

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Chinese inner-city *kampung*'s spatial pattern transformation in colonial and post-colonial SemarangKezia Eka Sari Dewi\*, Viviana d'Auria, and Bruno de Meulder

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## Abstract

The ex-colonial part of Semarang hosts a significant population of the Chinese Indonesian community (descendants of Chinese migrants). They live in an area (Chinatown and the adjacent neighborhood) designated by the colonial government. Since colonial times, the Chinese Indonesian community has played an essential role in economic activities and acted as intermediate merchants between the Dutch and the indigenous. The Chinese Indonesians benefited from agrarian law during colonial times and controlled vast lands in Semarang. For the diaspora, being and becoming local in the new home requires shifting and negotiation of identities, as identity is linked to home. An ethnic enclave, where the diaspora lives, thus becomes a symbolic representation of home, where they produce a hybrid characteristic of a place that reflects their home country and their host country. In the case of the Chinese diaspora in Semarang, their ethnic enclaves consist not only of Chinatown. This article examines the spatial pattern of inner-city *kampung*, which was owned by Chinese landlords and inhabited by Chinese Indonesians. The spatial maps of three *kampungs* were analyzed, along with the discussion about the agrarian statutes and how the Chinese Indonesian landlords created their own *kampung*. Findings suggest that the agrarian laws, Chinese culture, and the Chinese concept of space influenced the spatial pattern of some inner-city *kampungs* in Semarang.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the major characteristics of colonial cities in Asia was its spatial organization as a mosaic of ethnic quarters – the tightly-packed shop house areas of the Chinese, Arabs, and Indians, the spacious low-density “compounds” of the Europeans, and the indigenous settlements (“*kampung*” in South East Asia) scattered around the city (King, 1974). In the Indonesian case, there were three main social groups during the colonial era. The first was the Europeans (including the Japanese in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century); the second, the “foreign” eastern group or *vreemde oosterlingen*, which consisted of Chinese, Arabs, and Indian migrants; and the third, the Indigenous Indonesian.

Applying the “divide and rule” strategy, the colonial government assigned each ethnic group to their separate settlements. This policy, called “*wijkenstelsel*” (quarter law), was formally initiated after the “Batavian massacre” in 1740 and became a strict law in 1843 after the Java War. The Batavia massacre, a program that claimed the lives of thousands of Chinese, radically resets the strained power relations between the Chinese community and the Dutch East India Company, which substantially tightened its grip on the territory and its populations. The massacre marked a major step toward enforcing an exploitative and extractive economic system. Spatial segregation policies became integral to the tightening colonial regimen. Different population groups were assigned different roles in the division of labor of the exploitative economic system, and this was translated spatially into ethnic segregation. The *wijkenstelsel* forbade everyone to live outside of their ethnic settlements (Phoa, 1992).

In 1870, the Dutch colonial government implemented an agrarian law, the “*Agrarische Wet Stb.* 1870 No. 55,” which opened up land to private sector investment in agriculture; in other words, the agrarian law encouraged extractive monocultures for export. As a consequence, two parallel land tenure systems emerged: on the one hand, the colonial system of private property that European (and other foreign eastern) investors could obtain, and on the other hand, the traditional system of land uses rights for which customary law (*Gewoonterecht*) remained in place. Customary laws only prevailed for non-Dutch (and European) subjects (the people of the sultans or tribes).

Mainly, the Dutch colonial law was applied in the urban areas and, after the agrarian law, also to lands for plantations. Customary law remained, in the best tradition of dual mandates, not only in the rest of the countryside, but also in the so-called *kampungs* around Dutch towns. These areas were not considered as urban in either legal or conceptual terms, but rather situated outside of the civilized European realm. *Kampungs* were predominantly left to the self-organization of their respective communities (a variation on the dual mandate doctrine) and were thus seen as traditional places governed by customary law. Consequently, land tenure in the *kampungs* remained under customary law, which in practice functioned as a system of land use rights. In this way, a dual practice emerged within the dual system of land tenure and urban management in colonial urban environments.

In the case of Semarang, the Dutch colonial policy began during Governor Daendels’s era (1800 – 1811), when he started leasing land for war funding. This approach was later reinforced by the Agrarian Law 1870, allowing the private sector to participate in the plantation business, which had a

structural impact on urban development. The agrarian law allowed any investors, indigenous and non-indigenous, to acquire government land. In many colonial contexts, any land not actively occupied by native communities was, by definition, considered government land, effectively resulting in the widespread expropriation of native lands. These landlords, in practice, not only took part in the plantation business but also used land tenure regulations defined by the agrarian law to develop real estate around the city center (Phoa, 1992). The landlords often used some of their lands for their workers’ accommodation or rented it to the rural migrants from surrounding regencies. This pragmatic (and often sideways) use of regulations ultimately led to a complex web of land tenure statuses. However, the Chinese Indonesians were positioned between native and European populations as a distinct category. Due to their economic role as intermediaries in commerce, they also assumed a notorious role as moneylenders, often using land as collateral for loans. As an indirect result, the Chinese Indonesians accumulated large amounts of land from their native debtors over time and across generations (Djalins, 2015).

In many coastal cities in Java, surrounding lands were acquired by investors as private estates (*particuliere eigendom*). These private estates often also contained settlements (*kampungs*, villages) within them. In the case of the Dutch East Indies, the private estate was granted the autonomy associated with private property. The city government has neither jurisdiction nor the intention to build infrastructures supporting settlements inside private estates or native *kampungs* and villages outside the state land (Cobban, 1988).

Around 1860, the main traditional market in Semarang city center, located next to Chinatown, attracted people who came to seek livelihoods and settle there, both temporarily and permanently. In Semarang, they usually rented a parcel of land from the landlords to build their own houses. This resulted in a multicultural district with a mixed character centered around the traditional market. Over time, the district gradually developed into a diverse inner-city settlement that includes trading spaces and residential settlements, where people from different ethnic backgrounds live side by side. In 1916, when Semarang got the status of an urban municipality, the city council incorporated land owned by private landlords into a master plan to accommodate new settlements (Cobban, 1988).

