

# Transformation of a Chinese Cultural Heritage House in Bandung: Towards Sustainability

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**Keywords:** Chinese, Contemporary Culture, Heritage, Sustainability, Transformation.

**Abstract:** Chinese settlement in Bandung is an inseparable entity that existed along with the development of the historical city. But due to the rapid development of the city and cultural restrictions policy during the New Order era, Chinese settlements are intentionally immersed socially by modernization and even neglected. Political changes by the end of the 1990s provide an opportunity for Chinese cultural practitioners to start preserving a culture. Many methods are conducted to conserve valuable heritage. One of them is to transform a Chinese heritage house attached with Chinese architecture elements, furnished the interior with Chinese style furniture so that it can educate society as well about the richness of the culture. The case study is the house of Mr. Lin at *Gang Basalamah* that was transformed into an art collector house. This paper aims to describe the transformation of the house and shows the physical elements that exposed Chinese contemporary culture. The research will be qualitative research based on purposive chosen sample on the house and explore the idea of sustainability that emerged from the transformation decision done by the owner. The research findings are the optimization of cultural revitalization as a result of the transformation of the house.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Chinese Indonesian Dwelling during Dutch Colonial Era

Learning about Chinese Indonesian houses; most of the scientific materials currently available mostly are the discussion of earlier Chinese dwellings, in areas called as *Pecinan* in the historical littoral old cities along the coast of Indonesian islands. The *Pecinan* is a product of Dutch colonial *Wijkenstelsel* segregation policy since the 18<sup>th</sup> century that Chinese communities should be contained in specific bonded areas only (Kustara, 2009: 72-74). During the ending of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the obstructions were relaxed and gradually released. Some Chinese people who have fortune built significant spacious houses outside of the ghettos. Those mansions have a courtyard and specific Chinese customs of closed buildings plan, with

components, and ornaments intense with Chinese symbolic meaning. They have made modifications in architectural aspects to suit tropical weather and local social culture features, named as *Indische Empire* style; a hybridization of local Indonesian (Javanese) style mixed with Dutch/European style, and then added up with Chinese architecture elements. Architecturally they are called eclectic designs, extravagant buildings to display the pride of the owner's successful lives, huge mansions with refined mixed Chinese cultural taste.

The development of Indonesia as a nation and especially Bandung with the contribution of the Chinese community happens within 5 centuries. According to Blusse in Kustedja (2012: 106), the first arrival of Chinese immigrants had been detected since the early 15<sup>th</sup> century; sailing through the western path passing Sumatra and Java and also through the eastern path passing the Maluku archipelago and the western coast of Kalimantan. But the formation of Chinese settlements in the

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cities of Java started in the mid of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, we know that the formation of the Chinese settlements could not be separated from the intervention done by the Dutch that arranged the settlements segregation according to the ethnic group and other restrictions to control the mobility of the Chinese community.

In addition to the rich heritages of the Dutch colonials, Bandung also has many precious Chinese community settlements which have been developed since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. During that particular period, the Dutch issued three policies that gave impact to Bandung that was the construction of a road along the island of Java, the construction of a railway and the development of a Chinese camp according to the decree dated on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1810. The development of the Chinese camp was to utilize empty lands for improving the welfare of the people (Kustedja: 2012, 114). At the beginning, the policy of the Dutch to improve the development of Bandung was an effort to fulfill the needs of residential facilities which later developed into the central government and economy in 1810. Therefore, Bandung was inaugurated as the capital of the district on the 25<sup>th</sup> September 1810.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Bandung gained more economic and political significance, the Chinese population grew as being involved in trade and manufacturing industries and in various white-collared jobs in service industries (Tunas, 2009: 31). Furthermore, the growth of Bandung that involved the Chinese communities inherits some cultural heritages, both tangible and intangible, that can still be found in certain areas. The most significant Chinese heritages in Bandung are architectural artifacts such as residential, hotels, schools, sacred temples, shop houses and commercial buildings owned by the Chinese descendants. Some of them are in good condition and others are not. These heritages evolved along with the needs of the owners; some are well preserved, others are converted into another function and some others are not even identified due to lack of information.

