

## Philological Studies: Analysis of Chinese Calligraphy at the Tjong A Fie Mansion Museum

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### ABSTRACT

*This article discussed the study of Chinese calligraphy texts/characters at the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum as covered in philological scholarship. The notion of philology in this paper is not limited to the root words but is broader along with the development of this science from time to time, in studying the cultural treasures of the past from the object of study which is called a manuscript. The research method was paradigmatic in order to create a form of research report that has been done. Presented starting from the descriptive, analytical and comparative stages. Utilizing the theory of philological explanation from Henri Chambert-Loir. The results of this study were the reconstruction of text/characters as the content of the manuscript which was abstract and essential, to be precise the calligraphy characters found at the main entrance, front door and back of the left-wing of the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum building.*

### KEYWORDS

*Tjong A Fie; Philology; Chinese Calligraphy; Museum; Medan city.*

### INTRODUCTION

The moved of the Deli Maatschappij office to Deli land or the city of Medan at this time was the beginning of the development of the Deli land area into a city. In the 1880s, Deli Maatschappij made a central square or open field or square surrounded by a highway near his office with the name *Esplanade* which was designed to be the city centre. The succeed of this export-oriented tobacco plantation was reflected in the establishment of prestigious buildings and the many trading companies that have been built around the Esplanade. Along with this progress, construction facilities had also begun to be constructed, such as railway stations, roads, telephones, telegraph connections, and various other facilities.

Although there were already some Chinese before the opening of the plantation, the biggest wave of migration occurred through the recruitment of Chinese labourers (contract coolies) to work on the plantations. In relatively small numbers, the subsequent migration of Chinese people was due to a desire to take advantage of economic opportunities in East Sumatra, particularly the city of Medan, which was then known as Tanah Deli. The Chinese, in the structure of colonial society, were classified as Foreign Eastern (*oosterlinegen*), including the governor's subjects, and were placed as intermediaries between the European and the indigenous peoples. Their central role, both in supporting the plantation industry and as minority middlemen, requires them to gather in a community. Considering the importance of the Chinese in East Sumatra, especially the city of Medan, the colonial government then considered it necessary to elect and appoint leaders from among them. This policy was needed to strengthen their position in the structure of colonial society, support the expansion of plantations, facilitate organization, and, last but not least, resolve the disputes that occurred between them (Rudiansyah, 2017:46).

The land of Deli then developed very rapidly and was modern and had multicultural characteristics with residents of various ethnicities living in this city, including Malays, Chinese, Indians, European, Javanese and others ethnics. They generally live in groups according to their respective ethnicities. The Chinese community occupied the south of the heart of the city (esplanade), to be precise in Kesawan which is a Chinatown. To the south of the city boundary, is an area for local communities, especially the Malay community, to be precise around the Maimoon Palace, the residence of Sultan Makmun Perkasa Alam (Sultan Deli). Thus the Deli land eventually became the capital of the Deli Sultanate. Meanwhile, the Indian community occupied an area known as Kampung Keling or Kampung Madras. The European community created its own region in Polonia by building many villas and gardens, so it was nicknamed Paris van Sumatra (Tanjung, 2019:71).

One of the legendary Chinese ethnic figures who played an important role in the history of Medan city development which was formerly known as the land of Deli is Tjong Fung Nam or known as Tjong A Fie. He came from China, to be precise in Songkou village, Meixian, Guangdong Province, South China. Living in a family that was completely deprived, did not hinder his growth into a smart figure. Living with a large family of 9 (nine) people, made Tjong A Fie had to share and love each other from an early age. Since childhood, Tjong A Fie had high ideals. Realizing that his life would not develop in Guangdong, he also wanted to migrate like his brother, Tjong Yong Hian (Rebecca, 2011:77).

Since the companies owned by his brother were growing rapidly, Tjong Yong Hian then invited Tjong A Fie to come to the land of Deli to help him. In 1875, at the age of 15, Tjong A Fie left his hometown for the land of Deli. Armed with trading tactics passed down from his father, who was a genuine trader, the Tjong brothers were able to establish a successful business empire in the land of Deli.

Armed with his proximity to the Deli Sultanate, Tjong A Fie could easily manoeuvre to expand the plantation area he had pioneered. His ability to lobby is very supportive in this regard hence Tjong A Fie can own tea, tobacco, rubber, coconut and coffee plantations. Tjong A Fie had many employees who were not only from China but also from indigenous people.

