



## Shaping Indonesia's Post-Colonial Identity: Han Awal's Conservation Efforts from Colonial Structures to Safeguarding Vernacular Traditions

AR2A011 Architectural History Thesis

Anisa Jocelyne Antonina Mini  
ID: 6287360

17 April 2025

Faculty of Architecture and the Built  
Environment  
TU Delft

Tutor: Serah Calitz

Cover Image: Han Awal, ca 1963-65. Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners

# Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Introduction	3
Historical Context	7
1.1 Post-Independence Nation-Building: Architecture and the Old Order (1945-1966)	
1.2 The New Order's Pragmatism: Pluralism, Preservation and the Seeds of Conservation	10
Han Awal	12
2.1 Han Awal's Education and Early Life	
2.2 Gedung Arsip Nasional: Conservation Methodology and Materials	16
2.3 Han Awal's View of New Order Modernisation and Redefining Architectural Practice	23
Conclusion	25
Appendix Interview Transcript with Yori Antar	30
List of Figures	32
Bibliography	33

# Shaping Indonesia's Post-Colonial Identity: Han Awal's Conservation Efforts from Colonial Structures to Safeguarding Vernacular Traditions

## Abstract

Following Indonesia's independence from the Dutch in 1945, the country underwent a nation-building process aimed at reshaping national identity, with architecture serving as a crucial medium for articulating postcolonial ambitions. This thesis examines the work of Han Awal, a pioneering architect whose career spanned Indonesia's two major political regimes, the Old Order under President Sukarno and the New Order under President Suharto. Rather than aligning fully with either regime's architectural ideologies, Han Awal emerges in this study as an individual agent navigating the nuanced and often contradictory landscape of postcolonial architectural production. His work challenged dominant narratives of modernisation by advocating for the conservation of colonial and vernacular architecture at a time when the state often prioritised development over preservation.

This thesis examines Han Awal's introduction of a counter-hegemonic discourse that positioned conservation as a tool of cultural reclamation rather than nostalgic reverence, with a particular focus on his restoration of *Gedung Arsip Nasional*. In order to place Han Awal's practice within larger conversations on architectural identity, memory, and state ideology, I conducted an in-depth interview with Yori Antar, Han Awal's son and architect, as well as using architectural plans, archival materials, and other sources.

This thesis aims to demonstrate how conservation, when rooted in local context and historical awareness, can play a transformative role in shaping a pluralistic and inclusive national architectural identity in Indonesia.

## Introduction

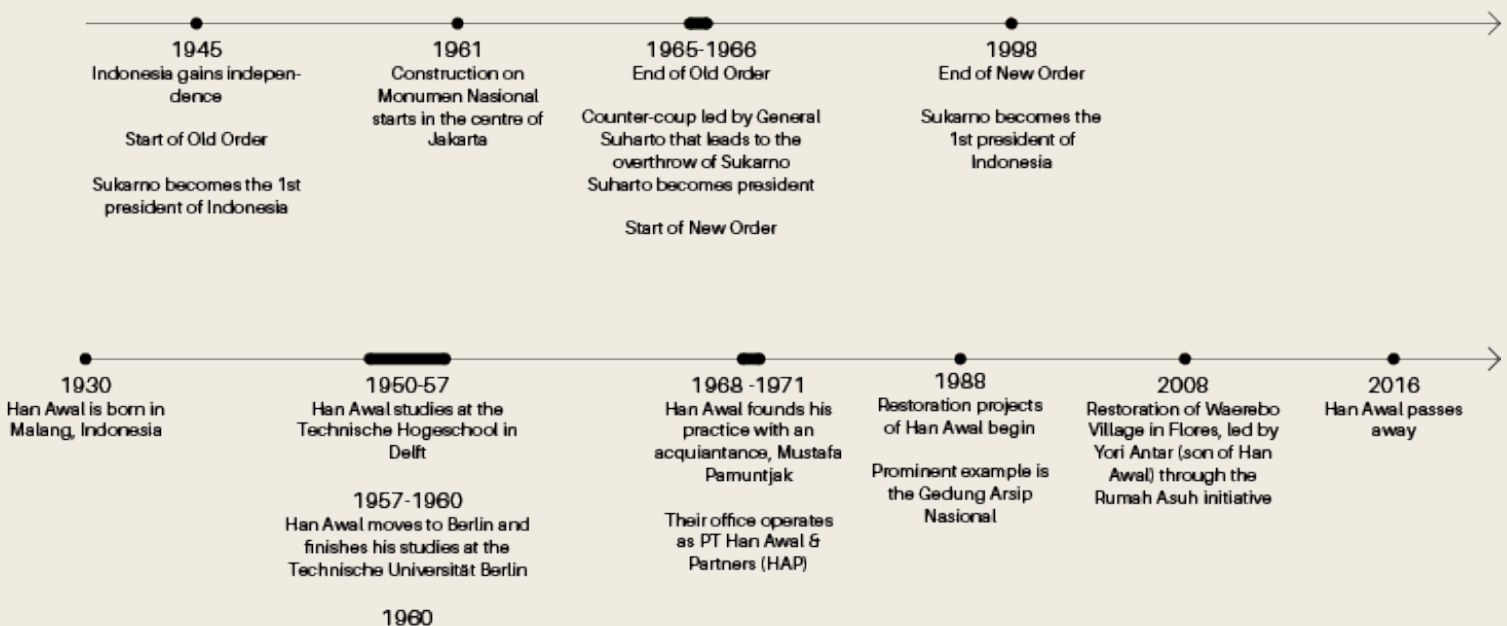
Han Awal, a pioneering Indonesian architect, emerged as a key advocate for heritage preservation amid the rapid modernization of post-independence Indonesia. His restoration of *Gedung Arsip Nasional* (completed in 1998) exemplifies his dedication to safeguarding historical architecture, challenging dominant architectural narratives that often prioritised new development over conservation. While much scholarly literature focuses on state-driven monumental projects (Leclerc, 2012; Kusno, 2000), there is comparatively less emphasis on architects like Han Awal who, while still operating within prevailing systems, offered alternative frameworks rooted in historical continuity. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how Han Awal's architectural practice navigated the ideological transitions between the Old and New Orders, and how his emphasis on conservation contributed to the formation of a more nuanced postcolonial architectural identity in Indonesia.

Following Indonesia's independence from the Dutch in 1945, the nation embarked on an ambitious journey to establish its identity, a process that involved political, cultural, and architectural transformations. Architecture became a powerful tool in articulating Indonesia's aspirations for unity, national pride, and progress. This search for identity was influenced by the political climate with two key regimes, the Old Order (Orde Lama, 1945-1966) under President Sukarno and the New Order (Orde Baru, 1966-1998) under President Suharto, each shaping post-independence architecture in profoundly different ways. Under the Old Order, President Sukarno promoted a modernist architectural aesthetic that merged nationalist ideals with international styles. These projects were monumental in scale and vision, designed to reflect Indonesia's postcolonial aspirations and leadership in the global decolonisation movement. Sukarno, who has a deep personal interest in urban planning and previously trained as an architect, envisioned a capital city that reflected his political ideals, resulting in grand boulevards and national landmarks such as Monumen Nasional and Istiqlal Mosque. By contrast, the New Order regime under Suharto, reoriented architectural priorities toward economic pragmatism. Rapid urbanisation, foreign investment, and infrastructural expansion gave rise to a pluralist but commercially driven architectural landscape, in which cultural symbolism was often subordinated to development goals (Emmerson, 1983; Kusno, 2000). The transition between these two regimes marked a significant shift from state-driven monumental nationalism to a pluralistic architecture landscape, dictated by commercial and functional demands.



