

BOUDEWIN CHABOT AND JARL CHABOT

Biography of Hendrik Theodorus Chabot

EAST-WEST

Is there East, is there West,
when Men at their very best,
meet each other on the field of activity,
for the progress of the human race,
for the glory of the Lord's grace,
for the fraternization of the Nations?

Neither West nor East
can stand alone at least.

Macassar, 8 April 1946

This little poem we found recently when looking through the files and documents that my father left after his sudden death on 30 March 1970. It aptly summarizes what has always been his firm conviction, that East and West are a unity, inseparable in their mutual dependency. This principle guided much of his work and thinking.

Henk Chabot was born as the first and only child of well-to-do parents on 29 April 1910 in The Hague. His father worked as a broker in a banking business. He never recuperated from the mental shock of the stock market crash of 1929, and died two years later when Henk was 21 years old. His mother was an active and quite dominant personality, and followed the activities of her son quite closely. She came to visit his family in Indonesia in 1937, travelling all over Sumatra and Java in her car, which she brought from Holland and left for her son when she took the boat back to Europe.

Chabot followed primary school in Rotterdam and secondary school in Haarlem (HBS-A). As a child he loved playing soccer, cricket, and tennis, and continued to enjoy being active in them the rest of his life.

In 1929 he enrolled at Leiden University to study Indonesian law, partly out of genuine interest, but also because entry requirements did not include knowledge of Latin and Greek. At university he became an enthusiastic member of the Leiden Student Corps. The friends and acquaintances he made during that time were to give him much pleasure and encouragement the rest of his life.

According to what he told us later, both his professional and married life started with the seminars in ethnology given by Professor J.P.B. de Josselin



H.Th. Chabot, Buru, 1933

de Jong in Leiden. About twelve people attended, among whom his future wife, colleagues, and friends. Some of these friends were to become quite famous later: J. van Baal, H.J. Friedericy, G.J. Held, G.W. Locher, Chr. Nooteboom, and F.A.E. van Wouden.

In 1932, shortly after the death of his father, Chabot was given the opportunity to accompany Professor De Josselin de Jong to Indonesia to conduct ethnological fieldwork in Buru, Wetan (Babar Islands), and Moa. According to an article in the *Telegraaf* of 12 January 1934, Chabot returned with part of the collected material in October 1933.

Back in Holland, Chabot pursued his studies, married Joke Kortmann on Christmas Eve in 1935, and finished his studies in July 1936. It was in the middle of the recession, and with Indonesian law as his specialization, he did not stand any chance of finding a job in Holland. Armed with introductory letters from the Leiden staff, the young married couple and their baby daughter Roekie set off for the East on the mailboat from Marseille to Singapore. They received fifty guilders a month from an aunt, who perceived that they would need some financial support.

On arrival in Indonesia in 1936, Chabot was given the choice between taking a regular job as a civil servant in the Ministry of Justice at a salary of 275 guilders per month, or else doing volunteer work in research on adat law in South Sulawesi for 56 guilders per month. The choice was not difficult: Chabot preferred interesting and stimulating work above well-paid but dull administrative work. So the family set out for Makassar, where they were very well received by their new colleagues. They found a house (at 25 guilders per month) and settled in.

However, while paying his first official visit to the Resident of the *Gewest* of Celebes, the latter said it was an embarrassment to have a white person on his payroll at such a low salary. The Resident added another 50 guilders to the salary from the *Landschapskas* of Makassar. Thus, together with the money from his aunt in Holland, the Chabot family had 156 guilders per month to spend, which in Makassar at that time was quite enough. After a year and a half, Chabot's appointment was made official, and he started his career as a civil servant at the regular salary of 275 guilders per month. His task was to write a description of adat law in South Sulawesi.

It was the 'language officer' A.A. Cense who took care of the young researcher at the time. He took Chabot everywhere during his field visits in the south of Celebes, and taught him the Makassar language. It was during these visits that Chabot came to know the young and dynamic head of the adat community of Borongloe, Mr. Hamzah Daeng Tompo. It was in this community that Chabot later did his fieldwork, both before and after the war. (Unfortunately, most of the material collected before the war was lost and has never been found. However, Chabot sent drafts of several chapters

to Professor Soepomo, and these have all been preserved.)

