Celebrating 100 Years
China Banking Corporation
The Bank, Its Building

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Commercial Climate of Manila during the first Quarter of the 20th century

The new century brought about dramatic changes in the Philippines. Not only did we have a new colonial master, the United States, which brought about changes in government, political democracy, religion, culture, society as well as commerce, but it also brought about a new reality to the country (Gleek, 1975, 180). Though Filipino nationalists fought a faltered independence long and hard, the United States nevertheless offered new freedoms and opportunities never experienced during the 330 years of Spanish domination. With these new realities, old established ties nevertheless remained. Though the colonial masters of the islands are new with their obvious influence, the established Spanish and European concerns remained intact.

Historic ties to America were new to the islands of the Philippines during the mid- 19th century, which at that time was opening up to the rest of the world. Through the Spanish policy of Laisses Faire, colonial strategies during the mid-19th century led to the opening of the country to all forms of liberties (LeRoy, 1904). From agriculture, education and business, less government intervention was the way forward for a colony that was struggling in light of the new political climate of the time. As the Philippines chief trading partner, Mexico veered away from Spanish control with its independence in 1816, the Philippines viability as a far away colony became a precarious condition for Spain. Political changes within Spain especially with the liberal programs of Ferdinand VII and later his daughter Isabel II as well as the ensuing Carlists Wars which struggled for the control of the Spanish Monarchy, led to the appointment of more liberal governors to the far-flung colony (Pierson,1999). This policy of openness brought forward new possibilities for businesses, particularly for European houses. Competing with this open market, American businesses similarly started to venture in. And with the victory of the United States against Spain in the Spanish-American War, the country brought further opportunities for American businesses seeking growth and new markets with this new far-flung colony. This business strategy later established the United States as a dominating power of the Pacific Basin.

With the dawn of the new century, and a new colonial master administering the islands, opening up of the country led to the establishment of many new businesses. American business led the way, outnumbering other foreign companies eager to enter the Philippine market. These companies eventually established themselves in all economic corners. In the beginning, a good number of businesses were small and for most were operated and represented by former American soldiers who found the country too tempting not to dabble in. These former American soldiers established all forms of businesses, from retail to the various professional services practiced in the United States, from legal to engineering and to architecture. Later as the new political climate was established, major business concerns started to flow into the new territory.

The early 20th century was also a period of innovation and invention and America led the way in introducing such novelties into the country. Novelties

such as ice cream, soda station, cinema, photography, electric appliances and motorized transport led the way. The Philippines thus became a sponge for new ideas and technologies introduced first by the European business elite, which was cemented further by American mass production.

Though the business climate in Manila was undoubtedly European and American, Asian businesses also blossomed during the period. Trade with our neighboring countries was predominated by the Japanese and the Chinese. Though both traded with the Philippines long before any of the colonial masters came, their legitimacy was established during the American era. Emerging from the dark smoky dens of Manila's business centers of Binondo, Santa Cruz and Quiapo, the Chinese and Japanese with their Filipino counterparts dominated local businesses. Competing with the established European and American shops which were mostly found in upscale Escolta, the Quiapo Bazars of the Japanese traders and the Binondo Shoppe houses of the Chinese businessmen found favor amongst the middle classes as well as provincial visitors of the city. Whereas Filipino traders concentrated on locally manufactured domestic goods such as wooden clogs, buntal hats, clay pots and pans and other woven products, which were popular in the bargain markets of Divisoria in Tondo.

Business in Manila, which was the de facto center of the country during the early 20th century, was thriving. Manila further cemented its reputation as the *Pearl of the Orient,* a sobriquet introduced during the mid-18th century and further confirmed during the 20th century (Tope, 2002, 7). Indeed, if one looks at period photographs of the era, one cannot deny that this title is true. For if Manila was the *Pearl of the Orient,* its only competition within the region was the more prosperous but also hedonistic city of Shanghai.

As Manila was the business capital of the islands, it hosted most of the commercial, retail and financial concerns of the country. Numerous investment houses called Manila its home. The Manila Bourse founded in 1927 had its home address in the Escolta. While along Calle Juan Luna in Binondo various foreign and local banks had their addresses making this street Manila's version of New York's famed Wall Street.

History of Banking in the Philippines

Banking history in the Philippines began during the Spanish colonial period with the first bank established during the 16th century. These credit institutions called *Obras Pias* were charitable institutions that collected money from the Catholic faithful to facilitate the establishment of orphanages, hospitals and schools (Phelan, 1957). They served as commercial banks and marine insurance companies with the bulk of their funds invested in the Philippines' primary business venture, the Galleon Trade. Spanish banks were by far the most notable in the country. The oldest being *el Banco Español Filipino de Isabel* today known as Bank of the Philippine Islands, which was established in 1851. BPI was also awarded the sole provider of local banknotes through the Spanish Royal Decree of 1854 known as *Pesos Fuertes* (Esteria, 2011). In 1882 *Monte de Piedad* was created and a year later Madrid based *Banco Peninsular Ultramarino* was

established, though this ceased operations only after four years. *Monte de Piedad* lasted till the 1990's and operated mainly as a bank with religious attachments.