Figure 1. Han Awal, ca 1963-65. Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners

Several scholars have analysed how Suharto’s administration reshaped Indonesia’s built environment through policies favouring modernisation and economic growth. Kusno (2000) highlights how the New Order prioritised commercial real estate over cultural memory, while Leclerc (2012) critiques the functionalist and profit-oriented character of the period’s urban planning. Van Reybrouck (2024) contextualises this shift within broader economic and political shifts in postcolonial Southeast Asia, where modernisation often became a tool for state legitimacy. Expanding on existing literature, Ardiani, Kurniawan, and Lukito (2023) explore themes of anti-colonialism during Suharto’s leadership and its effects of architectural conservation, arguing that the regime’s emphasis on nationalism selectively erased colonial structures while promoting state-approved heritage sites. Amid these dominant state-led narratives, Han Awal’s conservation work offers a compelling counterpoint. Trained in European modernist principles in the Netherlands and Germany, his early career aligned with the ethos of progress and functionality. Yet as Indonesia’s urban fabric rapidly transformed, Awal increasingly turned toward a conservation-based philosophy, advocating for the preservation of colonial and vernacular structures that embodied Indonesia’s layered architectural history (Setiadi, 2018). Han Awal’s architectural conservation work serves as an exception and counterpoint to these hegemonic trends.



His restoration of *Gedung Arsip Nasional* provides a critical case study in understanding how architecture could both coexist with and gently challenge the dominant modernisation agenda. Instead of categorically rejecting state narratives, Awal's work showed that preservation and advancement don't have to conflict. Despite Suharto's emphasis on development, Awal's contributions were nationally recognised, earning him the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award of Excellence for Cultural Heritage Conservation (2001) and Indonesia's Satya Lencana Kebudayaan award. His practice helped bring architectural conservation into the national discourse, subtly reshaping perceptions of what constituted valuable and meaningful architecture in a postcolonial society. Unlike the dominant state-driven projects, Awal's efforts foregrounded vernacular architecture and historical preservation, challenging the narrative that modernisation necessitated the erasure of the past.

To explore these themes, I employ a qualitative methodology that draws from both oral history and archival research. Central to my process was an in-person interview I conducted with Yori Antar, Han Awal's son and a respected architect in his own right. His reflections offered valuable first-hand insight into his father's philosophies, visions and missions, design decisions, and the evolution of architectural conservation in Indonesia. In addition to this oral history, I had access to family archival materials, including drawings, photographs, and unpublished documents from Han Awal & Partners (HAP), which provided a rare and intimate look into the thought processes behind key conservation efforts such as Gedung Arsip Nasional. Combining these personal narratives with primary source analysis allowed me to explore not only the technical dimensions of conservation, but also the emotional and cultural stakes embedded in these projects.

By situating Awal's contributions within the broader socio-political landscape, this thesis aims to examine how Han Awal's architectural practice both engaged with and subtly diverged from dominant narratives of modernisation, contributing to the shaping of a more historically grounded and plural postcolonial identity in Indonesia.

## Historical Context

### 1.1 Post-Independence Nation-Building: Architecture and the Old Order (1945-1966)

To better understand the established narratives of architectural shifts in Indonesia, it is essential to examine the historical context of the Old Order (1945-1966), particularly the political, social, and economic forces that shaped architectural discourse during this formative period. Following Indonesia's independence in 1945, architecture emerged as a powerful tool for expressing national identity and sovereignty. Under President Sukarno's leadership, the built environment was reimagined to reflect the ideals of a modern, unified Indonesia, breaking away from its colonial past and mould a new visual language of independence.

Although Sukarno was deeply rooted in traditionalism, emphasizing Indonesian cultural roots in both politics and culture, this was not overtly reflected in the architecture of Jakarta (Shackford-Bradley, 2000). As a trained architect himself, Sukarno understood the power of architecture beyond mere functionality; to him, it was a symbol of independence, progress, and national pride. Several scholars have interpreted the transformation of Jakarta's built environment during this period, characterised by the modernist "international style" popular in the 1950s as an intentional effort to forge a cohesive national identity and uplift the self-esteem of Indonesians in the wake of colonisation (Sudrajat 1991; Leclerc 1993; Macdonald 1995; Wiryomartono 1995). By adopting modernist forms, Sukarno's vision deliberately rejected Dutch colonial architecture, replacing it with monumental modernism that looked forward rather than backward.

Sukarno's vision for a modern and independent Indonesia was materialised through a series of large-scale architectural projects that served not only practical functions but also is ideological statements of national unity and pride. Iconic structures such as Monumen Nasional (Monas, completed in 1975, as seen in Figure 2 and 3), Istiqlal Mosque (completed in 1978, as seen in figure 4), and Gelora Bung Karno Stadium (GBK Stadium, constructed for the 1962 Asian Games, was a demonstration of Indonesia's readiness to take its place on the global stage. The Istiqlal Mosque, symbolising religious inclusivity, was intentionally located opposite Jakarta's Catholic Cathedral, a spatial representation of Indonesia's national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), which reinforced the regime's message of religious harmony (Soekarba, 2018).



Figure 2 (Left): *Monumen Nasional* in construction, c. 1970s. Courtesy of Adhi Karya.  
Figure 3 (Right): *Monumen Nasional* upon completion, 1975. Courtesy of Adhi Karya.



Figure 4: Istiqlal Mosque during construction, c. 1950s. Image retrieved from [istiqlal.or.id](http://istiqlal.or.id)

Architecture during the Old Order functioned as a critical medium for articulating political ideology. Through these monumental projects, Sukarno mobilised nationalist sentiment, using architectural space to shape collective memory and identity. His vision of Jakarta as the “beacon of the emerging nations” was directly tied to Indonesia’s leading role in the 1955 Bandung Conference, which positioned the country at the forefront of global decolonisation movements (Bandung Conference, 1955). A state-led initiative to create a new visual and spatial identity for the country defined this era. This conscious aesthetic choice demonstrates how modernism was seen as a forward-thinking instrument in the Old Older, able to represent technological advancement, national cohesion, and a clear break from colonial heritage.



Figure 5: Nikita Khrushchev (left) and President Sukarno (right) Overlook the Model for the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium. Courtesy of Mikhail Tsyganov, private archive of Igor Kashmadze

## Historical Context

### 1.2 New Order's Pragmatism (1996-1998) : Pluralism and the Seeds of Conservation

The New Order came into action in 1966 with an attempted coup on 30 September and 1 October 1965 that was countered by Suharto-led troops. Following Suharto's ascendancy to power, the involvement of western investment and foreign aid were encouraged as the domestic production of oil in Indonesia greatly expanded, leading to revenues used to fund infrastructures and projects (Roosa, 2007). The shift from symbolism to pragmatism signified an embrace of pluralism in Indonesia's architectural landscape that became characteristic of the New Order era.

Under Suharto's New Order, the government encouraged architectural pluralism, but in a markedly different form from the top-down, ideologically unified projects of Sukarno's Old Order. Whereas Sukarno exercised direct control over architectural production, commissioning monumental state projects such as Monas and Istiqlal Mosque to express a coherent national identity; the New Order saw a partial withdrawal of the state from design leadership, allowing greater involvement from private actors and foreign investment in the built environment. This shift led to what some scholars describe as capitalist-driven pluralism, where architecture no longer served as a state-authored ideological tool, but rather reflected market demand, economic pragmatism, and urban growth priorities (Kusno, 2000). In this context, architecture became less of a vessel for unified national identity and more a medium for consumer expression and real estate development, resulting in a fragmented and heterogeneous urban fabric (Leclerc, 2012). Paradox is seen in Suharto's regime, as his approach was anti-colonialism, but at the same time attempted to cooperate with the Dutch; however, this collaboration was shortly ended and then focused on returning to preserving traditional Indonesian architecture (Ardiani, Kurniawan & Lukito, 2023).

