reinforced concrete construction. The spaces between the structural components were filled with brickwork and the whole was finished in stucco. In order to achieve a relief effect in the façade, the brick masonry sometimes either projected or retreated a short way relative to the concrete skeleton. Pilasters or inbedded columns and a rising or tower-like section building produced a predominantly vertical character in the elevations. A widely-used element in Nillmij office buildings particularly prominent in the designs in Bandung, Semarang and Yogyakarta was the concrete grille. Fitted for their cooling effect in the upper half of the outside openings of the gallery, they rendered an almost lace-like refinement to the building.

An important point of departure for the interior layout of the buildings was that it had to be as practical as possible and all superfluous luxury was to be avoided. The ground plans show few hierarchical features in the office rooms: the directors' and personnel offices were close together. To allow for future expansion, the architects created more office space than was required for Nillmij's own use at the time of building. The offices of Nillmij were arranged on the first floor and the remaining space was rented to third parties. Certain modifications necessitated by this use of space (e.g. additional entrances) were incorporated inconspicuously into the elevations.

### New grounds

Commercial aspirations of private enterprises gradually and irreversibly changed the appearance and function of cities: the original low-density houses and open-space characteristics which prevailed until around 1910 were replaced by dense houses. In addition to or maybe as a result of this development, politicians, doctors and engineers became increasingly aware of the need to orchestrate the ongoing developments, either by improving existing neighbourhoods or developing new urban schemes. It was not very long after the establishment of several local councils on Java and Sumatra that urban development became one of the major responsibilities of local councils.(27)



Ill. 7 Office building Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij, Koningsplein/Medan Merdeka Timur, Weltevreden/Jakarta (1916-1923). Design: Algemeen Ingenieurs- en Architecten Bureau. For its new head quarters in the Dutch East Indies KPM picked a parcel of arable land on the eastern side of the main central square in Weltevreden, bordering on the new residential areas Menteng and Gondangdia.(34)





*Ill.8 Access road to Gondangdia, Weltevreden/Jakarta (around 1930). The predominantly Western residential areas Gondangdia and Menteng were situated south of the built-up area of Weltevreden, south of Batavia. Their most striking features are the spacious lay-out with wide main thoroughfares, canals, plenty of plants and detached houses. Both plans were designed in 1918 by J.F. van Hoytema, F.J.L. Ghijsels en H. von Essen.*

A detailed description of municipal legislation and planning, and the effort made by the municipalities to coordinate and channel the needs and requirements of the newly composed early twentieth-century society is beyond the scope of this article. However, the fact that urban developments, boosted by commercial activities, proceeded at a great rate, can be clarified by a brief outline of the course and results of such developments.

Leading architect and urban designer Thomas Karsten acknowledged the initial influence private enterprises had on urban changes and the passive role initially played by the government. He was of the opinion that the size and character of extensions to buildings and more densely built-up areas brought about far-reaching changes which have re-formed the outlook of cities for ever: "(...) it was the private construction industry that built here: offices and general shops in the centre, which very often displaced old neighbourhoods; and new houses in the districts, which maintained a residential function".(28) Since extensions to buildings on existing plots were usually impossible, companies would purchase a piece of land outside the city centre. New office buildings were often situated in prominent locations. The erection of such buildings was often part of, or generated, the development of an entirely new city district. Karsten and his colleagues realised quite early that this unrestrained construction would lead to various problems and undesirable results, rang-

ing from drainage to infrastructure problems to housing-shortage. They pleaded for a structured approach, by both local and national authorities, to the development of towns and villages.

The realism and reasonableness of their views was recognised by the government, who from 1915 onwards, collaborated with municipalities, architects and engineers. Together they analysed the requirements for housing, sanitation, extensions and improvements to buildings and their restoration. They created procedures, ordinances, committees and departments to ensure that municipalities would have the means to control this large and complicated task. F.H. van de Wetering, mayor in Menado and Palembang respectively, stated that urban development was one of the most important and beautiful aspects of a local council's work because it was of general interest.(29)

These joint efforts resulted in the publication of a draft Town Planning Ordinance for Municipalities on Java, including an Explanatory Memorandum (1938), to develop a well thought-out and coordinated urban planning and design practice in the Dutch East Indies. Owing to political developments in Europe and later in Asia, however, the ordinance was never passed until 1948.