In 1869 and with the opening up of the Suez Canal, direct trade with Europe became possible. This attracted foreign capital, particularly British capital to the islands. By 1872 the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China, today better known as Standard Chartered Bank ventured into Manila and by 1896, Hong Kong Shanghai Bank opened its first branch along Calle Rosario.

With the new century came a new dawn. The arrival of the Americans brought a new wave of banking investments in the colony. The American Bank was first to open in 1901 and a year later the Guaranty Trust Corporation and International Banking Corporation. Though the latter two were chartered companies tasked to undertake banking business outside the United States, these were eventually merged by 1918 with the National City Bank of New York to become First National City Bank today's Citibank. By September 15, 1919 Asia Banking Corporation, a New York based bank referred to as an American Bank for Trade in the Orient established its office.

Asian Banks also started brisk business. Foremost of them was the Japanese *Yokohama Shōkin Ginkō* or Yokohama Specie Bank established in 1918. The Chinese-American Bank founded in 1910 in Beijing also had offices in the city. By 1920 China Banking Corporation was incorporated. Catering to the Filipino–Chinese clientele, China Bank has the distinction of being the sole Filipino owned foreign registered bank of the period catering to the needs of small-scale Chinese businessmen through a trustworthy system known as *xínyóng.*

In 1916 *Banco Nacional Filipino,* today renamed Philippine National Bank was established with the government mandate of breaking foreign banking monopoly as well as remedy the lack of credit facilities in the country. During the commonwealth period more foreign banks ventured into the country. By 1927, The Bank of Taiwan opened its branch and in 1938, saw the entry of the *Nederlandsche Indische Handelsbank.* In 1939, the government created the Agricultural and Industrial Bank tasked to absorb the functions of the National Loan and Investment Board and to harness government resources. Also, in the same year the Philippine Bank of Communications, reported to be the first bank with genuine Filipino private capital was established.

During the Second World War, only Filipino and Japanese owned banks could trade, forcing most foreign registered banks to be placed under liquidation by the Japanese Military Government. The *Nampo Kaihatsu Kinko* or Southern Development Bank, which started operations in 1942, acted as a branch of the Japanese Government Treasury. It was given the sole power of note issue. All the military notes were distributed through it.

After the liberation of the Philippines, domestic banks that operated during the War Years were unable to open as most of their assets were considered worthless. But by June 1945, Executive Order No. 48 allowed the reopening of

some banks with licenses granted immediately to pre-war American and foreign banks. New players entered the local scene with Bank of America of San Francisco setting office in 1947.

In 1946, as the Philippines gained independence from the United States and a new chapter was written post the tumultuous war years, the new republic learned to proclaim its independence. By 1949, the Central Bank of the Philippines began its career of monitoring the banking system in the country. In its wake, the Philippines consisted of seven commercial banks, three thrift banks, one sole government specialized bank, the *Agricultural and Industrial Bank*, and seven foreign bank branches.

Commercial Architecture during the early 20th century in Manila

Philippine architecture underwent an exciting phase during the early 20th century. What began in the later decades of the 19th century, with the advent of new technologies and materials, saw a full fruition with the arrival of the Americans. During the late 19th century, architecture and construction techniques continued to rely on old colonial and classical methods. Thick stone masonry, of either volcanic tuff or bricks plastered with lime, was the normal process of building solid walls. This was supplemented by a variety of local hard woods, and dedicated carpentry skills employed throughout much of the architectural scene to make artistic and durable works of architecture. Though the combination of both masonry and hard wood resulted in buildings being durable, and elegant, the structural nature of the building was vulnerable to both the climactic and geo-tectonic nature of the country.

During the end of the 19th century, and with the arrival of advanced industrial processes primarily from Europe, modern engineering technologies filtered into the Philippine architectural and construction scene. Reinforced concrete was introduced and steel construction was exploited. In fact, steel was such a popular material that bridges built during the period utilized it extensively. The most innovative use of steel was seen in the Church of San Sebastian in Quiapo, which utilized 100% of the material in both its structure as well as architectural cladding (Lahug, 2007, 88). Other building types that exploited this material was seen in markets, train sheds and stations, homes, street architecture from lamps, chairs and even decorative fountains.

Reinforced concrete, the mixture of poured cement on a steel frame became the vogue of construction during the early 20th century (Day, 2003). Capable to supporting a heavier load, reinforced concrete allowed buildings to have walls that were thinner and floor numbers that go higher. During the Spanish colonial period, buildings remained low, with two to three floors being normal. This was due to the nature and strength capability of masonry as well as the span capability of cut lumber. In principle, the thickness of masonry walls was proportional to the height of the building, the taller the building, the thicker the masonry walls. Supporting tall buildings, masonry not only had to be thick but also supported by thicker and massive buttresses. It was not unusual for buildings from the period to sport 1.00-meter-wide walls with even wider

buttresses. This resulted in the buildings floor plate being reduced significantly as well as properties eaten up by supporting protruding buttresses. And as structures aspired to be taller, particularly churches and their bell towers, the chances of structural damage brought about by earthquakes was inevitable. Numerous bell towers from the colonial era periodically collapsed due to their weight and height. No doubt added further was their construction methods. This resulted not only in physical and property damage but also death. Timber, on the other hand, was used extensively on the upper floors of buildings and homes, as this was durable and malleable. Timber became the primary architectural and artistic component of structures. Though workable, the material has obvious flaws. Wood in general has two weaknesses. First, being organic, it can be exposed to rot and insect infestation. A thorough drying process, with added chemical protection though can reduce this but in the long term, wood manifests its organic composition and thus is subject to eventual deterioration. Second, wood is combustible. As an old adage, wood and fire do not mix. True to this, a good number of catastrophic fires that hit Manila periodically is brought about by the combustibility of this material. Wood is a fuel, that when burned can be hard to douse.