Alongside this commercial shift, elements of vernacular revivalism emerged, supported by both the state and private architects aiming to root modern structures in "Indonesian identity" by integrating traditional motifs and references (Kurniawan, 2018). However, many critics have pointed out that such gestures were often superficial, amounting to the decorative application of local forms or motifs onto otherwise modernist, concrete structures (Muthmainnah, 2018). Dealing with the influence of cultural politics in the mid-1980s, Indonesian architects had formulated 'Indonesian architecture' through promoting Javanese nationalism (Pemberton; Anderson, 1994). This decision was deplored by many architects, as it was seen as the outcome of a 'conservative ethno politics of the state'. Given that Indonesia is composed of over 13,000 islands and more than 700 ethnic groups, architectural interventions were expected to express a national identity that did not privilege or glorify a single culture (Kusno, 2017). This tendency to symbolically invoke tradition, without structurally embedding it, raises questions about the depth of cultural integration in New Order architecture. These trends of different markets and local design show the mixed results of the New Order's architectural legacy: buildings influenced by economic freedom and cultural symbols instead of a united national idea.

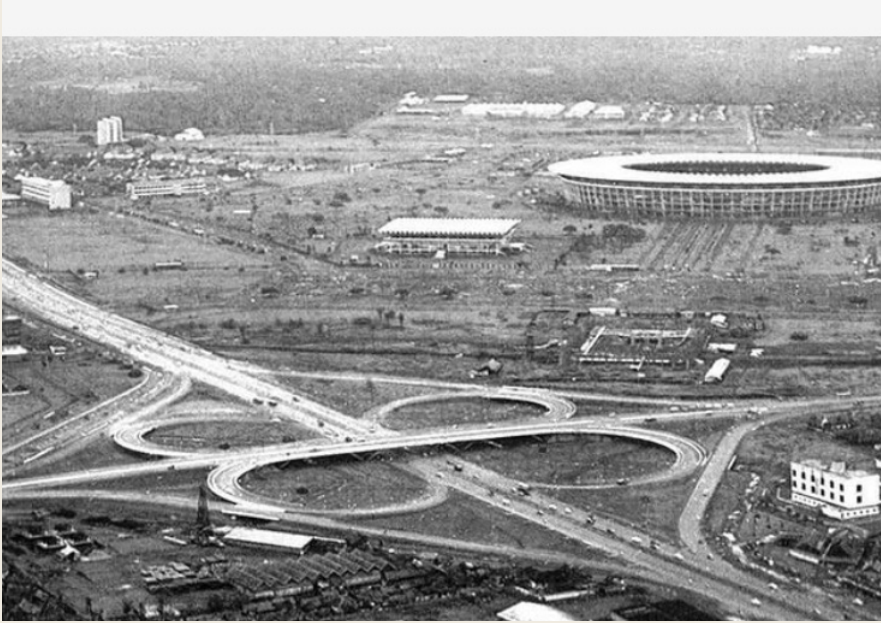


Figure 6 (top): Semanggi toll road in construction during the new order (Jakarta, 1945-1967), Source unknown

Figure 7 (bottom): Semanggi toll road in the present day (Jakarta), Source unknown

Despite these criticisms, some projects were successful in fusing modern design with traditional elements to create environments that spoke to local cultural identities. Understanding these complex, counter-hegemonic attempts to address the relationship between modernity and tradition under the Suharto regime requires an awareness of Han Awal's work.

## 2.1 Han Awal's Education and Early Life

Following from the previous section's description of hegemonic architectural trends in post-independence Indonesia, this section will analyse the work of Han Awal as an exception and counterpoint. The section will first revisit Han Awal's early education and career, before addressing the case study of *Gedung Arsip Nasional*, to illustrate his position in relation to dominant architectural trends.

Han Awal began his architectural studies in the Netherlands, enrolling at the Technische Hogeschool in Delft from 1950 to 1957 on a scholarship from the Diocese of Malang, Indonesia. His education was shaped by the height of European modernism, where functionalism, structural clarity, and material honesty defined architectural excellence. However, in 1957, political tensions arose between Indonesia and the Netherlands over the West Irian (now Papua) dispute.<sup>1</sup> In response, the Indonesian government closed its embassy, pressuring Indonesian students to return back to Indonesia. Though Awal was given the option to stay in the Netherlands, he chose to leave in solidarity with his peers and continued his studies at the Technische Universität Berlin from 1957 to 1960 (HAP Archives, 2017). During his studies in Germany, Awal's architectural philosophy was further shaped by the principles of Bauhaus, where the integration of art, craft and technology framed design as a societal tool (Antar, 2025).

<sup>1</sup> The Papua Conflict is an ongoing conflict between Indonesia and West Papua, as Indonesian government at the time wanted control of all former Dutch colonies in the Asia Pacific region. In 1957, Indonesia cuts diplomatic ties with the Netherlands and temporarily shuts down its embassy, ordering Indonesian citizens to evacuate the Netherlands (Free West Papua Campaign, 2017).



Figure 8: Han Awal during his studies abroad (c1950s). Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners

Upon returning to Indonesia in 1960, President Sukarno asked Awal to contextualise modernist design in tropical Indonesia (Khouw, 2017). Together with an acquaintance, Mustafa Pamuntjak, Awal founded an architecture consultant firm in 1968, and in 1971, their office operated as PT Han Awal & Partners (HAP). He started his career with a major project with Universitas Katolik Atma Jaya (Atma Jaya Catholic University Indonesia) (Djarot, 2023). The office designed a variety of projects, including hospitals such as Rumah Sakit Akademik Atma Jaya (completed in 1995) and Siloam Hospitals Lippo Cikarang (completed in 1995), alongside numerous churches, schools and hundreds of private houses. The main conservation project that sparked Awal's start on the architectural heritage renovations was the Jakarta Cathedral (1984-1987) when the Archbishop of Jakarta awarded Awal with the challenge of conserving the Jakarta Cathedral. Struggling to find the archives, Han Awal and his team re-measured, hand-drew, and traced the data of the Jakarta Cathedral all the way to the Netherlands (Pusat Dokumentasi Arsitektur, 2020).

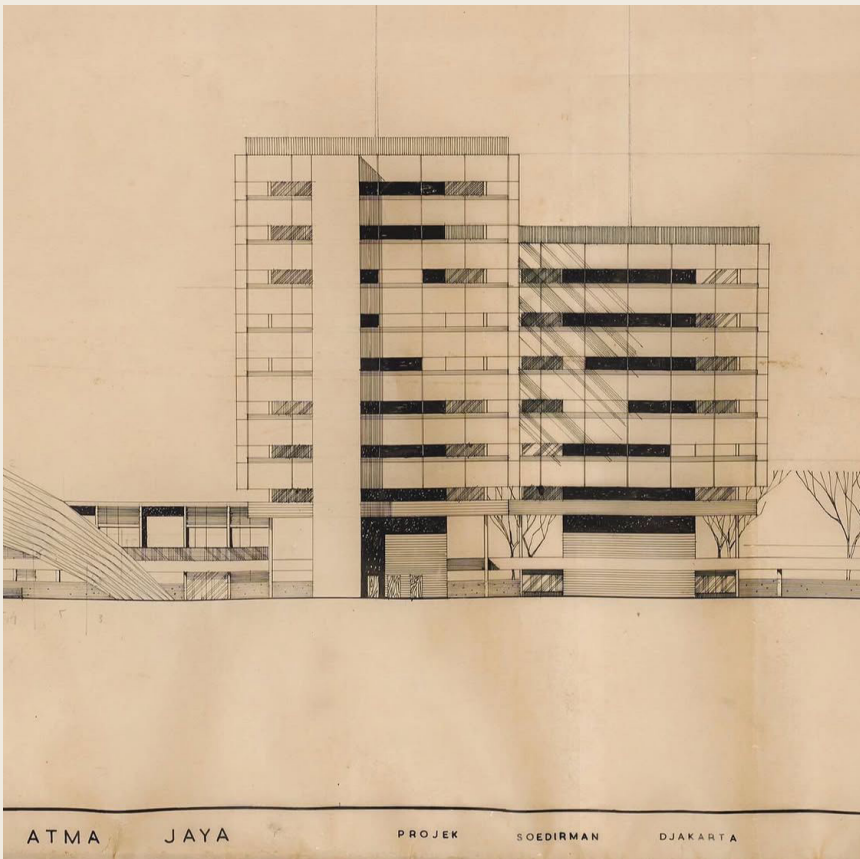


Figure 9: Universitas Katolik Atma Jaya (Atma Jaya Catholic University Indonesia, completion 1995). Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners



Figure 10: Universitas Katolik Atma Jaya (Atma Jaya Catholic University Indonesia, completion 1995). Courtesy of atmajaya.ac.id



Figure 11&12: Colour study of the interior of the Cathedral Church, Jakarta. c. 1984-1987. Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners



Figure 13: Jakarta Cathedral, Year unknown. Courtesy of katedraljakarta.or.id

## 2.2 Han Awal's Shift to Conservation

As Jakarta grew, and the focus shifted to profit-driven development, Awal saw that saving heritage buildings was important not just to remember the past, but also to keep national identity in a changing society. Instead of thinking that modern buildings were the only sign of progress, Awal began to see value in historical continuity, especially in buildings that bore witness to Indonesia's complex colonial past (Antar, 2025). His shift toward conservation was a response to both professional concerns and ideological reflections on how architecture could better serve memory, culture, and identity. His transition from modernist architecture to a focus on conservation marked a broader shift in the discourse surrounding post-colonial identity in Indonesia.