After knowing the figure of Tjong A Fie as a legendary Chinese figure who contributed to the city of Medan, then Tjong A Fie's mansion, which is currently being converted into a museum, is located at JL. Jend. Ahmad Yani No.105, Kesawan, Medan city is a historical building as well as the evidence of Tjong A Fie's life journey. In this historical building, there are paintings of Chinese calligraphy, photographs, clothes of Tjong A Fie and his wife, and household furniture used by the Tjong A Fie family in the past. Not only that, but the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum also stores ancient writings or texts that were owned by Tjong A Fie, including a will he wrote before his death. Based on the explanation above, The writers wanted to explore more deeply about the writing or text of Chinese calligraphy which was found at the main entrance, front door and back of the left-wing of the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum building. This phenomenon was what later became the author's reference to study the writing or script of Chinese calligraphy through philological studies.

Information on the past is necessary to be disclosed because it is believed to hold historical and cultural values that are still relevant to the present. These values were stored in manuscripts or what we are better known as ancient manuscripts. However, not all people are in direct contact with the script. Only certain groups can access, and even store manuscripts, both in families inherited from generation to generation or in several scripts such as cultural institutions, museums, and libraries that store manuscripts.

Research on manuscripts if not initiated by philological research is considered imperfect. The breakdown in reading, material defects, and the appearance of a number of variations in the text demands a way to approach it. As a result, efforts to extract information stored in written works in the form of past products must deal with the conditions of the work, which apart from the material being informed is no longer understood by today's readers, also with its physical condition which is no longer perfect because it is damaged by time.

As philological research, at first, the researchers should determine which approaches that will be used in the research. This is important to make the research to be focused. It would be better if this research can formulate the approach first. This means, on the one hand, examining the original form of the text which is close to the original so as to obtain authentic text or information, on the other hand knowing the ways of changing the text that the copyists made in the existing versions. Hence, it was also identified the history of the text reading based on each reader or the reception. However, in a study, there are human limitations as authors. For example, limitations in terms of time, ability, cost, and so on. Therefore, it is hoped that this research will be more careful to overcome the existing limitations. Such as by limiting the research problem to be carried out, for example, one study could specialize in traditional philological studies and another in modern philological studies or oral philology. At least, with this specialization, research can be sharper and more specialized hence the results can be maximized. Thus, to obtain clear information on the text or information or manuscripts understudy can complement each other by converting the respective results from both traditional and modern philology research (Kosasih, 2014:12).

Regarding its type of science, philology is motivated by a number of factors as follows: (1) The appearance of information about the past in a number of written works; (2) The presumption of values contained in the legacy of past writings that are still considered relevant to today's life; (3) The physical condition and substance of the information material due to a long period of time; (4) Socio-cultural factors behind the creation of past written works that no longer exist or are not the same as the socio-cultural background of today's readers; (5) The need to obtain accurate understanding results. (Baried, 1994:3).

The basis for this work can determine the steps of the research. In traditional research, the way it works can be seen in previous research. The authors summarize their research starting with (1) an inventory of the manuscripts; (2) identification of the manuscript; (3) reconstruction/refining of manuscripts; (4) determine the script to be edited; (5) manuscript edition; (6) translation; and (7) explanation (Kosasih, 2014:12).

## **METHOD**

This research used the philology explanation theory from Henri Chambert-Loir, a philologist from France. Philology is not a goal, only a piece of equipment, this was brought up by Henri when he started his introduction to his edits to the manuscript of "*Hikayat Nakhoda Asik*" by Sapirin bin Usman and "*Hikayat Merpati Mas*" by Muhammad Bakir. Through this statement, he was not reducing the importance of philology. On the other hand, he was unravelling and placing the function of philology proportionally in scientific studies in general, as well as in text in particular. In this case, namely examining old texts to find out what the author intended to convey. Interpret and understand what is going on in Deli land concerning Tjong A Fie, the span of his life as a character in social as well as cultural interactions with the Deli land community. The single incident referred to is the study of philology contained in the Chinese calligraphy text/script at the main entrance, front door and back of the left-wing of Tjong A Fie's mansion, which is now converted into a historical museum.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Major Tjong A Fie**

Tjong A Fie (张阿辉) is a captain, plantation entrepreneur and banker of Hakka ethnic descent. He was born in Sungkow, Meixian, Guangdong, China in 1860. Coming from a humble family, Tjong A Fie lived with his older brother Tjong Yong Hian. As a child, Tjong A Fie had left school and chose to help his family to look after the shop. Even with minimal education, Tjong A Fie was a very smart child. One of them was his trading skills, hence his family's shop business runs successfully (Rudiansyah, 2017:50).