With the introduction of reinforced concrete at the end of the 19th century, the issue of wall thickness and combustibility was solved. Walls had a uniform thickness of 30 inches from the ground level all the way to the top most floor. And because walls were solid and strong, buildings can go higher. By the early 20th century, the Philippines first "skyscrapers" started to emerge along the famed Calle Escolta, Rosario, Dasmariñas and Anloague, later renamed Juan Luna. These buildings, tall at 3 to 5 floors were built using the modern processes of reinforced concrete.

Continuing its use as both an architectural and decorative material as well as supplementing reinforced concrete, buildings of the period utilized decorative hard wood for flooring, doors, wall paneling, window sash works, and architectural decorative works. As the Philippines was a tropical country with an abundance of timber, the exploitation of decorative hard wood for its finish was utilized extensively.

For roofing, corrugated tin sheets introduced as early as the 1860's was employed. This replaced Spanish terra cotta pantiles which until that period was the prominent roofing material especially for the most important buildings. Unfortunately, its heavy weight added with the geo-tectonic movements periodically experienced by the country resulted in much building damage as well as deaths brought about by crashing tiles on unsuspecting victims.

For flooring, numerous materials were utilized, from hard wood, concrete tiles or *baldozas* as well as terrazzo became popular. Mixed together with colored cement, this allowed various shades, tones and patterns on one's impressive floor. By the 1920's, linoleum flooring was also introduced. This flooring type further became popular in later decades with vinyl tiles' easy installation, affordability, and variety.

Technologically, one important invention that coincided with the advent of the high-rise was the introduction of the elevator. The Otis elevator, so named after its inventor, Elisha Otis, allowed people to access upper floors of tall buildings without the necessity of climbing stairs. Introduced to the world in the 1850s, the earliest known elevator in the country was installed in the *Edifício Burké* along Calle Escolta sometime in the early 1910's. Soon after, more buildings employed the Otis Elevator for their properties, with most business addresses along Manila's busy streets utilizing such equipment.

As the Philippines is a tropical country, cooling systems introduced into the world market as early as the turn of the century only made commercial stride during the mid-20th century. Buildings relied heavily on natural and passive forms of cooling with a high floor to floor ratio. Floor height was standard at 4 meters or 13 feet for upper floors and a ceiling height of 5 to 6 meters or 16 to 19 feet for the ground floor, inserted at times with a mezzanine. Tall adjustable windows were also employed, together with collapsible canvas awnings allowed wind but not sun and rain into spaces. Finally, tall suspended ceiling fans allowed air to circulate freely into the space, giving a refreshing and comfortable working environment even during the hottest of days. Added to this was the reality that Manila during the early 20th century was cooler, breezier and cleaner than today's weather, which allowed such natural forms of cooling possible.

The architectural language of the late 19th and early 20th century also matured. Though Romantic architecture still prevailed particularly in the domestic variant, Beaux Art and Neo-Classical, Historicism or Gründerzeit revival, Art Nouveau and Mission style were utilized in commercial architecture. With the arrival of Spanish schooled architects during the latter years of the 19th century and the influx of American architects in the early 20th century, popular forms of architecture were soon introduced to the country. These buildings all employed a sturdy structural concept for their construction, with concrete mixed with metal bars and later I-beam technology becoming popular. Buildings utilized various period styles from Art Nouveau, as seen in the *Edifício Uy Chaco* along Plaza Cervantes, and *Edifício Perez-Samanillo* along Calle Escolta, to Mission style as seen in the old Masonic Temple along Calle Escolta and the Philippine General Hospital along Calle Taft. Mannerist Revival can be seen in the buildings of *Edifício Burké* along Calle Escolta and The Hong Kong-Shanghai Bank Building along Calle Juan Luna. Beaux Art became the preferred language of most government buildings such as the Old Congress Building now National Museum along Calle Padre Burgos, the Nurses Home of the Philippine General Hospital along Calle Taft, and most of the buildings that comprised the old U.P. campus along Calle Herran. Commercial buildings such as *Edifício Regina* and *Natividad* along Calle Escolta and International Commercial Banking Corporation Building along Calle Dasmariñas corner Muelle de la Industria and the China Banking Corporation Building along Calle Dasmariñas corner Juan Luna also utilized variations of the Beaux Art style.