One of Han Awal's most significant conservation projects was the restoration of *Gedung Arsip Nasional*, originally constructed in the 18th century as the residence of Dutch East India Company Governor-General Reynier de Klerk (b. 1710 - d. 1780). *Gedung Arsip Nasional* is located on Gadjah Mada Road in Jakarta, comprised of the main central building with two lateral wings on the side, forming a U-shaped configuration around an open courtyard. The main building serves as the architectural centrepiece, with a symmetrical façade, high ceilings, shuttered windows, and prominent terracotta roof tiles. It is constructed with thick brick walls, timber framing and lime plaster. The surrounding courtyard creates a buffer from Jakarta's busy and dense surroundings, enhancing its historical atmosphere.

During the late 20th century, the building's poor condition represented a lack of attention to heritage conservation in Indonesia along with rapid urbanisation in the country. Its condition was not simply the result of time but of systemic neglect, a reflection of how colonial buildings were excluded from the nationalist architectural agenda of both the Old and New Orders. In the eyes of the state, colonial architecture represented oppression and was largely overlooked in favour of constructing a new postcolonial visual language. Furthermore, under the Suharto regime's development-oriented priorities, architectural conservation was peripheral to national goals, which leaned toward economic growth and urban expansion. *Gedung Arsip's* abandonment must also be understood within the broader ideological dilemma of preserving colonial architecture in a nation founded on decolonisation. The question of whether colonial structures should be preserved, demolished, or reinterpreted was fraught with tensions between memory, nationalism, and modernisation. This complexity added weight to Awal's eventual intervention, conservation became a way not of glorifying the colonial past, but of recontextualising it within Indonesia's layered heritage.



Figure 14: Facade of *Gedung Arsip Nasional*, 2025. Image taken during personal site visit

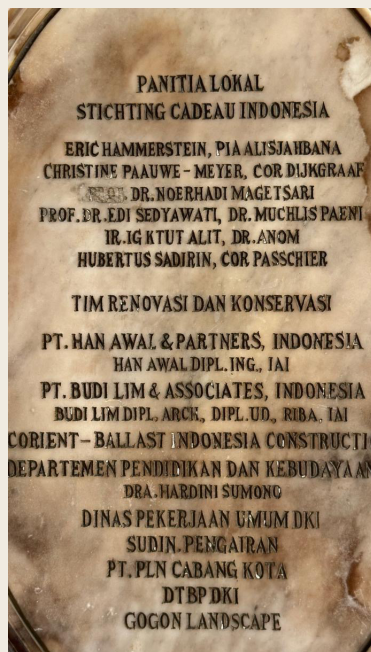


Figure 15: Plaque of teams involved in the conservation of *Gedung Arsip Nasional*, 2025. Own photo Image taken during personal site visit

The restoration of *Gedung Arsip Nasional* was made possible through both the efforts of Indonesian and Dutch advocates, who saw the architectural and historical value of the building. The initiative first started with Mr. Hemerstein, along with Ms. Christine Paauwe-Meyer, who established the Stichting National Cadeau (National Gift Foundation), a fundraising and project management organisation; dedicated to restoring symbols of Indonesia's shared colonial past. Together, they approached Ms. Alisyahbana of the Indonesian Heritage Society to help support and promote the project locally. After assessing several possible sites for restoration, the Gedung Arsip building was ultimately chosen due to its architectural significance and unique Indo-Dutch heritage (UNESCO, 2011). The project was financed by receiving donations from over sixty Dutch businesses that operated in Indonesia, giving clear example of showing the potential of international collaboration in heritage preservation. Before any construction work began, Han Awal's team was faced with the challenge of navigating bureaucratic and political systems. Extensive networking, lobbying and negotiation with the Indonesian government authorities, which took over four years, to slowly build the trust and cooperation needed to move forward with the project. These efforts culminated in the establishment of a successful public-private partnership, which not only enabled the restoration of the building but also set a precedent for future heritage projects in Indonesia.

Han Awal's restoration of Gedung Arsip in the 1990s employed a rigorous methodology that combined international conservation standards with local sensibilities. His philosophy of "minimum intervention, maximum preservation" guided every decision. The main scope of the project was to restore the buildings and prevent future flooding as Jakarta is prone to it during the wet seasons and is the major culprit of decay in the buildings. Rather than replicating the past, his team aimed to preserve as much of the original material and design as possible. The conservation process started with studying the building and its areas of needed intervention to decide which materials and methods were most appropriate. For example, samples of paint were analysed to match the original colours; broken roof tiles were replaced with tiles salvaged from other buildings of the same period; and decayed timber elements damaged by termites, were repaired only in damaged sections rather than replacing entire beam. This extends to replacement teak, as it came from other old buildings, as substitutions in the project were only done with old, recycled building materials. In addition to this, the original kinds of building materials were used wherever possible, for example linseed-oil putty in the window frames (UNESCO, 2011).



Figure 16: Courtyard of *Gedung Arsip Nasional*, 2025. Own photo Image taken during personal site visit

The building's current state of restoration is evidence of the accuracy and cultural awareness of the conservation efforts. Relying heavily on local materials and labour, such as hiring Balinese craftsmen to repair the original paintwork, the restoration process reaffirmed the project's dedication to preserving an authentically Indonesian identity. Carefully restored but not overly polished, the building now blends in with its urban surroundings, highlighting the project's underlying cultural reclamation philosophy. Refusing to treat the building as a separate historical artifact and instead integrating it into the living legacy, the restoration aimed to reframe the building as part of Indonesia's larger architectural narrative rather than erasing its colonial past. Scanned archived plans from Han Awal's office for the *Gedung Arsip Nasional* strictly stated things such as "roof tiles must not be replaced with new ones" or "The damaged parts are repaired by peeling off the outer skin and restoring it to its original state", strongly showing that these preservation methodologies must be respected through the entirety of the project.

Where modern materials were utilised, like improved drainage systems or waterproof coatings, they were applied covertly to avoid visual intrusion while resolving functional problems like Jakarta's frequent flooding. The building's colonial identity was not lost during Awal's restoration; rather, it was reframed as a component of a larger architectural narrative that encompassed colonialism, independence, and renewal. According to Kusno, "this cross-cultural practice suggests intertwined temporalities where tradition is no longer in opposition to modernity" (Kusno, 2017).