Discussing about Chinese cultures in Indonesia, we cannot deny the sociological problems that started decades ago. It is obvious that during the Dutch occupation, peoples in Indonesia were segregated by ethnic groups to avoid gaining power through unity that might cause problems to the Dutch. The Chinese for many years had become a social buffer to separate the Dutch with the local citizens. In some cases, even the Chinese were accused of being accomplices of the Dutch, although

there were some Chinese who fought and rebelled against the Dutch during the occupation.

## 1.2 Chinese Indonesian Dwelling after the Indonesian Proclamation

After the Indonesian proclamation of the independence, the Chinese descendants had become part of the society, but still with the foreigner status. Twenty years later, for about three decades (1965 – 1998), Chinese cultures were unexpectedly not able to grow in Indonesia due to some political issues. Ethnic discrimination emerged and Chinese descendants were forced to leave their nationality and even their Chinese names. Chinese Culture, Chinese language and even characters were not allowed to be shown in public. The acting government at that time nurtured the anti-Chinese spirit among the nation. Therefore Chinese cultures were sublimed yet live within the heart of the Chinese descendants. Chinese Indonesian release Chineseness ornament in houses, and increasingly turned towards local and Western style architecture.

Three decades was sufficient to disrupt the process of inheritance of the culture to the younger generations. Younger generations, both Chinese and locals have lack of knowledge about the Chinese cultures and heritages in Bandung and cause a latent threat to the sustainability of the Chinese Heritage. People of Bandung hardly can understand the significance of the Chinese cultural heritages, so those heritages are in a serious thread of mistreatment, misunderstood and even possibly facing destruction.

Fortunately, at the end of the second millennium, supported by the reformation spirit of the nation, a new paradigm of nationalism emerged; values of humanity and plurality were considered in a new way. K.H. Abdurrachman Wahid, as the President of the Republic of Indonesia at that time, opened the gates of ethnic discriminations that had been closed for decades and widened the way of multiculturalism and plurality in the nationhood of Indonesia, especially for the Chinese descendants.

Nowadays there are many Chinese organizations in Indonesia. The spirit of reformation seemed to have touched the roots of political awareness of the Chinese descendants. Now they are actively involved in both social and political daily life of the nationhood of Indonesia. Chinese descendants' cultures rose as part of the nation's culture. They live as Indonesian culture and are greatly diverse. This situation opens opportunities to rethink and

reposition the Chinese cultures and also re-identified the cultural heritages in order to preserve it.

This paper aims to describe a case study of a Chinese Indonesian person who is very concerned about the preservation of Chinese cultural heritage. He revitalized his old house into an art house and shows the physical elements that exposed Chinese contemporary culture.

## 2 METHODS AND MATERIALS

### 2.1 Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a development process based on the principle of meeting the needs of the present without sacrificing the needs of future generations. One of the factors faced in achieving this development is maintaining the environment without sacrificing the needs of economic development and social justice. Development by paying attention to the preservation of cultural, historical, social values, and building conservation to improve people's lives is one of the concerns in the declaration of the United Nations Climate Change Conference ("COP21") in Paris and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Conservation of cultural heritage in sustainable development supports the 2015-2030 Sustainable Development Goals initiated by the United Nation. Cities or areas with cultural heritage need to be managed properly so as to create a more established, safe, sustainable city and human life by making efforts to protect and maintain world cultural heritage and natural cultural heritage (The Ecological Sequestration Trust, 2016).

### 2.2 Conservation of Cultural Heritage

The cultural heritage is the expression of a variety of ways of living built by a community that is passed from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expression and a certain value. This cultural heritage is both tangible and intangible (ICOMOS, 2002). There are 3 types of cultural heritage: built environment that includes building, city and archeological remnants; natural environment that includes rural environment, coastal environment, and agricultural heritage; and artifacts includes documents, books, products and pictures. Cultural heritage is very important since it indicates the level of a nation's civilization.