As the 20th century progressed, new architectural movements started to emerge. Popular during the mid-1920's onward was Art Deco. This style gained popularity with cinema houses, commercial edifices, houses, government

buildings and even mausoleums. By the 1930's, the architectural climate in the Philippines was already developed. Supplemented with a fast-growing professional pool of mostly foreign schooled architects, the local architecture scene was developing into a cosmopolitan mix. Filipino architects, most of whom were schooled abroad competed and collaborated with foreign born architects practicing freely in the country. By the mid 1920's, local training was becoming institutionalized with numerous schools opening programs for architecture. Foremost of which were Mapua Institute of Technology, which set up a night school for Engineering and Architecture in 1925, the University of Santo Tomas College of Architecture opened its program in 1930, and Adamson University in 1941.

Manila during the pre-war years was becoming truly cosmopolitan. Lined with the most modern and graceful buildings, Manila's social and business elite found themselves in a world that was oriental yet graced with the best that the west can offer.

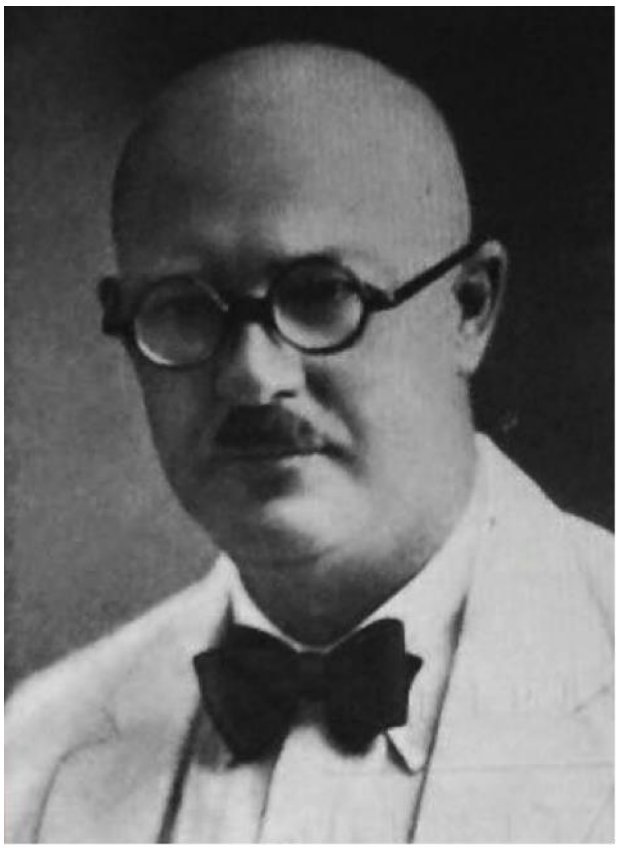
Arthur Julius Niclaus Gabler Gumbert

The architectural scene in the Philippines during the turn of the 20th century was truly international. Architects practicing in the country were composed primarily of those with an educational background and those whose training was based solely on the practice of experience and apprenticeship. Those with academic training had to gain their degrees from foreign institutions as schools of architecture in the Philippines was in its infancy. In fact, the first school to offer a course that was close to the practice of architecture was *Escuela Práctica y Professional de Artes y Ofício de Manila,* which was established by the Spanish colonial government in 1880 to train men into becoming a *Maestro de Obras* or Master Builders. This was more akin to a practical training in all forms of building construction including carpentry, masonry, and decorative arts. Though another institution was opened in 1900, the *Liceo de Manila,* there was no formal educational facility that educated young men into becoming true architects in the Philippines. Until the return of one *pensionado* who studied architecture in Cornell University in New York State, Tomas Mapùa, who opened his night school of engineering and architecture in 1925 (Villalon, 2009, 9-12).

Qualified architects at that time were primarily educated in Europe and later in the United States. Architects during the Spanish era were primarily Spanish born and educated or Spanish Insulars who likewise studied in Spain. Most architects of the period worked for the *Inspeccíon de Obras Publicas* in Manila, which was the precursor to today's Department of Public Works. These architects together with their engineers designed churches, government buildings, infrastructure works and at times dabbled in commercial architecture and residences. Outside of the Spanish national or Spanish insular Filipino, most architects that practiced in the country were of foreign nationality. With the turn-over of the Philippines to the United States a flood of American architects practiced their profession in the country. Foremost of them was Daniel Hudson Burnham who created the so-called *Burnham Plan* of Manila and Baguio of 1905 (Burnham & Anderson, 1905, 627-635). This plan proposed to transform a

Spanish colonial city into a modern metropolis akin to the progressive cities seen at that time in the United States. Tasked to undertake this gargantuan plan was Burnham's handpicked architect William Edward Parson who designed Burnham's city with vigor and resolve, replete with beautiful architecture on a tropical setting. With Parson's entry in the Philippine architectural scene, other American architects ventured forth. By 1903, the *Pensionado Act 854* allowed qualified Filipinos education in the United States. These lucky few were able to study in prestigious schools, amongst them numerous Filipinos enrolled in architecture (McFerson, 2002, 92-94). Upon their return, these Filipino trained architects soon joined the government rank, working on numerous infrastructure and architecture projects.

