

OBITUARIES



Patrick Edward de Josselin de Jong (1922–1999)

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The first day of 1999 proved to be a dark one among Dutch anthropologists for on that day one of their most eminent and respected colleagues passed from the scene. Patrick Edward de Josselin de Jong, Professor Emeritus of Cultural Anthropology, University of Leiden, at age 76 died in Oegstgeest, a Leiden suburb. He was instrumental in refining the theory of structuralism, developing a cognitive anthropology, fashioning the theory of "political myths," establishing the parameters of the "field of anthropological study" with special reference to Southeast Asia, and making better known abroad the contributions of Dutch anthropology past and present.

He was born on July 8, 1922, in Peking, where his father, a Sinologist who had studied Chinese at Leiden and Berlin, was Chinese Secretary for the Dutch Legation. He grew up speaking Dutch with his father and English with his mother, an artist from Scotland with an Irish lineage.

Upon completion of a classical education in Leiden, he enrolled at the University of Leiden in the fall of 1940, a fateful semester in occupied Holland, to pursue studies in Malay language and literature, Arabic, Islam, and cultural

anthropology. In November, the Nazis closed the university after Professor Rudolph P. Cleveringa gave a speech in the main auditorium on November 26 denouncing the dismissal of all Jewish faculty and staff. His talk triggered student demonstrations supporting his stand. (Delft Technical University met the same fate when a like occurrence took place there.)¹ Despite the closure, de Josselin de Jong was able to continue his studies clandestinely at the homes of various professors. He expanded his studies to include Sanskrit and Indian literature, for which he traveled to Utrecht to study under Professor Jan Gonda. Thanks to an agreement with the University of Amsterdam, he was able to take his exams there in March 1943 for his first degree (*Candidaats*). Shortly thereafter, the Nazis required that university students sign a loyalty oath if they did not want to be sent to Germany as slave labor. De Josselin de Jong went underground and joined the resistance movement and worked on a resistance newspaper, *The Home Service*, a thrice-weekly publication that got its name because it featured news from BBC broadcasts. In addition, he helped forge German documents.

After the liberation, he resumed his studies at Leiden focusing on Malay, Javanese, and other Indonesian languages (Buginese, Achenese, and Gayo), and to these subjects were added linguistics and cultural anthropology. In April 1948, the university conferred the M.Phil. (*Doctoraal*) on him, but he continued his studies in cultural anthropology by attending the courses offered by his uncle, Jan P. B. de Josselin de Jong (1886–1964), Leiden's professor of cultural anthropology. It was he who suggested to his nephew the topic for his Ph.D. dissertation: an analysis of the kinship and political systems of the Minangkabau of Sumatra compared with their immigrant counterpart in Negri Sembilan of Malaya.

While doing library and archival research on his dissertation, Patrick de Josselin de Jong worked as Assistant Curator of the Islamic Collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, a position he had assumed in the fall of 1949. This was also the semester when Professor Jan de Josselin de Jong started a series of seminars and workshops that lasted three years on the analysis of kinship systems. In that same fall, his nephew purchased Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* at a well-known corner bookstore that specialized in scholarly books. Greatly impressed with what he had read, he recommended the book to his uncle, who was not yet familiar with the French anthropologist's book. After having studied it, his uncle, the professor, was equally impressed, with

the result that he published a monograph, *Lévi-Strauss' Theory on Kinship and Marriage* (1952), critically analyzing its main features. Parenthetically, because it was written in English, this publication helped acquaint the non-French-reading anthropologists, especially in America, with Lévi-Strauss's kinship theories. It was also of Jan de Josselin de Jong's monograph that Lévi-Strauss wrote, "it was the first study ever devoted to one of my works" (1987:99).