After growing up, Tjong A Fie decided to migrate to Indonesia to seek a better life. In 1875, when he was 15 years old, Tjong A Fie went to the land of Deli, North Sumatra to try his luck. He followed his brother Tjong Yong Hian with a small amount of money. At that time his brother had become one of the leaders of the Chinese community in the land of Deli. While in the land of Deli, North Sumatra, with the help of his brother, Tjong A Fie worked in a shop owned by his brother's friend, Tjong Sui Fo, in that shop, he was in charge of serving customers who came, holding books, and collecting debts from customers.

Tjong A Fie was known to be very friendly and sociable, not only with fellow Chinese but also with all elements of society, including Malays, Indians, Arabs and Dutch people. He also started studying Malay, which is the everyday language of the people in the land of Deli.

Tjong A Fie grew up to be a tough and brave figure, he became a role model with his outstanding leadership character. He avoided negative things such as gambling, drunkenness, and prostitution. With his brave and firm attitude, Tjong A Fie often mediated in the event of disputes between the Chinese community and other ethnicities. In addition, if there was a riot among the workers that caused chaos, Tjong A Fie was also asked by the Dutch East Indies government to help solve the problems caused by the workers. Because of his ability and shrewdness in this matter, he was later appointed as Lieutenant for the Chinese community in the land of Deli.

In 1911, due to his outstanding achievements, in a fairly short time, Tjong A Fie was appointed as Chinese Captain (*Majoer der Chineezen*) to lead the Chinese community in the land of Deli, replacing his older brother Tjong Yong Hian as the leader of the Chinese community. *Majoer der Chineezen* is a term given by the Dutch East Indies government as a colonizer in the land of Deli to a certain community or ethnic leader, while this level starts with a lieutenant or assistant to the Major then continues to the position of Major as the highest position and prestigious at that time. Apart from serving as an advisor to the Dutch East Indies government, thanks to the recommendation of the Sultan of Deli, he was also appointed a member of the *Gemeenteraad* (city council) and *Cultuurraad* (cultural council).

Tjong A Fie was highly respected, besides that he also controlled the economic and political fields. His business empire included plantations, palm oil mills, sugar mills, banks and railway companies. During his assignment as a Major, Tjong A Fie had also succeeded in developing a personal business the land of Deli. One of the developments that resulted from Tjong A Fie towards Deli land was the establishment of Bank Kesawan as the embryo of storing money in Deli land. Construction of the Old Mosque in Gang Bengkok (1884), Vihara Kwan Im (1879), Bridge of Virtue/Titi Beliani (1917), RS. Kusta on Pulau Sicanang, the Bell Tower in the City Hall Building, educational facilities, hospitals, places of worship and other public facilities have made Tjong A Fie a prominent figure in Deli land. This was supported by the close relationship between Tjong A Fie and the Sultanate of Deli. He died in Medan on February 4, 1921 and was buried in Pulo Brayon, Medan, North Sumatra.

### **Tjong A Fie's Mansion**

Tjong A Fie's Mansion or currently known as the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum has long been a landmark or a famous location in the capital city of North Sumatra. This building is right on Jl. Jend. Ahmad Yani No. 105 Medan. Apart from the architecture that looks so luxurious and distinctive, this large house also symbolizes the diversity of Medan city people that had emerged since ancient times. Consisting of 2 floors, with 35 rooms, this house was built in 1895 on an area of 8000 square meters, with the nuances of a very thick blend of Chinese, Malay and European architecture. The structure and layout of the buildings were made with the principles of feng-shui in mind. The rooms are located on four sides of the building and surround a large open courtyard in the centre of the building. This is believed by the Chinese community as the "Well of Heaven," namely the entry point for lighting and air circulation that spreads evenly in this house (Rudiansyah, 2017:50).

This mansion building also has a main gate with a Chinese culture characteristic, namely Chinese calligraphy that is beautifully engraved on the main gate and entrance, as well as the front and back doors of the right and left wings of Tjong A Fie's mansion. This calligraphy writing certainly has an implicit meaning that Tjong A Fie's extended family wants to show and convey to the wider community, especially to Chinese community leaders who are in Deli land or the city of Medan today.

