

7. The Chinese Tea Lords

Introduction

If you thought that after 10 years research you know all about your ancestors, then you might be in for a big surprise. This happened to me after receiving an email from a certain Dr. J.J.P. de Jong. Dr. de Jong is a researcher of East Indian and Chinese families in the nineteenth century. Specifically his research is centered around families who had been active in startups of new enterprises, tea and coffee plantations, sugar manufacturing etc.

He discovered that the tea company **Sinagar** in the Preanger area (known by the famous book of Hella Haase: Tea lords) was possibly started by my ancestors from the Tan family. Dr. De Jong emphasized that his source was reliable, viz. an official study of the governments cultures from 1869 based on official documents. Since he had difficulty in finding all the names in my family tree on internet: www.genealogieonline.nl/stamboom-kan-han-en-tan/ he contacted me by E-mail. It turns out that the difficulties arose due to different ways of transcribing Chinese names, and respectively the failures in writing correct names in official administrative documents. So I was suddenly confronted with questions about a tea company in our family of which I never had heard before.

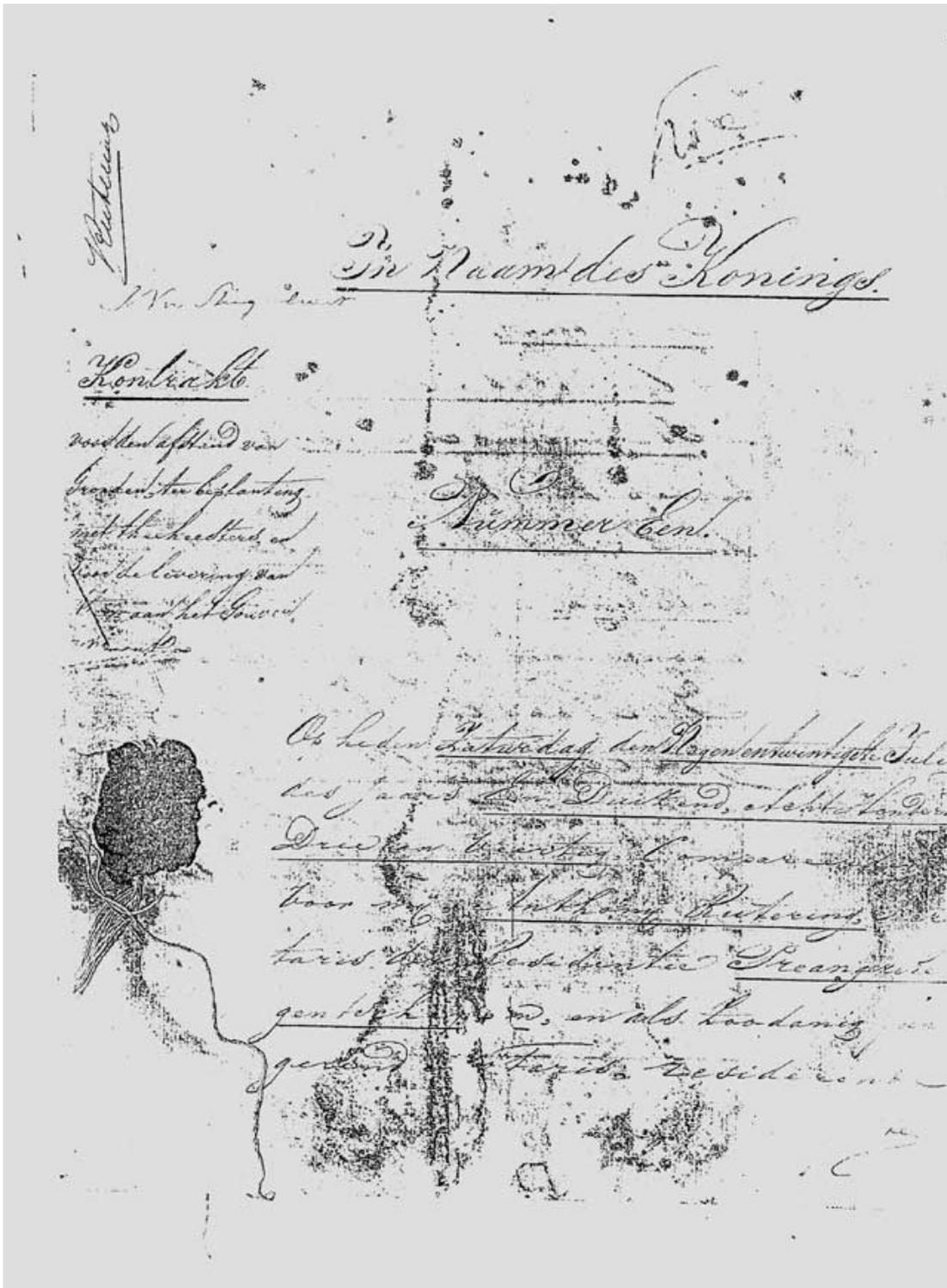
Enquiries at our eldest living cousin of the Tan family: Tan Eng Swie yielded a surprising clue. It happened that Tan Eng Swie possessed a photocopy of a contract. Since he could not read the old handwriting, he thus had never read through the contract. Now Ems by her searching her own family tree, could read old Dutch script handwriting. Thus she typed the complete contract. Now we could read the contract and it appeared to be a tea contract dated 29 July 1843. It turns out that Dr. De Jong, who did not know of this particular tea contract, just offered the right information drawn from those official documents. The tea contract was part of the concessions emitted by the East Indian government as part of the Cultuurstelsel. It was a shock to me to realize that my ancestors have been involved in the Cultuurstelsel.

