

THE BATAVIAN EASTERN RAILWAY CO.  
AND THE MAKING OF A NEW "DAERAH"  
AS REFLECTED IN A COMMEMORATIVE SYAIR  
WRITTEN BY TAN TENG KIE (1890)\*

Claudine Salmon

The Indonesian Chinese produced, as I have said elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> a literature in Malay spanning about ninety years from the 1870s to the 1960s, the quantity of which is overwhelming, when compared with the few attempts these writers made in Chinese in newspaper supplements and, more rarely, in book form. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, no fictional work has been traced which may be attributed with certainty to an Indonesian Chinese writer. Up to that time, these authors' works consisted exclusively of translations from the Chinese—especially traditional fiction<sup>2</sup>—and of poems—*syair* and *pantun*. These descendants of *totok* or *Peranakan* Chinese appear to have had a pronounced taste for Malay classical literature and to have been familiar with the fashionable genres. Between 1886 and 1910 over forty *syair* by twenty-seven authors appeared in book form, not to mention the countless poems published in the local press. The *syair* form was so common that it was even used to write personal letters, love letters, or even open letters to the press.<sup>3</sup>

Taken as a whole, a wide variety of *syair* were produced consisting of: adaptations of prose works; stories in a moralizing vein; works intended as pure entertainment; and accounts of contemporary events. This last category is valuable for anyone interested in the *histoire des mentalités*,<sup>4</sup> for these poems provide an insight into the way people experienced great events punctuating their everyday life. The oldest such poem that I have been able to trace which may be attributed to a *Peranakan* writer was printed in Batavia in 1871. Entitled *Sair kedatangan Sri Maharadja Siam di Betawi* or "Poem on the Visit of the Great King of Siam to Batavia," it commemo-

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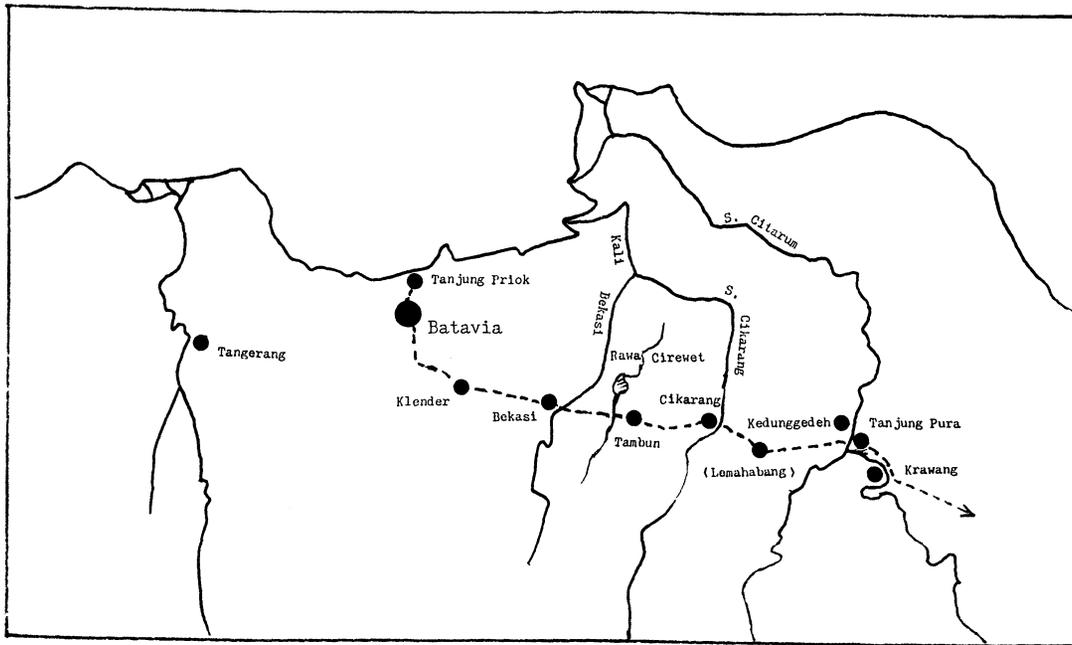
\* This article is based on a paper presented at the Sixth European Colloquium on Indonesian and Malay Studies (ECIMS), The Daerah—Past and Present, June 22–27, 1987, at the Department of Southeast Asia Studies, University of Passau, West Germany.

1. Claudine Salmon, *Literature in Malay by the Chinese of Indonesia: A Provisional Annotated Bibliography* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Etudes insulindiennes—Archipel 3, 1981).

2. Cf. Claudine Salmon, "Translations of Chinese Fiction in Indonesia," in *Literary Migrations: Traditional Chinese Fiction in Asia (17th–20th Centuries)*, ed. C. Salmon (Beijing: International Publishing Corporation, forthcoming), pp. 375ff.

3. Such was the case in 1891 when Boen Sing Hoo, the author of a satirical *syair* on the opium farmers wrote a *surat kiriman sair* in order to ask a relative of his who was indirectly criticized in the poem for permission to reprint it; after he received this permission he wrote another poem to express his thanks.