*Ills.9 Images presented at the exhibition 'Het stadsbeeld voorheen en thans' (1939), organised by the Vereeniging van Locale Belangen, the deliberative body in which local councils were united.*



*a. Alun-alun South-Pandhuisstraat, Malang (1915 and 1937): "The former simple dignity of the cityscape at the corner of Aloen2 has made way for a jazz of posts, wires, road signs and advertising displays!"(35)*





*b. Tanah Abang, Batavia (1876 and 1937): "A typical transitional situation which is generated by alignments that 'cut into' (STERK AANSNIJDEN) existing buildings; the inevitable result is a poor cityscape during the long period of transition. Part of the small buildings that jut out dates from before 1876."*(36)



*c. Bragaweg/jl. Braga, Bandoeng (1911 and 1937): "A good example of a complete development from open to perimeter buildings which took place within a period of 25 years; the intermediate stages are ugly, but the beginning and end situations are relatively satisfactory; the present streetscape, however, requires that the electric cables should be put underground. The present buildings generally have a top storey that is used as a dwelling."*(37)

## The end

The heyday of private enterprise in the Dutch East Indies lasted until 1929. The Wall Street Crash of that year and the consequent international business crisis did not leave the Dutch East Indies untouched. A fifty percent fall in the value of exports depressed business until roughly the mid 1930s. No sooner had trading links revived somewhat, however, than the outbreak of the Second World War (1939) and the Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies (1942) put a stop to economic development once again.

After the war, business gradually recovered. It soon became clear however that the war had caused a more drastic breach with the past than people first thought. The first sign of this was the proclamation of independence on 17 August 1945, followed by the foundation of the independent Republic of Indonesia. Although many Dutch nationals and Dutch companies believed they could pick up again where they had left off before the outbreak of war, the majority of them had decided to leave the country by the end of the fifties. They thus put an end to the prominent, indeed dominant, part the Dutch had played for many decades in the commercial life of their colony.

## Recapitulation

The less imperial line taken by the Dutch government in the Dutch East Indies after 1870 resulted in the establishment of a diversity of commercial companies and influenced the growth and composition of the population, the cultivation of land, the development of town and country and the construction of buildings. The commercial necessity for a firm to display its wares in suitable surroundings was as important to the companies that settled in the Dutch East Indies after 1870 - as it is to today. The resulting need to occupy representative company premises led to the construction of highly representative buildings, and these have affected the appearance of cities to a significant extent. It can thus be stated that private enterprise turned out to be foremost in stimulating and determining several developments in the colony and through its need for office and other (commercial) buildings greatly influenced the architectural and urban development in the colony.

Since the management of the companies acknowledged and realized that representative accommodation was good for i.e. would encourage business countless new office buildings were designed, particularly during the period of economic prosperity (1905-1930). As a result of the newly arisen awareness, in combination with the companies' increased prosperity, directors often appointed architects who assumable would be capable of preparing a design to match the nature and character of the company and the status to which it aspired. In other words, create a building whose architecture gave expression to the importance and position of the firm



in the business world. In that respect the situation in the colony fully corresponded with the situation in the Netherlands.

Whether or not and to which extent commissions were given based on stylistic or ideological considerations is difficult to establish and can therefore hardly be maintained. Because although style, character and location of a new office building was required to match the nature, status, position and, last but not least, prosperity of the company, in no case is there any evidence that the professional or ideological views of the architect played a crucial part in the selection of an architect. For the architects, the projects presented them with opportunities to develop and realize their personal views on style.

As elsewhere in the world, it proved no easy matter to distil a style of building that would be suitable for this particular region. New technical possibilities, climatic requirements, commercial considerations and artistic ambitions largely determined the course of development of architecture in the Dutch East Indies during the first half of the twentieth century. The differing standpoints prompted a debate on the use of new building materials and the modern architectural design style associated with them. In the choice of a particular building style, the architecture seems to have been less dictated by prevailing rules on the suitability of a particular style to a particular building than by the personal views of the architect and client. In the end the most obvious differences between the old and the new buildings were the larger scale, the new, contemporary Western-based form language and the use of new building materials such as reinforced concrete and iron.