Figure 17 (left) : Exterior walkway of *Gedung Arsip Nasional*, 2025. Own photo Image taken during personal site visit

Figure 18 (right) : Ornament of staircase railway in *Gedung Arsip Nasional*, 2025. Own photo Image taken during personal site visit



★ Translated plans

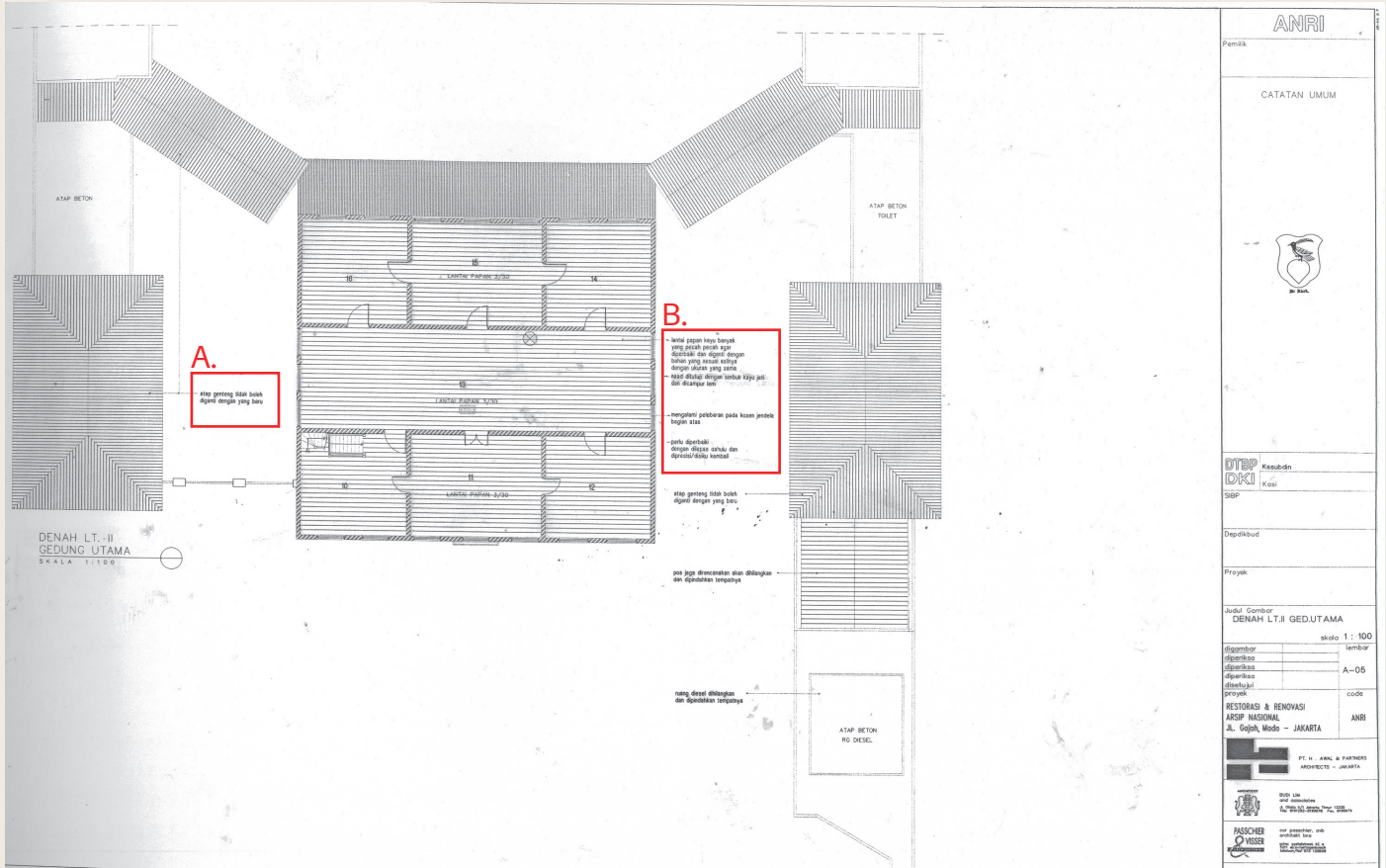


Figure 20: Gedung Arsip Nasional, Plan 2nd Floor Main Building, 1997. Courtesy of Han Awal & Partners Archive

A. - Roof tiles should not be replaced with new ones

B. - Many of the wooden floorboards are broken, they need to be repaired and replaced with materials that match the original with the same size

- Experienced widening on the upper window frame

- Need to be repaired by being first removed and precisionized / reshaped

## 2.3 Han Awal's Broader Position on New Order Architecture

Han Awal's approach to *Gedung Arsip Nasional* exemplified a larger critique of Indonesia's approach to architectural heritage. The dynamic illustrated a broader tension in Indonesian architectural discourse, where conservation efforts could simultaneously challenge and reinforce state narratives. *Gedung Arsip Nasional* can be seen as a successful collaboration between the private and public sectors, setting a precedent for future heritage conservation partnerships in Jakarta. Awal's work also reflected the contradictions inherent in his position. While he championed conservation as a means of reclaiming Indonesia's historical identity, many of his projects were state commissioned, aligning him with the very institutions that prioritised modernisation (Ardiani, Kurniawan & Lukito, 2023).

While Awal's work stood in contrast to the Suharto regime's dominant architectural trends, it also reveals the nuanced complexity of operating within a state-led modernisation agenda. On one hand, his advocacy for conservation challenged the developmental narrative that equated modernity with demolition and rebuilding. On the other, many of his projects, including *Gedung Arsip*, were ultimately endorsed or supported by state institutions, suggesting a level of alignment with national agendas (Ardiani, Kurniawan & Lukito, 2023). This duality positions Awal not as a dissident, but as a practitioner who navigated the system tactically, both working with and against the dominant architectural trends. The government's support for his work raises the questions: To what extent was Han Awal an independent agent, and to what extent was he an expression of state ideology? On one hand, his restorations preserved historical narratives that might have otherwise been erased under Suharto's development agenda. On the other hand, his projects served a state-driven agenda, as the government selectively endorsed conservation efforts that fit within its broader national image (Kusno, 2010). This struggle to define a truly inclusive architectural identity underscores the importance of Han Awal's work, which sought to preserve both colonial and indigenous structures as integral parts of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