4. Or "history of the mentalities," one trend of French historiography.



1. Route of the Eastern Railway Line Linking Batavia to Kedunggedé, 1890.

### DJOEROESAN BATAWI -- KEDOENG-GEDÉ

<i>Datang dari</i> Prijoek	6.8	7.10	*8.13	9.18	*10.18	*11.28	12.38	*2.33	—	4.18	—	5.40
Batawi . . . . . B.	6.30	7.15	*8.23	9.26	*10.25	11.38	12.48	2.47	*3.26	*4.33	5.2	5.47
Kemajoran . . . B.	6.41	7.25	*8.34	9.37	*10.36	11.49	12.59	2.58	*3.37	*4.44	5.12	5.58
Pasar-Senen . . B.	6.47	7.30	*8.40	9.43	*10.42	11.55	1.5	3.4	*3.42	*4.50	5.18	6.5
Mestèr . . . . . (D.	6.57	7.39	*8.50	9.53	*10.52	12.5	1.15	3.14	*3.52	*5.—	5.27	6.15
. . . . . B.	7.—	—	—	9.58	—	12.10	—	3.19	—	—	—	—
Kelèndèr . . . . B.	7.9	—	—	10.7	—	12.19	—	3.28	—	—	—	—
Tjakoeng . . . . B.	7.21	—	—	10.19	—	12.31	—	3.40	—	—	—	—
Kerandji . . . . B.	7.28	—	—	10.26	—	12.38	—	3.47	—	—	—	—
Bekasi . . . . . (D.	7.31	—	—	10.32	—	12.44	—	3.53	—	—	—	—
. . . . . B.	7.39	—	—	10.39	—	12.51	—	4.—	—	—	—	—
Tambon . . . . . B.	7.53	—	—	10.55	—	1.10	—	4.16	—	—	—	—
Tjikarang . . . . B.	8.12	—	—	11.16	—	1.31	—	4.37	—	—	—	—
Kedoeng-Gedé . D.	8.37	—	—	11.41	—	1.56	—	5.2	—	—	—	—

Kerèta-kerèta jang bertanda \* itoe djika hari Ahad dan hari raja tjada di djalankeu.

B ertinja Berangkat. D. ertinja Datang.

2. One of the two time-tables published with the syair.

rates the first official visit of King Chulalongkorn to Java in May 1871.<sup>5</sup> These *syair* may record events in the world of the Europeans, such as the celebration of the silver wedding of the (Dutch) Resident of Ambon commemorated by Abdul Karim Tjiat (1890), Prince Frederik Hendrik's visit to Ambon by Ang I Tong (1890), or the arrival of the Russian Crown Prince in Batavia by Tan Teng Kie (1891). They may also describe events affecting the indigenous population, such as the death of Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore related by Na Tian Piet (1896) or the stay in Semarang of the Susuhunan of Solo in June 1903 by an anonymous writer. Events concerning the Indonesian Chinese in particular, such as the foundation of the *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan* celebrated by Tjia Ki Siang (1905) or the arrival in Java of a Chinese naval squadron recounted by T.B.H. (1907), also appear in *syair*.<sup>6</sup>

The *syair* discussed in this article is unusual because it deals with the opening of a new railway line linking Batavia to Kedunggede near Krawang, an event which had a tremendous impact on the social and economic life of this micro area famous for its rice production.<sup>7</sup> The poem is entitled *Sj'air djalanan kréta api ja'itoe Bata-viasche oosterspoorweg dengan personeelnja bij gelengenheid van de opening de lijn Tjikarang-Kedung-gede bezongen oleh Tan Teng Kie* or "Poem on the Batavian Eastern Railway and its Staff on the Occasion of the Opening of the Cikarang-Kedung-gede Line Sung by T.T.K."<sup>8</sup> We know very little about the author, who apparently was a merchant or a contractor based in Batavia and Bekasi. Judging from the detailed reports on the construction of the railway provided in his poem, one may assume that he did work for the Eastern Railway Company. He clearly had a good command of Dutch, for the last part of the poem has a few verses written half in Malay and half in Dutch.<sup>9</sup> He was also well versed in Malay literature, having himself composed several *syair*, and was an avid reader of classical *hikayat*.<sup>10</sup> We do not

5. Cf. Claudine Salmon and Denis Lombard, "Le poème en malais d'un *peranakan* sur la visite du roi Chulalongkorn à Batavia en 1871," *Archipel* 22 (1981): 133-66.

6. Cf. Claudine Salmon, "Le *sjair* de l'Association chinoise' de Batavia (1905)," *Archipel* 2 (1971): 55-100; Claudine Salmon and Denis Lombard, "A propos de la visite à Java d'une escadre chinoise en 1907," *Archipel* 33 (1987): 79-115.

7. For a study of its present state, see Jean Couteau, "Production et commercialisation du riz dans la région de Krawang-Bekasi," *Archipel* 9 (1975): 155-70.

8. The original poem consists of 99 stanzas (pp. 1-20); an addendum of 19 lines (pp. 21-24) was apparently composed for the publication in which the author wrote a few lines in praise of the publisher.

9. Such as these lines (p. 22):

"Adakah toewan soedah vernomen?	"Mister, have you been informed?
Sigera kita orang ke-Krawang stoomen	We are 'steaming' to Krawang right now
Sijapa kira 't zoover zou komen	Who could have imagined it would go so far
Sijapa dahaeloe 't had durven droomen!"	Who could have dared to dream of it before!"