Patrick de Josselin de Jong's research resulted in the doctoral dissertation "Minangkabau and Negri Sembilan: Socio-Political Structure in Indonesia." One goal of his research was to examine the relationship between asymmetric exchange (Lévi-Strauss's *échange généralisé*) and double descent (Lévi-Strauss's disharmonic system) and the possibility of their coexisting in one culture. Lévi-Strauss surmised that they could not.² Their coexistence, however, had been discerned by Jan de Josselin de Jong and his students and was analyzed in Frans A. E. van Wouden's seminal dissertation on kinship systems of eastern Indonesia (1935), a work with which Lévi-Strauss had not been acquainted because it was written in Dutch. One of Patrick de Josselin de Jong's conclusions was that although asymmetric exchange and double descent were absent among the Minangkabau of Negri Sembilan, they must have existed in an earlier period.

In December 1951, de Josselin de Jong was awarded a Ph.D. cum laude. The honor for the dissertation was richly deserved. Fred Eggan, reviewing it in *American Anthropologist*, started his review of this brilliant dissertation thusly:

Here is an outstanding contribution to our knowledge of the socio-political structures of Sumatra and the Malay peninsula, one that gives us a new vantage point from which to understand the complex institutions of Indonesia. Without benefit of field research, but utilizing an admirable combination of historical and comparative methodology and the concepts developed by modern students of social structure, the author has reduced the large body of available materials on Minangkabau and Negri Sembilan to the "underlying system" and then subjected it to theoretical analysis and interpretation. [1952:539]

Eggan then concluded his review with these observations:

Students interested in social organization will find this an exciting volume, with many controversial problems being presented and argued. Of particular significance is Dr. de Josselin de Jong's discussion of the theories of Lévi-Strauss and Murdock in the light of the Sumatran data, and his emphasis on the importance of seeing Minangkabau institutions as variants of social patterns widespread in Sumatra. We hope that he will continue his researches in the Dutch and Indonesian literature and that he will have an opportunity to clarify the crucial points by first-hand field research. [1952:540]

In 1953 de Josselin de Jong moved with his wife to the University of Malaya in Singapore as Lecturer in Malay Studies. While in Malaya he conducted fieldwork in two Negri Sembilan districts and in Kedah (later he did fieldwork in southern Thailand and in Serawak on the status of Malayan minorities). One surprising finding in his research that helped fashion one of his theoretical orientations was that his informants agreed with the double descent structure as had been explicated in his dissertation but disagreed with the asymmetric alliance principle, which he thought was the stronger part of his model. This meant that for the Minangkabau of Negri Sembilan, the patrilineal principle was more salient to the informants than the literature had indicated; correlatively, marriage with the mother's brother's daughter was seen as ideal in one of the districts, but asymmetric alliance, its consequence, was not.

His fieldwork made him reconsider the role of models and made him take into consideration cultural ideals of informants and their perceptions. In several subsequent publications, he stressed the importance of the cognitive dimension and ultimately the significance of a cognitive anthropology (e.g., de Josselin de Jong 1956, 1967). Another surprising finding was that much of what he had concluded to be the basic structure of Minangkabau society was "still there" (Fox 1989:506).

Another important theoretical interest he developed, based on research in Malaya, was in the area of myths, especially "political myths." As summarized by Visser and Moyer, in de Josselin de Jong's analysis of the *Malay Annals* (*Sejarah Melayu*),

he put forward the view that a people's history is a perceived history expressed in narratives or myths. With a view to arriving at a proper understanding of Minangkabau and Malay ideas on the position of the legitimate ruler [through the *Annals*], he juxtaposed anthropological, literary, and historical sources and analytically compared these. [1999:183; cf. de Josselin de Jong 1975, 1980a, 1985]

The recognition of the significance of his publications led to invitations to participate in various events. In 1963 he gave a paper entitled "Ambrym and Other Class Systems" (de Josselin de Jong 1966) at an Edmund Leach seminar at Cambridge; in 1965 he gave a lecture at Oxford on social anthropology in Holland; in 1968 the Wenner-Gren Foundation invited him for its conference in New York on the nature and function of anthropological traditions (de Josselin de Jong 1980b); in 1969–70 he lectured in London, Moscow, and Heidelberg on the dynastic myth of Negri Sembilan (de Josselin de Jong 1975). But most notably, along with Maurice Bloch, Wendy Flaherty, Roman Jakobson, and Sidney Mintz, de Josselin de Jong was invited to Paris for the special ceremony honoring Claude Lévi-Strauss sponsored by the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities, an event that took place at the U.S. Embassy in November 1978. At this occasion, de Josselin

de Jong's homage, in French, to Lévi-Strauss contained these passages.