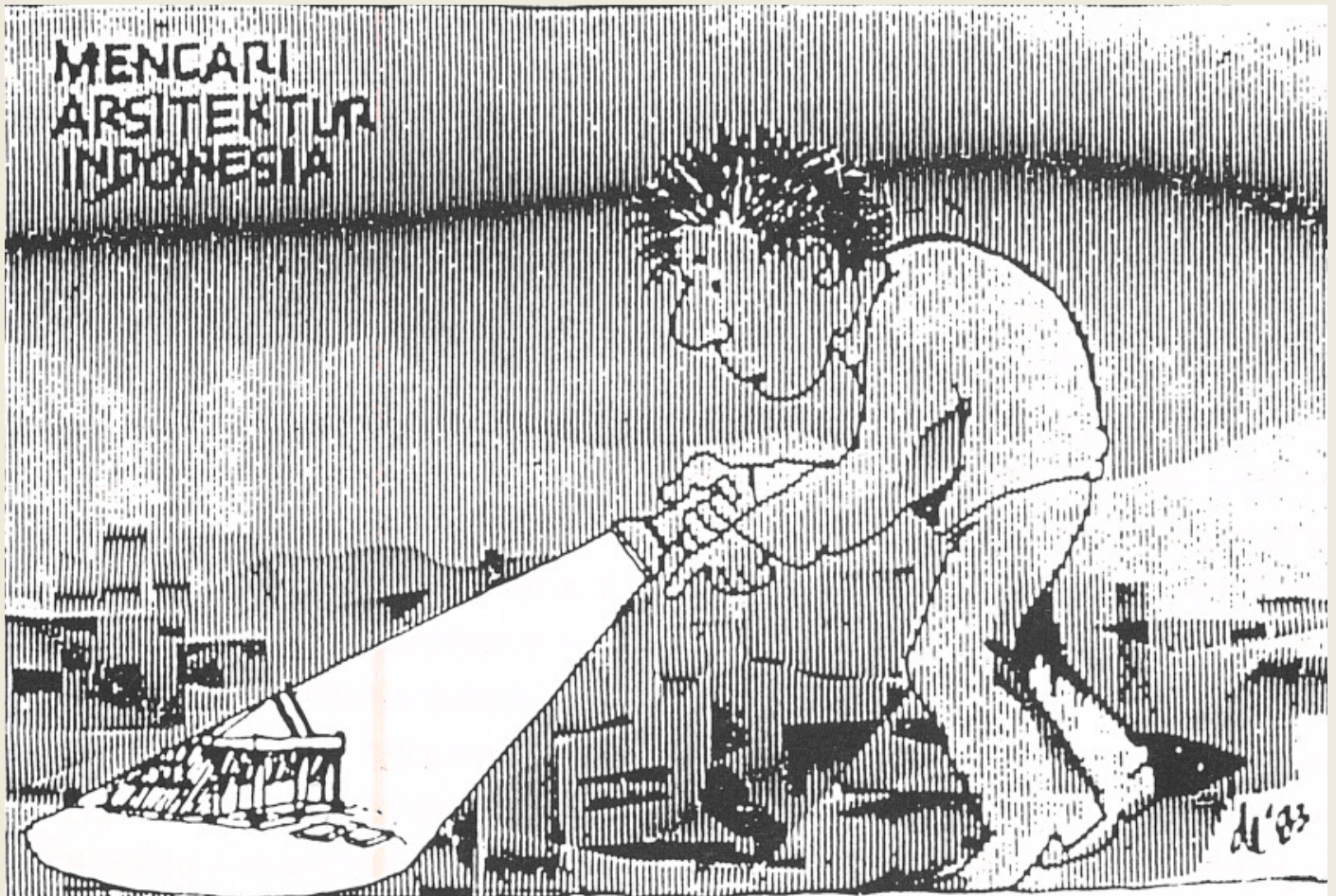


Figure 21: MISSING: THE SEARCH FOR "INDONESIAN ARCHITECTURE" (1983), Source: Gallery-UndiplCakrawala Arsitektur

Han Awal's commitment to conservation extended beyond *Gedung Arsip Nasional*, reflecting a broader critique of Indonesia's approach to architectural heritage. Unlike the dominant trends of the New Order, which often incorporated superficial traditional elements into modern structures, Awal advocated for a more rigorous and historically sensitive method of restoration. His career reflects the complexities of Indonesia's architectural evolution, balancing modernist principles when it was the dominant priority, with a deep commitment to conservation (Pusat Dokumentasi Arsitektur, 2020). His European training initially aligned him with the nation's modernisation efforts, but his later work challenged dominant state narratives by advocating for the preservation of architectural heritage. Through projects like *Gedung Arsip Nasional*, he demonstrated that conservation could coexist with progress, offering an alternative to the New Order's rapid urban development. While his projects did not completely subject state narratives, they introduced an alternative framework for understanding Indonesia's architectural identity; one that embraced historical continuity rather than rupture (Kusno, 2010). It highlights the tension between state-driven modernisation and the need to safeguard historical identity, positioning him as both a participant in and a critic of Indonesia's architectural transformation.

## Conclusion

Han Awal's contributions to architectural conservation in Indonesia have left a lasting impact, ensuring that the nation's historical structures remain preserved despite the pressures of modernisation. His work laid the foundation for a broader movement in heritage conservation that extends beyond the colonial past. His dedication to architectural preservation did not end with his passing; rather, his team and, more significantly, his son, Yori Antar, has continued his legacy. While Han Awal focused on the preservation of colonial-era buildings, his son has extended these missions to include the conservation of indigenous architecture, a primary example of this would be the traditional village of Wae Rebo in Flores. His approach to conservation was not merely about preserving buildings but about safeguarding the diverse historical narratives embedded within them.

Following Han Awal's passing, his architecture team remained committed to his principles, as seen in their office in figure 24, ensuring that his dedication to conservation did not fade. Many of his former colleagues and protégés have carried forward his restoration methods, applying them to new projects while refining them to address contemporary challenges. Rather than merely preserving old buildings for their aesthetic or historical value, they have continued Han Awal's practice of integrating restoration into urban development, demonstrating how heritage conservation can coexist with modernity, through initiatives such as Rumah Asuh, an organisation of professional architects working to preserve and reconstruct traditional houses in Indonesia, founded by architect Yori Antar. Alongside the broader discourse on conservation, there has been a growing recognition that historical sites in urban areas hold not only economic value but also play a crucial role in shaping national identity (Abel, 1994 and Böhme, 1998). One of the major contributions of his team has been the expansion of conservation efforts to structures that were previously overlooked. While Han Awal focused heavily on colonial architecture, his successors have broadened their scope to include traditional Indonesian buildings, religious sites, and culturally significant vernacular architecture. This shift reflects a growing recognition that Indonesia's architectural identity is not solely tied to its colonial past but is also deeply rooted in indigenous traditions. By maintaining this dual focus, Han Awal's team has ensured that their conservation work remains relevant to Indonesia's evolving cultural landscape.

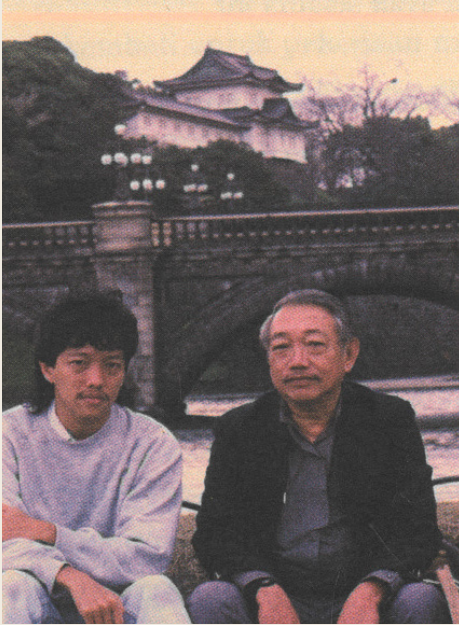


Figure 22 (left): Yori Antar (Left) and Han Awal (Right) (c. 1990s). Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners  
Figure 23 (right): Han Awal (Left) and Yori Antar (Right) (c. 1990s). Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners



Figure 24: Ambience of Han Awal & Partner's architecture office (2015). Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners

Unlike his father, Yori Antar did not instinctively pick up the idea of being an architect. After graduating from secondary school, he decided to major in mechanical engineering at the University of Indonesia (Supriyanto, 2024). In the third semester after realising he was not compatible with his major, he moved to architecture. Antar felt compelled to learn more about Indonesia's history, and from there he decided to change his mind set to see and experience Indonesian architecture. In 2008, Antar arrived in Flores and came across a village called Wae Rebo that was on the verge of extinction. Through visiting, Antar felt like a tourist who came to see the area, taking their knowledge then leaving, meanwhile the community got nothing in return. Yori Antar has pioneered community-based conservation models, shifting away from a top-down, expert-driven approach to one where local community play a central role in restoration. Unlike colonial-era conservation, which often prioritizes material preservation, Antar's approach ensures that restoration also revitalizes traditional craftsmanship, knowledge, and social structures (Antar, 2024). In Wae Rebo, local villagers were not just beneficiaries but active participants in the restoration of Mbaru Niang houses, learning techniques that will allow them to maintain their architectural heritage independently in the future.



Figure 25: Reconstruction of Wae Rebo, Flores (2008). Courtesy of Han Awal & Partners

One of the central themes throughout this thesis has been the paradox of modernity and heritage conservation. As Evers and Korff (2000) explain, the modernisation of Southeast Asian cities has been largely driven by international integration policies, resulting in cities transforming into global metropolises. This urban expansion has led to a physical and ideological contrast, the juxtaposition of high-rise developments alongside traditional structures symbolises the ongoing tension between economic progress and cultural preservation. In Indonesia, this contrast is particularly pronounced in conservation efforts, where projects must navigate the challenges of balancing heritage integrity with contemporary urban development pressures.