The organization of settlements, shaped by ethnicity, land tenure laws, and economic activities, has influenced the character of the neighborhood for centuries. Although most Chinese residents lived in Chinatown during the colonial period, over time, many began settling in the

surrounding *kampungs* beyond the Chinatown boundaries. Today, there are almost no visible differences between inner-city *kampungs* in Semarang (the former colonial town) and those in other Indonesian urban areas.

Various studies have examined urban *kampung* (Budiarto, 2005; Funo, 2002; Tunas & Peresthu, 2010), although only Budiarto (2005) specifically addresses their spatial patterns. In general, an urban *kampung* is an organically developed settlement that emerges incrementally, without formal planning. Budiarto (2005) outlines the spatial structure of urban *kampung* in his study; however, he does not consider land ownership as a potential factor influencing spatial pattern organization. He also does not explain *kampungs* with specific inhabitants, such as Kampung Kauman or Chinese *kampungs*. Kampung Kauman, found in many Indonesian cities, is home to devout Muslims, Ulamas, Hajj pilgrims, and their students. The spatial pattern of Kampung Kauman was traditionally centered around the house of the Islamic teacher (Suprati, 1997), a configuration similar to old settlements in the Middle East, such as Najaf (Farhan *et al.*, 2022).

However, fieldwork revealed differences related to land tenure and spatial patterns in the inner city *kampungs* around Semarang Chinatown. This study traces how, paradoxically, the colonial-era agrarian law that generated a class of landlords ultimately had a significant impact on the spatial pattern of certain inner-city *kampungs*. These landlords had the authority to shape their own *kampungs* based on their cultural background and their needs as merchants and property developers.

## 2. Research method

This study investigates two research questions, including:

- (i). How did the landlords of inner-city *kampungs* in Semarang shape the spatial pattern of their *kampungs*?
- (ii). Did the landlords and inhabitants of the Chinese *kampungs* implement the Chinese settlement's spatial pattern in their *kampungs*?

To answer the questions, fieldwork, a literature review, and map analysis were applied in this study. The fieldwork was conducted in 2018 and 2019. Three inner-city *kampungs* were selected: two with the same Chinese landlord and significant numbers of Chinese residents and one with a Javanese landlord. The *kampung* with the Javanese landlord was included for comparison. It is uncommon for a single landlord to own all the land within a *kampung*.

A brief description of inner-city *kampung* and land tenure issues in Indonesian urban *kampungs* is provided in the literature review. The literature review was conducted

with a focus on the characteristics of urban *kampung* in Indonesia, including their spatial structure, previous studies conducted by Budiarto (2005) and Nugroho (2009) on urban *kampung* characteristics, as well as other studies on urban *kampung* in Indonesia. However, most of the articles on urban *kampung* characteristics did not investigate land ownership and its impact on the spatial pattern of the *kampung*. Although certain inner-city *kampungs* in Indonesia's ex-colonial cities were built based on the ethnicity of the residents, they did not investigate the influence of the inhabitants' culture on the spatial pattern.

As the Chinese Indonesian ancestors are predominantly from southeastern China, namely the provinces of Fujian and Guangdong, the literature review includes an examination of the spatial patterns of traditional Chinese townships and cities, particularly in southeastern China. The literature review was followed by a description of the case study and the observation results.

Neighborhood transformations are investigated through available historical colonial maps from *Nederlandsch-Indische Levensverzekering-en Lijfrente-Maatschappij* (NILLMIJ) (the 1930s) and current maps of three *kampungs* and Chinatown. Since the maps from 1945 to 1999 are unavailable, the reconstruction of these *kampungs*' transformations is based on the chronology of the Chinese community in Semarang, a book by Liem (2004), a study by Pratiwo (1996), and a conversation with the local Chinese community. It is worth noting that colonial-era maps recorded only brick buildings and marked *kampung* areas in green color. The purpose of this investigation is to examine how the presence of the landlords influenced the spatial pattern of *kampungs*. To support the reconstruction of neighborhood transformation, an expert interview was also conducted with a professor from a local university.

## 3. Land tenure complexity in Indonesian urban areas

The Indonesian land tenure system reflects the interplay between Dutch colonial and indigenous practices. During the Dutch colonial period, a dualism of the land rights system prevailed in Indonesia. The Dutch colonial system under the Dutch civil code applied mainly to urban land and the plantation sector (for instance, private estate, for 99 years), and this was called the *garapan* right. In contrast, land under the Indigenous kingdom was regulated by native leaders according to customary law and was known as *girik* right. Indigenous Indonesians were allowed to regulate their land autonomously, provided it did not conflict with land governed by Dutch law (Leaf, 1993). Depending on the extent of Dutch influence and interest,

*garapan* rights are dominant in areas with stronger Dutch presence, particularly on private land, while *girik* rights are dominant in regions with lower Dutch presence, typically on state land (Leaf, 1993). Nevertheless, a vast area between towns (including army and slavery quarters) and the countryside gradually developed into urban *kampungs*. These *kampungs* provided housing and services for non-European populations who were excluded from the “European” towns. In these rather disordered and mixed regions, an amalgamation of complex land tenure rules emerged, combining, subverting, and adapting the two main categories previously mentioned. Following independence, an additional layer of complexity was introduced, reshaping the existing system even further.

Following the end of Dutch colonial rule, expropriation law was promulgated in 1958 and applied to all private estates owned by Europeans, foreign Eastern groups, and other wealthy indigenous entrepreneurs. In principle, all privately owned land was returned to the state as state land. Traditional land use systems were replaced by the provision of *girik*, except in cases where land was converted to *garapan* right. The problem with this post-independence law was that it required the existence and continuous updating of a comprehensive property inventory (Leaf, 1993). Furthermore, many European landowners avoided expropriation after 1945 by selling their private estates to Chinese Indonesian landlords (Leaf, 1993). The complexity of the land tenure system resulting from these historical dynamics persists until today.