The buildings commissioned were largely designed according to Western principles and points of departure and are generally characterized by an interplay between light-coloured, protruding parts and dark-coloured, receding or covered parts. Gradually, the wall surfaces, galleries and windows grew larger and excessively fine detailing was omitted. The taller buildings gave architects an opportunity to design façades with a predominantly vertical character, in the form of colossal columns and pilasters and multi-storey bay openings. During the 1920s the previously largely horizontal façade treatment made way for a more vertical rhythm in the façades. Owing to climatic considerations, the buildings retained the wide roof overhangs, canopies above doors and windows, galleries, balconies, ventilation openings

and light-coloured façades.

Modern materials and a modern form language were used from the outset. Particularly in later designs, the omission of details and the use of large uninterrupted wall surfaces produced an up-to-date architectural style - which could have served as a model for the tropical/East Indies architectural style sought by the architects who were designing buildings at the time.

The stylistic principles of AIA drew the following comments in 1936: "Averse to 'new objectivity', Futurism or Dadaism, and to indulging in personal hobbies or a craving for progress, they strive in their form and construction towards the satisfaction of the company's business requirements, in the awareness that the serious architect has a duty to serve enduring interests with enduring material."<sup>(30)</sup> Two examples of different entrepreneurs who both commissioned office buildings but of completely different architecture were the Javasche Bank and the Nillmij. Each in their own right their office buildings illustrate the search for and the development of modern-style architecture in the Dutch East Indies.

It is often difficult for the Western-oriented viewer to give names to the different architectural styles that emerged during the first half of the twentieth century in Indonesia because although they follow styles developed in the West in broad respects, they also make very free use of elements drawn from traditional indigenous architecture. Measured by occidental standards, the early twentieth century architecture holds its own with works realized in the West. Koning expressed this as follows: "But there are also - and their number is growing larger all the time - office buildings erected beneath the tropical heavens in a vigorous yet elegant style, buildings that can easily withstand detailed comparison with trading establishments in the Western centres of commerce."<sup>(31)</sup>

All in all, it may be justifiably stated that the leading and often initiating role of (played by) private enterprise with regard to the urban and architectural development from the final years of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century was highly significant and of considerable influence on changing the Dutch East Indies, on a social as well as on a physical level. The result of which can still be seen and felt today.



## End Notes

(1) "Er zijn enkel maar lage huisjes in Indië, nietwaar? - vroeg onlangs iemand die het voorrecht niet had genoten Indië te mogen bezoeken. (...) Een even zonderlinge opvatting als de hierboven gesignaleerde ten aanzien van Indische huizen, treft men in Holland ook nog vaak aan wanneer ter sprake komt de voorstelling die men hier heeft van Indische kantoorgebouwen". J. Koning 'Moderne bouwwerken in Indië,' *Het Nederlandsch-Indisch Huis Oud en Nieuw* (1922), 93 and 95.

(2) For companies dealing in agricultural and export products, this implied an establishment on Java, the east coast of Sumatra or the Moluccas. Companies operating in mineral extraction and mining mostly settled in the so-called 'outlying regions': Bangka, Borneo, near Langkat and the Riouw Archipelago. Industries, small- and medium-sized businesses and the rapidly developing services sector were generally housed in or near the cities on Java - in the vicinity of the colonial government headquarters.

(3) The amenities mentioned were initially provided only for the European population, and most entrepreneurs gave little attention at first to the living and working circumstances of their employees. This attitude changed consequent to the 'ethical politics' that made headway at the beginning of the twentieth century.

(4) The main sea harbours in terms of the volume of goods shipped were Batavia, Surabaya and Semarang (on Java) and Belawan, Padang and Palembang (on Sumatra). Around 1910, in Semarang, the shops, offices and central trade and industry remained established in the centre close to the Semarang River and Heerenstraat. In Surabaya, the trading centre developed around Rode Brug/Jembatan Merah, for long the heart of the Chinese business district. However, the European retail district developed along Toendjoengan, one of the roads linking this trade centre with Darmo, a high-class European residential district to the south of the city.