Of the many foreign architects practicing in the Philippines, one such national was of German Prussian origin, Arthur Julius Niclaus Gabler Gumbert. Born in 1882 in the Province of Posen in Prussia, today's Poznan in Poland. The 29-year-old Gabler Gumbert arrived in the Philippines on the 19th of December 1911. Having completed his degree from the College of Technology in Posen in 1904, he immediately worked with the *Preußische Staatseisenbahnen* or Prussian Railways Company in Cologne till 1907. After which he was employed with Becker and Baedeker, a noted German Architectural practice, which had offices in Shanghai and Tientsin, China from 1907-1908.



Being an expert in railway architecture, Arthur Gabler Gumbert worked for the Chinese Government on the Tientsin & Pukow Railway System from 1908 to 1911. Here he helped design the Tsianfu-Shadong Train Station (1908-1914). It is a magnificent station touted as the biggest, most modern train station in China

at that time. It is not clear though why Gabler Gumbert relocated to the Philippines, but one compelling reason may be the outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution or the Chinese Revolution of 1911 which eventually overthrew China's last imperial dynasty.

One factor for this revolution was the government's mishandling of China's Railway Protection Movement which was a political protest that erupted in 1911 in late Qing China against the government's plan to nationalize local railway development projects and transfer control to foreign banks. The movement, centered in Sichuan province, expressed mass discontent with Qing rule, galvanized anti-Qing Groups and contributed to the outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution, which eventually led to the ouster of China's last imperial dynasty and the formation of the Republic of China under Dr. Sun Yat Sen (Li, Xiaobing, 2007, 26-27).

As China was in a state of chaos, foreigners fled the country, and Gabler Gumbert found himself in the American controlled Philippines.

Arthur Gabler Gumbert immediately established himself in his new situation. By 1912, having been registered licensed architect number 7, he opened his architectural practice in #74 Calle Escolta. Also, in the same year, he became a member of the Casino Union, later renamed the *Deutscher Klub,* eventually becoming its president by 1923.

Having established himself in the Philippines, Arthur Gabler Gumbert immediately set out to get commissions primarily from the German community in the country. As numerous religious organizations were primarily German in origin, they became the obvious clients for the new architectural practice. One of which was the SSpS or *Servae Spiritus Sancti* or Missionary Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit, who in 1922 commissioned their school building along Calle Mendiola.

In 1922, the booming architectural practice saw further important commissions. Foremost of which was the Yutivo Hardware Building along Calle Dasmariñas and by 1923, the China Banking Corporation Building also along Calle Dasmariñas corner Juan Luna.

Noted works from the office of Arthur Gabler Gumbert were:

1926:	San Miguel Dairy Products Factory along Calle Echague, Quiapo
	San Miguel Brewery Administration Building (now Executive House, Malacañang Palace, Calle Aviles, San Miguel
	German Club of Manila, San Marcelino, Ermita (lost)
1935:	Dr. I de Santos Building, Divisioria

Other works include:

Plaridel Masonic Temple
Alhambra Cigar Factory
Manila Gas Corporation Building
The Boulevard Apartments

In 1936 he partnered with the newly graduate Architect Rufino Antonio. He also partnered with his brother-in-law, Herman Fischer. With Herman and his sister, Asta, he bought and managed Majaba island in Samar, where both Herman and Arthur retired. According to a surviving grandniece, Arthur Julius Niclaus Gabler Gumbert practiced architecture until his death in 1940. His mortal remains are buried in Masonic division of the North Cemetery.

