

# Chinese Cemeteries as a Symbol of Sacred Space

## *Control, Conflict, and Negotiation in Surabaya, Indonesia*

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### Introduction

'*Hidup hanya menunda kekalahan*' (Life simply means postponing defeat), said Chairil Anwar in his poem *Dera-dera cemara*. Everybody will die one day. Yet, is that the end of everything? It is for the individual who is dead, but not to his or her remaining family and relatives. Death can sometimes stir up a hornet's nest of problems. Funerals might be obstructed, graves might be robbed, tombstones might be destroyed, and cemeteries may be relocated, having to yield to city development. These problems represent the fate that has befallen Chinese cemeteries in Indonesia. In Yogyakarta, for instance, a Chinese cemetery abutting the housing complex of the Gadjah Mada University (UGM) had to be relocated because the land was needed for a campus mosque. In Makassar, a Chinese cemetery had to make way for an office for the governor of South Sulawesi.

As Surabaya developed in the 1950s, Chinese cemeteries also had to be closed. The urban population grew rapidly after independence. Squatters were looking for land on which to build a dwelling, and both the municipality and real-estate developers needed land for housing estates. The threat posed to tombs in the middle of housing areas was especially high on two counts. Firstly, on the practical level, they were considered excellent building land for housing.

Secondly, the graveyards conflicted with the desire of the urban government to give the city a modern appearance, one which befitted the newly won independent status of the country. The scattered graveyards violated the aesthetics of order and regularity, which also in colonial times were in the eyes of planners a sign of modernization (Van Roosmalen, this volume). The cemeteries thus ran counter to the desired modern image of Surabaya. Chinese cemeteries in particular were deemed inappropriately located in the centre, because in a sense they encapsulated the problematic relationship between the politically dominant, indigenous majority and the economically powerful, but politically weak, Chinese minority.<sup>1</sup> Two excerpts of the reasons given by the Surabaya

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1 According to the statistics of February 1959, the population of Surabaya consisted of: 1,003,312 Indonesians; 125,747 Chinese; 12,268 Europeans; 8,703 Arabs; 2,191 Indian/Pakistanis; and 117 Stateless persons (*Surabaya Post* 25-3-1959).

municipal government for its decision to close cemeteries in 1958 refer to the aesthetics (*keindahan kota*) and the fact that the cemeteries are no longer up-to-date with a modern city.

In view of the latest developments, it is inappropriate to have cemeteries such as those on Jl. Tambaksari Street, Embong Malang, Pandegiling, etc. in the middle of the city. [...] Moreover, if the aesthetic quality of the city is to be maintained, it is essential to close down the cemeteries.<sup>2</sup>

[...] Because they are no longer consonant with current conditions in the city, the cemeteries in the city should be closed. This is in order to enlarge the city [...] On that particular vacant land, decent houses, which would enhance the aesthetics of the city will be built<sup>3</sup>

For its part, in view of the significance of graveyards in their culture, the Chinese community was extremely upset by the closure of its cemeteries by the municipality. The reasons for closing the cemeteries and using the land for housing complexes reflect the insensitivity of the local government to the existence of a cemetery, which was more than just a resting place for the deceased; it was a potent symbol of respect for the ancestors (Figure 13.1). In the eyes of Chinese people, a cemetery is redolent with a sacrosanct significance and function. Any negligence in caring for the ancestors' tombs could have fatal consequences for their children and grandchildren. Quite apart from any sacred significance, a tomb is also a cogent reminder of people's social-economic status; the reason rich people are willing to buy a large piece of land in which to bury their parents.

In Chinese culture, a tomb has enormous importance as it is believed that the soul of the deceased remains in contact with surviving family members. In order to show proper respect to the ancestors, it was necessary to construct a tomb as soundly as possible. In Chinese culture, respect for parents is called *Hao* and this is shown to living parents every day, but respect for the

2 'Mengingat akan perkembangan-perkembangan pada dewasa ini, sangatlah tidak pada tempatnya adanya makam ditengah kota, seperti yang terletak di Djl. Tambaksari, Embong Malang, Djl. Pandegiling dsb [...]. Demikian djuga untuk memelihara akan keindahan kota, maka perlu sekali sekarang dimulainja penutupan makam-makam tersebut'. Arsip Kota Surabaya (AKS), box 118, no. 1824.

3 '[...] karena sudah tidak sesuai lagi dengan keadaan kota, maka makam-makam didalam kota itu harus ditutup. Ini untuk keperluan perluasan kota [...] Diatas tanah yang kosong itu lalu diberdirikan rumah-rumah yang baik dan yang sesuai dengan keindahan kota'. (Surabaya Post 25-3-1958).