In practice, the Basic Agrarian Law of 1960 reproduced legal dualism through administrative categorization: registered land, the one with specific rights under the Basic Agrarian Law, and unregistered land, which remains governed by older systems. Registered land is recorded in the land office under the National Land Agency, while the unregistered land is expected to be recorded in the land books maintained by the sub-district or village office (Leaf, 1994). Needless to say, the complexity and ambiguity of the Indonesian land tenure system have been exacerbated by the lack of proper records in the sub-district offices, especially for unregistered lands within *kampungs*.

In particular, land tenure security issues within *kampungs* originally derived from the historical rights of *girik* and *garapan*. At present, the *girik* right is well known as an ex-customary right, as it no longer embodies customary (*adat*) principles due to the imposition of property tax during Dutch colonization and the unification of dual systems following independence (Leaf, 1993). The delineation of these two dominant rights presumably occurs depending on their past historical development on specific land and layered rights: state land that is originally

stewarded by Indigenous communities but later brought under the control of Dutch law, and private estate land, which is governed under the Dutch civil code (Hoffman & Marbun, 1990). In cities like Jakarta, *kampung* dwellers typically hold *garapan* rights.

Land parcels in *kampungs* are often transferred through informal private conveyance, the unofficial land transaction. Although many *kampung* residents possess some form of legal claim over their land, they are often unable to prove it (McCarthy, 2003). A common practice in the *kampung* involves transactions without legal registration from the agrarian office or the presence of a notary. Instead, both parties only sign a stamped agreement in front of the community leader. This practice can be seen as a mutated form of customary land use rights given by local community leaders.

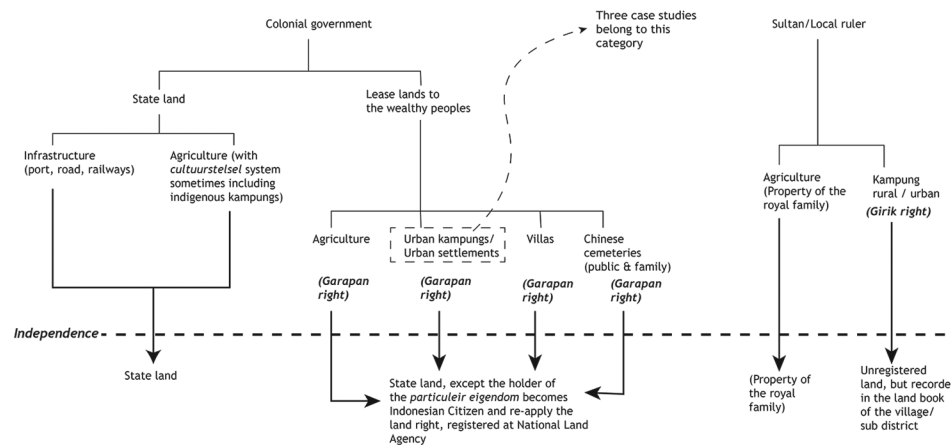
Past dualism in the land tenure system has not only influenced the land right structure but also impacted the physical structure of inner-city *kampungs*. This distinctive settlement pattern is closely tied to the coexistence of different land tenure and use right categories (Leaf, 1993). Supriatna (2018) reveals that in Jakarta, informal and semi-formal (*adat* right holders) *kampung* dwellers perceive their tenure security through the government's public services provision, the degree of social cohesion, and support from civil society groups instead of the possession of land tenure rights-related documents (Supriatna, 2018). Figure 1 summarizes the land rights system during the colonial and post-colonial periods of Indonesia.

#### 4. Chinese Indonesians in the inner-city *kampung* in Semarang

Before the arrival of the Dutch, Semarang was an indigenous fisherman settlement. Semarang was handed over by the Sultan of Mataram to the Dutch East Indies in 1678 (Stibbe, 1919). After years of occupation, Semarang officially became a city of the Dutch East Indies Company when the Sultan made a deal on October 5, 1705, granting extensive trade rights in exchange for wiping out Mataram's debt (Ricklefs, 2008). The Dutch built a city with a fortress, later the Chinese Indonesian community came and separated settlements along with the Indian and Arab communities. In fact, the city of Semarang was referred to only as the Dutch quarter, while the other ethnic settlements were considered villages outside the city boundaries (Pratiwo, 2005).

During the colonial era, Semarang was a prototype of the Asian colonial town – a mosaic of ethnic quarters, with *kampungs* scattered around the European town. The Europeans occupied the fortress near the port and the fortified quarter surrounding it. Next to them were the





**Figure 1.** Diagram of land rights during colonial and post-colonial Indonesia  
Source: Diagram by Kezia Dewi, based on literature review

ethnic settlements of foreign eastern traders (Chinese, Arab, Indian, and Malay), which also served as a buffer between the European quarter and the indigenous settlements (Blusse, 2004). The law of *wijkenstelsel*, which required individuals to reside within areas designated for their respective ethnic groups, was enforced during this time. There were no physical boundaries, such as walls, in the ethnic quarters, but a legal boundary did exist. This legal boundary caused internal densification within these segregated neighborhoods (Widodo, 2004). However, such regulation apparently did not prevent the formation of Chinese enclaves outside the designated Chinese quarter (Tan, 1963).

In Semarang, the river played a dominant role in goods transportation. The Semarang River connected the Chinese quarter and the traditional market within the harbor. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the rich Chinese merchants still maintained private docks behind their houses for their boats. Typically, their homes were shop houses, with shops and warehouses on the ground floor and the residences above. These Chinese Indonesian community leaders, mainly from two families, owned and lived in large villas with large gardens (Liem, 2004). It was common practice to allow workers to settle or build decent accommodation on these plots (Liem, 2004).