The Architecture of China Banking Corporation

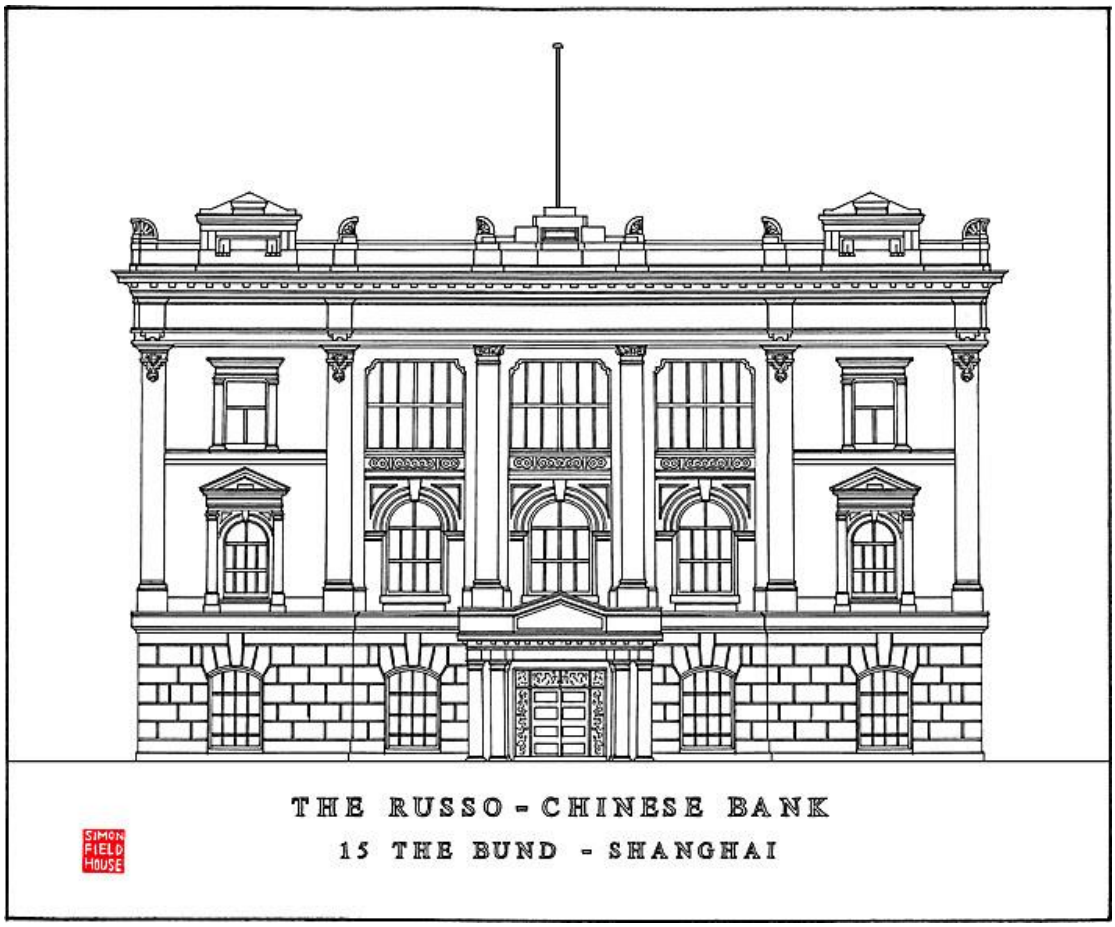
Architecture is the act of replication and innovation. Replication refers to the "architects' mimic" tried and tested formula, and innovation is brought about by the advent of new technologies, sciences and philosophies into architectural thinking and the general commercial market. In the first quarter of the 20th century, any of the Neo-Classic, Beaux Art, Mannerist, and Mission Style movements dictated the architectural trend that permeated Manila's commercial architectural scene. All of which had its roots in the Neo-Classical idiom popular during the latter half of the 19th century. Following the dictates initiated by the Burnham Plan and the City Beautiful Movement from where it was based on, architects utilized their architecture as a means of promoting government's desires to create a Manila that was deemed progressive and modern. Abandoning the previous architectural styles, the Neo-Baroque and the Mudejar preferred by the Spanish colonizers, the Neo-Classic and Beaux Arts movement suggested a lean towards the Greco-Roman ideals of equality, fraternity, and democracy, similarly espousing the mottos of the new American administrators of the islands albeit in the framework of a tropical setting.

The architecture of China Banking Corporation followed such paradigm shift. Establishing itself as an erstwhile competition in the local banking scene, China Banking Corporation utilized tested architectural expressions of solidity, reliance, continuity and progress. These can be seen in the character and elements found in the design of the building, such as its stately arches, dignified Corinthian columns and graceful grill works and moldings.

Designed and built in 1923-1924, China Banking Corporation is in Binondo. Standing in the corner of Calle Juan Luna and Dasmariñas, the 5-story building, later extended to 7 levels, holds its own position amidst fierce competition from well-established local and foreign banks within the banking district. In fact, major players are within a stone throw away from one another. The Neo-Classic-Beaux Arts building with its mannerist arches and Corinthian columns defines banking traditions similar to those applied in the buildings of major banking houses abroad. Arthur Gabler Gumbert, the architect hired to design the building was well aware of identity in architecture, as identity defines who and what the building is. Banks are important commercial institutions and their architectural

interpretation elucidates who they are. As can be seen in the architecture of other banks in the area, the Neo-Classic-Beaux Arts style firmly rooted in the classical traditions of the past exudes confidence and trust. A must have for worthiness and reliability if one is to invest one hard earned money within its perceived solid walls.

Arthur Gabler Gumbert's background as a European Architect, together with his exposure in both Germany and China, provides assurance to this requirement. Having worked on major railway projects whose architectural language is dignified and majestic at most, Gabler Gumbert utilized monumentality and tradition in expressing his art in creating his design for China Banking Corporation. Similarly, having worked with Becker and Baedeker, the architects of the renowned Russo-Chinese Bank in Shanghai of 1902, further cements Gabler Gumbert's awareness of the importance of design in creating impact especially in banking institutions (retrieve Dec 29, from http://essential-architecture.com/CHINA/BUND/SH-BU-010.htm.). The design of the Russo-Chinese Bank heralded Shanghai's foray into the Beaux Art and the succeeding monumental architecture found along the renowned Bund.



The Russo-Chinese Bank, Shanghai, China. Designed by Becker and Beadeker.

