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## A Study of the Chinese Immigrants Housing Heritage at Gedong Village, Bangka Island - Indonesia

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### Abstract

Bangka Island in Indonesia is recognized by the Chinese as mentioned in old documents as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century. Around the 17<sup>th</sup> Century there were large migrations from mainland China into Bangka Island, which was known as one of the largest tin deposits in the world. They came to open tin mining both as owners and also workers, and brought the technology to process the tin. At the time the demand for tin was very high as it is used for incense paper in China and tea packaging in Europe. The Chinese immigrants built their settlements with their own architecture knowledge and skill. These is supported with a very tolerate environment from local residence, where the Chinese are free to conduct their traditions, resulted in a nearly original Chinese architecture. Some of assimilations with local culture did happen. In some cases, there are influences from Dutch colonizer who build houses for Chinese people, who were politically given responsibility as the supervisor of other Chinese worker. One of this type of settlement is Gedong Village, located in Belinyu district which is still exist today, and is being assigned by local government as one of tourist attraction. However, there are no clear business scheme nor subsidized fund from the local government of how to operate and maintain the village and its houses as a tourist attraction. Hence the residence who wants to have better economy conditions left the village to move to bigger cities and most of them the start to sell the houses since the maintenance cost is too high. The purpose of this research is to study the remaining houses as of what cultures influenced the architecture of the residential buildings, and to document to preserve one legacy of Indonesian intangible diaspora culture

**Keywords:** Bangka, Chinese, diaspora, Gedong

### Introduction

Bangka has the biggest tin deposit and is part of *Indonesian tin belt* which span for around 800 km from Bangka Island until the west part of Kalimantan. (Gusnelly, 2016) At the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Kesultanan Palembang (Palembang Kingdom) bring in Chinese people and their mining technology to Bangka to process tin.



**Picture 1. Tin mining in Bangka (Source:<http://mining-2018.info/mining-calculator-zcash/china-tin-mining.php>)**

The Chinese people immigrant mainly came from Guangdong and mostly is Hakka people. They build their settlements near the mines. They brought their way of building houses, both in technique also in space arrangement according to their beliefs. Most of the houses are built from *kayuulin* (ulin wood) which is very hard and dark in appearance. These houses last for a long time and most of them are still exist until today in the arrangement of Chinese villages. In late 17<sup>th</sup> century VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*) which was an early modern megacorporation consist of several Dutch trading company, takeover the mining industry as part of their colonization.

After political turbulence which include the hand over to British in 1812-1816, the Dutch ruled again and taking over all the area which before being managed by the VOC. In the era of Dutch occupancy, they applied indirect rule system, where the Dutch appoint people to held position in various government position in civil administration. Mostly to coordinate their fellowmen. They were being given military ranks like *Kapiten* (Captain), *Mayor* (Major), *Letnan*(Lieutenant), etc. For the Chinese community there were *KapitenCina* (Chinese Captain) or *Mayor Cina* (Chinese Major) amongst other title and positions.

Their residential houses show unique colonial architecture and located in various locations in Bangka Island. Many of the house have “*Indische Empire Style*”. The architecture typology shows huge pillars to create the sense of grandeur expressing the golden age of the Dutch occupancy. Hellen Jessup explained that this style was actually borrowed from the Neo-classic style which at the time was a different style than the style that was thriving in the Netherland at that period (Sumalyo 1993).

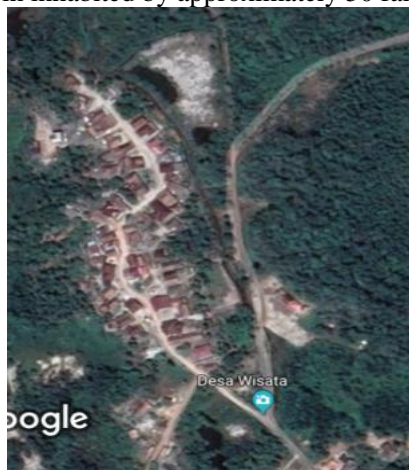


**Picture 2. The house of Chinese Major Tjoeng ATiam at Muntok City (Documentation: Kusbiantoro, K., 1918) KAMPUNG GEDONG (GEDONG VILLAGE)**



**Picture 3. Entrance to Desa Wisata Gedong (Documentation: Kusteja, S, 2018)**

Gedong Village is located at the outer of Belinyu city, is one of the villages where the residents are entirely Chinese descendant from the first wave of migrants at the period of *Kesultanan Palembang*. It is the residential area for the miners. This village is inhabited by approximately 50 families.