This Cultuurstelsel was introduced in 1830 under Governor General van den Bosch by the Dutch government in their colony East Indies. Part of the cultivated agricultural area by the locals had to be reserved for the harvest of products which could be exported. In Indonesia nowadays this is taught at school as "Tanam Terpaksa" (forced agriculture) because the local people were compelled to plant on the best part of their property Cultuurstelsel crops. This resulted in that too few land and time was left for growing of food, resulting in famine under the population.

Tea plants were among the products which should be grown on the plantations of the colonial government. That is why already in 1827 about 13000-17000 tea plants successfully were grown in 's Lands Plantentuin (Botanical Garden) in Buitenzorg. These plants were cuttings from the original plants which were imported by **Von Siebold** and **Jakobson** and planted by de Serriere with the aid of Chinese planters. So on the first Colonial Industrial Exhibition on August the 24th 1828 one could try and taste tea.

For the first tea plantations in the Preanger area the locations Bodjanegara, Tjioemboeloit, Radjamandala and Tjikadjang were chosen [2/, p.149]. In 1842 the colonial government decided to emit 3 new contracts for private exploration on the locations **Sinagar**, Perakansalak and Djatinangor. The area of the estates was 300 bouw (or 0,21 km²; 1 bouw = 7.096,50 m²).

In Search for missing Puzzle Pieces.



After the discovery of the tea contract, we together with Tan Eng Swie, began a search for the missing pieces of the puzzle. The tea contract of 29th July 1843 on the tea plantation Sinagar is formally between the Dutch East Indian Government and Tan Soeij Tiang, Lieutenant China in Buitenzorg. However in the Regeringsalmanak of the year 1843 the only Lieutenant or Lieutenant titular for Buitenzorg is Tan Soeij **Tiang**. So in this contract he was wrongly mentioned as Tan Soeij **Tiong**.

With this tea contract Tan Soeij Tiang gained the right to cultivate tea for the Dutch East Indian Government and to sell tea at a prefixed price and quality. The tea was to be cultivated on the land Sinagar close to the city of Tjiandjoer, property of the Government, and leased for free to Tan Soeij Tiang for this purpose. The contract was to last 20 years.

Tan Soeij Tiang is the younger brother of my great great grandfather Tan Soeij Tjoe. Tan Soeij Tjoe (1808-1850) signed the contract as one of the two individual fellow debtors.

