Peter Post and May Ling Thio, *The Kwee Family of Ciledug: Family, Status, and Modernity in Colonial Java*. Volendam: LM Publishers, 2019, 288 pp., ISBN: 9789460224928, price: EUR 29,50 (paperback).

Peter Post and May Ling Thio call attention to the private lives of modern Chinese *peranakan* families in colonial Java through a private collection of photographs and home movies. The main protagonists are the Kwee family from Ciledug, who controlled the sugar factory of Djatipiring. With more than 2,000 photographs from over 24 albums, taken mostly by Kwee Zwan Liang, this book seeks to examine how ideas about progress, development, and modernity have affected this family's worldview and lifestyle.

Post argues that there are no other family albums from the Netherlands Indies that illustrate the life of one family so systematically and for such an extended time. It is probably the world's most comprehensive private photo collection of pre-war Java.

Meanwhile, the Kwee family's home movies that have survived the chaotic regime changes of Indonesia do not only enable us to imagine the social life of the Kwee family throughout the period 1927–1939, but also visualize a wide range of images of pre-war Java, such as metropolitan life in Java's cities, official ceremonies, celebrations, and festivities in colonial Java, along with popular leisure activities, sports of the European elite, and all aspects of the sugar factory in Djatipiring. (pp. 16–17)

Those visual materials portray how Western-style modernity penetrated the lives of the 'enlightened' Kwee family. Wealth, status, and modernity emerged as essential identity markers for the Kwee family, and were expressed, for example, in their fancy Western cars, the women's membership to the Chinese Housewives Association (*Hoe Djien Hwee*), highly modern outfits, the family's participation in elite sports, their self-constructed environment and modern interiors, and their children's education (p. 209)

Post highlights four additional subjects that appeared frequently in the Kwee photo albums: cars, funeral ceremonies and burial grounds, night markets (*pasar malam*) and annual affairs, and outdoor fashion. Through photographs, Post analyses how the Kwee family fostered their upper class (*cabang atas*) status in colonial Indonesia between the 1910s and 1940s.

Post also strives to reconstruct the Kwee family network, demonstrating how the family formed strategic social networks all over Java. One of the crucial strategies, as Post argues, was through strategic marriages with other influential, Western-oriented, and modern *peranakan* Chinese elites families.

This practice can be seen through photographs of strategic marriages. Kwee Zwan Lwan married Jenny Be Kiam Nio, daughter of Major-titular Be Kwat

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Koen of Solo. Kwee Der Tjie married Han Tiauwing from the notable Han family in East-Java. Kwee Zwan Liang married Roos Liem Hwat Nio from the reputable and powerful Liem family from Surabaya. Kwee Zwan Ho married Betty Tan Ing Nio of the Tan family from Buitenzorg (Bogor). Through such marriages, the Kwee family paved the way to other powerful and influential *peranakan* Chinese family networks. After all, the more extensive such connections were, the more power and prestige a Chinese leader could secure.

The Kwee family was firmly grounded in the Javanese community, having created strong relationships with the traditional Javanese ruling aristocracies. Because of the close connection between the family, the Central Javanese Principalities, and the Cirebon Residency, they were able to maintain their prestige in local Javanese society and the *peranakan* Chinese associations at large. These resulting alliances secured the family wealth for the upcoming future and enabled them to continue living their luxurious and modern lifestyles. In 1925, Kwee Zwan Lwan even acquired a position on the Regency Council, and by the mid-1930s he became the leader of the Chinese community in Cirebon.

Another interesting point that Post highlights in this book is the way women take center stage in a number of private photos and films. The Kwee women certainly enjoyed a lot of freedom. This can be seen from their fashionable and often self-made clothing, which became an essential identity marker, separating them from other people, and “thereby challenging the Dutch and Indo-European population groups who publicly criticized these modern attitudes of the Indies Chinese.” (p. 50)

The beginning of Indonesia’s War of Independence (1945–1949), which was immediately followed by anti-Chinese outbursts in many areas in Java and Sumatera, forced the whole Kwee family to leave Cirebon. After that, the Kwee family lost its power and influence in Cirebon. After 1948, the photos in the Kwee collection focus on three major topics: farewells and departures, new beginnings, and deaths and funerals. As the author concludes, “[t]hese images and the stories behind them show the deep impact the violent regime changes in Indonesia had on the once all-powerful *peranakan* Chinese elite.” (p. 258)

Through these fundamental photographs and home movies, readers are presented with a new viewpoint on the social dynamics of late-colonial Java. The book successfully portrays the lives and works of this elite *peranakan* family, their extensive social networks, and their place in colonial society. It was able to capture a ‘modernizing Java,’ a dynamic world in motion, in which technological progress rapidly changed the lives of the island’s inhabitants.

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