**Picture 3. Gedong Village Map (source: left - GOOGLE MAP, right - Sugata, 2008)**

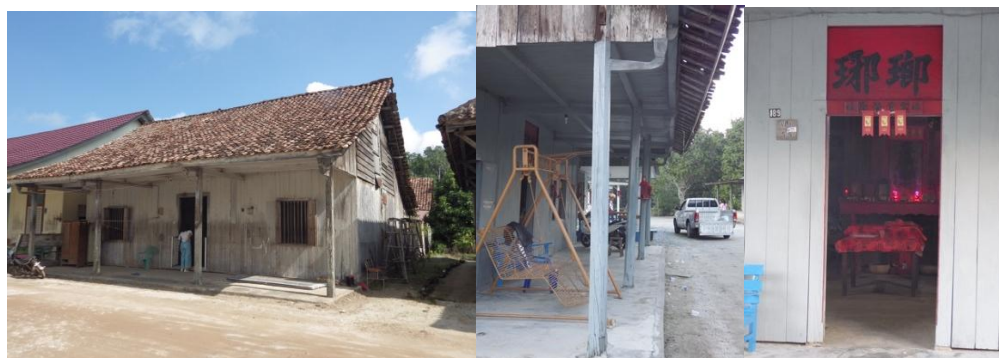
The entrance to the village located at the southern part. On this area there are residential building owned by more prominent persons, *Kapiten Cinaor* merchants who traded as there was a river running alongside the east part of the village. The river had been blocked and redirected to another area since it flooded the village until around 18times a year.



**Picture 4. The Gedong Village Temple at estern part of the village (Documentation: Kustedja, S., 1918)**

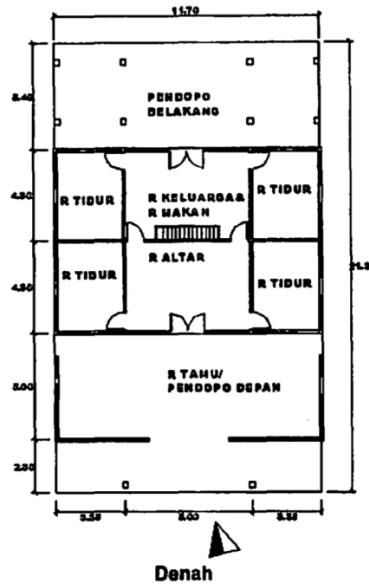
To the northern area of the village the houses owned by people whose profession were mostly miners but some of them were also fisherman. As per interview, many of the houses were built at the early of 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The houses are built of *ulin* wood structures and the walls also from *ulin* planks which installed vertically. It is very strong and last for a long time. Most of the houses are in the authentic original form. Realizing these buildings as potential heritage objects, in the year of 2001, the government declared the village as one of Bangka's tourism destination or *desawisata*.



**Picture 5. Chinese residential houses (Documentation: Kusbiantoro, K, 2018)**

The houses are built-in Chinese construction techniques and directives as could be seen in the structures; as Hakka architecture which emphasizes on function with less ornaments. Mostly within a square and symmetrical lay out, which depict Yin Yang balance and orderly flow of Chi. (Hua, 1998). Most of them have a small terrace in the front of the house, with one entrance in the middle and two windows which positioned symmetrically. Entering the front door, there is common room with an altar in between two doors and two rooms at each side. The doors lead to the inner room where we usually find a stair to the attic. In this inner room, there are another two rooms in each side. At the furthest wall there is a door leading to the back garden and service area. Some of them still have an inner court or the *skywell*. But for smaller house the back area is finished on the back terrace. This layout is similar with the typical layout from houses in Chinese Village located in Lasem, Java Island.