From personal experience, I can say how, for the group of structurally inclined anthropologists in Holland, and for the smaller comparable group in England, the appearance of your "splendid failure"³ in 1949 gave us the feeling of windows being thrown open, letting in fresh air and opening up wider perspectives than ever before. . . .

For several decades, anthropology of the type now often called cognitive has been studying myths—as narrative tales and as acted in dramatic performances. One of the important things the *Mythologiques* series has demonstrated is that, in the anthropological study of myths, it is possible to combine two sets of apparently incompatible qualities. The first is the combination of sound, fact-based solidity with subtlety; the second, the combination of vast scope with a detached, precise research procedure. This procedure has also proved applicable in your recent beautiful book on works of art [*La Voie des Masques*, 2 vols., 1975]. To conclude, may I say that your publications themselves are works of art, and that this quality (and the recurrent light touches of humour) add *pleasure* to anthropology. [quoted in Vermeulen 1987:39, emphasis in original]

De Josselin de Jong's invitation to give a personal statement at the event along with the august few who were also asked to do the same was consonant with the ties that had evolved between Leiden and Lévi-Strauss. Leiden was where the importance and appreciation of Lévi-Strauss's study of kinship outside of France had been recognized very early, first in Patrick de Josselin de Jong's dissertation and then in his uncle's monograph. This warm tie, which came to be known as the "Paris-Leiden connection," included a series of exchanges with the French anthropologist over theoretical issues pertaining to kinship and social structure. It then came to include Lévi-Strauss's article (1956) in a festschrift for Jan de Josselin de Jong and was further strengthened by his visit to Leiden's Institute of Cultural Anthropology in May 1973, and Patrick de Josselin de Jong's detailed review articles, over the years, of Lévi-Strauss's publications as they came off the press.

Historically, however, the connection had been established much earlier, with Leiden's indebtedness to Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss's studies of classification (1903) as one of the major theoretical underpinnings for many studies that came to be loosely grouped as having a Leiden orientation (de Josselin de Jong 1972, 1977, 1980b). In 1898, Marcel Mauss had visited Leiden⁴ and had started to review Dutch publications, which he continued to do over the years (de Josselin de Jong and Vermeulen 1989:290, 298). In addition, P. E. de Josselin de Jong was strongly influenced by the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, particularly by his holistic view on language and by the Saussurian concepts of *signifiant* and *signifié*.⁵

In his 1989 interview by James J. Fox in *Current Anthropology*, de Josselin de Jong noted the following regarding the Leiden orientation:

[It] really has two components: on the one hand, Indonesian studies within the framework of 'Indonesia as a field of anthropological study,' with intra-Indonesian comparison, and, on the other hand, structuralist studies, focusing particularly, I think, on the cognitive aspects of a culture. How do the people see their natural and social environment and react to it and build their world view? [1989:507]⁶

Left unstated was the fact that the structural approach was undoubtedly *the key* theoretical approach for the vast majority of studies that were undertaken by American Indonesian anthropologists in their publications from the 1960s to around 1990 (this period more or less paralleled the years when de Josselin de Jong was teaching at Leiden), although few acknowledged or were aware of their indebtedness to their Leiden lineage.⁷

Upon his uncle's retirement as professor of cultural anthropology at Leiden, a nine-person selection committee chose the nephew as the successor, a position the younger de Josselin de Jong assumed in January 1957 and held until his retirement in August 1987. Patrick de Josselin de Jong had to take on a heavy administrative load in addition to teaching. Always the mild-mannered gentleman and diplomat, and although he personally found academic politics anathema, he was a skilled administrator. He successfully came to anthropology's defense when forces unfriendly to the discipline planned to relegate its role to a secondary position during several reorganizations of the social sciences at Leiden.