The Agrarian Law of 1870 prohibited non-Indigenous people from owning land (Djalins, 2015). However, they were allowed to lease land for up to 99 years. As a result, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Semarang city government owned only 6.25% of the land in Semarang (Van Dorp, 1915). All of these lands were originally unused indigenous lands and were deemed to be state land. As the city expanded to the west and south, the land was mainly controlled by private estates, either through ownership or lease (Kerchman, 1930).

In the 1870s, improved communication, brought about by the mail and railway projects, led to an economic boom in the city. Driven by economic growth and spatial city planning, the city had doubled in size and expanded to the south by the 1920s, making Semarang an important colonial trading center. The growth of Semarang attracted migrants from the surrounding regencies as well as from abroad, primarily Chinese migrants. As a result, the newcomers crowded the existing *kampungs*. Wealthy merchants who owned land from the government subdivided their lands into small parcels and leased them to the newcomers, while some of these newcomers were working for the landowners.

Urban *kampung* provides cheap accommodation for the people who come to the city for jobs. In the colonial era, the *kampung* contrasted with the walled city where Europeans lived (Budiarto, 2005). Unlike the formal settlements built by the government, the *kampung* had a “chaotic” pattern and developed incrementally. However, in the case of Semarang, due to the agrarian policy that allowed the wealthy to lease land from the colonial government, some *kampungs* also expanded onto the leased land.

In this situation, the colonial government of Semarang had very little jurisdiction over these settlements. The physical conditions of Semarang’s urban *kampungs* were poor and unhealthy. These urban *kampungs* resulted from the colonial exclusion of indigenous people from the formal city, who were expelled to designated places outside the town or city and were left to organize themselves. Consequently, the indigenous people developed neo-traditional urban-rural systems. Although segregated, they were close enough to the town and workspaces to serve as a labor force. This situation reflected the colonial dual attitude: on the one hand, exploiting indigenous labor by

keeping them close to the town, harbor, and plantations where they were needed; on the other hand, refusing to accept them in the European town and thereby avoiding responsibility for their welfare and social reproduction – services that a normal city provided as a physical and social entity. This contradiction gave rise to the colonial fable of self-organization, outsourcing the responsibility for the exploited labor force to those being exploited.

When the conditions of the urban *kampungs* began to threaten the health of Semarang city, since the self-organization of the exploited inevitably led to slums in physical, social, and medical terms, the colonial government launched a *kampung verbetering* (improvement) program. However, in some *kampungs* located within the land owned by landlords, the city government faced jurisdiction challenges.

In fact, Chinatown was also a “Chinese *kampung*,” although it had a different spatial pattern. Chinatown mainly followed a grid pattern. As the settlements of the Chinese community, Chinatown was squeezed in between the town and indigenous *kampung*, reflecting the hierarchical position of the Chinese between the Dutch/Europeans and the indigenous, as well as the division of labor, with the Chinese serving as middlemen and traders, functionally occupying a central position in commerce. Chinatown itself became more crowded due to the waves of new immigration from China. All the interventions by the city government to improve the physical conditions there were discussed with the community leaders, but were still doable.

Some rich Chinese Indonesians, capitalizing on the success of Semarang as a port and trade center, took advantage of the opportunities provided by the agrarian law. People from surrounding regencies and immigrants from abroad came to lease land plots from them to build their houses. After the decentralization, when Semarang became a city and developed an expansion plan at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these private estates (mainly controlled by Chinese Indonesian landlords) were included in an expropriation scheme aimed to create space for new residential areas for wealthy Europeans, Chinese, and rich locals (Cobban, 1988; Kerchman, 1930).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese Indonesians in Semarang also expanded their settlements into the surrounding *kampungs*. They occupied areas that were previously assigned to Indian people, as well as parts of some indigenous *kampung*. Some Chinese Indonesians rented land parcels along the main street that were owned by indigenous landlords. In this way, they acquired land use right far beyond their original colonially defined and assigned settlement.

After independence, ethnic-based restrictions were lifted. The Chinese Indonesians spread to the neighboring *kampungs*, some of which originated from the land owned by the Chinese Indonesian landlords, as well as into the ethnic Indonesian *kampungs* and the new business district. On the other hand, ethnic Indonesians also started to live in *kampungs* that were previously dominated by the Chinese inhabitants. It was revealed that *kampungs*, which were inhabited by the Chinese and other ethnic groups around Chinatown, were controlled by the Chinese Indonesian landlords through the complex land use or land tenure rights developed over time. Annual rental fees are still paid to these landlords today. This is evidence of the complexity of *kampung* land tenure, especially when the land is owned by Chinese Indonesians, who are non-indigenous. During colonial times, they were technically prohibited from owning land, and after independence, they needed Indonesian citizenship to claim ownership of their former lands.

## 5. *Kampung* spatial structure

*Kampung* is a term for a hamlet in Malay-speaking countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei). It is closely related to the word “compound” in English, which often means camp. The word “*kampung*” is also used in Cambodia. *Kampung*, in its fundamental sense, is defined by the people and their culture. *Kampung* is also a place that serves as a site of social and cultural construction (Maliki, 2008). In Malaysia, the word *kampung* mostly indicates a settlement in rural areas. A village mainly consists of several *kampungs*. However, in Indonesia, the word “*kampung*” is also associated with typical urban settlements. *Kampung*, as an urban settlement, has acquired special characteristics as an autonomous community model. In general, the urban *kampungs* share common attributes such as poverty, unplanned origins, incremental growth, and a need for attention from city authorities (Krausse, 1975). However, socially, a *kampung* is not necessarily defined by poverty (Funo, 2002).