The fact that Tan Soeij Tjoe acted as a unlimited joint debtor for his younger brother without any right of recovery or splitting could indicate that the latter acted as “jackstraw” for Tan Soeij Tjoe (head of the extended Tan family). So the entire theater was the concern of Tan Soeij Tjoe.

Since Tan Soeij Tjoe was just a merchant; undoubtedly it was simpler for a Lieutenant China to qualify for a tea contract than for a merchant.

In 1847 Tan Soeij Tiang went bankrupt. In the inventory of Tan Soeij Tiang was the tea contract of 29 July 1843. The liquidator (Weeskamer) auctioned the contract. Bidders were B.B. Crone and Tan Goan Kee (whose proper name in our genealogy would be Tan Goan Koeij, a son of Tan Soeij Tjoe and adopted as a son by Tan Soeij Tiang.

As was said B.B. Crone had promised to bid in such a way that the price was not pushed up, on the condition that when the tea contract was awarded to Tan Goan Kee, Crone, without any payment to Tan Goan Kee, would become a 50% partner in the tea contract of 29 July 1843.

Possibly Tan Goan Koeij, as his adopted father Tan Soeij Tiang, was also just a jackstraw for his biological father Tan Soeij Tjoe.

B.B. Crone was, until the tea contract was awarded to Tan Goan Koeij, 1st Customs Official at the Directors of Cultures. A very important aspect as would appear later: he and Tan Goan Koeij were associated in the same circle of friends. As was usual at that time, the civil servants who were badly paid were invited at home by wealthy Peranakan Chinese families. For the civil servants without families in their post, there was very few entertainment. Tan Goan Koeij died in 1853. Tan Soeij Tjoe had already died in 1850. His son Tan Goan Pouw (in the books on tea plantations /2,3/ sometimes wrongly misspelled as Pau, or Pauw – this was the cause of the email of Dr. De Jong). Tan Goan Pouw, was an elder brother of my great grandfather Tan Goan Piau (See the story Tan Goan Piau and Thung Leng Nio on this site).

On 22 January 1854 50% of the tea contract of Tan Goan Koeij was transferred by name to Tan Goan Pouw. This was approved by the Dutch Indian Government. So 50% of the tea contract would belong to the Tan Soeij Tjoe branch again not only economical but also legally.

Alas, according to the High Government in the Netherlands this approval was not in accordance with law:

Following Stbl.1856 no. 64 tea contracts were to be undertaken solely with Europeans and with Europeans equated (this was to protect European planters from competition with non-Europeans, thus also from “inlanders” and “Oosterse vreemdelingen”).

The registration of Tan Goan Pouw as partner co-contractor of Crone was a new contract for the rest period of the old contract, which was in contrast to the law and thus invalid.

The Chinese Tan Goan Pouw as Oosterse vreemdeling could never be a partner co-contractor of Crone because he was not equated with Europeans.

When the tea contract of 1843 had to be adjusted because of legal commercializing of all tea contracts, this was regarded as a new contract and B.B. Crone was the only contractor in the contract. Tan Goan Pouw who had paid for all investments in this project from his own capital had (legally) lost with one stroke all his investments and was dependent on the honesty of (luckily for him) the friend of the family, B.B. Crone. Economically Tan Goan Pouw was still a silent partner for Crone, and thus legally invisible!

The Dutch Indian Government was clearly aware of this “it was for Tan Goan Pouw not that important that he was no more mentioned in the tea contract, because he retained his permit to stay on the tea estate” (This would otherwise not be possible for a Chinese under the then ruling PASSENSTELSEL to live outside the Chinese camp. Tan Goan Pouw gained this permit possibly as renter/hidden still partner of Crone).

From notes of my aunt Non = Tan Tjing Nio, daughter of Tan Tjoen Keng, grandchild of Tan Goan Piauw, we guess that Tan Goan Pouw had lived on Sinagar. This is confirmed by Mr. J.A. v.d. Chijs (/3/ p.177).

Crone has prolonged the tea contract in 1863 with Tan Goan Pouw as renter/still partner.