The intergenerational continuation of Han Awal's work also speaks to the adaptive nature of conservation. The community-participatory approach emphasized by Antar, ensures that heritage sites are not just physically maintained but remain culturally relevant to the communities that inhabit them. It also reflects the expansion of conservation beyond architecture; heritage is no longer just about buildings but also about preserving the social and cultural systems that give them meaning. This shift signals a broader redefinition of conservation practice, one that is proactive, living, and deeply embedded in the local context. The challenges of urbanisation and globalisation continue to put pressure on conservation efforts, but the innovations introduced by Han Awal's successors offer sustainable and inclusive solutions. As Indonesia moves forward, its conservation efforts must continue to balance modernity with heritage, ensuring that progress does not come at the expense of cultural continuity. In doing so, the nation develops an architectural identity that is both reflective of its past and adaptable to its future, embracing the rich diversity that makes Indonesia's built environment so unique.



# Appendix

## Transcript of Interview with Yori Antar - 21.01.2025

*Conducted in Indonesian, translated into English*

*Translated transcript - summarised*

Anisa: How would you describe Han Awal's core architectural philosophy?

Yori Antar: I once asked my father, what do you think Indonesian architecture is? The answer was simple and very much a modernist view. Indonesian architecture for me is architecture that is useful for Indonesians. What does that mean? If I make a building with the theme of Balinese architecture, Javanese architecture, and then the building is finished, but the building is not useful, it has no use, it is not used, I have failed.

Anisa: So you can say that the vision, mission of Han Awal's office from several decades ago has remained the same?

Yori Antar: Still the same. Our principle is, we just work on it from all sides so that it can also be done.

Anisa: Did his education in Germany influence his approach to architecture?

Yori Antar: And he actually went to school in Delft. Delft was longer, and then there was a conflict between Indonesia and the Netherlands over West Papua. Then my father moved to Berlin. And in Berlin, my father of course got a view of the principles of the Bauhaus architects. So the Bauhaus was quite influential. So in his work, my father did not pursue monumentalism. Because maybe he was also a socialist. So of course, the function of the building is important. The principles, the honesty of the materials, no need to glorify and so on. And of course once it arrives in Indonesia, the principles of tropical architecture must be added. Because Indonesian architects have to be versatile. After Indonesia's independence, my father was the first generation to become an architect in the independence era. And from there, he decided to do military service. So he was also a nationalist. President Sukarno was replaced by President Suharto, but my father did a lot of work in the Sukarno era, not Suharto. Because he got important buildings, the GANEFO Building, the current DPR Building, and also because my father was financed by the church, so when he returned home he was also trusted to design the Atma Jaya campus. And yes, of course, my father's architecture is very simple, his monumentalism is in simplicity.

Anisa: During the Old Order, architecture was closely tied to nation building and expressing Indonesian identity. How did Han Awal's projects reflect these aspirations?

Yori Antar: Yes, in the Sukarno era it was clear that Sukarno did not want to follow the colonial era. So we consider modern architecture. And that led to an era of modern architecture. Many of Sukarno's buildings were assisted by architects from Russia and America. But Sukarno clearly defined an era of modern architecture. In fact, there were many architects in the colonial era who had adapted as much as possible to Indonesian architecture. So my father and his DIPLing friends, that started Indonesia's modern architecture. My father was one of the 7 or 8 DIPLing who studied in Germany during that era. When he returned to Indonesia, he was immediately given important projects by the new Sukarno government.

Yori Antar (continued): Immediately returned to Indonesia and took action. Important projects by the new government. Yes, after the Suharto era, I don't think he did many government projects. More running this office, building hospitals, building offices, building factories. And then in the 80s I was trusted by my father to continue the office.

Anisa: How did Han Awal balance the political expectations of the New Order government with his own design philosophy, particularly in conservation projects?

Yori Antar: Our office has a special certificate from the TKI government to do restoration work. So if there is restoration work, and then it is carelessly buried, the RKI can seal it, stop it. And then he asked if you wanted to continue work on the cultural claw building, our office was proposed. My father has a special certificate because of his achievement in restoring, especially the cathedral building, the national archive building, Bank Indonesia, and he has passed on many principles, based on the building. And that spirit has been passed on to me. But when it comes to your question, one by one, yes my father did graduate in modern aspects.

more pragmatic. Today, younger architects are somewhere in between, they're thinking about sustainability, heritage, community. And I think that blend of ideals is where Indonesian architecture can evolve.

Anisa: What inspired Han Awal's focus on preserving colonial-era buildings during the New Order?

Yori Antar: I think it came from his belief that those buildings were part of Indonesia's layered history. He didn't see colonial buildings only as symbols of oppression but as cultural artifacts that needed to be contextualised and reused, not erased. He was more focused on preserving stories through architecture. In the New Order era, that approach wasn't common, most people just wanted new, modern buildings.

Anisa: From your perspective, how did Han Awal's architectural work differ between the Old Order and New Order in terms of style, materials, and cultural expression?

Yori Antar: In the Old Order, his work was more tied to the nationalist project, big civic buildings, universities, public commissions. The materials were simpler, but there was a push for boldness. In the New Order, his work became more introspective. He turned to conservation, paying close attention to historical materials, lime plaster, teak, clay roof tiles—and craftsmanship. It was more careful, more research-heavy.

Anisa: Are there specific projects you think best illustrate the differences in his approach between these two periods?

Yori Antar: Yes. In the Old Order, it would be the GANEFO building, now DPR/MPR, the symbol of a rising Indonesia. In the New Order, definitely Gedung Arsip Nasional. That project showed his full transition to conservation work. It took years of research and care. That's the contrast.

Anisa: As someone who grew up observing your father's work, how did his values as an architect shape your own career and approach to architecture?

Yori Antar: A lot. Learning a lot about restoration, of course if you look at my father's method, it's more conservative. So it takes research, it takes seams, and sometimes not all clients want to be patient. Especially if it's government recruitment. They're always related to the budget, this budget is coming down this much, it has to run out this year.

Anisa: How does your approach to restoration differ from your father's, particularly when working with clients or government-led projects?

Yori Antar: I try to continue his spirit but with a more flexible approach. Sometimes we need to adapt the principles to real-world constraints. The community aspect is very important to me. I don't want to just restore a building, I want to involve the people who use it. That's why projects like Wae Rebo became important to me. It's not just conservation, it's revitalisation.

Anisa: Do you think the political and cultural shifts between the Old and New Orders created lasting impacts on how Indonesian architects approach their work today?

Yori Antar: Absolutely. The Old Order instilled a sense of national pride in architecture. The New Order made people more pragmatic. Today, younger architects are somewhere in between, they're thinking about sustainability, heritage, community. And I think that blend of ideals is where Indonesian architecture can evolve.

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Han Awal. Photograph of Han Awal, ca. 1963–65. Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners, Jakarta.

Figure 2: Adhi Karya. Monumen Nasional in Construction, ca. 1970s. Courtesy of Adhi Karya.

Figure 3: Adhi Karya. Monumen Nasional upon Completion, 1975. Courtesy of Adhi Karya.

Figure 4: Istiqlal Mosque during Construction, 1950s. Retrieved from <https://istiqlal.or.id>.

Figure 5: Tsyganov, Mikhail. Nikita Krushchev (left) and President Sukarno (right) Overlook the Model for the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium. Courtesy of the private archive of Igor Kashmadze.

Figure 6: Semanggi Toll Road in Construction during the New Order (Jakarta, 1945–1967). Source unknown.

Figure 7: Semanggi Toll Road in the Present Day (Jakarta). Source unknown.

Figure 8: Han Awal. Photograph during Studies Abroad, ca. 1950s. Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners, Jakarta.

Figure 9: Han Awal & Partners. Universitas Katolik Atma Jaya (Completion 1995). Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners, Jakarta.

Figure 10: Universitas Katolik Atma Jaya (Completion 1995). Courtesy of [atmajaya.ac.id](http://atmajaya.ac.id).

Figure 11&12: Han Awal & Partners. Colour Study of the Interior of the Cathedral Church, Jakarta, ca. 1984–1987. Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners, Jakarta.

Figure 13: Jakarta Cathedral. Year unknown. Courtesy of [katedraljakarta.or.id](http://katedraljakarta.or.id).

Figure 14: Facade of Gedung Arsip Nasional. Photograph taken during personal site visit, 2025.