Cultural heritages are unique, rare, fragile and cannot be renewed or replaced by various technologies and materials that exist today because it is an authentic legacy of human activity in the past. The threat of destruction of various cultural heritages is usually caused by 2 factors: the first is the impact of time considering that the material will slowly deteriorate over time; the second is active destruction due to disaster, war and others (Svoboda, 2013).

Cultural heritages need to be preserved due to its importance. The preservation that is carried out does not rely merely on physical preservation, but includes various intrinsic values contained in cultural heritages. Cultural heritage must be treated very carefully to avoid any damage caused and any changes in the heritages, because the slightest change has the potential to reduce the significant cultural values.

There are various basic concepts of action that can be taken as a concrete effort to preserve this cultural heritage:

1. Conservation is the entire process of managing a place so that its cultural meaning is maintained. This includes conditions-appropriate maintenance which includes Preservation, Restoration, Reconstruction and Adaptation
2. Maintenance is the continuous maintenance of a building, the meaning and arrangement of a place.
3. Preservation is maintaining (preserving) what has been built somewhere in its original state without any changes and prevents destruction.
4. Restoration is restoring what has been built in a place to its original known state, by removing additions or rebuilding original components without using new materials.
5. Reconstruction is rebuilding a place in accordance with the original conditions that are known and differentiated by using new or old materials.
6. Adaptation is changing a place according to the function that can be combined.
7. Revitalization is a development activity aimed at regrown important values of cultural heritage by adjusting new spatial functions that do not conflict with the principles of preservation and community cultural values.

Simon Thurley proposes his idea of how to make cultural heritage a part of modern society today

through a cycle: enjoying, understanding, valuing and maintaining. According to Thurley, when a cultural heritage is enjoyed by society, there is an effort to understand it. Once understood, the cultural heritage is given a special value or meaning. After it is interpreted specifically, people will take care of it. After the cultural heritage is preserved, people will enjoy it, and this cycle will continue (Thurley, 2005).

### 2.3 Chinese Contemporary Architecture

Chinese contemporary architecture refers to the buildings that were designed after the start of the Opium wars in the 1840s. During that period, Chinese architecture began to elaborate the traditional Chinese style with the western architectural characteristics. The traditional elements such as sweeping roofs, open courtyards, screens and wooden columns as elements held over the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644) and those inherent to the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911) of the time remained prominent.

By its openness to western culture, China started to adopt an eclectic European style in Chinese architecture during the 1840s to 1920s. Several main treaty ports such as Guangzhou, Xiamen, and Shanghai possessed lots of buildings designed by foreign architects. The so-called Chinese contemporary architecture is therefore an idea of blending traditional style of architecture with a more eclectic Western architectural style in terms of expression. But in the narration there are 3 aspects that are treated in the process: form and function examined in architectural ontology, the social and cultural value of architectural texts and the technological evaluation of architectural products (Xue, 2006: 5).

During the past decade, the understanding of contemporary Chinese architecture has changed. Along with the massive growth of China's cities, architects have a larger opportunity to work freely, innovatively, distinctively and creatively. Architects find their way in these sudden eruptions of speedy changes; they react creatively and critically upon these changing conditions. Architects are looking at tradition as an inspiration, as an intellectual and conduct physical engagement with the creation of space (de Muijnck, 2016).

### 2.4 Contemporary Chinese Indonesia Home

This research paper focused on a current Chinese Indonesian dwelling. The previous existing studies generally discuss Chinese buildings during the Dutch colonized situation; most of the research will refer to heritage buildings of expansive Indische Empires mansions style, decorated with extravagant traditional Chinese symbolic elements, and old-style furnishings made with special custom ornaments related to Chinese culture. This case study object was purposely chosen, described, analyzed, and interpreted by comparing to typical styles of traditional Chinese culture.