FIGURE 13.1 *Funeral procession of a Chinese person in Surabaya, around 1900*  
 SOURCE: KITLV COLLECTION 9853. COURTESY OF KITLV/ROYAL NETHERLANDS  
 INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES, LEIDEN

dead is paid differently. Confucianism teaches a tradition of strong kinship ties in which the family forms the basis for preserving customs and culture, and enormous respect is paid not only to the living parents but, by extension, also to the ancestors (Herlianto 2001:5; Moerman 1929:128–136).

Therefore, having a child, particularly a son, is of enormous importance to a Chinese family. A son is needed to continue the patrilineal lineage and to bring blessing (*hokky*), and also eventually he will replace his father in his role as guardian of the ancestors' ashes. Given this situation, a parent's tomb is thought of as the focal point of kinship ties among family members and relatives. Therefore, there is an annual celebration in the cemetery on *Cengbeng Day*, when relatives gather, pray, and make offerings at the ancestors' tomb.

The preparations for a Chinese funeral can be complicated because it is essential that a tomb have good *feng shui*, that is: it should be located on a hill in the vicinity of flowing water (Figure 13.2). Bearing this in mind, many Chinese opt for cremation and preserve the ashes in an ash house in order to avoid tombs with bad *feng shui* and, of course, excessive expenses. Moreover, special account has to be taken of the orientation of the tomb, the tombstone,



FIGURE 13.2 Chinese graves at Embong Malang, Surabaya, 1880

SOURCE: KITLV COLLECTION 36D356. COURTESY OF KITLV/ROYAL NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES, LEIDEN

and the date of the funeral. The Chinese believe that whether the *feng shui* is good or bad will become evident in a year's time revealed in potential tangible influences on the son. At all costs, the Chinese usually strive to avoid changing the location of a cemetery considered good or, at least, not bad. However, if there are indications manifested through bad effects, a *feng shui* expert will immediately be summoned to examine the tomb to establish the reasons for the pernicious influences, and if possible, see if it can be upgraded to eliminate the atmosphere of calamity.

The measures taken by the city government in closing several Chinese cemeteries in Surabaya in the 1950s severely disturbed the sacredness of the tombs and eroded respect for ancestors. Instead of being a sacred symbol of the relationship with the ancestors, these cemeteries were unceremoniously transformed into building land, contested between parties with disparate interests. The relocation of cemeteries for city development and dwellings, office buildings, mosques, and other purposes sent palpable signals, which could not be ignored, that a cemetery as a sacred symbol had to bow to economic and political symbols (Nas 1993). This chapter examines the ways in which Chinese cemeteries in Surabaya were disturbed and the Chinese using them felt threatened as the city was modernized, and how their role in Chinese society was superseded by other symbols.

## Chinese Cemeteries during the Colonial Era and the Japanese Occupation

In the face of rapid population growth, the position of a cemetery as a last resting place became crucial. In the colonial era, cemeteries were located in the residential areas of each community group in Surabaya. The European cemetery was close to the Krembangan church, in the vicinity of the European area around Jembatan Merah. The Arab cemetery was located in the Arab quarter, Ampel. The principal Chinese cemetery was in the Chinese quarter, located between Handelstraat (now Jalan Kembang Jepun) and Chinesche Voorstraat (now Jalan Karet) (von Faber 1931:314–319), but Chinese graves were found in at least ten different locations in Surabaya.

In the last days of the colonial era, matters relating to the Chinese cemetery were regulated in the *Verordening op de Algemeene Begraafplaatsen voor Chineezzen in de Stadsgemeente Soerabaja*. This regulation was issued on 7 February 1940 and ratified two months later.<sup>4</sup> The decree set out the conditions pertaining to such matters as the burial permit, the digging of the grave, transportation of the corpse, tombstone, as well as the maintenance costs of the cemetery.

In contrast to the period after independence, the Chinese cemeteries raised very few problems during the colonial era and the subsequent Japanese occupation. There are several possible explanations for this relative lack of problems relating to cemeteries. One possible reason might have been the discipline exercised by the determination of the Dutch and Japanese colonial governments to protect public places. Another possible reason is that the Chinese population had more political clout before 1942; for instance, they were entitled to reserved seats on the municipal council. Arguably most importantly, there was less population pressure and more other available land.