(5) In the Dutch East Indies, both machinery and labour were imported. Most of the machinery came from Europe. Labourers were recruited in the Dutch East Indies and elsewhere in Asia. Special offices were established for this purpose, such as the Java Immigratie Kantoor founded in 1912, through which Javanese labourers were recruited to work on drainage projects. The natives were considered too 'unsuitable and indolent' for other kinds of work, so the Deli Maatschappij had approximately 9,000 workers per annum shipped in from China. These employees were given a three-year contract.

(6) "Komt men er eenmaal toe om een ander kantoor te zoeken, dan ligt het tevens voor de hand om hiervoor een pand te kiezen, dat meer in het publiek verkeer is gelegen, dan te Batavia, in de z.g. benedenstad, het geval

kan zijn." *Gedenkboek 1895-1909. Nederlandsch-Indische Lijf en Levensverzekering Maatschappij*, 139.

(7) The Indonesian word 'susah' signifies burden, trouble, concern, grief; awkward, inconvenient, annoying, difficult; have a rough time, having trouble with, painful. The word has become part of Dutch common parlance.

J.F. van Hoytema, 'De Westersche Bouwkunst in Nederlands-Indië', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 32 (1922), 413.

(8) "De vraag kan dadelijk worden gesteld, of het wenschelijk is, het Indische type van huizen voor een gebouw als het bedoelde, te handhaven, of wel daarvan af te wijken. Voor mij is de keus niet twijfelachtig, al behoeft daarmee nog niet het type in al zijne nuchtere gewooneheid te worden gevolgd. Het lijkt mij in het algemeen het meest gewenschte, de bouwwijze van Indië in hoofdkarakter te behouden, maar voor dit doel die architectuur eenigszins rijker te maken. De ontwerper is echter van eenen andere meening uitgegaan en heeft eenen zuiver Europeesche architectuur gegeven. Daarvoor bestond nu waarschijnlijk een goede reden, die ik dan ook gaarne aanneem, maar over deze soort Europeesche architectuur kan ik niet anders dan een afkeurend oordeel geven, omdat de gevel is die van een villa-achtig winkelhuisje in ee kleine gemeente, ontwerpen door een kleine architect. Het is deze architectuur die al onze mooie steden en stadjes heeft leelijk gemaakt. Het kantoorgebouw der maatschappij moet toch waarlijk van een ander karakter zijn." Letter from H.P. Berlage to the board of directors of Algemeene Lijf- en Levensverzekerings Maatschappij dd. 10 August 1898. Amsterdam Municipal Archives PA 580, inv. no. 5342. A salient detail in connection with Berlage's critique (justified or not) is the fact that Berlage penned these words without ever having been in the Dutch East Indies. His acquaintance with the Orient would have to wait until 1923, when he toured Java following an invitation to produce recommendations on the restoration of the Buddhist temple complex of Borobudur near Yogyakarta.

(9) J. Koning, 'Moderne bouwwerken in Indië', *Het Nederlandsch-Indisch Huis Oud en Nieuw* (1922), 98.

(10) (...) "niet tevreden met de ongelukkige pakhuizen die lange jaren tot kantoor dienden" (...). J.F. van Hoytema, 'De Westersche Bouwkunst in Nederlands-Indië', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 32 (1922), 312.

(11) "Door den gewijzigden tijdsgeest, door de verandering en verbetering van de woningen, ging men ook aan de kantoorgebouwen hogere eischen stellen. Door de uitbreiding hunner zaken gedwongen naar ruimere lokalen om te zien, werden vele nieuwe gebouwen opgericht door particuliere maatschappijen en handelskantoren, welke in vele opzichten aan eischen van comfort, hygiëne en aesthetica voldoen. Ook hier is nog



niet alles zooals mocht worden verwacht, doch een zeer groote vooruitgang valt te staven." P.A.J. Mooijen, 'De ontwikkeling der bouwkunst in Nederlandsch-Indië. I Nederlandsche bouwkunst', *Bouwen* (1924), 115.