10. At the end of the *Sj'air djalanan kréta api* Tan Teng Kie published a request addressed to the editor, in which he said that the *Hikayat Sultan Ibrahim* was greatly appreciated among the *Peranakan* but since it was only available in Jawi, very few *Peranakan* could read it; even adding that someone had read it to him. He called for the *Hikayat* to be transliterated into Latin script and published, which was done that same year. The text of his request reads as follows:

"Kepada Toewan Editor,  
Chabarnja *Hikajat Soeltan Ibrahim* itoe lakoe sekali dan terlaloe soeka orang membatja dija. Sajang letter Arab djadi orang Tjina tijada kebaha-

know when Tan Teng Kie started to write. The *Sja'ir djalanan kréta api* which was published in book form in December 1890 is the oldest *syair* we know of. It was reprinted as early as January 1891 by a Dutchman, very likely of German origin, Alex Regensburg, whose firm was based in Senin and who was also an interpreter and a publisher of Malay texts.<sup>11</sup> In addition to his *syair* commemorating the visit of the Russian prince in Batavia mentioned above, which was printed together with an edifying poem about wild animals of the jungle, he also wrote a "Poem on the Flowers," "*Sair Kembang*" (1898) with each verse depicting a different flower, which had no other pretension than to amuse its readers. From what has been said above, one may get an insight into the mental world of Tan Teng Kie. He was well rooted in Malay culture and very much enjoyed writing poems,<sup>12</sup> but at the same time, thanks to his knowledge of Dutch and his contacts with Dutch civil servants and businessmen, he was ready to accept the changes in economic activity which accompanied the introduction of the railway to his country.

Many studies and reports in Dutch deal with the history of the railways in the colony,<sup>13</sup> but to the best of our knowledge few discuss the reception of this new mode of transport among the local population. Some brief comments are to be found here and there, such as those by Purwa Lelana in his travels through Java (c. 1860–1875).<sup>14</sup> For the nineteenth century, Tan Teng Kie's poem is the only text in Malay exclusively devoted to the railway that I have thus far been able to trace. It was written twenty years after the opening of the first railway line in Java, linking Semarang to the Principalities, which caused much controversy among the Dutch,<sup>15</sup> and six years after the contract for the construction of the Batavia–Krawang railway had been granted to a private concessionaire, the Batavian Eastern Railway Company, by a decision of the colonial government. The first segment of the line, from Batavia to Bekasi, was completed in the mid-1880s, and Tan Teng Kie in his poem deals with the second phase of the project: the extension of the line eastwards toward Krawang, which in 1867 had been promoted to the rank of a Residency.

A glance at the map will remind us that this large rice-farming area had not been penetrated by the *Groote Postweg* built at the beginning of the last century. Though there was a road linking Krawang to Batavia through Cikarang, Tambun, and Bekasi, rice for the capital was transported by boat along the coast. Consequently,

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gian membatja. Begitoe djoega orang soeda batjakan saja hikajat itoe dan saja dan laijn orang teman saja sampaij sedih mendengerkan tjeritanja. Haraplah dengan beberapa harap toewan editor menjalin dija, soepaja lekas di tjtak dan di keloewarken dija dengan letter Belanda. Lajijn tijada saja poenja tabik dan hormat. Saja jang rendah, Tan Teng Kie."

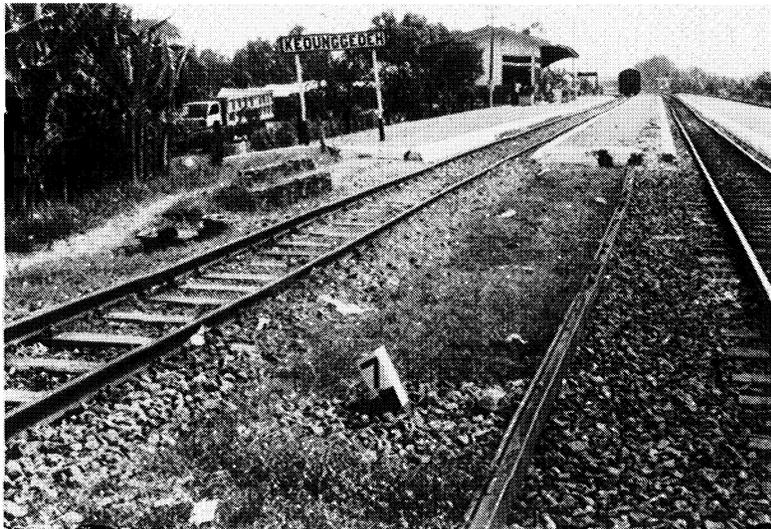
11. His firm bore the name of Regina–Orientalis and specialized in publishing Asian literature (Uitgeverskantoor hoofdzakelijk voor oostersche literatur).

12. As he writes in his *Sair kembang*: "Doedoek mengarang iseng–isengan . . . Soeka sendiri hendak berpoesingan" or "Seated I write relaxing . . . I like to rack my brains."