### **Main Entrance**

At the main entrance to the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum, there is an inscription of *Qīnghé táng* 清河堂 (above) indicating that the owner of the house is surnamed, Zhang. It is believed that the ancestors of the Zhang clan came from the city of Qinghe (Meixian, Guangdong) in China. First read from the top right to the bottom left according to the rules of ancient Chinese reading. *Xīmíng jīdé* 西銘積德 (right), *Xīmíng* comes from a book written by Zhang Zai (Song Dynasty) where this book describes a person's devotion to parents, respecting others, doing good deeds, facing the ups and downs of life steadfastly and living life according to natural law, then life will feel serene and peaceful until the end of life. The writing of *Xīmíng jīdé* has the meaning that someone does a lot of good deeds and lives according to the laws of nature, so it is believed that someone will live peacefully until the end of life. The writing of *Jīn jiàn liú wēi* 金鑑流微 (left), comes from the word *Jīn jiàn*, where the Jian script means a mirror, formerly the ministers presented a golden mirror to King Tang Xuanzong, then one of the ministers Zhang Jiuling said: A mirror can be used as a medium to see faces, deficiencies in yourself and try to continue to improve from the mistakes that have been made. Respect and mutual respect among fellow communities, without having to differentiate between race, ethnicity, culture and religion, it is hoped that the creation of a high sense of solidarity and kindness will continue to flow throughout the ages.



**Figure 1.** The main entrance of the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum

In addition, at the main entrance to the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum, there is also the inscription of 加冠 (Jiā Guān) which means adding to the aristocratic title and 晉爵 (Jìn Jué) which means the title of an aristocrat during the Jin dynasty. In previous Chinese beliefs, it was believed that the aristocratic title 爵 (Jué) was divided into 5 categories, namely Gōng (公), Hóu (侯), Bó (伯), Zǐ (子), and Nán (男). From this title, it is hoped that the house owner, namely Major Tjong A Fie, can continue to improve the position and duties entrusted to him.



**Figure 2.** The front entrance of the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum

### ***Front Door of the Left-Wing***

鳳翥鸞翔 *Fèng Zhù Luán Xiáng*, this Chinese calligraphy is beautifully engraved on the front door of the left-wing of Tjong A Fie's mansion, which has now turned into a historical museum. This calligraphy has an implied message from Tjong A Fie for his children, especially his daughter. This Chinese calligraphy means 'a hope from the parents, that the married life of their daughter will be lasting and happy forever'.



**Figure 3.** The front door of the left-wing of the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum

### ***Left-Wing Rear Door***

桂馥蘭馨 *Guì Fù Lán Xīn*, this Chinese calligraphy writing is no less interesting. Engraved in detail, precisely on the rear door of the left-wing of Tjong A Fie's mansion. This script has a moral message from Tjong A Fie to his children, especially his daughter. This Chinese calligraphy contains meaning, with messages full of hope that married life will always be beautiful and fragrant like Osmanthus (typical Chinese flowers) and orchids flowers which smell good. From this implicit message, it can be said that Tjong A Fie fully hopes that his children can have a peaceful and harmonious household relationship, and also can maintain the image and good name of the family wherever they are.



**Figure 4.** The rear door of the left-wing of the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum

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In this emotional atmosphere, we are also happy because today is a moment of gratitude and very much to be desired. Hopefully, there will be enough benefits from this paper for readers and can contribute to science, especially in the field of Chinese cultural studies in Indonesia and even the world.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of past culture, written legacy needs to be understood in the context of the society that gave birth to it. Knowledge of the various conventions that live in the society behind its creation has a major role in the effort to understand its content. From this understanding, it can be concluded that the study of this text is based on the information stored in it about the results of human culture in the past. Therefore, as a discipline, philology belongs to the human sciences which aim to reveal the cultural results of the past that are stored in legacies in the form of written works. The concept of "culture" is linked, among other things, with thoughts, feelings, beliefs, customs, and values that apply in society. In this context, the researcher has succeeded in translating, deciphering the meaning and implied message written by Tjong A Fie at the main entrance, front and back doors of the left-wing of the building.

Chinese calligraphy script is a work that consists of the constituent elements, such as the owner, belief system, and the relationship between humans and nature. Through these elements, of course, the homeowner wants to convey something useful for the community.

The research effort and preservation of Chinese calligraphy script are one of the efforts to assist the government in carrying out National Development activities in the field of culture by conducting research, study, and recording of Chinese calligraphy characters to be understood, developed and disseminated throughout Indonesian society and even the world.

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