In Southeast Asia, the most important buildings or functions (such as temples of origin, chieftains’ houses, or ancestral graves) are primarily placed on the vantage point of the village or toward the mountain (Widodo, 2010). In the case of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei, a *kampung* is usually defined by the relationship of its inhabitants to the mosque or prayer. The spatial perception is centrifugal around the ruler’s house (Evers, 1977). According to Koentjaraningrat (2007), Indonesian rural *kampung* spatial patterns are also highly influenced by agricultural activity, where the settlements are located next to the paddy fields (Koentjaraningrat, 2007). In the *kampung*, the living spaces are integrated with workspaces.

Urban *kampungs* are somewhat different, although living and working spaces are still integrated. However, the main livelihoods are not always related to agriculture. Urban *kampungs* are typically developed without any planning process (Nugroho, 2009). Urban *kampung* is an example of self-help housing in urban areas, characterized by its informality, irregularity, and illegality (Tunas & Peresthu, 2010) and is found near the city square, which serves as the city center (Obermayr, 2017).

In a study emphasizing the relationship between a *kampung*'s spatial structure and the dwellers' socioeconomic life, three spatial patterns are reported (Budiarto, 2005), including:

- (i) Simple grid pattern: The main roads are mostly dominated by public and mobile activities, such as street traders and food stalls. In outdoor public spaces, domestic activities such as babysitting, chatting, and cooking are also commonly observed. The intense mixtures of domestic and public activities are apparently seen.
- (ii) Labyrinth-like pattern: Most of the inhabitants in this spatial pattern work in gardening or the home industry, in which the activities are concentrated near their homes, with the help of third parties to sell their products. This pattern is uncommon in an inner-city *kampung* that is encircled by urban function and infrastructure.
- (iii) Mixed pattern: The simple grid pattern is not commonly found here. Informal trading activities are found not only on the main road but also within the interior areas, where some yards are used as workplaces. In the past, the mix of rural and urban occupations in this area was rather high.

Budiarto (2005) also mentioned that grid patterns are found mainly in inner-city *kampungs*. Inner-city *kampungs* are located between former colonial towns and newly developed centers and exhibit the following characteristics: high population density (100,000/sq km) and poor environmental conditions. Despite this, inner-city *kampungs* continue to attract residents due to their convenient access to employment (Ford, 1993).

Guinness (2009) views *kampungs* as informalized living environments, which often have a "chaotic" spatial pattern, in comparison with urban settlements built by the government or private developers. *Kampungs* are characterized by narrow, intimately scaled alleys. Within the *kampung*, the boundary between private and public areas is often blurred. Community and private spaces tend to merge into a shared environment.

Although *kampungs* typically have at least one alley wide enough for automobiles, they are better understood

as being traversed through a network of narrow paths designed for foot, bicycle, or motorcycle traffic. *Kampung* footpaths reflect the ambiguity of neighborhood habitation, traffic density, and private space (Guinness, 1997).

In relation to land ownership, *kampung* inhabitants often do not bother to register changes in the ownership of their housing lots (Evers, 1977). It was customary in urban *kampungs* for newcomers to simply seek approval from the elders or community head before relocating there (Winardi, 2020). Typically, the land in the *kampung* is not owned by a single individual.

## 6. Chinese and Chinese diaspora concept of settlements

The Chinese conception of space differs greatly from that of the Malay race, including the Javanese. The Chinese conception of space is bounded. Chinese people, including those from rural areas, have a clear image of the "city" and of urban life (Evers, 1977). A typical Chinese city built by the Han people is often characterized by an urban form of walled enclosures, an orthogonal spatial layout, and an ordinal spatial hierarchy. The spatial structure was also symmetrical. There are differences between cities in northern China and southern China. Southern China has numerous waterfront towns organized on river delta systems. These towns are more organic, with free-flowing, curved roadways that adapt to the undulating terrain (Liao *et al.*, 2021).

Besides the symmetrical pattern, there is another interesting spatial characteristic. A "square", such a type of space, was not favorable in traditional Chinese, especially in southeast China. The public realm took a linear form, typically that of a commercial street. Some urban settlements in southeastern China also depended on canal systems. These canal systems served as transportation networks and also functioned as energy supply systems (Miao, 1990).

The Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia implemented these traditional spatial concepts in their settlements. For example, in the city of Malacca, with Chinese traditions affecting the whole layout of the Chinese quarter, several major divisions were marked out by a grid, with a strong axis in the middle. Along the axis, different functional layers were arranged from the Malacca River to the west, toward the inland areas. They were, sequentially, the old harbor, workshops, markets, the wealthy residents' quarters, the ordinary residents' quarters, and the temple complex. Docks and warehouses were set near the coast and pointed toward the southwest. The rich merchants' shop houses were built side by side along the coastline. In Penang Chinatown, the street system was developed according to the traditional grid pattern, while the housing

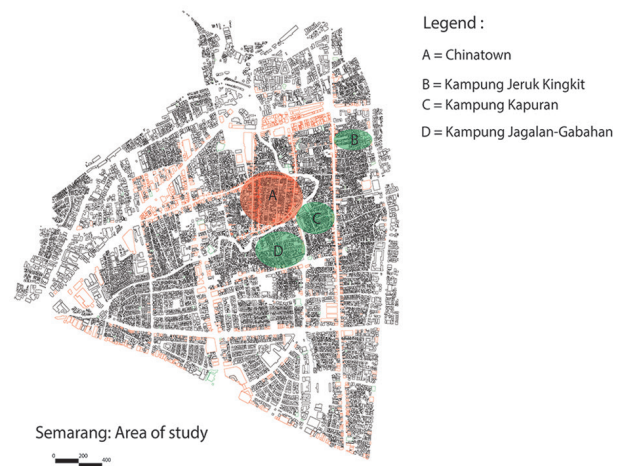
units were arranged in rows along streets (Han & Beisy, 2016). This spatial pattern is also similar to the Chinatown of Semarang.