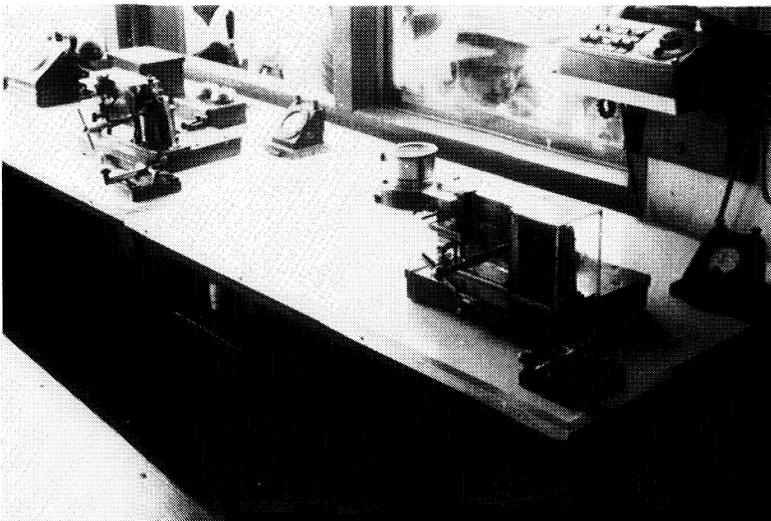
13. For an overview of the history of the development of the railway in the Dutch Indies, see S. A. Reitsma, *Staatsspoor en tramwegen in Nederlandsch–Indië 1875–6 April 1925* (Weltebreden: Topographische Inrichting, 1925).

14. Marcel Bonneff, *Péréginations javanaises—Les voyages de R.M.A. Lelana: une vision de Java au XIXe siècle (c. 1860–1875)* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Etudes insulindiennes–Archipel 7, 1986), pp. 90, 99, and 152.

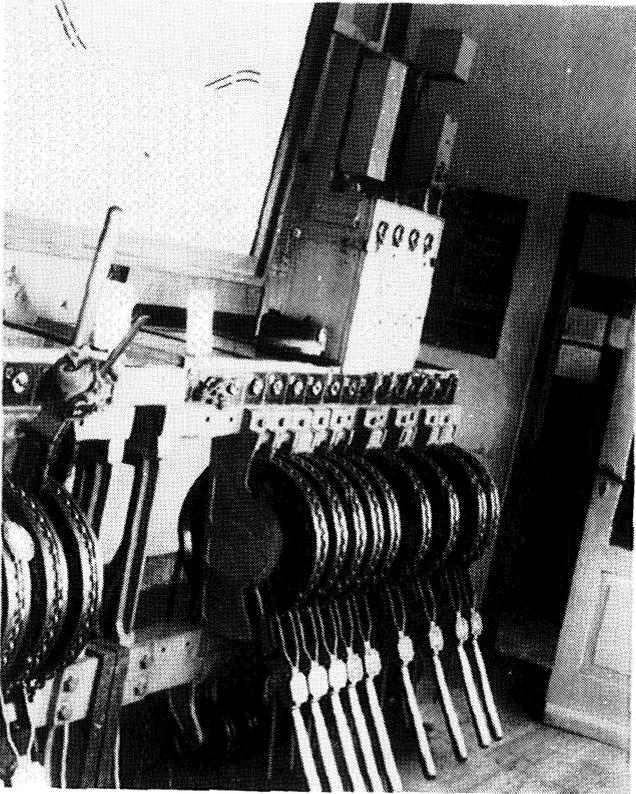
15. Cf. J. P. de Bordes, *De Spoorweg Samarang–Vorstenlanden* (The Hague, 1870); V. J. H. Houben, "Kraton en Kumpani: Surakarta en Yogyakarta 1830–1870" (PhD dissertation, University of Leiden, April 1987), p. 318.



3, 4. Views of the station of Kedunggede (photo C. D. Grijns, 1987).



5. The telegraph which may date from the foundation of the station (photo C. D. Grijns, 1987).



6. Shunting station which may well be the original one (photo C. D. Grijns, 1987).



7. The Chimney of Kedunggede rice-mill built in 1883 (photo C. D. Grijns, 1987).

settlements and rice mills were clustered along the rivers, especially the Citarum. Another peculiarity of this area was its large number of big "landlords" or *tuan tanah*, as they are called in the *syair*, among whom were many persons of Chinese origin; usually they also owned the rice mills. A novel written in 1924 by Tan Kim Sen contains a splendid description of the residence of one of the richest *tuan tanah* of Kedunggede at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Located close to the Sungai Citarum, the rear of the house offered a view of the traffic on the river; at the same time its location was high enough to prevent damage from the frequent floods. The house itself was designed in the most refined Chinese style and surrounded by a beautiful garden:

Kaloe orang liat potongannja gedong itoe, orang lantas bisa doega bahoera orang jang berdiriken itoe tentoe ada saorang hartawan besar. Di depan sampe ka blakang, gedong itoe ada mempoenjai loteng dengan lankan-lankan jang berkembang. Kendati di bagian sebelah depan orang tida bisa dapet pemandangan soeatoe apa jang indah dari atas loteng, aken tetapi dari loteng sabelah belakng orang bisa dapet pemandangan loewas pada apa jang kadjadian di kali Tjitaroem. Kaloe kali itoe bandjir besar, sedang roemah-roemah di sakitemja telah kelelep dan anjoet, gedong ini jang berdiri di atas tanah tinggi, tinggal slamat. Itoe pekarangan lebar jang terkoeroeng oleh tembok, roepanja ada bekas satoe taman jang indah, kema sampe sekarang masih ada toemboeh poehoen-poehoen kembang tjoelan, rose, kenanga, siantan dan kemoening, jang sekarang soeda djadi tinggi kema toewanja (. . .)