When the war started in 1941, Chabot was stationed at the military base at the Makassar airport. However, according to our mother, the anti-aircraft artillery had no bullets or ammunition. These were still in Java and the boats just did not arrive. It is clear from her accounts that the situation was so grotesque as to be hilarious, and that the Dutch had no chance whatsoever in this combat. After the Dutch surrendered to the Japanese in early 1942, Chabot joined a group of about ten people under the command of First Lieutenant D.A. Vink to search for Lieutenant-Colonel A.L. Gortmans, one of several Dutch officers who did not agree with the surrender. Gortmans had installed himself deep in the jungle near the town of Enrekang, where he was finally persuaded to surrender. Chabot ended up in the Japanese Prisoners of War (POW) camp in Makassar. He was very fortunate to be assigned to work in the translation department of the camp, thus avoiding the heavy physical labour that most POWs had to do in the harbour. In July 1945 he was sent to Java on an oil tanker, an extremely risky voyage with the allied forces all around. But again he had luck on his side and the end of the war found him in Djakarta, alive and well. Here he was reunited with the rest of his family, Joke and his two children, who had also managed to survive Japanese imprisonment. After the war, in 1946, Chabot was appointed lecturer in adat law at the 'Emergency University', which later became the University of Indonesia in Djakarta. He published some articles, conducted fieldwork during his summer holidays, lectured in social anthropology at various places, and in general seemed quite productive. In October 1950 he defended his PhD dissertation entitled *Verwantschap, stand en sexe in Zuid Celebes*. At the PhD defence, his supervisor, Professor G.J. Held, gave a clear description of one aspect of Chabot's personality:

'The dissertation of our young doctor shows that he possesses what for an ethnographer is an enviable trait. Without being intrusive, he is able to move freely in the society he is studying, gaining access to relatively intimate parts of the society which to other, less endowed researchers often remain inaccessible. Dr. Chabot has been able to do this because of his winsome personality. However, I do not deny that these traits also have disadvantages: the dissertation is colourfully descriptive rather than deeply analytical.

I have always disagreed with those who claim that the thinking of Westerners is analytical, whereas the thinking of Easterners is associative. Chabot's dissertation is further evidence of my view since his approach would have to be seen as more Eastern than Western.'

In 1951 Chabot was appointed Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Indonesia at Makassar. Here he started studying the processes of change among different social groups in the city, a subject that would figure in his Inaugural Lecture given in October 1952, entitled 'Aspecten van het proces van cultuurverandering' (Aspects of the process of cultural

change). The same subject was addressed in later publications concerning Makassar, the Sangir Islands, and even Southeast Kalimantan. In fact, this interest in social change is a constantly recurring theme in Chabot's work, and also forms the basis of his 1968 research proposal to WOTRO for his 'Follow-up study twenty years later'.

By 1952 the situation in Indonesia was such that the Chabot family could not stay any longer. With mixed feelings they returned to the Netherlands, where Chabot was very lucky to find work in The Hague, where he joined the academic staff of the Institute of Social Studies (ISS). Later he took up the post of Dean of Studies at ISS. In 1962 Chabot participated in the World Congress of International Sociological Associations in Washington, D.C., and in 1966 in the annual meeting of the British Sociological Association. From 1962 till 1966 he was a member of the Board of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal, Land- en Volkenkunde (KITLV).

During these years at ISS, Chabot concentrated on teaching and counselling foreign students, who found it hard to survive in the cold climate of The Hague. We remember how he often brought these students home for a meal. The table was set nicely and a three-course dinner was served, tasteful as well as simple, so as to represent a 'typical Dutch meal' in a family setting. The evening was spent in amicable discussions on all sorts of topics. Unable to speak English and in any case too young to join in, we children listened with pride while all these knowledgeable men discussed issues that sounded to our ears quite important.

To his colleagues at ISS, Chabot's preference for the ordinary and down-to-earth was palpably evident. His Volkswagen was the most humble and perhaps dirtiest of all the cars parked at Noordeinde Palace. Clearly, he paid very little attention to his appearance.