Figure 15: Plaque of Teams Involved in the Conservation of Gedung Arsip Nasional. Photograph taken during personal site visit, 2025.

Figure 16: Courtyard of Gedung Arsip Nasional. Photograph taken during personal site visit, 2025.

Figure 17: Exterior Walkway of Gedung Arsip Nasional. Photograph taken during personal site visit, 2025.

Figure 18: Ornament of Staircase Railing in Gedung Arsip Nasional. Photograph taken during personal site visit, 2025.

Figure 19: Han Awal & Partners. Gedung Arsip Nasional, Plan 1st Floor Main Building (Wall & Column). 1997. Courtesy of Han Awal & Partners Archive, Jakarta.

Figure 20: Han Awal & Partners. Gedung Arsip Nasional, Plan 2nd Floor Main Building. 1997. Courtesy of Han Awal & Partners Archive, Jakarta.

Figure 21: Missing: The Search for "Indonesian Architecture". 1983. Source: Gallery–Undipl Cakrawala Arsitektur.

Figure 22: Yori Antar (Left) and Han Awal (Right). ca. 1990s. Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners.

Figure 23: Han Awal (Left) and Yori Antar (Right). ca. 1990s. Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners.

Figure 24: Ambience of Han Awal & Partners' Architecture Office. 2015. Courtesy of Archive Han Awal & Partners.

Figure 25: Reconstruction of Wae Rebo, Flores. 2008. Courtesy of Han Awal & Partners.

## Bibliography

- Abel, Chris. "Localisation versus Globalisation." *The Architectural Review*, September 1994, 4-5.
- Akmal, Imelda. *Indonesia: Architectural Guide*. Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2016.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Anderson, Benedict. "Indonesia: Unity vs. Progress." *Current History*, February 1965, 75-81.
- Anderson, Benedict, Ruth McVey, and Frederick Bunnell. *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965, Coup in Indonesia*. Interim Report Series. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1971.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London: Verso, 1991.
- Anderson, Benedict. "Colonial Language Policies in Indonesia and the Philippines: A Contrast in Intended Aims and Unintended Outcomes." In *Text and Nation: Cross-Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities*, edited by Laura Garcia-Moreno and Peter Pfeiffer, 46-64. Columbia: Camden House, 1996.
- Ardiani, Yanita Mila, Kemas Ridwan Kurniawan, and Yulia Nurliani Lukito. "Anti-Colonialism during Suharto's New Order Era and Its Impact on Conservation of Architecture in Indonesia." *International Society for the Study of Vernacular Settlements* 10, no. 8 (August 10, 2023): 62-71. <https://doi.org/10.61275/isvsej-2023-10-08-05>.
- Arsitek Indonesia. "Ikatan Arsitek Indonesia: Proses Pembentukan dan Keegiatannya hingga Saat Ini." *Arsitek Indonesia*, February 1985, 9-10.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Colombijn, Freek. "Public Housing in Post-Colonial Indonesia: The Revolution of Rising Expectations." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 167, no. 4 (2011): 437-458.
- Crouch, Harold, and Benedict R. Anderson. "Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance 1944-1946." *Pacific Affairs* 45, no. 4 (1972): 617. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2755692>.
- "Dipl.-Ing. Arsitek: An Indonesian-German Architectural History - Announcements." e-Flux. Accessed December 10, 2024. <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/627838/dipl-ing-arsitek-an-indonesian-german-architectural-history/>.
- Emmerson, Donald K. "Understanding the New Order: Bureaucratic Pluralism in Indonesia." *Asian Survey* 23, no. 11 (November 1, 1983): 1220-1241. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644374>.

Evers, Hans-Dieter, and Rüdiger Korff. *Southeast Asian Urbanism: The Meaning and Power of Social Space*. New York, 2000.

Gerke, Solvay. "Global Lifestyles under Local Conditions: The New Indonesian Middle Class." In *Consuming Asians*, edited by Chua Beng Huat. London: Routledge, 1999.

Han Awal & Partners. Han Awal & Partners Archive. Jakarta: Han Awal & Partners, n.d.

Henning, Moritz, and Eduard Kögel. *Dipl.-Ing. Arsitek: German-Trained Indonesian Architects from the 1960s*. Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2023.

"History of West Papua." Free West Papua Campaign, August 17, 2016. <https://www.freewestpapua.org/info/history-of-west-papua/>.

Karsten, Thomas. "Town Development in the Indies." In *The Indonesian Town*, edited by W.F. Wertheim et al., 115–136. The Hague: W. van Hoeve Ltd., 1958.

Kalb, Bernard. "Rekindling Memories in Jakarta." *The New York Times*, December 9, 1984.

Kurniawan, Kemas Ridwan. "Memory and Nationalism: The Case of Universitas Indonesia." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 498–511.

Kusno, Abidin. *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia*. London: Routledge, 2014.

Kusno, Abidin. "Sukarno's Jakarta, 1960–1966." In *Urban Symbolism*, edited by Peter Nas. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993.

Lee, Rachel. "Engaging the Archival Habitat." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 3 (December 1, 2020): 526–540. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-8747502>.

Macdonald, Gayle. "Indonesia's Medan Merdeka: National Identity and the Built Environment." *Antipode* 27, no. 3 (1995): 270–293.

Martokusumo, Widjaja. "Heritage and Urban Conservation: Some Notions on Post-Colonial Urbanism in Search for Cultural Identity." Unpublished manuscript.

Pemberton, John. *On the Subject of "Java"*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Pemberton, John. "Recollections from 'Beautiful Indonesia' (Somewhere Beyond the Postmodern)." *Public Culture* 6 (1994a): 241–262.

Pepinsky, Thomas B. "Pluralism and Political Conflict in Indonesia." *Indonesia*, no. 96 (2013): 81–100.

Pusat Dokumentasi Arsitektur. Gedung Arsip Nasional: Arsip Proyek Konservasi. Archive Collection. Jakarta: Pusat Dokumentasi Arsitektur, 2020.

Roosa, John. *Pretext for mass murder: The September 30th movement and Suharto's coup d'état in Indonesia*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006.

Shackford-Bradley, Julie. "Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space, and Political Cultures in Indonesia." *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 1 (2003): 181–185.

Siegel, James T. "Once Again: Nationalism and Revolution." *Indonesia*, no. 101 (2016): 29–54.

Sudradjat, I. *A Study of Indonesian Architectural History*. PhD diss., Department of Architecture, University of Sydney, 1991.

Suharto. *Soeharto: My Thoughts, Words and Deeds*. Jakarta: PT. Citra Famtoro Gung Persada, 1991.

Sukarno. "[Address Given by Sukarno (Bandung, 18 April 1955)]." In *Asia-Africa Speak from Bandung*, 19–29. Jakarta: Indonesia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1955. <https://www.cvce.eu/s/3o>.

Sukarno. "Transformation of Djakarta Raya." In *Indonesia 1962*. Jakarta: Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 1962.

Tjahjono, Gunawan. "Arsitektur Di Indonesia: Kancan Penjelajahan Tanpa Batas." Inaugural speech for Professorship in Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, University of Indonesia, Depok, December 28, 2002.

Tjahjono, Gunawan. "Center and Duality in the Javanese Dwelling." In *Dwelling, Settlements and Tradition: Cross Cultural Perspectives*, edited by J.P. Bourdier and N. AlSayyad, 237–250. Lanham: University Press of America, 1989.

UNESCO Office in Bangkok. *National Archives Building, Indonesia*, 2011. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160713072550/http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=2135>.

Van Reybrouck, David. *Revolusi: Indonesia and the Birth of the Modern World*. Narrated by Neil Gardner. Old Saybrook: Tantor Audio, 2024.

Van Reybrouck, David. *Revolusi*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2024.

van Roosmalen, Pauline K. M. "Confronting Built Heritage: Shifting Perspectives on Colonial Architecture in Indonesia." *ABE Journal*, no. 3 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.4000/abe.594>.

Wiryomartono, B. *Seni Bangunan dan Seni Binakota di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Gramedia, 1995.

