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Souw Beng Kong’s Tomb: Transformation of a Green Chinese Cemetery Area to a Present Dense Area

Ikrar Raksaperdana¹, Kemas Ridwan Kurniawan²

¹Student, Dept. of Architecture Universitas Indonesia, Beji, Depok 16424, Indonesia
²Lecturer, Dept of Architecture Universitas Indonesia, Beji, Depok 16424, Indonesia

E-mail: ikrar.raksaperdana@ui.ac.id

Abstract. In 1644, Souw Beng Kong lay on his final rest, in a burial site on the middle of a coconut plantation site in Mangga Dua. A portrait of a green cemetery area in the heart of Batavia, which cannot be found anymore. Despite the preservation act, Souw Beng Kong's tomb is now located in a very narrow space amid the overcrowded area. This paper seeks to explore the Souw Beng Kong’s Tomb historical value, which categorized as one of Jakarta’s urban heritage, in an aim to generate more understanding of a place, mainly the green cemetery site on the past and to trace the change of place, with a main question on how was the transformation of place occurred on the site of Souw Beng Kong’s Tomb? How the site was treated on each era (colonial and post-colonial)? What was the socio-political occurrence that triggers the contrasting change of the place? In processing data, beside using the content analysis method, the interpretation will be processed using Fumihiko Maki (2018) approach on reading the urban morphological changes that includes observation on morphological and microtopography, community culture, and site-specific basic principles.

1. Introduction

Between the 17th and the mid-19th century, a great number of the Europeans who came to Batavia were lively to come to the Chinese cemeteries in order to enjoy the green atmosphere from these green landscapes, as they would have done in a public garden [1]. Worth to note that all of those green cemeteries are blooming from the oldest Chinese tomb that still existed in the present time. The Souw Beng Kong tomb, which remained as a landmark of the Chinese Society in Batavia and present Jakarta. But how is the tomb’s condition now? It is not an enjoyable, green landscapes from the past given the massive development that occurred in the area around the tomb of Souw Beng Kong at this time and the potential damage to the site that will occur.

Analyzing a transformation of a place is important because - in addition to studying the past - the history of a place can be a survey for future speculations of that place. Historical tracing can be a tool for innovations that will be carried out in protecting the human environment. "........ any imagination of the past is ineluctably linked to the present, and that how we tell history is as important as what we tell." Scott, 2004 [2].
The observations included the Mangga Dua area as the site of Souw Beng Kong's tomb - also alluded some about the expansion of the tomb of Souw Beng Kong to Gunungsari Sentiong. Observation of the area will trace the transformation of place of the Souw Beng Kong tomb site to learn how a green cemetery in the colonial period turned into a densely populated area.

1.1. Background
Walking through Jalan Pangeran Jayakarta, we will find a narrow alley named Gang Souw Beng Kong. Traced from historical archives, we can see the alley - including Jalan Pangeran Jayakarta - has existed since the colonial era. Standing under the name Gang Mangga Doea in the colonial era, now we know it by the name Gang Taruna, which was later changed to become the Souw Beng Kong Gang. Walking deeper into the Souw Beng Kong Gang, we will find a passageway that is access to one of the oldest tombs in Jakarta. The tomb of Souw Beng Kong, a silent witness to the transformation of fertile land of the former klappertuin - coconut plantations - which is now a densely populated land. Geologically and geomorphologically, DKI Jakarta area since the colonial era is a flood-prone area. These conditions aggravate the integrity of Souw Beng Kong's tomb until finally it is necessary to preserve the Souw Beng Kong tomb. In 2008, a revitalization act was finally carried out by the Souw Beng Kong community [3].

Figure 1. Untreated tomb site (circa 2012). Source: Adolf Heukeun (2012)

Therefore, we can discuss a number of things from this site. First, discussing a historical value preserved in an architectural object. To analyze a cultural heritage object, it needs to be underlined more on the meaning contained in the object. In the Souw Beng Kong tomb case, people are unaware of the hidden history in the tomb, namely the existence of a tomb that also has a function as a green area in the heart of Batavia. The hidden meaning will have a very useful value for a discussion related to urban areas, some examples are that the acknowledgement of a place in the past can increase public awareness of the need for green space, also realizing that at colonial era, other than city parks, even cemeteries can also be optimized to become green areas. Second, rapid growth of the capital city and the high need for spaces for essential needs. We often saw buildings that have elements of historical value that have already begun to experience space reduction or function change, let alone tombs. We cannot avoid the reduction of space that occurs in the Souw Beng Kong tomb site, but we can transform the site into a more informative site such as Menteng Pulo Dutch Cemetery in Central Jakarta, because the most important thing of preserving an object of cultural heritage is to preserve all memory contained in that object. In addition, related to preservation, citing the writing of Dolores Hayden, 1997, preservation of the memory of a place can also protect us from historical distortions formed by massive development in urban areas. Herbert J. Gans and Ada Louise Huxtable in Hayden [4] revealed that “a monument should respond to memories from the past of the entire surrounding community (place)”.