This paper tries to discuss a well preserved house located in *Gang Basalamah* (Basalamah Alley) Bandung city, at a business block area (Astana Anyar – Jendral Sudirman). *Gang Basalamah* is a narrow street of 2 meters in width. Along the western street entrance; nearly half of the street length, with hawker stalls on both sides becoming a traditional wet market called *Pasar Basalamah* (Basalamah Market). They are selling specifically Chinese dishes' materials (pork, fishes, frogs, crabs, chicken, beef, and Chinese vegetables), condiments, and Chinese spices. On the east side of the road is a clear street without any stalls on both sides are residential areas. The nominated house is a consolidated lot of 3 houses, *Gang Basalamah* number 4, 6, and 8.



Figure 1: Map of Gang Basalamah.



Figure 2: Building (Basalamah 6, 8) façade as seen to the west, the end side of the traditional wet market.





Figure 3: Façade (Basalamah 4, 6, 8) as seen to the east, junction with Jalan Kasmin.

The owner is Mr. Lin Che Wei, a successful professional and businessman. His childhood time was living in the house Basalamah Alley 8. Mr. Lin also owns another building facing the main street (Jendral Sudirman Street) once used as an art gallery Sarasvati house. Those two places are connected through a short alley. In this Basalamah Alley lot, those three buildings façade are kept as their origin, assumed built about 1920s – 1930s. By observing the façade and roof style carefully, the building has gone through the process of being restored.

Mr. Lin has the idealism to preserve historical heritage by establishing an art-house (Sarasvati Art House) in Bandung while together intending to make that area (Jendral Sudirman Street) as one of the unique identities of Bandung (<https://sarasvati.co.id/roemah-seni-sarasvati/background/> accessed on July 12, 2020). He said many people understand the meaning of buildings only as inanimate objects, whereas since the building was designed, we see the journey of human life in it (<https://www.dunia.lingga.com/2013/05/menelusuri-jejak-art-deco-di-bandung.html> accessed on July 12, 2020). His inspiration to get involved with passion in preservation of cultural heritages is from Lu Xun (1881 –1936) a Chinese writer: “*Hope is like a path across the land, it is not there to begin with, but when lots of people go the same way, it comes into being*”. Mr. Lin said, the preservation Mr. Lin said that very few people have preserved Chinese cultural buildings. Preservation can be started from him, so that other people will see and also participate in preserving it. In the year 2013, Mr. Lin became CEO of PT Pembangunan Kota Tua Jakarta (Jakarta Old Town Development) who took the revitalization of buildings in Jakarta Old City area which at that time Jakarta Governor was Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok).

Lin Che Wei house is a representation of the Indonesian Chinese House which still exists, where most Chinese houses in Bandung have undergone very drastic changes and no longer gives the impression of Chinatown (Kusteja, 2012). The

construction of modern Chinese houses after 1990 caused the depletion of traditional Chinese elements in architecture (Hadinoto, 2007). The house is still maintained, and has been restored with a mature concept by Mr. Lin as a cultural observer, and has been realized in revitalizing the Old City of Jakarta and Gedung Pensil Bandung. This building itself is very important because it is on the West Groote Postweg Line (*Jalan Raya Barat/Jalan Jendral Sudirman*) and within the Jamika Industrial Estate area. Only people with certain positions or certain economies could own a house in the center of the main route during the Dutch colonial period. Groote Postweg is the main highway for the economic interests of Java Island which was built in 2 years by the Dutch General Governor (Daendels) (William, 1979: 1-29).

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

David G. Khol (1984: 22), wrote in the book “Chinese Architecture in The Straits Settlements and Western Malaya”, provides a kind of guidance, how to see the characteristics of Chinese architecture that exist, especially in Southeast Asia. These are some characteristics of Chinese Architecture in the Chinatown area until prior of 1900:

1. courtyard
2. emphasis on a distinctive roof shape open structural elements (which are sometimes
3. accompanied with decorative ornaments)
4. use of distinctive colors

Although Mr. Lin renovated based on his personal experience, in fact, the characteristics of Chinese houses as referenced by Knapp was unwittingly restored by Mr. Lin.