## 7. Observation results

The second and third fieldworks in Chinatown Semarang and the surrounding neighborhoods were conducted from March 1, 2018, to April 26, 2018, and August 5, 2019, to September 25, 2019. The results reveal how land use and tenure rights operate in the field and are experienced by inhabitants. Inhabitants of Jeruk Kingkit, Kapuran, Jagalan, and Chinatown have been paying annual rent to the landlords (one Chinese and one Javanese) until today. This is remarkable in a way, considering that the colonial agrarian law grants property rights for only 99 years. Such long-term rights were uncommon in urban *kampungs*. Moreover, after independence, the private estate right from the colonial period has been abolished. Some of these private estate lands were taken by the government (Tirto, id, 2017). This firm position of the new nation-state was, however, seriously eroded by the necessity to support its development. Previous landlords could eventually reclaim their “colonially acquired” property on the condition that they fulfilled an investment or development agreement with the government. However, such applications were only accepted by Indonesian citizens, which excluded many Chinese Indonesians who had chosen or acquired Chinese or Dutch nationalities during the volatile post-colonial period.

As mentioned above, fieldworks were conducted in Chinatown itself, in the *kampung* of Jagalan and Kapuran (along the eastern riverbank of Kali Semarang), and Kampung Jeruk Kingkit (the *kampung* behind Mataram street – the main street crossing the business district), and in the area of Karanganyar Street (southeastern of Chinatown). In all these places, the inhabitants pay annual rent to an individual named Liem and to the Tasripin family (for Kampung Jeruk Kingkit). They have also struggled to acquire land certificates from the agrarian office since the 1990s. They agreed to buy their land parcel from Mr. Liem, but sometimes, the process is difficult due to the complicated bureaucracy. Figure 2 shows the areas of study in Semarang city center, where the three *kampungs* and the Chinatown are located, while Table 1 compares the three *kampungs* in terms of land ownership, inhabitants, and occupation.

Field observation shows how the neighborhood developed over time. The neighborhood changed due to the political and economic situation. In the discussion with Prof. Djamilla Kautsary Sharma (personal communication was done on April 4, 2017) from the Sultan Agung



**Figure 2.** Area of study in the Semarang city center  
Source: Map by Kezia Dewi, based on literature review and Google Earth

University of Semarang, it was mentioned that property in Semarang Chinatown and the surrounding *kampungs* (extended Chinatown) is still managed by the clans or community organizations. Inhabitants have no right to sell their property without approval from the community organizations. The right to own a house or a building within Chinatown is typically passed from generation to generation. The inhabitants have the right to renovate the building or rent it to a third party. In reality, 80% of the inhabitants are from the Chinese Indonesian community (Zahnd, 2008). This contrasts with other former ethnic quarters that transformed into inner-city *kampungs*, where original inhabitants are only around 30%.

## 8. Spatial reconstruction and discussion

According to historical records and field observation, the area of study is a colonial town consisting of a set of ethnic neighborhoods adjacent to the previous “European quarter,” surrounded by indigenous neighborhoods, usually called *kampungs*. Since colonial times, there have been several traditional markets in the area of study, such as the Pedamaran and Djohar markets. Indigenous farmers bring their products to the market, where other ethnic groups purchase them. Chinese Indonesians also sell their goods there. Over time, the area has developed into a densely populated settlement and business district.

The prosperity generated by the trading activities catalyzed migration to Semarang from surrounding regencies. The Dutch East Indies also became the destination for Chinese migrants escaping poverty in China. They were mainly young bachelors who worked for the Chinese merchants in the Dutch East Indies and subsequently began to settle on their masters’ land.



**Table 1. Comparison between three kampungs in terms of land ownership, inhabitants, and occupations**

No	Key characteristics	<i>Kampung B (Jeruk Kingkit)</i>	<i>Kampung C (Kapuran)</i>	<i>Kampung D (Jagalan–Gabahan)</i>
1	Current land owner	Javanese landlord (Tasripin)	Chinese landlord (Liem Mo Lim)	Chinese landlord (Liem Mo Lim)
2	Inhabitant	Mostly Javanese	Significant number are ethnic Chinese	Significant number are ethnic Chinese
3	Dominant occupation of the inhabitants	Informal economic activity, i.e., a trader in the traditional market	Informal economic activity, i.e., a trader in the traditional market, a street food stall seller, a worker of the Chinese shop in Chinatown	Informal economic activity, i.e., a trader in the traditional market, a street food stall seller, a worker of the Chinese shop in Chinatown
4	Original spatial pattern	Oriented toward the mosque and the landlord's house	Mixed pattern, but the landlord's house occupied the highest hierarchy on the riverbanks	Grid pattern, not too dense, with the landlord's house occupying the highest hierarchy on the riverbanks
5	Current spatial pattern	Oriented toward the mosque and the landlord's house	Mixed pattern but denser	Chaotic grid pattern, very dense

Source: Compiled by the authors

Landlords rented land parcels to these newcomers from China or Indigenous people from surrounding regencies, who then built their accommodations. Over time, the lands owned by the landlords transformed into inner-city *kampungs*.

The spatial patterns of *Kampungs Jeruk Kingkit*, *Kapuran*, and *Jagalan–Gabahan* are as follows:

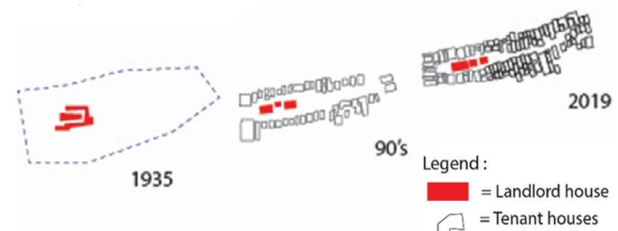
## (i) *Kampung Jeruk Kingkit*

*Kampung Jeruk Kingkit* is owned by a famous Javanese landlord, Tasripin. He was a wealthy merchant who got the land from the colonial government. The original landlord's house was surrounded by the tenant's land plot. Now, the main alley is also the main axis of the settlement, the previously undersized communal space. While the tenant houses vary in size, the inhabitants are primarily Javanese from the surrounding regencies. They work at Djohar, the main market of Semarang. Figure 3 shows *Kampung Jeruk Kingkit*'s spatial pattern transformation from time to time, while Figure 4 is a picture of the house of *Kampung Jeruk Kingkit*'s landlord.