1.2. Methods
The transformation of Souw Beng Kong's tomb will be carried out through the interpretation of photos, maps and historical texts. The data that has been collected will be processed into an analysis of morphological change in the Souw Beng Kong tomb area with the coverage of the Mangga Dua area. In processing data, beside using the content analysis method, the interpretation will be processed using
Fumihiko Maki (2018) approach on reading the urban morphological changes that includes observation on morphological and microtopography, community culture, and site-specific basic principles [5]. The first part of this paper will discuss the deployment of Souw Beng Kong’s Cemetery Site on Colonial Era and the second will discuss the deployment on Post-Colonial Era.

2. Result

2.1. Deployment of Souw Beng Kong’s Cemetery Site on Colonial Era

Souw Beng Kong was buried in 1644 in private cemetery of So family in the Mangga Dua area, with five other tombs located next to each other [6]. According to de Haan [7], the So family's private funeral is not the only cemetery in the Chinatown, especially the Mangga Dua area. Chinese family cemeteries have spread in Chinatown since 1620. The cemeteries began to be managed collectively - often referred to as yizhong referring to Chinese cemeteries - in 1650 along Jakatraweg - now Jalan Pangeran Jayakarta [8]. In 1660, the Chinese community under the Kong Koan (Council of the Chinese) proposed an expansion of the burial ground to the southern region along the Ciliwung River. Until 1761, Chinese cemeteries spread to the Kemayoran and Gunung Sari areas [9].

Looking at the situation map of Souw Beng Kong's tomb (Figure 3), Souw Beng Kong's grave was located in the middle of the four graves around it, and there are two other tombs in the south and north. Souw Beng Kong's tomb is surrounded by coconut plantations and some houses. In the south there was the Ciliwung River which later became a benchmark in distribution of Chinese tombs in Mangga Dua area.

Social aspects on the Chinese community cemeteries are different from other cemetery. Luxurious funeral ceremony and decorated site were the views that could be seen on the Chinese tombs especially Souw Beng Kong tombs that placed on a green landscape with some vegetation as a buffer between the tomb and the residents' settlements. Although, the shape of the tomb which was decorated with jewels and coins coupled with the presence of guardrails at each tomb, caused Chinese cemetery became a target of theft [10]. In 1668, there was an attempt of pillages on Chinese graves in Mangga Dua and its surroundings by Ambonese who destroyed nearly four hundred graves in the area of Mangga Dua and its surroundings [11]. Even the pillages continued until the end of the 18th century. Seeing the conditions that were not conducive, the Chinese cemetery was moved to south of Batavia. Until only a few graves remain in Mangga Dua.

The condition of the tombs in the Mangga Dua area has become neglected, the area around the tomb of Souw Beng Kong, which was often crowded if there was a funeral procession, has now become quiet throughout the year. However, what can be seen was people around still respect the existence of tombs, and surrounding green areas. The area around Souw Beng Kong's tomb remain preserved as a green area even though vegetation has begun to undermine the body of Souw Beng Kong's grave. Rows of shade

![Figure 2. Development of Chinese tombs in Batavia. Source: Claudine Salmon](image1)

![Figure 3. So's family funeral, Mangga Dua (1920) Source: Yayasan Kapiten Souw Beng Kong](image2)
trees can be seen lined up along the transportation route. The morphology of the Mangga Dua area did not grow massively. Until the end of the Dutch Colonial era, the Chinese burial area where Souw Beng Kong's tomb stood was still maintained as a green cemetery in Batavia.

**Figure 4.** Green scenery around Mangga Dua area and the Souw Beng Kong’s tomb site (1909)  
Source: KITLV & Yayasan Kapiten Souw Beng Kong

Despite several attempts at vandalism, pillaging, and the removal of land, until the end of the colonial era, the green areas in the Chinese burial area in Mangga Dua and surrounding areas is still maintained. In fact, based on drawings and maps in the colonial era, the Gunungsari Sentong cemetery area - the expansion of the Chinese tomb of Mangga Dua - became a vast area where urban cemeteries and greenings were placed. The trace of green cemetery area was no longer seen after independence along with massive developments that were reducing the Souw Beng Kong cemetery space.