On 22-1-1856 a fierce fire is raging in the tea estate of Sinagar. Extinguishing was no more possible. The estate belongs to Mr. B.B. Crone, who let it however to the Chinese Tan Goan Pouw and he incurred the important damage of ca f.150.000 being about 50.000 and 60.000 pounds of tea, which was ready for examination, as well as 60 tjaings padie was burnt.

— Van Buitenzorg wordt ons het navolgende medegedeeld :

Den 22sten dezer, des morgens omstreeks vier ure, woedde er te Senagar, op de grenzen van Buitenzorg en de Preanger Regentschappen gelegen, in het aldaar gevestigde thee etablissement, een hevige brand. Dezelve ontstond in de fabriek door het vuur, waarop de thee gebraden wordt, en, daar alles zich nog in diepe rust bevond en de vlam zich onmiddellijk verspreidde, was er bij het ontdekken geen blusschen meer mogelijk.

- Het etablissement behoort aan den heer B. B. Crone, die hetzelfde echter aan den chinees Tan Goan Pouw verhuurd heeft en op wien dus de belangrijke schade van pm. f 150,000 nederkomt, als zijnde er tusschen de 50,000 b, 60,000 pond thee, welke voor de keuring gereed stond, benevens 60 tjaings padie verbrand. —De bisschop van Colophon, apostolisch vicaris en

Kop: ⓘ SOERABAYA, den 6den Februarij 1856.
Krantentitel: ⓘ De Oostpost : letterkundig, wetenschappelijk en commercieel nieuws- en advertentieblad
Datum, editie: ⓘ 06-02-1856, Dag
Nummer: ⓘ 6
Uitgever: ⓘ Fuhri

At 1-8-1863 Eduard J. Kerkhoven is engaged as deputy administrator of Sinagar [/4/p.133]

The tea contract is sold by B.B. Crone in 1863 for f.200.000 to G.L.J. van der Hucht for the purpose of A. Holle and E.J. Kerkhoven [/4/ p.142]. But in the Aardrijkskundig en statistisch woordenboek van Nederlandsch Indie (Geographic and statistic dictionary of Dutch East Indies) of the year 1869 B.B. Crone and Tan Goan Pouw were still mentioned as owners of Sinagar.

Aardrijkskundig en statistisch woordenboek van Nederlandsch Indië

1869



diën, regentschap Magettan, alwaar een oud gemetseld bad wordt gevonden.

Simpatan, dorp in Borneo's Westerafdeeling, rijk Sambas, afdeeling Boedoek, aan de rivier Slakkouw.

Simpawa, dorp op Java, residentie en regentschap Tagal, distrikt Gantoengan.

Simperem, onderdistrikt of troep op Java, residentie Preanger Regentschappen, afdeeling Bandong, distrikt Gandasoeli, met de twee

adsist. Inhoudsopgave tan goan pouw
Si-naboen, d. Resultaat 1 van 1 x d Bani, rijk
 Boleling.

Si-nagar, thee-etablissement op Java, residentie Preanger Regentschappen, afdeeling Tjiandjor, distrikt Tjiheulang, 9 palen van Tji-tjoeroek, 1,491 Rijnlandsche voeten boven de zee. Het behoort aan B. B. CRONE en TAN GOAN POW, en heeft een aanplant van 300 bouws.

E.J. Kerkhoven is appointed as administrator on behalf of his family. After Albert Holle was deceased in 1885, E.J. Kerkhoven is appointed director of Sinagar [/4/ p.142]

And here starts the book “Tea lords” of Hella Haase.

Epilogue

This story is a good illustration of how one can obtain information on hidden family matters by just placing your family tree on internet. We thank Dr. J.J.P. de Jong who made us aware of the tea history and Tan Eng Swie who still could find some explanation in his archive and helped to finish the search for the missing puzzle pieces.

On the website of the Tea-family-archive is a photo of the old mother Tan Goey (or Gwie) La Nio. Apart from that she is mentioned as the "njai" of E.J. Kerkhoven, few is known about this woman. Mentioned is only that she was from the Chinese camp behind the house of the administrator. Was she belonging for instance to the family of Tan Goan Pouw ? we do not know.