During their occupation, the Japanese did interfere with the Muslim cemeteries, which lay scattered throughout the town. On 1 August 1942, the Japanese government announced the closing of some Islamic cemeteries, including those at Simolawang Gang II, Oendaan Wetan, Kalisari Gang I, Kambojastaat, Ketabangkali, Djagalan Gang IV, Djagalan Gang V, Kawatan Gang 12, and Plemahan Gang V (Penoetoepan 2602 [1942]). The following year, on 30 June 1943, the municipality decided that as of 1 July 1943 cemeteries in certain neighbourhoods (kampongs) would be out of bounds. The cemeteries closed at that juncture were Soerabajan, Kedoengklinger Gang VII, Wonoredjo Gang III, Kedondong Lor, Pandegiling Gang I, Koepang Pandjaan, Kedoenganjar Gang

4 AKS, box 1827, no. 45.887, *Bijvoegsel van het Provinciaal Blad van Oost-Java* Serie B, no. 4, 1-4-1940. There were separate regulations for other ethnic or religious groups.

Kuburan, Petemon Gang Kuburan, Garoeda Gang 2, and Dinojo Aloen-Aloen Gang IV.<sup>5</sup> No explanation was given for closing the cemeteries, but it might even then have been related to the need of space to pursue measures to improve the already obvious dearth of housing.

Insofar as the Japanese were concerned about Chinese deaths, it was not about the cemeteries, but their custom of keeping the dead body above the ground for some days. Although the Japanese Government still allowed Chinese people to keep deceased relatives at home for several days, this was on the condition that the corpse was in a closed coffin and that they complied with orders issued by the Eisibutyo (Head of City Health Office).<sup>6</sup>

### The Chinese Cemetery during the Early Days of the Republic

After independence, Chinese cemeteries became increasingly vulnerable. Conflicts, once latent, between the Chinese and the local community began to emerge. These contentions were essentially about space and land as homeless people used the cemetery land to build houses on; they turned the cemeteries into kampongs. This practice already occurred in colonial times (Figure 13.3), but now became more common. The sorts of incidents which vented the latent tension could assume many forms and included burglaries, the obstruction of the Chinese funerals, and various swindles, to mention just a few. On 27 January 1958, for example, three pieces of limestone worth 600 rupiahs each were stolen from Kembang Kuning Chinese cemetery (*Surabaya Post* 28-1-1959). Chinese associations regularly submitted complaints to the municipal government when such problems arose. Importantly, these associations offered families a formal vehicle in which they could organize themselves and draw strength from unity; taking care of the elaborate, expensive burials was just one of the tasks assumed by these associations. In this section, I shall indicate a number of cemetery-related disturbances with which the Chinese had to deal in the early years of the independent Republic of Indonesia.

On 28 March 1951, the Giok Yong Kong Hwee association sent a letter to the Surabaya municipal government enumerating the disturbances experienced by its members. These incidents had taken place on 24 and 25 March 1951. On 24 March, Tan Ing Tjiauw, who had just buried his child in Banju Urip, was forced to sign a letter by a group of people before they would let him go home. On 26 March, some of these people came to Tan Ing Tjiauw's house and again

5 AKS, box 231, no. 4185, letter Surabaya Shityo, no. 1076/B, 30-6-2603 [1943].

6 AKS, box 127, no. 1934; box 133, no. 1975.



FIGURE 13.3 *Chinese graves amidst kampong dwellings in the 1920s*  
SOURCE: FLIERINGA (1930:78)

asked him for money. What exactly happened remains unclear, but it would seem that Tan Ing Tjiau was intimidated and felt compelled to pay in order to be left in peace. Another disturbance in the cemetery in Banju Urip occurred on 25 March when people from the local community prevented Njoo Hian Liong from burying the body of his daughter. Njoo Hian Liong then requested the Hok Kian Kong Tik Soe association to allow his daughter to be buried in the Kupang Gunung cemetery.<sup>7</sup>

The municipal government promptly responded to the letter from the Hok Kian Kong Tik Soe association and issued an official announcement, dated 12 April 1951, stating that the land in Banju Urip was a cemetery: as this status had now been confirmed, no building permits for this land were to be issued by the municipal administration. Thus, on 2 May 1951, the Dewan Pemerintah Daerah (DPD, Executive Board of the Local [Municipal] Administration) of Surabaya sent a letter to the Kepala Kepolisian Urusan Dalam Kota Surabaya (Chief of the Surabaya Police) with the request that the requisite measures be taken to prevent disturbances at Chinese funerals and to prosecute offenders properly according to the letter of the law. In the opinion of the DPD the offences against the Chinese should be regarded as criminal acts as stipulated in the Criminal Code, which stated:

7 AKS, box 1496, no. 32.896.

Any individual who deliberately disturbs people who enter a cemetery for legitimate purposes or who obstructs a funeral will be sentenced to a maximum of one month and two weeks' imprisonment or a fine of a maximum of 120 rupiahs.<sup>8</sup>

The police responded to the request from the DPD, by interrogating the persons involved in the particular incidents and these people promised henceforward to refrain from any further actions. The Dinas Perkembangan Kota (Urban Development Office) cleared the burial ground of the huts, which had recently obstructed people who were holding a funeral.<sup>9</sup> These examples of cases would seem to warrant the conclusion that the municipal administration upheld the historical rights of the Chinese cemeteries against the invasion of land-hungry squatters.

### Ongoing Conflicts: The Closure of Chinese Cemeteries in the Late 1950s

In the course of the 1950s, the matter of squatting became an issue of steadily growing proportions in Surabaya (Purnawan 2005; Colombijn 2010). The problem of demolishing illegal dwellings was a serious matter, as the Pakis incident of April 1956 shows. The attempted demolition of illegal houses in Kampong Pakis resulted in four deaths and two people injured. Furthermore, as a direct response to this demolition, thousands of people went on strike in May 1956 and a number of communal and political organizations called for an end to the demolitions, demanding the prosecution of the state apparatus (military). The upshot of this event was a prohibition on demonstrations in the area of Surabaya City proper. This prohibition was issued and then officially proclaimed by the commander-in-chief of the army.<sup>10</sup>

Against the confused background of the spread of squatting, the mounting population pressure and the hints of a deterioration in Chinese-indigenous

8 *'Barang siapa, jang dengan sengadja mengganggu orang bepergian jang diperbolehkan masuk dalam suatu pemakam atau mengganggu/menghalangi pengangkutan djinazah kesuatu pemakam, dihukum pendjara selama-lamanja satu bulan dua minggu atau hukuman denda sebanjak-banjaknya seratus duapuluh rupiah'*. AKS, box 1496, no. 32.896, Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana, Article 178.

9 AKS, box 1496, no. 32.896, letter Dinas Perkembangan Kota, 25-7-1951.

10 *Surabaya Post* 17-4-1956, 7-5-1956, 8-5-1956, 9-5-1956, 14-5-1956, 15-5-1956, 16-5-1956, 23-5-1956.



relationships, the municipality of Surabaya somewhat cut back of its previous efforts to defend the cemeteries against squatters. In 1958, the Dinas Pekerdjaan Umum (PU, Public Works Office) proposed the closure of several Chinese cemeteries in different areas of the town. The Public Works Office argued that these closures were essential because cemeteries should not be located in the middle of the city. Such a location was deemed inappropriate and was thought to affect the appearance of the city adversely. The proposal was sent to the Dewan Pemerintah Daerah Peralihan (DPDP, Interim Executive Council of the Local Administration) of Surabaya, which discussed the matter with a specially instituted commission, Panitia Penyelesaian Tanah Makam Tionghoa (Commission for the Settlement of [the Disputes about] Chinese Burial Grounds), which included representatives from the Chinese community in Surabaya. After reaching an agreement with the Panitia Penyelesaian Tanah Makam Tionghoa, on 11 March 1958 the DPDP of Surabaya publicly announced the planned closure of seven Chinese cemeteries.<sup>11</sup> People were given a period of up to six months after this proclamation was issued to submit a written request to hold a funeral in one of the cemeteries or lodge an objection to this plan.<sup>12</sup> The DPDP also designated three cemeteries which were to remain open and where burials could continue to take place. The three cemeteries threatened with closure were those to the south of Jalan Banju Urip, to the west of Jalan Kembang Kuning, and the cemetery in Banju Urip, Kupang Gunung, and Kembang Kuning.

Closing seven cemeteries to burials dealt with just one aspect of the problem; the urban administration also tried to solve the problem, which formed the other side of the coin: squatting in cemeteries. Therefore, as well as the announcement of the closure of the cemeteries, the DPDP declared that henceforward it was prohibited to erect dwellings within the confines of a cemetery. Furthermore, to ensure that the announcement was put into effect, the DPDP added another rule, stating that any individual in breach of the prohibition on the construction or use of buildings in one of the ten Chinese cemeteries (seven closed, three still open), would be liable to punishment under a regulation of the Central Military Sovereign dated 4 December 1957.<sup>13</sup> This ordinance covered the prohibition on the use of land without the possession of a legal

11 These cemeteries were: Jalan Kembangjapun; Jalan Tambaksari (Karanggajam); Jalan Teratai/Jalan Mendut; the south and north of Jalan Embong Malang; south and north of Jalan Pandegiling; the north of Jalan Banju Urip; and Jalan Cokroaminoto.