Picture 6. A typical Chinese House Lay out of SigitWicaksono in Lasem (Source:Darmawan, D.,2012)



Picture 7. Interior of the residential building (Documentation: Kusbiantoro, K. 2018)

Unfortunately although the village had been declared as one of the tourism destinations, the government does not support by any clear program on how the village should be managed, and empowered the people to maintain their houses which mostly build of a rare and expensive *ulin* wood. Hence there are many houses that had already been torned down and rebuilt with modern building materials.



Picture 8. New houses with entirely different form and order as the original ones (Documentation: Kustedja, S. 2018)

### RUMAH Kapiten Cina (Chinese Captain)

Based on the information of the descendant, the first owner of this house name was Bong CiuHie. He was believed to be a Chinese person that was being entrusted by the Dutch to supervise fellow Chinese miners, therefore he's got the title of *Kapiten* or Captain. However, there are no documentation that confirmed this information, other than pictures that shows the relations of Chinese – Western figures which lived in the colonial era and were adapting the diaspora culture such as clothes and style of marriage.



**Picture 9. Photograph of owner of the house (Documentation: Malinda, M., 2018)**

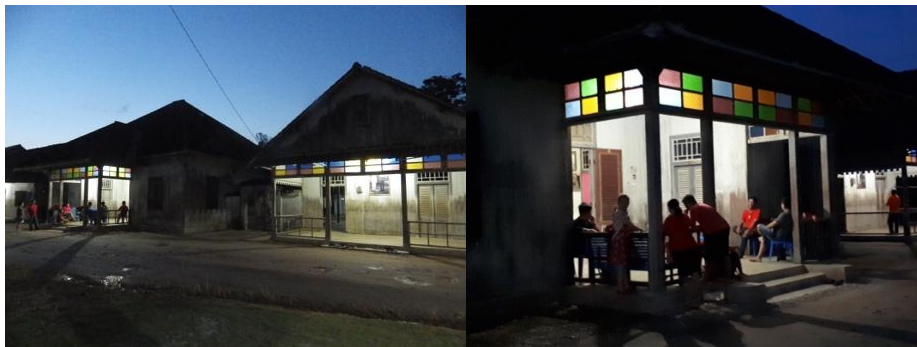
The house itself is the only one which have this colonial influenced architecture, which may corroborate the close relations between the Chinese owner and the VOC. Looking at the style and some historical information, this house were built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; considered newer than the Chinese houses at the northern part.



**Picture 10. The main house of *Rumah Kapiten* on the right picture and the pavilion on the left (Documentation: Maya Malinda & Krismanto Kusbiantoro)**

The main building is symmetrical with hipped roof. There are no ornaments on the ridge or the edges. The roof structure was made of wood and the floor tiles was made of red clay.