Kapan orang masoek ka dalem itoe gedong di roewangan jang pertama orang nanti dapetken satoe medja aboe leloehoer jang soeda djadi penoeh dengan hiohwee-hiohwee dari bebrapa toeroenan. Di atas tembok pada pinggiran kiri kanan dari roewangan itoe orang bisa liat lian-lian jang menoetoepi penoeh saanteronja tembok itoe, sabagian besar lian itoe soeda sobek atawa abis dimakan koetoe, tapi tinggal teroes tergantoeng, kema tida saorang jang openin itoe. Di dalem itoe roewangan ada terhias dengan korsi-korsi dan medja-medja haksioe-ie jang di ini djeman soeda djadi barang koeno. . . . (pp. 3-4)<sup>17</sup>

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16. Tan Kim Sen, *Saorang hartawan jang sial dangkalan* [A wealthy man who was extremely unlucky] (Batavia: Prohibitias, 1924).

17. "On seeing the style of the building one can immediately guess that the person who built it was indeed a very wealthy man. The house has an upper floor extending from front to rear, with balconies burgeoning out. From upstairs at the front, one can't get any view at all, but from the back balcony there is an extensive panorama of everything going on on the river Citarum. If the river floods, while the houses alongside are submerged and swept away, this building, standing on higher ground, remains safe. It has a wide yard, enclosed by a wall, which was formerly apparently a beautiful garden, for even now trees still flourish (aglaia, rose, kenanga, angsoka, and kemuning) now grown high because of their age. . . .

"On entering the building, in the first room one comes on an altar table for ancestral ashes, which has become full of the ashes from the joss sticks of successive generations. One can see covering the right and left walls of the room scrolls with antithetical inscriptions, most of which are torn or eaten out by bugs, but left hanging there because there is no one to look after them. Inside, the room is still fitted out with chairs, tables, and armchairs which by now have already become antiques."

According to our colleague, Mr. C. D. Grijns who was kind enough to revisit Kedunggede in August 1987 and take several pictures for us, the landowner's residence

Not far from the house was the rice mill which was run by a relative of the owner, who with his family and other employees lived close by.

Tan Teng Kie tells the story of the construction of the railway in a very realistic way. He presents first the surveying, then the recruitment of coolies and the company's organization of the labor force, the recourse to contractors for some special tasks, the functioning of the line, and finally the economic impact it had on the whole area.

#### *Preparations for the Construction of the Line*

Tan Teng Kie omits the decisions at the administrative level, for questions of financing the project and of purchasing the imported locomotives and other equipment were exclusively the concern of the Dutch policy makers. He is more interested in the preliminary work conducted on the spot, which he saw with his own eyes. He starts his poem by saying that "the railway line up to Bekasi has been opened with the permission of the landlords" ("Kreta api boeka djalan Bekasi/ Sama Toewan tanah dengan permissi"). This simple remark, which may sound a bit strange for the time, is nevertheless very significant. It means that the Eastern Railway Company was not faced with problems of social disturbance. The company assessed and reimbursed villagers and landowners for any damages:

Maskapij bjarin orang kampoennja,  
Apa jang soedah keroesakannja  
Keloewar ongkos dengan sepatootnja,  
Jang mana kena di oekoernja. (p. 2)

The Company indemnified the villagers,  
Whatever had been destroyed  
Was paid properly,  
What had suffered damage was assessed.

One Dutch employee, a certain Calona, had the task of estimating the damages caused to the population, hence his name of *djoeroe taksir*. He moved along the path the track would follow, keeping account of the trees which had to be felled, the houses which had to be pulled down, and the paddy lands and gardens which the company needed to acquire. He is described as someone very clever who always does his work excellently ("Orangnja pinter dengan sempoema/ Kerdjanja radjin amat bergoena").

As a matter of fact the surveyors, here called *toewan keker* (from the Dutch *kijker*, "spectator"), were faced with more difficulties as regards the terrain to be traversed by the railway line. They had to balance the cost of construction against the annual maintenance and operating costs. The main problem was that of bridging the three big rivers. Tan dwells on the difficulties they presented: the Kali Bekasi, he says, is as wide as an estuary ("Kali Bekasi seperti moewara"). The engineers had to calculate the precise location of the bridges. Another thorny problem was that the track had to cross several swampy areas, the most dangerous being the Rawa Cirewet: "Its waters are so deep, once in a while a person can disappear in them" ("Rawa Tjirewet ajernja dalam/ Djarang orang boleh menjilam").

#### *Recruitment of the Coolies and Organization of the Work*

As was the case with the first line constructed in Central Java, labor had to be brought from elsewhere. Tan does not provide much information on how the coolies were recruited. The main force apparently consisted of Bantenese who had

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is now in ruins. The only remnant is the chimney of the rice mill which dates from 1883 (see illustration 7).

considerable experience as laborers working under European overseers and who were already used to hard work:

<p>Orang Banten pada koeli'an Kerdja lama soedah kebi'asa'an, Apa keprentah bendera toewan, Mengerti dija soedah ketentoe'an." (p. 2)</p>	<p>The Bantenese were hired as coolies For they were accustomed to long hours of work, Whatever the order given by the boss's flag They understood it, that's for sure.</p>
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But there were also coolies from other parts of Java, especially from Cianjur. They were paid once a week and apparently their wages were all the same, unlike the wages of the coolies who constructed the first railway line:

<p>Hari sabtoe koeli gadji'an, Bajarnja betoel dengan sekali'an, Rata terbajar tijada berbéda'an, Tijada soewatoepoen jang kesalahan. (p. 12)<sup>18</sup></p>	<p>On Saturdays the coolies were paid, The amount was correct, in one lump sum, Their wages were equal without any difference And without a single mistake.</p>
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How the work was organized is not always very clear. Soldiers had been brought in and were settled with their families along the track, probably in order to control the coolies as well as to protect the work sites against vandalism:

<p>Teroes (Lie) Boelong ke-Tandjoeng-poera, Banjak bawa bala tentara, Sekali'an anak bini soedara Ikoet sama-sama djalan sengsara. (p. 12)</p>	<p>Directly (Lie) Boloeng brought to Tanjung Pura Many of the military forces, At the same time child, wife, and relative Joined in treading this road of misery.</p>
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Native contractors, some from as far away as Surabaya, took on part of the clearing work, it seems:

<p>Mandor besarnja bernama Da'èra, Kerdja teroes sampè ke-Tandjoeng-poera, Soerabaja itoe dija poenja negara, Sekali'an datang sanaknja dan soedara. (p. 8)</p>	<p>The upper foreman was called Da'èra, He oversaw up to Tanjung Pura, Surabaya was his native place, From where also came his children and relatives</p>
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Their task was to supervise the coolies who cut down the trees and the bushes and who leveled the terrain, sometimes filling in the paddy fields, sometimes digging where it was necessary to level the track bed. Other workers constructed the bridges under supervision of Dutch engineers. Finally after the track bed had been well aligned on both the horizontal and vertical planes, the cross-ties, ballast, and rails were carried along the track in a work train:

<p>Moewatin rèl bawa mengétan Sarat isinja dengan moewatan, Orang koeli datang berselaboetan, Moekanja hitam seperti sétan.</p> <p>Moewat balok serta karang Krèta api tarik ke-Tjikarang Koeli soerak dengan girang, Sampè tijada dapat di larang. (pp. 7-8)</p>	<p>The freight of rails was carried east, The cargo was full to the brim, The coolies came in great confusion, Their faces black as devils.</p> <p>Cargo of beams and coral, The train hauled to Cikarang, The coolies cheered in merriment, One could not forbid them to do so.</p>
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The coolies then began to lay the rails. These various tasks were difficult and sometimes also very dangerous. Several accidents occurred during the construction. Tan records at least four cases which he happened to witness. The first occurred during the filling of the swamp of Cirewet and ended with the death of a coolie; by way of explanation Tan merely says:

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18. V. J. H. Houben reports that after having been paid per day of work the coolies were finally paid piece rates; but in both cases there were differences of rates according to the different categories of work ("Kraton en Kumpani," p. 319).

Koeli kerdja'in rawa itoe  
Oeroek tanah pasir dan batoe,  
Ada jang mati koelinja satoe,  
Kelanggar salat si sètan itoe. (p. 10)

The coolies working in that swamp  
Filled it in with sand and stones,  
One coolie from among them died  
That devil had forgot his prayers.

which may well be a means to avoid relating the actual cause of the accident. The three other accidents, one where a coolie broke his elbow, another where a worker had his fingers crushed under a rail, and a third where one fell off a bridge, are presented as resulting from the inattention or even the negligence of the coolies themselves.

### Cooperation of the Landlords

Apart from the various tasks under the direct supervision of the company, many others were entrusted to local Chinese contractors, and maybe Tan Teng Kie was one of these, since for a time he resided in Bekasi. We learn for instance from his *syair* that the Captain of Bekasi, Tan Kang le (appointed on June 15, 1882), who was also a big landowner, had contracted with the company to supply bricks, gravel, and sand. He had entrusted a certain Tan Ek Joe, probably a relative, with production of bricks. The latter had built a kiln (*lijo*) in Bekasi not far from the place where he lived:

Baba Tan Ek Joe mendirikan lijonja,  
Di Bekasi djoega tempat tinggalnja,  
Borongin Maskapij batoe batanja,  
Sekali'an kolar dengan pasirnja.

Baba Tan Ek Joe built his kiln,  
Bekasi was also the place he lived;  
He contracted with the Company for the supply  
of bricks  
As well as that of gravel and sand.

Jang pegang lijo nama Tan Ek Joe,  
Tinggalnja dekat roemah Bokajoe,  
Orang kampoeng mendjoewalin kajoe,  
Poehoen tertembang jang mana lajoe.

The kiln's owner was called Tan Ek Joe,  
He lived close to Auntie's house,  
The villagers sold him lumber,  
Felled trees which were now deceased.

Pekerdja'an lijo kapitan serahkan,  
Kongsinja Tan Ek Joe tinggalkan,  
Oentoeng roegi tijada hinaken,  
Bakar tjitakan Ek Joe pahamken. (p. 8)

Work on the kiln the captain delegated,  
Tan Ek Joe abandoned his kongsi,  
Profit or loss there was no humiliation,  
Ek Joe knew how to make bricks.

Although information about recruitment of the workers is lacking, very interesting details appear about control of the work. All the workers' names were listed in a book, and every day they had to report to the clerk or *djoeroe toelis*, while an overseer or *tjintèng* watched them so that no one could get away with anything.

Boedjang kerdja di masoekken boekoe,  
Kepada djoeroe toelis misti mengakoe,  
Sabab tjintèng doedoek di bankoe,  
Boedjangnja tijada boléh selingkoe. (p. 9)<sup>19</sup>

The workers' names were listed in the book,  
They had to give these to the clerk,  
With the overseer sitting on the bench  
The workers were unable to cheat.

A certain Lie Boelong contracted to deliver all the *damar* or resin needed to prepare the torches and oil lamps which were used by the workers at night. A third contractor, Boen Kwee, from Tambun supplied the company with the required ballast. Some even opened short segments of road. Such was the case in Tambun where the landowner Li Kim Lin assumed responsibility for construction of the road leading to the station.