12 AKS, box 118 no. 1824, letter Dinas Pekerdjaan Umum to Dewan Pemerintah Daerah Peralihan, 7-2-1958; *Surabaya Post* 14-3-1958.

13 Regulation of Central Military Sovereign dated 4 December 1957 No. Pert/P.M./014/1957.

permit from the landowner or the authorities.<sup>14</sup> Naturally enough, the prohibition on squatting in cemeteries did not end the practice; the municipality now faced the task of finding land to accommodate the people who had built illegal dwellings in the cemeteries and were now evicted (*Surabaya Post* 14-3-1958).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the measures taken by the local administration, on 16 March 1958 another conflict erupted between the local community and Chinese people who had gathered to bury a relative. This case is interesting for two reasons. First, the intervention of security officers who were guarding the funeral prevented the local people from making trouble, however it simultaneously stirred up anger and subsequent reprisals against the city government. Second, the conflict occurred on day five after the announcement on the closure of seven Chinese cemeteries. The announcement might well have triggered the conflict.

The conflict began as Liem Kie Seng prepared to bury his female relative, Liem Kiem Nio, in the cemetery belonging to the Hwa Kiauw Bian Hap Hwee association, south of Jalan Banju Urip.<sup>15</sup> The reason the local community halted the funeral was its objection that the tomb was located very near one of its houses. The people asked Liem Kie Seng to move the location of the tomb away to a distance of 100 metres from the house. This request was rejected by the children of the deceased, Liem Kiem Nio, on the grounds of Municipal Ordinance No. 770200/8, dated 13 March 1958, which permitted the funeral. Furthermore, it was impossible to postpone the funeral any longer. To avoid further incidents, the State Police Sector I joined members of the Military Police Unit 55 to provide an escort for the funeral procession.<sup>16</sup>

In the next phase of the incident, the local people, represented by the heads of the neighbourhood associations and the Panitia Penutupan Penguburan Jenazah Bangsa Tionghoa (Committee of Chinese Cemetery Closure, a committee formed by the people of Banju Urip) took the matter to the provincial government. They sent a letter to DPDP of East Java, dated 1 April 1958, in which the residents complained about the unjust and discriminatory decision of the Surabaya Municipality DPDP in the case of the funeral of Liem Kiem Nio. Her tomb was located on the border of Kampong Banju Urip Kidul and very close

14 On 25 August 1958, the DPDP of Surabaya sent a letter to the Advertising Agency Pantjaragam asking the agency to republish the announcement of the closing Chinese cemeteries and the prohibition on the erection of buildings in the cemeteries in seven newspapers: *Pewarta Surabaya*, *Suara Rakjat*, *Harian Umum*, *China Daily News*, *Trompet Masyarakat*, *Indonesian Daily News*, and *Surabaya Post*. AKS, box 118, no. 1824.

15 The exact family relationship between Liem Kie Seng and Liem Kiem Nio is unclear.

16 AKS, box 118, no. 1824.

to people's dwellings: only 25 metres from houses and wells for drinking water. The local people had not been able to do anything to prevent the burial because the police had protected the funeral party.

In its letter to the DPDP of East Java, the local community argued that the incident was an unequivocal indication that the decision of the DPDP of Surabaya had been unfair. Whereas the interests of Liem Kie Seng had been thoroughly taken care of by the granting of permission to hold the burial, the interests of the Banju Urip people had been completely ignored. The unfortunate incident had stirred up feelings of deep resentment in the community of Banju Urip, for two reasons. Their first grudge was that the funeral of a Chinese person (Liem Kiem Nio), who was of no significance to the state or the people, had been protected by state institutions, and this was not one of its official tasks. The letter is not fully clear on this point, but people felt that perhaps the police had protected the funeral above and beyond the call of duty and had actually been privately hired by the relatives of Liem Kie Seng. Whatever the truth of the matter, the people believed that the police and military had other, more urgent tasks to perform than escorting a funeral. The second cause of resentment was that the incident supported the popular feeling that democracy was consciously being violated by a small group of people to sustain their own vested interests, at the cost of public interests.<sup>17</sup> The letter of the neighbourhood people did not make explicit which minority group allegedly violating democracy they had in mind, but almost certainly from the context they were referring to the Chinese.