(12) Around 1910, Medan underwent a period of rapid development thanks to the presence of a private tobacco company, Deli Maatschappij. The activities and involvement of the company in the city had considerable effect on the development of the Deli region in general and the city of Medan in particular. The company influenced urban development by controlling the issuing of land and by keeping a check on regular, hygienic, aesthetic building. So as to be able to steer things in the right direction, the company granted agricultural concessions, and there were instructions concerning materials to be used, building and repair work to be carried out, etc.

(13) This working situation differed little from that prevailing in the Netherlands.

(14) In a few instances it was patently obvious that connections played a bigger part than professional criteria when it came to the appointment of a particular architect. This was true for example in the case of the appointment of the firm of Ed. Cuypers te Amsterdam for the design of the office buildings of Javasche Bank. Although commissions had been granted to other architects for two of the buildings, these were set aside by the director of Javasche Bank, G. Vissering, in favour of his acquaintance Eduard Cuypers. The reason for this was that Vissering had made the acquaintance of Cuypers during the construction of his bank building when he was a director of the Nederlandse Bank in the Netherlands. B. Gerlach, *Eduard Cuypers architect*, doctoral thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1978.

(15) "De eigenwijze bemoeizucht van 'artistieke' bouwheeren (...) spreekt van weinig waardeering voor de artistieke gaven van een zelfstandig architect." Chs.E.J. Meyll, 'Eenige proeven van moderne Nederlandsch-Indische Bouwkunst' *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 48 (1912), 579.

(16) 'Indische architectuur' (East Indies architecture) refers to the architectural style that evolved during the first half of the twentieth century in the Dutch East Indies and was in various ways used for to contemporary buildings.

(17) "Het verticalisme tot ontropisch te verklaren gaat niet, maar wel is het te begrijpen dat de tropische klimaatseischen zeer moeilijk met een doorgevoerde verticaal verhouding in overeenstemming zijn te brengen." J.F. van Hoytema, 'De Westersche Bouwkunst in Nederlands-Indië', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 43 (1922), 317.

(18) v. H. (= J.F. van Hoytema), 'Moderne materialen

en hun invloed op de Bouwkunst', *Indisch Bouwkundig Weekblad* 4 (1912), 57; C.J.A. Gokkel, 'Bouwkunst te Batavia', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 2 (1907), 18.

(19) J.F. van Hoytema, 'De Westersche Bouwkunst in Nederlands-Indië', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 43 (1922), 319.

(20) "De Indische bouwkunst is een typische schaduw-architectuur; tegenstellingen van licht en schaduw vormen meer dan kleur en materiaal de groote aantrekkelijkheden van de goede Indische gebouwen." J.F. van Hoytema, 'De Westersche Bouwkunst in Nederlands-Indië', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 32 (1922), 315.]

(21) "Het zal ons moeilijk vallen te wennen aan de schoonheid van groote vlakken, aan de rust van enkele groote verhoudingen en aan het gemis van vormen, die uit den stelselmatigen opbouw voortspuiten." v. H. (= J.F. van Hoytema), *Indisch Bouwkundig Weekblad* (1912), 57

(22) The firm was founded in 1909 under the name Architectenbureau Ed. Cuypers en Hulswit te Weltevreden. It was decided to change the name after A.A. Fermont joined the firm in 1910. The partnership is a good example of an architecture firm that combined design practice with construction. Cuypers was the only architect within the firm for a period of ten years, but later other architects were appointed.

(23) The space under the roof was used for ventilation.

(24) Fermont-Cuypers, 'De Javasche Bank en andere kantoorgebouwen te Batavia', *I.B.T. Locale Techniek* 2 (1937), 53.

(25) Such for example was the situation in Pontianak where the ground was extremely marshy and constructive adaptations tured out to be necessary. The solid bedrock was situated at a depth of 250 metres below ground level, so it was necessary to erect the building on a floating foundation. Despite all the precautions by the designers and engineers, this led to a strange incident shortly after the building was taken into use. It was noticed that the building was beginning to tilt to one side. The reason for this was that the copper coins in the safe had been stacked too high and off-centre, despite instructions displayed by the architects concerning stacking height and loading. By four days after the money had been re-stacked, the building had returned to vertical. A.C. Ingenegeren, 'Gewapend beton in Indonesië', *De Ingenieur* 2 / Beton 1(1956), 2.