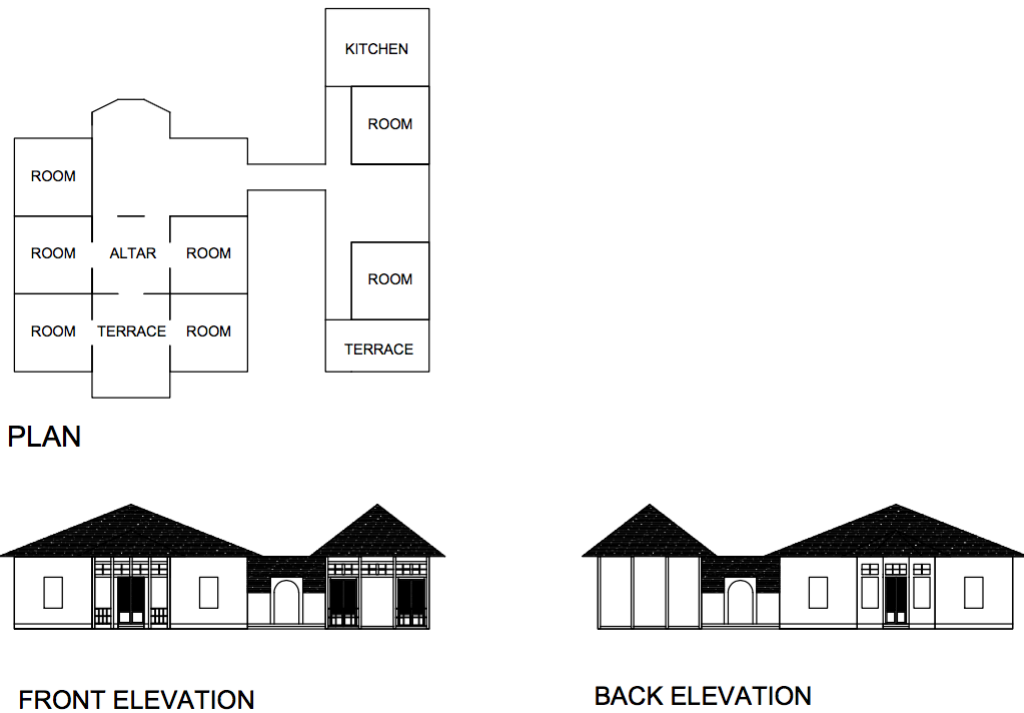
The buildings structure are made of *ulin* wood, which are the same with the other houses of the area. The wood planks for the walls were being installed vertically which are the same technique for all the house in the area, however the house structure itself use western technique which used diagonal bearings.



**Picture 11. The front of the house at night (Documentation: Gunawan, I)**

Unlike the other houses in the area, the house has a spacious terrace that extends to the front with elevated floor. There are columns to support the roof which have horizontal part decorated with stained glass. The terrace also has some wooden balustrades.





**Picture 12. Schematic layout and elevation of Chinese Capitan’s house (drawing by Avianti, J., Nuraini, N.,Laurent, K.)**



**Picture 13. Terrace (Documentation: Kusbiantoro, K)**

The terrace is in the middle with two bedrooms on each side which can be accessed from the terrace. The bedroom doors are louver-panel doors with an upper ventilation (*bouwenlicht*). The main entrance using a double door which is louver-panel doors on the outside and stained-glass panel doors in the inside. The floor is covered by cement tiles. The ceiling also shows typical Dutch design where the ceiling plates are hold together to the upper structures by lines of wood stripes. This kind of floor and ceilings are applied to the whole main building.



**Picture14. Symmetrical room with family altar in the middle and two door in each of the sides (Documentation: Kusteja, S)**

Despite the unique architecture of the house compared to the other houses in the area, the altar room in this house is the one which layout is maintained according to the original. The altar is in the middle of the wall in between two doors that connects to the family room. This altar room also have rooms in each side.



**Picture 15. Half Octagon Room (Documentation: Kusteja, S., Gunawan, I)**

As other house has a simple square layout, the main building has a half octagon room in the middle of the back area with windows and doors opening to the backyard. The windows and doors are applied with texture and stained-glass, also western style accessories (handles and locks).



**Picture 16. Double door and window display with Dutch style interior accessories (Documentation: Gunawan, I.)**



**Picture 17. Kitchen and service area (Documentation: Gunawan, I.)**

The kitchen was designed traditionally, however the position is at the back area of the pavilion. As a whole, the building whole lay out is not a square anymore, but already adjusted to Dutch lay out where the pavilion and service is in one array.

### **Conclusion**

From the analysis there are two influences affect the architectural of the houses in Gedong Village until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which is of Chinese Hakka and the Dutch Colonial architecture as could be seen at the Chinese Captain house. Nevertheless, these facts do not explain the reason why this particular house did not apply the “Indische Empire Style”. The originality of the design of the Chinese architecture shows the level of tolerance between intercultural relationship in this region. The originality of Chinese architecture in Bangka Island needs to be preserved as an important tangible culture. Further documentations and analysis need to be done, especially information about the transformation of Hakka architecture in their migration destinations.

Currently, there are some effort of the local government to raise awareness of the heritage, supported by local communities. As preservation could not be done without a proper sustainable system both in form of program and financial system, the effort needs to be done by developing a holistic approach of tourism industry in the area.

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