The frequent reference to the word 'democracy', and the 'destruction of democracy', is significant in the socio-political period of 1957–1965, when Indonesia was ruled by what was known as Guided Democracy. This was a politically shaky period. In 1958, the perceptibly growing centralizing power of the Government was seriously contested in the PRRI/Permesta Rebellion (Ricklefs 1991:396; *Surabaya Post* 22-2-1958; 3-3-1959). At the local level, in 1957 and 1958 local municipal politics livened up, because, in contrast to the Parliament, municipal councils were elected bodies and, secure in the knowledge they had been chosen by the voters, dared to speak out. As a partial consequence of the national elections of 1955 and municipal elections later, the Indonesian Communist Party, plus other political parties and labour unions, emerged as champions of the squatters. People no longer just accepted any arbitrary decision issued by the government; they dared to resist (Colombijn 2010).

17 AKS, box 1852, no. 46.935.

In reaction to the letter sent by the neighbourhood leaders of Banju Urip, the DPDP of East Java sent a letter, dated 9 June 1958, asking the DPDP of Surabaya to submit a report setting out details of the situation. In a letter, dated 31 July 1958, the mayor of Surabaya informed the DPDP of East Java that the problem was solved after the local community had been provided with the necessary explanation.<sup>18</sup> Whether tension on the ground had really been dissipated by this exchange of letters remains an open question. The real answer is perhaps not, as another major conflict broke out within months.

The next major conflict, again involving the police, erupted on 14 July 1958, when two members of the Chinese burial association, Hwa Kiauw Bian Hap Hwee, were digging a grave. When the local community noticed the work in progress, its members obstructed it, with the result that the relatives of the deceased had to go to the Public Works Office of the Surabaya municipality to try to repair the situation. The family received a letter of notification from the head of the *Bagian Makam* (Cemetery Division) of the Public Works Office, M. Kasno, stating that the cemetery was not one of the seven cemeteries, which had been closed, so the burial could proceed.

Because the community did not comply with the letter of notification from the municipal government and continued to hinder the funeral, the Chinese family sought help from the police. Anticipating possible riots, the police made sure that it had backup from the Military Police. Despite the forces arrayed against it, the community was determined to obstruct the funeral. They presented a common resolution stating their arguments for doing this. This resolution confused both the police and the military police, who consequently offered the Chinese family insufficient help to ensure the safe procedure of the funeral. In view of the situation and as it was growing dark, the board of the Hwa Kiauw Bian Hap Hwee burial association hurriedly offered another burial place, which was accepted by the relatives, although the deceased could no longer be buried alongside his wife's tomb as requested in his will.<sup>19</sup>

The board of the Hwa Kiauw Bian Hap Hwee association claimed that this incident had contravened the state regulations and had violated the moral right of the family to hold a funeral in accordance with its own traditions. Therefore, the committee urged the government to take the measures necessary to ensure against any recurrence of the unfortunate affair. It argued that steps to prevent any future disruptions should include ensuring that the local community was provided with detailed information via the heads of the urban kampongs (*kepala Rukun Kampung*, or RK). This would ensure three matters:

18 AKS, box 1852, no. 46.935.

19 AKS, box 118, no. 1824.

funerals taking place in legitimate cemeteries would no longer be obstructed; funerals would no longer have to be escorted by the police as this caused resentment in the community against the security forces; and there would be a stop to the illegal use of burial land and illegal buildings in the cemeteries.<sup>20</sup>

The municipal government responded positively to this request by the burial association, to the effect it sent a letter to the kampong heads. The letter, dated 2 September 1958, stated three points. The first of these was that those Chinese cemeteries not listed for closure in the decree of 11 March 1958 were legally designated cemeteries in which funerals could be held. The second made clear that the obstruction of the funeral of two Chinese people on 14 July 1958 in the legally designated Chinese cemetery in Kupang Gunung had broken the law and was irresponsible. Finally, to avoid similar incidents in future, all heads of the kampong associations were requested to inform their communities about the legal position of Chinese cemeteries.<sup>21</sup>