(26) *Gedenkboek 1895-1909. Nederlandsch-Indische Lijf en Levensverzekering Maatschappij*, 139.

(27) The Decentralisation Act (1903) paved the way for the establishment of local councils, regional government units with territorial jurisdiction, in 1905.



(28) "(...) *het is de partikuliere bouw geweest, die hier werkte: kantoren en toko's in de centra, zeer vaak met verdringing der oude woonbuurten, nieuwe huizen in de wijken die voor bewoning bestemd bleven*". Th. Karsten, 'Stedebouw' in: F.W.M. Kerchman, *25 Jaren decentralisatie in Nederlandsch-Indië 1905-1930*, Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen, Semarang/Weltevreden, 1930, 141.

(29) F.H. van de Wetering, 'Stadsvorming in de praktijk', *Locale Techniek/IBT* 3 (1939), 93.

(30) "Wars van "nieuwe zakelijkheid", futurisme of dadaïsme, en van het uitvieren van persoonlijke hobbies of zucht naar opgang, is in vorm en constructie gestreefd naar een voldoening aan de zakelijke eischen van het bedrijf, in het besef, dat de serieuze architect met blijvend materiaal blijvende belangen heeft te dienen." N., 'Werken van het A.I.A.-Bureau te Soerabaia', *I.B.T. Locale Techniek* 6 (1936), 135.

(31) "Maar er zijn ook, en hun aantal wordt voordurend grooter, kantoorgebouwen onder den tropischen hemel opgetrokken in krachtigen en tegelijk sierlijken stijl, gebouwen die gerust een gedetailleerde vergelijking kunnen doorstaan met handels-établissemten in de Westersche commercieele centra." J. Koning, 'Moderne bouwwerken in Indië', *Het Nederlandsch-Indisch Huis Oud & Nieuw* (1922), 95.

(32) H. Baudet, M. Fennema, *Het Nederlands belang bij Indië*, Het Spectrum, Utrecht/Antwerpen, 1983, 33.

(33) "Renaissance met religieus Hindoe-Javaanse motieven." P.A.J. Mooijen, 'De ontwikkeling der bouwkunst in Nederlandsch-Indië. III Naaste Toekomst', *Bouwen* (1924), 18.

(34) The shipping company Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij maintained one of the main connections between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies. Their ships called at various ports in the archipelago: Batavia, Semarang, Surabaya, Cheribon, Tegal and Pekalongan.

(35) "De vroegere eenvoudige waardigheid van het stadsbeeld op dezen hoek van Aloen2 heeft plaats gemaakt voor een jazz van palen, draden, wegbakens en reclames". *Het stadsbeeld voorheen en thans*, catalogue accompanying the exhibition organized by Vereeniging van Locale Belangen, Visser, Bandoeng, 1938, 13.

(36) "Typische overgangstoestand, die ontstaat bij rooilijnen, welke de bestaande bebouwing sterk aansnijden; het onvermijdelijk gevolg is een slecht stadsbeeld gedurende de lange overgangsperiode. De kleine voorspringende bebouwingen dateren deels van vóór 1876." Th. Karsten, 'Het stadsbeeld voorheen en thans', *Technische Mededeeling* 10 (1937), 22.

(37) "Goed voorbeeld van volledige ontwikkeling van open naar gesloten bebouwing binnen 25 jaar; de tusschenstadia zijn leelijk, doch begin- en eindtoestand zijn betrekkelijk bevredigend; het huidige straatbeeld vraagt evenwel om het onder den grond leggen der electrische leidingen. De huidige bebouwing heeft in het algemeen een bovenverdieping, gebruikt voor woning." *Het stadsbeeld voorheen en thans*, catalogue accompanying the exhibition organized by Vereeniging van Locale Belangen, Visser, Bandoeng, 1938, 17.