**Figure 5.** Morphological changes on the site of Souw Beng Kong’s Tomb. Source: Maps.Leiden.uni

### 2.2. Massive Post-Colonial Development and Reduction of Cemeteries Space

After Independence, urban development turned every piece of land in Jakarta became extremely expensive. The existence of graveyards in the heart of city became threatened. Those are included to The Souw Beng Kong’s tomb site. The site – include every piece of land in the Mangga Dua area – after independence developed so rapidly. This area is the heart of the shopping center in the city of Jakarta. The area around the tomb is now a densely populated area with a total population – as of 1971 – 23,142 people per Km² (data collected from BKLH DKI Jakarta 1985a: 9).
Figure 6. Changes on site seen through the map on the tomb of Souw Beng Kong and Gunungsari Sentiong (1935 & 2020). Source: Leiden.maps & Google Maps

Rapid growth certainly produces various environmental problems as could be seen on the area around the tomb of Souw Beng Kong which is now in the Sawah Besar sub-district, Central Jakarta, the construction of residential and shopping centers has become the focus of the regional government. The expansion site of Chinese cemeteries in the colonial era - from Souw Beng Kong Cemetery to Gunungsari Sentong - has also disappeared even though Gunungsari Sentong's grave site has now been moved south of Jalan Gunung Sahari and having a space reduction. Seen in the map (figure 7.), the Chinese tomb that used to have a function as a green area, is now disappear, filled with massive development around it.

All the residents in Souw Beng Kong's Street are aware of the tomb's existence, but not every person knows who is Souw Beng Kong. That condition would portray an irony if one day the Souw Beng Kong’s tomb were extinct. It happens on the other tomb next to Souw Beng Kong’s tomb, not a single trace left behind from the tombs. Souw Beng Kong’s tomb still has a luck on it existence when The Souw Beng Kong Foundation endeavors to carry out the restoration of the tomb on February 11th 2008 [12]. The restoration of Souw Beng Kong’s tomb maintained the space with a metal fence and create an addition on the headstone. The restoration act cleared up the Chinese literary inscriptions adorn the middle side of the Bong Kong headstone. Three inscriptions which surround him speak about his life in Dutch and Chinese. However, even though an act of restoration has been carried out, years after the restoration, the site several incidents still occur that threaten the existence of Souw Beng Beng site became neglected again also there have been several attempts to vanishing the tomb site such as protests against the policy of the determination of the Souw Beng Kongs tomb as a cultural preservation site that carried out by a political leader [13].

That protest expressed that Souw Beng Kong was an accomplice of Jan Pieterszoon Coen. Determination of Souw Beng Kong's grave as a cultural preservation will hurt the memory of the indigenous people who were oppressed at that time by Jan Pieterszoon Coen. The Souw Beng Kong Tomb is just a landmark that reminds the Chinese community in the region of the existence of the first Chinese Kapitan in the city of Batavia who successfully raised the position of the Chinese community at that time. But the point that was missed in the discourse is that there are other traces which can’t be forgotten, the tomb was not just telling a story of Souw Beng Kong, but also the existence of a space in the past, a green cemetery in the heart of Batavia, a green space in the middle of the city’s hustle bustle. A city that have such a heterotopia in the center of the city with the function of a city lung and even a relaxing destination for Europeans who travelled through the Mangga Dua area. Remembering and studying the historical value of an urban heritage can give a picture of speculation from a place, through changes that occur at that place. We can see the transformation of a place, from a space that was breathe freely in the center of the city with the primary function of the cemetery which also has a secondary function of the green area for the city, into a narrow tomb space surrounded by slums and also an apartment towering next to it.
3. Conclusion

The Souw Beng Kong’s Tomb site was a green area back at 17th century. Series of attempt in pillaging the luxurious goods the cemetery, abandonment of the place, and relocation of Chinese cemetery site created a neglected space. But the area still preserved as a green area, also the tomb still preserved as a memoir for the first Chinese Kapitan in Batavia. After Indonesian independence, Mangga Dua became a dense district. The Souw Beng Kong’s Tomb site were gone through a reduction of space due to massive development on the surroundings. Until 2008, a preservation act was made for the tomb to create a boundary for the main memoir of the tomb. Yet, years gone by, the space around become more crowded and the tomb are once again neglected.

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