19. *Lijo*, *kongsi*, and *tjintèng* are the only terms of Chinese origin to be found in this *syair*.

But in so doing he made sure that it passed close to his rice granary ("Toewan tanahnja bersoeka hati/ Kongsi goedangnja kréta dekati"). Without a doubt, the *tuan tanah* saw in the construction of the railway a means to expand their economic activities.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Line, Its Stations, Employees, and Traffic*

Tan Teng Kie does not say much about the construction of the stations for which the bricks had been produced. These buildings must have seemed very modern to the local population; each was provided with toilets, which were of course a novelty ("Dimana station di bikin kakos"). Speaking of the station of Cikarang which had just been completed, Tan says that next to the station itself was a house, and the whole compound was protected by guards. The stations were under the control of Dutch stationmasters: accommodation was provided for them and their families. The machinists and locomotive engineers were apparently indigenous people. To the great surprise of our writer all employees of the company from the top down had been recruited after they had passed an examination. Unlike the coolies, who were paid once a week, employees who had been hired on a permanent basis received their wages monthly. The company had issued labor regulations and employees who transgressed them might lose their jobs. Here Tan gives an amusing example. Humorously he writes:

Di Tjikarang itoe ramé dagangan,  
Tetapi ajer ada koerangan,  
Kalow ahoes minoem sopi djangan,  
Sabab itoe melanggar larangan.

Dahoeloe chefnja ahoes keliwat  
Itoe sababnja di soeroeh berangkat,  
Kijasnja: djika minoem ajertèh ta'koewat  
Di Tjikarang djangan ingin pangkat. (p. 24)

In Cikarang business is brisk,  
But there is a shortage of drinking water;  
If you are thirsty don't drink *sopi*<sup>21</sup>  
Because it is an infraction of the rules.

Formerly the stationmaster was very thirsty,  
Because of that he was asked to leave.  
The moral is: if you don't feel strong from  
drinking tea,  
Don't expect to be promoted in Cikarang.

At the opening of the line there were eleven stations both for passengers and goods. Moreover Tan refers to another small station, called Lemahabang, which does not appear on the maps but which seems to have been located between Cikarang and Kedunggede. This halt was used only to take on rice ("Di Lemahabang ada station satoe/ Gampang beras naijk disitoe"). We know from the two time-tables which are published along with the *syair* (see plate 2) that there were four trains every day (except Sundays and public holidays) in each direction. It took about two hours and twenty minutes to travel from Tanjung Priok (the new harbor of Batavia) to Kedunggede.<sup>22</sup>

20. The recourse to private contractors for the construction of the railway was apparently very common at the time. Interesting data regarding the carrier of the *totok* Chinese contractor Ho Tjong An (born near Canton in 1841) who was entrusted the clearing work for the line Rembang-Blora-Cepu are to be found in Liok An Tjoe, "Satoe aannemer kreta api Tionghoa," *Sin Po* (weekly), October 21, 1939, pp. 10-15.

21. From the Dutch *zoopsche*: plain gin or even sweet liqueur.

22. Reproduced above (plates 3, 4, 5, 6), courtesy of Mr. C. D. Grijns, are four pictures of the station of Kedunggede as it stood in 1987.

*Impact on the Area*

Since the *syair* was written just after the line was opened, we cannot expect the writer to give us a complete picture of the social and economic consequences of the introduction of the railway in this area. However, it is quite clear that the main beneficiaries were the landlords, who for the first time had a form of overland transportation that was fast, relatively inexpensive, little affected by weather conditions, and capable of moving large quantities of rice. The satisfaction of the *tuan tanah* is well expressed in the following lines:

Tamboen Tjikarang ada stationnja,  
Disitoe tempat djoewal kartjijnja,  
Toewan-tanah hatinja girang semoewanja,  
Sebab beras moedah milimja.

Doeloe beras moewat di sampan,  
Moewat sarat perahoenja papan,  
Sijang dan malam boewat harapan  
Boléh sampé koetika kapan.

Djikalaw belajar harapken angin,  
Itoe toewan tanah poenja kepingin,  
Sijang dan malam boewat pikiran  
Takoet keleboeh jang di selempangin.

Krèta api itoe tijada selempang,  
Orang ta'oesah toeroet menoempang,  
Djalan lempang tijada menjimpang,  
Tijada chawatir dengannja gampang.

Tambun and Cikarang have stations,  
Where the travelers may purchase tickets.  
All the landowners are overjoyed  
Because rice flows away easily.

Previously rice was shipped,  
Sampans and wooden boats were loaded,  
Night and day full of hope,  
The landowners were wondering when they  
would arrive.

If it were a sailing-ship, they hoped for wind,  
Such was the desire of the landowners;  
Night and day lost in thought  
Afraid lest the ship may sink.

With the train there's nothing to fear,  
No need to accompany the freight,  
The line is straight without deviating,  
With the train there is no worry, it is easy.