Still unsettled by the ongoing disturbances at the Chinese cemeteries, the Panitia Perhimpunan Makam dan Tanah Makam Tionghoa (Committee for the Protection of Chinese Cemeteries and Burial Land), a Chinese lobby group, sent a letter to the Surabaya municipal government dated 9 September 1959. The letter enumerated five points. First, the situation in the cemeteries had not improved despite the announcement by the DPDP that seven Chinese cemeteries had been designated for closure and the subsequent prohibition on erecting buildings on designated cemetery land without a permit in the before-mentioned 1957 regulation of the Central Military Sovereign.<sup>22</sup> Second, the dismantling and moving of illegal houses in Chinese cemeteries had not yet been completed, as the heads of the kampongs (kepala RK) were aware. Third, illegal buildings in the cemeteries, some of them even built of brick, were mushrooming. Fourth, the community was still denying the legitimate use of the still open cemeteries by the Chinese. Fifth, it was impossible to hold a funeral in the proper Chinese manner as people were forced to separate spouses in death. Referring to the latest incident, the letter mentioned that one funeral had had to be moved to another cemetery in order to prevent an escalation in the conflict between the police and the local community.<sup>23</sup>

The Surabaya DPDP forwarded this letter to the Chief Inspector of the Surabaya City Police with the request that any further destruction of the Chinese cemeteries be prevented in accordance with the agreement made in

20 AKS, box 118, no. 1824.

21 AKS, box 118, no. 1824, letter DPDP Surabaya to Kepala RK, 2-9-1958.

22 Regulation of Central Military Sovereign dated 4 December 1957, No. Pert/P.M./014/1957.

23 AKS, box 118, no. 1824.

the previous month between three parties: Komando Militer Kota Besar (KMKB, Military Command of a Municipality), the police, and the DPDP of Surabaya.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the best efforts undertaken by the Surabaya municipal government to deal with the disturbances at Chinese cemeteries, none of its actions was very successful; the destruction inexorably continued. On 15 July 1961, Tan Hong Lian (a government medical doctor) sent a letter to the mayor of Surabaya in which he complained about the destruction of his family's tomb in Banju Urip. The extent of the destruction was so serious it had led to the exposure of a coffin. Responding to the complaint, the mayor forwarded the letter to the Chief of the Surabaya Police Sector I so that the necessary measures could be taken.<sup>25</sup> The latter's reaction is unknown.

### Negotiating a Solution

As a response to the plan to close seven Chinese cemeteries and to the opportunity offered by the DPDP to object, various Chinese people submitted a special consideration to the municipal government. On 28 March 1958, for instance, the Lam Yang Tjo Soe association, chaired by Han Twan Hwie, wrote a letter to the DPDP requesting permission to use two graves it had bought on Jalan Mendut.<sup>26</sup> On 12 May 1958, the association sent another letter informing the authorities that there were thirty-two tombs still unused. In this letter, Han Twah Hwie requested that funerals on this land should be permitted to go ahead without any unnecessary obstacles.<sup>27</sup>

On 3 September 1958, Tjoa Ping Khie sent a letter requesting that he and his wife be given permission to use the Chinese cemetery in Banju Urip for their future funeral. Tjoa Ping Khie had bought the grave space for himself and his wife five years prior to the announcement that this cemetery would be closed. The municipal government consented to the latter's request.<sup>28</sup>

24 AKS, box 118, no. 1824.

25 AKS, box 1852, no. 46935.

26 The Chinese cemetery in Jalan Mendut (now Jl. Teratai) was closed in 1982 and moved to Kembang Kuning. This was decided and carried out under Mayoral Decree Number 471/1982. Afterwards, the former cemetery was used to build the Tambaksari District Office. See: AKS, box 2119, no. 58.557.

27 AKS, box 2100, no. 57.534.

28 AKS, box 1852, no. 46.953, letter DPD Surabaya to Tjoa Ping Khie, 20-6-1961.

As said, in the municipal proclamation of 11 March 1958, Chinese people were given a six-month period in which to submit a request for dispensation for those among them who wanted to bury relatives in one of the seven cemeteries. This provision was a prudent decision as many Chinese had already bought land for their tombs long before the Government issued the announcement. Nevertheless, the granting of dispensation became a source of conflict between the local community and the Chinese who wanted to hold funerals. In the opinion of the people living around the cemeteries, commencing with the proclamation on 11 March 1958, the Chinese funerals could no longer be held in the designated graveyards.