The existing theories provide the characteristics of houses before 1990; there is a theoretical gap for researchers to analyze the characteristics of Chinese contemporary houses after 1990. Through the discussion of this case study, it is suggested for further research on Chinese contemporary houses to use the following characteristic criteria:

1. courtyard
2. distinctive roof shape
3. Chinese decorative ornaments
4. local / global culture ornaments
5. distinctive colors

### 3.1 Courtyard



Figure 4: Courtyard.

The courtyard has some benches, sometimes the owner runs movies on the white screen, which covers the red bricks end wall for the shows, and sometimes he likes to have tea in this area. The front building (left side) is still preserved as built before. The right side building is totally rebuilt with new construction; the designer was the late Ir. Ahmad Djuhara. The roof ending has a different style compared with the front side (diverge with traditional custom).

### 3.2 Roof Shape

On renovated gable walls Mr. Lin restored the specific design at the peak and at two sloping sides with curls ends as previous. Those styles are not copied from any typical Chinese traditional style. But in general, those decorated parts and sloping ridge at two ends are in general similar to South China's traditional architecture styles. It is a reinterpretation of traditional customs by previous developer.



Figure 5: The current roofing and gable wall condition, the 2 ends of gable sloping, finished with curls.



Figure 6: The typical Chinese traditional gable wall peak details.



Figure 7: The ending roof ridge is sloping up at both ends, similar with traditional Southern China typical ridge architecture. Here the sloping is with corner and straight line, while the traditional style is smooth arc without any sharp bent.



Figure 8: Additional ornaments were added during the late Mr. Lin's father, intended as Chinese geomancy (feng shui) elements against bad things (sha qi 杀气).

### 3.3 Decorative Ornaments

The one focal point within three buildings; is the set of 18 units of wooden lattice panels at the hall building which are distinctively showing his passion with Chinese culture style crafts. For the panels area he made a serial design for each of them. Patiently Mr. Lin ordered the craft artisans to produce specific complicated double faces – a copy of the same sculpture on both sides for each panel. Every panel decorated with “The three kingdoms” (*san guo yan yi* 三国演义) episodes, to remember his childhood, the story that he loved to read when he was young. They took 4 years to finish the complete series with 3 sets of complete panels.



Figure 9: Set of 18 wooden lattice panels at the hall building.

Some wooden crafted ornament units on the wall as ventilation openings (crafted with “The three kingdoms” episodes), at the balcony railings they show intricate Chinese traditional patterns, some railing with Chinese object crafted emblem with figures of The Gods (*Fu Lu Shou* 福禄寿).



Figure 10: The railing with Chinese style lattices pattern, medallion with The Gods (*Fu Lu Shou* 福禄寿) images.

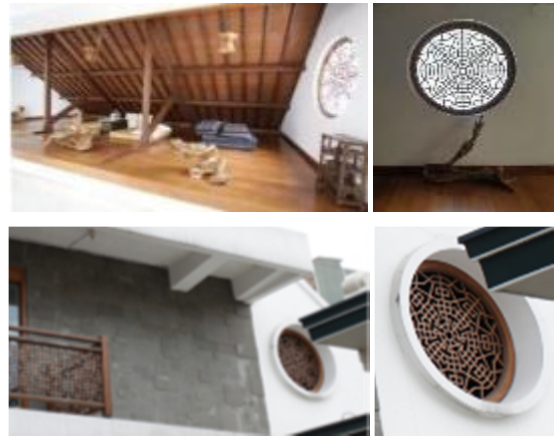


Figure 11: Window trellis with 8 corners, Chinese traditional pattern lattice, in Chinese numerology 8 can be symbol for Eight trigrams (*ba-gwa* 八卦), Eight treasures (*ba bao* 八宝), Eight deities passing the ocean (*ba xian guo hai* 八仙过海), Buddhism eight lucky symbols (*ba ji xiang* 八吉祥).



Figure 12: Ventilation openings with hand crafted wooden trellis, decorated with The Three Kingdoms episodes.