A prolific scholar who authored over two hundred publications, including nine books (Vermeulen 1999), he also supervised 27 doctoral dissertations; six of the doctoral students were from abroad. These, and other foreign students, came from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Japan, France, Germany, Indonesia, and Denmark. In between his heavy teaching and administrative load, he also did fieldwork in Malaya and Sumatra.

A number of honors were bestowed on him. Among these were: Honorary Member of the Royal Asiatic Society, Malayan Branch; Honorary Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland; and Honorary Member of the Royal Institute of Linguistics, Geography, and Anthropology (KITLV) at Leiden. He had served for more than twenty-five years on several Royal Institute committees, particularly the Editorial Board, and while on this board worked ceaselessly to make Dutch anthropology sources available to a wider audience through KITLV's Translation Series.

He had a keen sense of humor and an optimistic outlook on life. These traits manifested themselves most clearly when he was facing severe physical hardships. Shortly after his appointment as professor, he had to undergo a series

of operations for what turned out to be a benign brain tumor. Toward the close of his teaching career his vision was impaired, as was his balance, but nevertheless he maintained his full schedule of teaching, research, and administrative work.

Also, Patrick de Josselin de Jong's support of and loyalty to his students and former students are legendary. This thoughtful, kind, and generous anthropologist leaves behind his wife, Eteke A. M. Oliver, whom he married in 1951, three sons, and a rich legacy of Dutch anthropology.

Notes

1. In honor of Professor Cleveringa, Leiden alumni associations around the world hold Cleveringa Lectures annually in November.

2. This is a complicated matter. In a January 7, 2000, letter to Han Vermeulen, Lévi-Strauss wrote: "I never disclaimed that in some societies dual descent and circulating connubium may be present together. My point was that in such cases the connexion is not a necessary one. Circulating connubium does not need dual descent to function. In respect to matrimonial exchange the latter is superfluous or, as the linguists say redundant (which does not mean useless but serving other purposes)." Relating to an earlier difference of opinion with Patrick de Josselin de Jong (Visser and Moyer 1999:179), he explained: "A disagreement still subsists between us however. In my mind dual descent does not pertain to circulating connubium at the level of the model. My Dutch colleagues were impressed with the fact that in Indonesia a combination of dual descent and circulating connubium has been found to exist. But elsewhere in the world, circulating connubium can also be observed so to speak in a pure state."

3. The quote "splendid failure" is from Edmund Leach, with reference to Lévi-Strauss's book on kinship.

4. In a letter to the Royal Institute of Linguistics, Geography, and Anthropology (KITLV) at The Hague (in 1966 KITLV moved to Leiden), dated April 21, 1898, Durkheim proposed an exchange of journals and noted that Mauss had visited Holland and was going to spend another period for studies there (Visser and Moyer 1999:178).

5. That Roman Jakobson was also a presenter at the 1978 ceremony for Lévi-Strauss in Paris is noteworthy; de Josselin de Jong had been influenced in his study of linguistics by Jakobson as well (Visser and Moyer 1999:182).

6. On the concept of "the field of ethnological study," see Patrick de Josselin de Jong (1980c), a refinement of earlier statements, and his edited volume (de Josselin de Jong 1984). They reflect his efforts to carry forward the comparative methodology introduced by his predecessor Jan de Josselin de Jong (1935) and his mentor Willem H. Rassers (1959).

7. The influence of Oxford's Rodney Needham on American Indonesianist anthropologists through his numerous publications must also be recognized. He attended some of Jan de Josselin de Jong's seminars and workshops on kinship in 1950. In the fall of 1953, Needham was doing research at the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, and gave a presentation at Jan de Josselin de Jong's Saturday seminar, which was held in the Museum, on the Penan. This was shortly after he had returned from Borneo.

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