In this *kampung*, which is owned by a Javanese landlord, the mosque and the landlord's house have become the focal points of the settlement. All of the tenant housing units face the mosque and the landlord's house. The growth of an urban *kampung* is often erratic. However, since this *kampung* has a landlord, he can purposefully organize the land allotment according to his own preferences. This style, in which the landlord becomes the focal point of the settlement, was typical among the Javanese nobility or the Muslim community. *Kampung Kauman*, located in Semarang, follows a similar pattern.

## (ii) *Kampung Kapuran*

*Kampung Kapuran* is officially located outside of Chinatown, as the eastern boundary of Chinatown is the Semarang River. It can be considered part of the extended



**Figure 3.** Spatial pattern of *Kampung Jeruk Kingkit* over time

Source: Drawings by Kezia Dewi, based on “*Semarang en Omstreken/aangeboden door Nillmij*” map (Hoofdagentschap Nillmij, n.d.) and map of Semarang from the Semarang City planning agency



**Figure 4.** Photograph of the landlord's house in *Kampung Jeruk Kingkit*  
Source: Photo by Kezia Dewi (2018)

Chinatown. *Kampung Kapuran* was previously owned by Be Ing Tjoe, one of the Chinese Majors during the colonial time. According to the chronicle of the Chinese community, the Chinese Major provided accommodation for Chinese newcomers who were to work for him in a compound behind his house. However, the colonial map

from Leiden (Hoofdagentschap Nillmij, n.d.) includes only stone or brick buildings, and the compound is not shown, likely because it was not built from stone. After independence, the family of the former landlord left Semarang. They donated their big house to the Catholic Church and transformed it into a church and school.

A new form of common law developed in these *kampungs*, which allowed tenants to continuously rent the land while granting them ownership of the buildings. Usually, tenants regularly maintain and renovate their houses when needed and affordable. The current spatial pattern shows how the owner subdivided their land for the tenants. Similar to Kampung Jeruk Kingkit, in varying sizes. Figure 5 shows the map of Kampung Kapuran's spatial pattern over time, while Figure 6 shows the open and communal space at Kampung Kapuran.

In Liem's (2004) book, there is a narrative about Be Ing Tjoe hosting a grand Chinese New Year celebration in his villa's garden. His lovely villa sat on the river and included a private dock. He arranged his workers' dwelling units in a series of row houses behind his villa, on the opposite side of the river. Here, he used the Chinese concept of ordinal spatial hierarchy. He occupied the riverbanks for his villa and built a wall behind it, after which he established settlements for his workers. Although typical Chinese settlements, as well as Semarang Chinatown, do not have open space where the street becomes communal space, this *kampung* has one open space for sport.

Following independence, people from nearby regencies began to move to Semarang's city center. They began to fill in the empty spaces in the *kampung*. As a result, the original pattern is no longer apparent.

### (iii) Kampung Jagalan–Gabahan

Similar to Kampung Kapuran, Kampung Jagalan is also officially located outside of Chinatown. In this *kampung*, there were two main stone buildings: the first was owned by Oei Tiong Ham, known as the king of sugar, and the second was the plastic factories. The workers built their houses behind the factory – a practice that was likely common, as landlord often subdivided their land for workers or tenants. After independence, a wealthy Chinese named Liem Mo Liem took over this *kampung*. Today, the inhabitants pay rent to his family.

Similar to Kampung Kapuran, many new inhabitants migrated and settled down in the empty spaces in recent years. They built smaller houses or semi-permanent houses in this *kampung*. The original big houses were either converted into a Chinese temple or subdivided into smaller buildings for the new tenants. Figure 7 shows the spatial pattern of Kampung Jagalan–Gabahan from time to time.

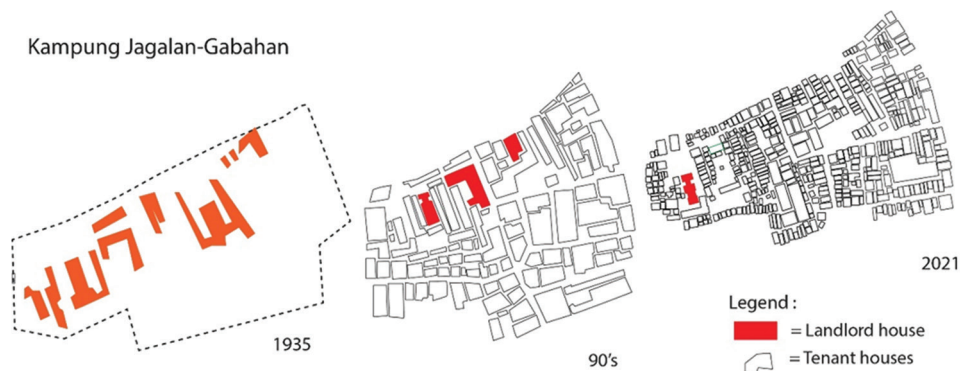


**Figure 5.** Spatial pattern of Kampung Kapuran over time  
Source: Drawings by Kezia Dewi, based on “*Semarang en Omstreken/ aangeboden door Nillmij*” map (Hoofdagentschap Nillmij, n.d.) and map of Semarang from the Semarang City planning agency