## Bibliography

- B., v., 'Indiese stedebouw', *De Taak* 43 (1919/20), 424.  
 B., v., 'Indische stedebouw', *De Taak* 45 (1919/20), 439-440.  
 Balbian Verster, J.F.L. de, *Deli Maatschappij. Gedenkschrift bij gelegenheid van het vijftig jarig bestaan*, Vereenigde Drukkerijen Roeloffzen-Hübner & Van Santen en Gebroeders Binger, Amsterdam, ?  
 Baudet, H., M. Fennema, *Het Nederlands belang bij Indië*, Het Spectrum, Utrecht/Antwerpen, 1983  
 Cramer, B.J.K., 'Kantoorgebouwen der N.I.L.L.M.Y. in Ned.-Indië', *Bouwen* 1924/25), 113-115, 204, 205.  
 Cramer, B.J.K., 'Indische natuur- en baksteen', *Bouwen* (1924/1925), 165-169.  
*Deli-Batavia Maatschappij 1875-1925*, Amsterdam, 1925.?  
 Fermont-Cuypers, 'De Javasche Bank en andere kantoorgebouwen te Batavia', *I.B.T. Locale Techniek* 2 (1937), 50-55.  
 Gedenkboek 1895-1909 Nederlandsch-Indische Lijf en Levensverzekering Maatschappij.  
 Gerlach, B., *Eduard Cuypers architect*, doctoral thesis, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam 1978.  
 Gokkel, C.J.A., 'Bouwkunst in Batavia', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 2 (1907), 18-20.  
 Groenewegen, J.M., 'Stedebouw en Stedeschoon', *Locale Techniek/IBT* 1 (1939), 16.  
 H., v., (= J.F. van Hoytema), 'Moderne materialen en hun invloed op de Bouwkunst', *IBT* 4 (1912), 54-57.  
 Hoytema, J.F. van, 'De Westersche Bouwkunst in Nederlands-Indië', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 32 (1922), 309-320.  
 Ingenegeren, A.C., 'Gewapend beton in Indonesië', *De Ingenieur* 2 / *Beton* 1 (1956), 1-8.  
 Karsten, Th., 'Stedebouw', in: F.W.M. Kerchman, *25 Jaren decentralisatie in Nederlandsch-Indië 1905-1930*, Vereeniging voor Locale Belangen, Semarang/Weltevreden, 1930, 137-144.  
 Karsten, Th., 'Het stadsbeeld voorheen en thans', *Technische Mededeeling* 10 (1937), 21-28.  
 Koning, J., 'Moderne bouwwerken in Indië', *Het Nederlandsch-Indisch Huis Oud en Nieuw* (1922), 92-117.



- Koning, J., 'Moderne bouwwerken in Indië', *Nederlandsch-Indië Oud en Nieuw* 5 (1922/1923), 134-154.
- Locale Techniek/IBT* 3 (1939) (planologisch themanummer)
- Meyll, Chs.E.J., 'Eenige proeven van moderne Nederlandsch-Indische Bouwkunst' *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 48 (1912), 578-581.
- Meyll, Chs.E.J., 'Eenige proeven van moderne Nederlandsch-Indische bouwkunst', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 49 (1912), 589-593.
- Mooijen, P.A.J., 'De ontwikkeling der bouwkunst in Nederlandsch-Indië. I Nederlandsche bouwkunst', *Bouwen* (1924/1925), 115-117.
- Mooijen, P.A.J., 'De ontwikkeling der bouwkunst in Nederlandsch-Indië. III Naaste toekomst', *Bouwen* (1924/1925), 17-21.
- N., 'Werken van het A.I.A.-Bureau te Soerabaia', *I.B.T. Locale Techniek* 6 (1936), 133, 135-139.
- Plate, A., 'Het uitbreidingsplan der Indische Gemeenten', *De Ingenieur* 16 (1918), 274-297.
- Het stadsbeeld voorheen en thans*, catalogue accompanying the exhibition organized by Vereeniging van Locale Belangen, Visser, Bandoeng, 1938.
- Wetering, F.H. van de 'Stadsvorming in de praktijk', *Locale Techniek/IBT* 3 (1939), 93-96.

#### Sources visual material

Gemeentearchief Amsterdam: 2