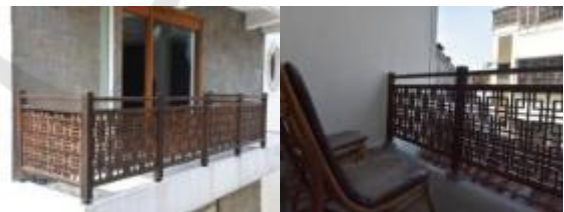


Figure 13: Railings with traditional Chinese patterns, the balcony facing the street in front.

Mr Lin is very serious about preserving Chinese culture. He has an in-house workshop with permanent crafter artisans. He looked for crafter artisans from Jepara, Central Java, the center of a famous wood craftsmen artisan area, and was employed in his private workshop. Expensive wood chunks carved manually by craftsmen.





Figure 14: Crafter artisans.

### 3.4 Local/Global Culture Ornaments

The furniture collections inside building number 6 and 8 have some antique Chinese styles, mixed with some articles related to Mr. Lin's parents, as his reminder of his younger time while living in that home. Some of this furniture is called "Yankee styles" (Indonesian: "Model Jengkee") which is popular during 1950s. Some of those Chinese styles antique were collected from China when he was travelling there.

Inside the building number 4, there is plenty of amazing Balinese sculpture collections, especially those created from naturally unique bending wooden trunks. There are some Chinese styles of antique furniture such as an old cabinet and a traditional Chinese canopy bed which were imported from China. The other furniture collections are from mixed styles: modern, Yankees, and antique European style (chairs, writing cabinet).



Figure 15: Balinese wooden sculptures collection.

### 3.5 Color

Chinese people really like the color red or vermilion, because it symbolizes luck and joy, they use it a lot on Chinese New Year or special occasions. Many ancient royal buildings used this color. For the facade of Mr. Lin's house, he used red (maroon) with yellow stripes, but not because it symbolizes



Figure 16: doors' color.

luck. According to him, he is copying the color of his daughter's "The Nanyang Primary School" in Singapore. For him, school (Nanyang Primary School) as the first place people (his daughter) study Chinese culture and Chinese language. He uses this color to remind him that people have to dig their own root. The original color was green Tosca (see bedroom photo).



Figure 17: Back side doors' color.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

This research focused on one current Indonesian Chinese *peranakan* dwelling. Similar study related to *peranakan* Chinese houses most researches will refer to Dutch colonial era heritage buildings with Indische Empires styles expansive mansions, with the extravagance of Chinese traditional symbolic elements on them. The styles and details are repetitively like using a fixed template. The furnishings usually are specific custom made as a complete set for each manor, with complicated ornaments related to Chinese culture.

With this case study, the conclusions are the contemporary owner (Chinese *peranakan*) has wider national and overseas vocabulary references, the building was renovated to suit the owner's taste with his private reinterpretation of traditional culture and style into an eclectic architectural style. Although the owner is a very keen observer of Chinese traditional culture, from private discussion; shows his interest in Chinese classical literature, Chinese music instruments, calligraphy, Chinese traditional poems, Chinese painting, and the family owns a traditional Chinese tea cafe in Jakarta at Glodok



*Pecinan* Area, but the furnishing and collections are multicultural.

Revitalize is to evoke memories of the past / recall the past. The owner has wide interest in cultural vocabulary (local, Chinese, other nations) that influence his style choice for collections (modern furniture, European classic furniture, Balinese sculptures, Javanese handcrafts). His passions in Chinese traditional culture are shown on the detailed design of hand carved wooden lattice folding panels. He collected Chinese antiques furniture, applying Chinese traditional patterns and folklore on building ornaments. He did not try to copy the characteristics of Chinese houses from the past (such as literature write about Chinese 4 side courtyard (*siheyuan* 四合院), traditional curved roofs, dragon decorations, Chinese red yellow color, as red luck of Chinese Culture) but rearranged Chinese-ness based on his experience as Chinese living in Indonesia (his favorite “Three Kingdom” comics during his childhood, Red Lantern Film), with Indonesian culture and insight into global culture.

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