Gabler Gumbert followed the classic tripartite formula in this project. A solid lower base, a repetitive middle level supported by classical columns, and a crown capped with, in this case the classic cornice. The base is pierced with arched

openings from where above it rests tall Corinthian columns. The original upper most level is crowned by corresponding moldings thus making the building a fine example of classical proportion and elegance. The ground level is articulated with tall stately arches. Four on both sides, though along Calle Dasmariñas, an arcade for shelter is provided. The inner arches mimic those found along the periphery. The ends or edges of the façade is thrust slightly from the main face and veer from the repetition of this formula; instead, square headed opening with a rectangular clerestory above it are utilized. The finish of the walls, which is of plastered concrete, is divided into two segments, the simple pedestal, which approximately stands one-fifth of the whole height of the ground floor, and the deeply grooved upper wall, which is layered and rendered in the mannerist tradition. The external arches are designed with layered moldings and capped by a classical *cyma reversa* keystone. The inner wall and arches of the arcade compared to the external façade, appears to be plainly treated. The tall and stately arches are adorned and protected with heavy elegant grill works with the monogram of China Banking Corporation rendered in a cartouche of metal plate located at the center of each upper arch. Above the arch, in what comprises architecturally the frieze is the etched name of China Banking Corporation, written both in English and in Mandarin *shūfǎ* characters. Other design elements in the architectural base of the building are relieves seen on the left-hand side along Calle Dasmariñas, whose design or identity has yet to be defined as well as griffin styled supports for what would have been a corner flag pole.

The building's upper floor, which rises from the second level to the fifth level, is treated in classical style. Resting above the base, corresponding to the second floor are ten fluted Corinthian columns, five on each side. These rise to the top of the fourth floor. Rounded attached columns align the central massing while flat square pilasters add support along the protruding edges. The corner edges protrude from the main face of the central massing. This is treated plain and articulated solely by the square headed fenestrations that line it. The sole exception is on the 2nd floor, which is designed with fully operating French windows supported by a corbelled balcony.

Along the strapwork, or the separating surface between levels, two distinct yet classical treatments are rendered. Between the second and third floor levels, the design utilizes raking cornices above each of the four-central double-hung windows. While between the third and fourth levels, a series of festoon relieves provide a festive look. Along the protruding edges festoons are again utilized between levels, though here two variants are utilized. Along the upper level, the festoons are designed with female heads, while wreaths decorate the lower level. The windows are articulated with separating transom and mullion molds, while the original flat iron windows themselves utilized double hung mechanisms. All windows except for the 2nd floor French Doors are square headed and divided accordingly into glazed panels.

Separating the fourth level from the fifth, above the Corinthian capital is a layered fasciae frieze designed with a series of flat strip moldings. This terminates into a ledge wherein the fifth-floor rests. This level repeats the articulation of the fenestrations below with the exception of the absence of

separating columns. In its place are rendered decorative corbels. An articulated Corinthian cornice utilizing dentils, modillions, lion encrusted cymatium, crowns the building, which originally terminated in the fifth floor. This is topped by acroterion's lining the cornice.

Evolution of China Banking Corporation Building

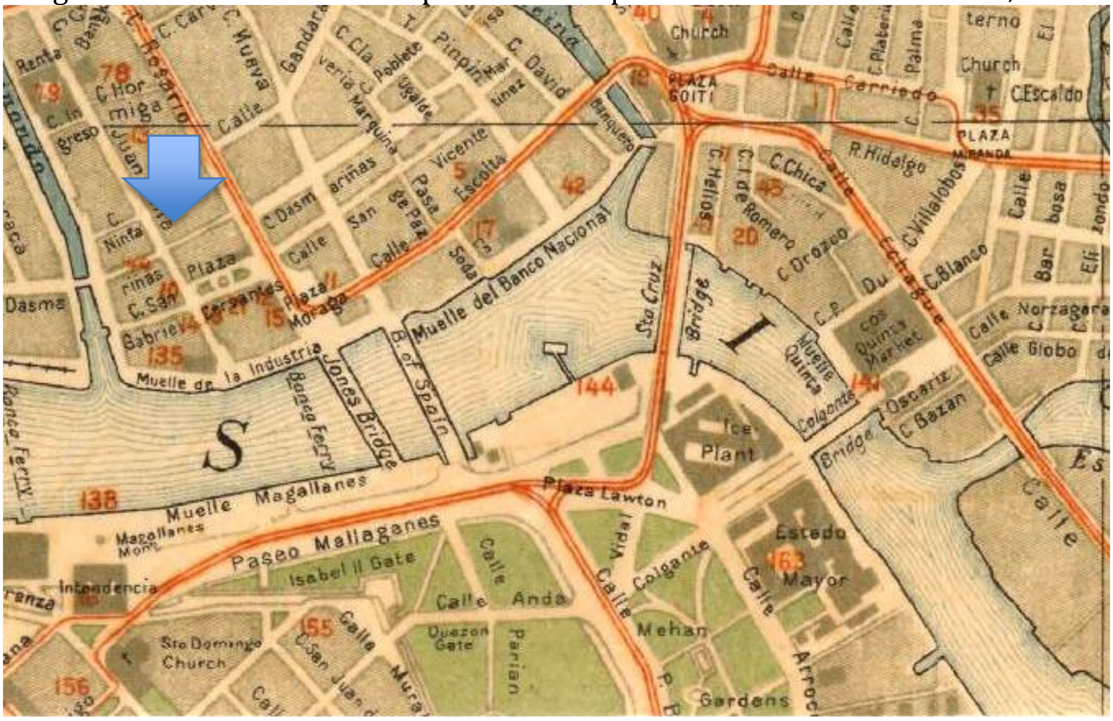
As archival information regarding the evolution of China Banking Corporation Building in Binondo is scarce. A description of the changes rendered to the structure is done utilizing available archival photographs as well as evidentiary information gathered from the building itself. Though archival photographs of the building are also limited, historic photographs of Binondo retrieved from the photo collection of John Tewell, particularly aerial photographs as taken by the War Department of the United States Army and Air Forces are available. These provide us a view of downtown Binondo from the 1920's all the way to the Liberation of Manila during the mid-1940's. Through these photographs, they show built up areas of the business district and their evolution from its architecture to even Binondo's town planning.