Politically speaking Chabot was a typical student of Professor C. van Vollenhoven, sympathizing even before the war with Indonesian nationalist sentiments. Chabot's preference was always for ordinary people, for the grass-roots level of society. This is apparent in the subject he chose for his dissertation, which aims the spotlight at the common man, while paying attention to the nobility only insofar as necessary to understand and find out how the common man lived and survived. It is also evident from the titles of his earlier works, such as 'Achtergronden van het proces Nadjamoeddin' and 'Steekpartijen in Goa'. This is not to say that Chabot was a leftist or a radical. Certainly not. Although emotionally he sided with the oppressed and with ordinary people, intellectually he always tried to remain impartial and to understand both sides. Glancing through Chabot's list of publications, one is struck by the substantial number of them. Although many people associate his name with his dissertation on South Celebes, these publications show that his interests were much broader. Adat



H.Th. Chabot, The Hague, 1962

law in South Celebes; transmigration of people from the Siau Islands; urbanization in Makassar (and Southeast Asia in general); women and their role in society; the social processes underlying political events; and the process of cultural change in general. Publications and papers by Chabot on all these subjects have been deposited with the library of the KITLV.

Of the material collected by Chabot in the 1950s, what remain are his reports of travels to Makassar, the Sangir Archipelago, and Bandjermasin, as well as three articles published between 1952 and 1956, and two articles written in 1967 entitled: 'Enkele resultaten van een onderzoek onder verschillende bevolkingsgroepen in de stad Makassar' and 'Bontoramba, a village in South Sulawesi'.

Much of Chabot's material is suitable for further study by other researchers. This is partly due to Chabot's tendency to go full speed ahead in a topic that interested him, rather than preparing beforehand in detail what methods he would follow. After first accumulating a mass of data, he then set to work, to sort it out. A good example of this tendency is the 'Follow-up study twenty years later', financed by WOTRO, which he enthusiastically worked on in South Sulawesi in 1968-69. His plan was to repeat all of the fieldwork he had done there in 1950-52, and then compare the two sets of results to see what processes of change could be identified. He managed to accumulate a mass of data, but did not live long enough to draw conclusions from all his fieldwork.

The material Chabot collected during the WOTRO fieldwork includes:

- Handwritten observations recorded between January and March of 1970, just back in Holland.
- Quantitative data from the period in Makassar.
- Quantitative data from the extensive census he conducted in 1969 (recorded on notecards in a suitcase) in Makassar.
- Handwritten observations on notepads, which J. van der Linden has supplied with key words.
- 156 pages of typed observations (with codes), entitled 'Outline of cultural materials'.

In 1969-70 he wrote three progress reports on his work in South Celebes, and gave lectures at Hassanuddin University. The text of the lecture he gave upon leaving Celebes contains information that puts some of his research data into perspective and suggests topics deserving of further study. Drafts of later articles shed light on Chabot's approach to some of the topics that interested him, in particular 'Future, as an anthropological interest' and 'Een elite in Zuid Sulawesi'.

Because of his 'empirical' approach, some people find it difficult to understand exactly what Chabot wanted to know and how he went about finding out. Which aspects of processes of change did he want to study?

What kinds of phenomena was he looking for? J. van der Linden, his assistant at ISS in the late 1960s, assessed in 1970 Chabot's WOTRO material and indicated the possibilities he saw for what could still be done with all these data. However, at the time of that review, much of Chabot's other work was not accessible to a wider audience. The bibliography in the present book gives a complete overview of Chabot's work, so that new possibilities for further study can emerge.

Considerable attention was given in the local press (particularly in *Het Vaderland* of 17 February 1969) to Chabot's departure for Indonesia in 1969 to carry out his 'Follow-up study'.

Due to his sudden death, the stage of comparing the two sets of data and information from 1951-52 with the findings of 1969 could not be carried out. We hope that this publication in English, and the bringing together of all Chabot's work in the KITLV collections, will enable scholars to continue the work that he started so many years ago.

In this way we hope to contribute to the understanding of the processes of change and therefore the process of development itself. That would bring Chabot's conviction – as described in the poem at the beginning of this biography – a little closer to reality.