(pp. 14-15)

Although Tan Teng Kie does not say anything about the price of the tickets, it appears that the common people could afford to take the train. We know from other sources that the first railway line, five years after its construction carried almost 900,000 passengers annually. This must have meant a greater mobility among the populace and a chance for smugglers and thieves to move more easily. This last point is touched on briefly by Tan Teng Kie. Speaking of the landlord of Tambun, who has opened the road to the station and whose rice storehouse was close to it, he comments: "What will he get in return? The fear of seeing his servants sell his rice."<sup>23</sup> As a matter of fact, a novel written in 1930 but set at the end of the nineteenth century, describes how a servant who had stolen his master's money and two outlaws who are smuggling *trasi* in turn take the train from Cicalengka (then the eastern terminal) in the direction of Bandung, and escape the local police who are chasing them.<sup>24</sup>

If the construction of the railway line was seen as an improvement by the landlords and the merchants, at the same time its consequences were badly resented by the boatmen and the carriers, who had previously shared the transport of goods within the area. They suffered because the established freight quickly shifted to the new railroad. Tan Teng Kie, who wrote his *syair* in praise of the railway, does

23. "Toewan tanah Tamboen nama Li Kim Lin,  
Djalan station soedah di betoelin,  
Apa perkara djoeragan timpalin,  
Slumpang beras boedjang djoewalin." (p. 13)

24. Thio Tjien Boen, "Bardjo" in *Tjerita Novel* (Bandung), October 1930, pp. 34-35, 63-64.

not really discuss the economic consequences that may result. How many transport workers had lost their jobs? How many new job opportunities had been created? What was the attitude of unemployed boatmen and coolies? Did they try to protest? Tan does not provide a comprehensive answer to these questions. But there are a few hints here and there which prove that he was well aware of these problems. He notes that in Bekasi the construction of a bridge for heavy traffic had greatly affected transportation on the river and that the number of ferry-boats had dramatically decreased ("erètannja bèda banjak koerangan"). As regards Tambun and Cikarang, he makes the following remarks:

Saja kira kahar koerangan,  
Sebab tijada ada tambangan,  
Toekang roempoet djoega kebinoengan,  
Karena koeda ada djarangan. (p. 4)

I think that the buggies are less numerous  
Because there are neither passengers nor loads;  
The grasscutters too are worried  
Because horses are becoming scarce.

Nevertheless, for Tan Teng Kie this new type of technological unemployment was not a possible cause of social disturbance. We should not forget that the construction of the railway was carried out under the constant surveillance of troops, the stations were controlled by guards, and the railway line was fenced to prevent people from crossing the track.

Pasang poehoen pagernja kawat,  
Poehoenja tgoeh sertanja koewat,  
Lihat dja'oeh djalannja sawat,  
Soepaja orang djangan berliwat. (p. 4)

Stakes and wire fence were fixed,  
The former were robust and strong,  
From afar the rail line caught the eye,  
To make sure that the people would not cross  
over it.

Another consequence of the construction of the line was that south-north communications decreased and the area was divided into two parts: the northern section was bypassed by the new network, whereas the southern part became closer to the capital. People like Tan Teng Kie were already commuting between Bekasi and Batavia in the way Dutch civil servants had been commuting between Bogor and the capital since the opening of the railway line there in 1871.<sup>25</sup> Klender and its surroundings became a resort for people living in Batavia, especially for those fond of hunting as we learn from the *syair*:

Djika toewan poelang van de jacht,  
Baijk met baijk zonder wild bevracht,  
Tjadaken toewan immer of nooit gedacht,  
Wat wonder U te Klendèr wacht. (p. 23)

When you come back from hunting,  
Loaded with game or not,  
You had never imagined  
What a wonder was waiting for you in Klender.

The use of the train for pure entertainment also developed among local Chinese who could afford it. After the completion of the Batavia-Tangerang line in the 1890s some wealthy *tuan tanah* from Kedunggede used to go by train to Tangerang just to attend the *Pecun* festival.<sup>26</sup>

25. Cf. Bonneff, *Pérégrinations Javanaises*, p. 99.

26. "Merika semoea maoe pergi ka Tangerang boeat nonton pesta petjoen di Benteng. Itoelah soeda djadi marika poenja kabiasaan, aken saban tahun di harian petjoen di Benteng, iaorang berangkat ka ini tempat dan menginep di roemah orang toewanja ia poenja istri, jang kabetoelan belakang roemahnja ada mengadepi kali.

"laorang laloe berangkat dengan itoe kreta toewa, ditarik oleh doea koeda grobak jang tida bisa lari kentjeng. laorang moesti lintasken perdjalanan ampat paal sampe di station Kedung-Gede." Tan Kim Sen, *Saorang hartawan jang sial dangkalan*, pp. 7-8

Tan Teng Kie's positive attitude to the introduction of the railway in his country was shared, as we have seen, by landlords and merchants who expected an increase of their economic activities. They were greatly impressed by the tremendous injection of capital required by the construction and by the apparent facility with which the company financed the project; as Tan writes: "The company financed the expenses satisfactorily" ("Ongkos keloewar tijada ketjewa"). They were also fascinated by the new technology, especially in the construction of bridges. Apparently, they were not really worried by the idea of an increase in the mobility of labor and thought that the temporary economic disruptions at the local level would not endanger the development of the new *daerah*. Their optimism may be explained by the fact that social control of the society was not their problem but that of the Dutch.

In order to get a better picture of how these technological changes were received at the local level, it would be useful to have a look at the Malay newspapers, but this is beyond the scope of the present study. We do know that the exploitation of the line was successful. In 1898 the state took it over and expanded it eastwards in the direction of Cirebon.<sup>27</sup>

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27. I would like to thank Dr. Mary Somers-Heidhues and Dr. Russel Jones who kindly read the first draft of this article and suggested some improvements.