**Figure 6.** Open space at Kampung Kapuran for sport  
Source: Photo by Kezia Dewi (2018)

Based on the observation of these three *kampungs*, we could see that the inner-city *kampungs* do not always have a simple grid pattern. The history of the *kampung* here is related to the Agrarian Law 1870, the private estate, and the presence of the landlords, which shaped the spatial pattern of the *kampung*. Kampung Jeruk Kingkit has a different spatial patterns compared with the other two *kampungs*, where the tenants built their houses around the landlord. This is similar to the spatial pattern of the *kampung* in the imperial city of the Javanese sultanate. In contrast, the other two *kampungs* are owned by Chinese Indonesian landlords, who subdivided the land behind their houses for the tenants. Commonly, a series of row houses were



**Figure 7.** Spatial pattern of Kampung Jagalan-Gabahan

Source: Drawings by Kezia Dewi, based on “*Semarang en Omstreken/aangeboden door Nillmij*” map (Hoofdagentschap Nillmij, n.d.) and map of Semarang from the Semarang City planning agency

built for the tenants. As the *kampung*’s population becomes denser, it is difficult to recognize the original pattern of these *kampungs*.

The government of Semarang does not have sufficient data about the land status in these areas. This might explain why the *kampung* inhabitants faced difficulties in obtaining land certificates. The government has little interest in these areas, as they are classified as settlements, and there is no need to clarify the land status.

In this situation, people continue to settle and maintain their properties here. Although they need to pay annual rent to the landlord, the area in the city center remains attractive to many. The main reason is the accessibility to services available in the city center, which offers abundant opportunities in both formal and informal job markets. Meanwhile, the Chinese Indonesians who maintain their right to settle in Pecinan and the surrounding areas have another reason, which is related to culture and faith. The Chinese must maintain their ancestors’ houses. While living inside Chinatown is prestigious, the Chinese who grew up there also have nostalgic reasons to live in these neighborhoods.

In contrast to several cases in Europe, such as the Bangladeshi settlement in West New Castle (Cameron & Field, 2000) and the Turkish-German settlement in Duisburg (Hanhörster, 2000), the native Indonesian population came later to this Chinese *kampung*. Based on the field observation, there is no tension between ethnic Chinese inhabitants and ethnic Indonesians. They are well integrated as they have similar social and economic conditions. Officially, they live in an inner-city *kampung*, which is classified as an Indonesian settlement, not inside Chinatown, where the Chinese clan leader maintains the dominance of ethnic Chinese inhabitants.

Although it is true that Chinese landlords combined traditional Chinese spatial characteristics with practical necessities as merchants, such as providing housing for their employees, the original spatial pattern can no longer be recognized due to the influx of new occupants. The local administration does not consider these *kampungs* to be Chinese settlements. In recent years, revitalization projects have centered on Semarang Chinatown, Kauman Kampung, and Arab Kampung.

## 9. Conclusion

The transformation of the former Semarang “colonial city” into an inner-city *kampung* and business district gives an interesting outlook on the development of Indonesian urban areas. The people keep migrating and settling there even without a guarantee of land ownership. As long as the district offers job opportunities and cheap accommodations generated by economic activities, people will be attracted to the neighborhoods.

This situation motivated the landlords to divide their land into small land parcels and lease it to the newcomers, starting with their own workers. The way they subdivided their lands did not always follow the simple grid pattern. Since they were left to organize the land by themselves, neo-traditional systems emerged. In one of the *kampungs* owned by a Javanese landlord, the traditional spatial pattern of a Javanese imperial city reappeared.

The other two *kampungs*, owned by the Chinese Indonesian landlord, do not show a specific spatial pattern. In general, the *kampungs* are behind the landlord’s house. During colonial times, the Semarang River served as the main transportation route. This explains why the landlord’s mansions are located in front of the river, reflecting a custom also seen in Chinese cities in southeastern China, where canals are essential.



These three cases demonstrate how the landlords significantly influenced the spatial pattern of the *kampungs* based on their culture and practical needs. This is in contrast to the general notion of urban *kampungs* in Nugroho's (2009) study that urban *kampungs* are developed without any planning process. The landlords also implemented their respective cultures, Javanese for Kampung Jeruk Kingkit and Chinese for the other two, and did not simply parcel out their land following a grid pattern, as mentioned in the study of Budiarto (2005). However, as the *kampungs* develop, the original spatial layout becomes blurred due to increasing density. The case of Chinese Indonesians in Semarang provides an interesting insight, revealing the complexity of land tenure in Indonesian urban *kampungs*. Despite having no legal right to land ownership, Chinese Indonesians were able to exploit loopholes in Indonesia's agrarian law and achieve a major role in shaping land tenure arrangements. In this situation, they could maintain their dominance in their former ethnic quarter while also building up another type of settlement, the Chinese urban *kampung*.

Apart from the hierarchy in spatial pattern and a few old buildings from the colonial era, the Chinese urban *kampung* in Semarang has exhibited few Chinese characteristics from the start. Most buildings in the Chinese *kampung* are similar to those found in other ethnically diverse urban *kampungs*. This observation raises important questions regarding ethnic settlement preservation in urban areas. Is preservation limited to ethnic settlements that still have notable physical ethnic characteristics and are dominated by the original ethnic group? What about the neighborhoods that are gradually developing into mixed-ethnic settlements?

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## Author contributions

*Conceptualization:* Kezia Eka Sari Dewi, Bruno de Meulder

*Formal analysis:* All authors

*Investigation:* Kezia Eka Sari Dewi

*Methodology:* Kezia Eka Sari Dewi

*Writing – original draft:* Kezia Eka Sari Dewi

*Writing – review & editing:* Bruno de Meulder, Viviana d'Auria

## Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institution Review Board of the Sultan Agung Islamic University (Approval ID: 57214722725). Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

## Consent for publication

All participants provided informed consent for the publication of the findings derived from this study. Where applicable, participants gave explicit permission for the publication of any data, images, or information that could potentially reveal their identity. The authors affirm that all relevant consent forms have been obtained and are available upon request.

## Availability of data

The data are publicly available through the digital collections of Leiden University: <https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/2011321>.

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