Tjoa Ping Khie, who had successfully obtained permission to be buried with his wife in the future, had to bear the brunt of this when he applied for dispensation to use the Chinese cemetery in Banju Urip. The community rejected the dispensation granted by the municipal government for the following reasons: Banju Urip was transformed into an orderly residential area, although the most of the houses situated there did not have a formal permit from the Surabaya municipal government and consequently the land use for funerals was illegal. Second, a recent confrontation with a person from Malang who was renovating his parents' tomb had caused an unexpected incident. In the opinion of the local community, to avoid further incidents, the municipal government should take three steps, namely: the Banju Urip cemetery should remain closed (no more dispensations should be granted); the designation of Banju Urip as a cemetery had to be withdrawn; and the dispensation granted to Tjoa Ping Khie should be nullified.<sup>29</sup>

The government repudiated the objections made by the community and permits or dispensations continued to be issued to Chinese families, for instance that given to Han Tjing Tjwan on 12 September 1961 to bury a relative, Mrs Han Tjong Khing, in Tambaksari.<sup>30</sup>

Eager to find a solution, the DPDP invited the Panitia Penyelesaian Tanah Makam Tionghoa (Committee for the Resolution of the Chinese Cemeteries) to a meeting on 21 January 1959. This same committee had been consulted prior to the seminal proclamation of 11 March 1958, stipulating that seven cemeteries had to be closed and squatting had to end. In this meeting of 21 January 1959, Amiruddin (member of the DPDP Surabaya), and Soedarmadji (member of the Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah Peralihan, Interim Municipal Council) represented the administration. The eight-person strong delegation from the

29 AKS, box 1852, no. 46.935.

30 AKS, box 1846, no. 38.178.

Committee for the Resolution of the Chinese Cemeteries was led by Ong Ing Sien.

The goal of the meeting was to find a solution for the community, which was using Chinese cemeteries as a dwelling place. The meeting also revealed that a few indigenous people were knowingly making a profit by buying and selling cemetery land. In the meeting, Ong Ing Sien pointed out that the problem with Chinese cemeteries did not stop with the illegal acquisition of land; it also extended to the obstruction of Chinese funerals by the local community. Therefore, he called on the local government to end the problem once and for all by requesting the military to take resolute measures.<sup>31</sup>

According to Oon Tjhing Tiauw (secretary of the Committee for the Resolution of the Chinese Cemeteries), one of the most difficult matters experienced by Chinese people was the illegal use of the empty spare tombs; tombs prepared for future burials were now occupied by local people. To retrieve the tombs, the Chinese people had to pay compensation. Therefore, he hoped that, anticipating *Cengbeng Day* on 5 April 1958, the local government would immediately remove all illegal dwellings from the cemeteries. Tho Boon Hwan, another member of the committee, proposed that the local government should relocate the tombs to a public cemetery, or the government should provide housing for the community.<sup>32</sup>

Three conclusions emerged from the meeting between the municipal administration and the Committee for the Resolution of the Chinese Cemeteries. First, while a solution was sought, the building of illegal dwellings would be halted. With the support of the authorities, the committee would set up border demarcation signs or build fences around the cemeteries. Furthermore, the committee was required to locate the troublemakers. Second, the local government would discuss the provisions concerning the cemeteries with the police. Third, the local government would discuss the security of the cemeteries on *Cengbeng Day* with the police.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

For many people who have special traditions linked to the burial of a relative, the cemetery is a 'sacred space' and a site of great importance. Cemeteries are particularly important to Chinese people, as the cemetery is more than the last

31 AKS, box 118, no. 1824.

32 AKS, box 118, no. 1824.

33 AKS, box 118, no. 1824.



resting place of their deceased relatives; its significance is far greater: it symbolizes respect for ancestors and underlines social status. The problem is that cemeteries require a large area of land, which often leads to conflicts about urban space. In colonial times, conflicts about Chinese burials were still largely contained by the state.

The frequency and intensity of conflicts increased in the course of the 1950s, for several reasons. The major reason was that many economic migrants had poured into Surabaya and empty urban space was in extremely short supply; these migrants invaded the Chinese cemeteries, occupied tombs, and built houses in the burial grounds. The municipal administration had less authority than its Dutch and Japanese predecessors had had and therefore less power to stop the squatters. The squatters, in contrast, had gained strength since colonial times, because they enjoyed the backing of grassroots movements, including political parties. Being the authorized owners of the cemetery, the Chinese community could not tolerate the squatters, let alone the constant disturbances, which disrupted funerals, but the Chinese had less political clout than they had had in Dutch times.

The response of the local administration to mounting tensions was to begin by closing seven Chinese cemeteries, but at the same time to give better protection from squatters to the three remaining Chinese cemeteries. In other words, slowly but surely the Chinese cemeteries were removed from the centre of the city. The untidy appearance of a Chinese cemetery was not suitable in a modern town. The idea that a cemetery, full of significance for the next of kin, was something valuable became increasingly obsolete in the modernizing city.

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