Buildings in the district are composed primarily of a mix of modern reinforced concrete structures, most utilizing the Neo-Classic-Beaux Art tradition popular during the turn of the century interspersed with old *Bahay-na-Bato* as seen in most of the districts shoppe-houses. A good number of commercial buildings in Binondo rise to a respectable height of 5 to 7 floors. A few available photos of China Banking Corporation Building show the structure from street level, with one photograph taken just before the mayhem of the Second World War. Also available are two unique photos showing the interior of the building after it was liberated during the end of the fighting.

China Banking Corporation Building was built in 1923-1924 on a 737.84 square meter property. In the 1920's, Binondo's land composition was in a state of redevelopment with highly dense and compact properties side by side with new modern edifices. Based on available aerial photographs of the period, Calle Dasmariñas in the 1920's was still under redevelopment with areas of the street expanded into a four-lane road while others still tight, cramp and narrow. Blocks contained a mixture of new development interspersed with old, tight and congested structures. The area around China Banking Corporation Building was, in the 1920's, one of the areas still undergoing expansion. In fact, the properties along Calle Dasmariñas were all built in the old style, primarily with masonry and wood. Curious as well was the width of the street, as available archival photos show that Calle Dasmariñas beside China Banking Corporation was only a narrow, almost 6-meter wide *Callejon* or alley. Making such tight quarters gave curiosity to both design and construction.

It was only in the 1930's that Calle Dasmariñas achieved the width that we are familiar today. And at about this time, the building started to evolve. No information was gathered as to the reasons to the evolution, though it can be deduced that the changes, particularly to the top most floor was brought about

by a final design application, from what was a temporary shed like structure to something more permanent. Similarly, expansion can also be brought about by the functional needs of the buildings' occupants. What was definite as seen in the archival photos was that the building was once a five-story structure with an insignificant extended shed or pavilion like space located on the roof deck, which

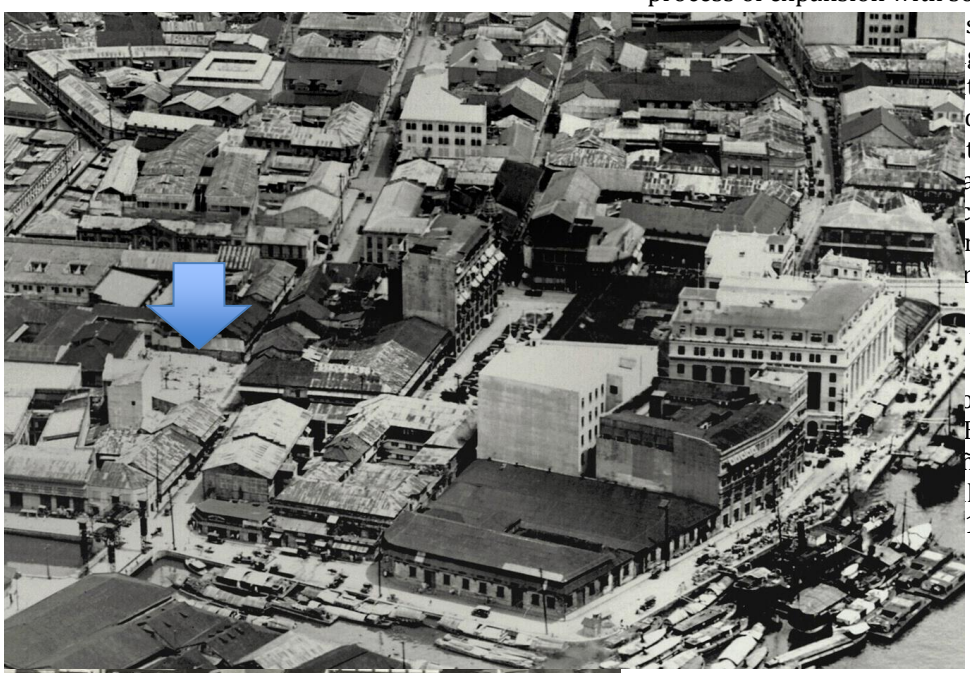


Manila map of 1920 showing the narrow streets of the city. Calle Dasmariñas was in a state of redevelopment as the road was being widened. In 1920, Calle Dasmariãs was not yet connected to Plaza Santa Cruz. The road stretched from Calle Pinpin to San Nicolas via the Estero de Binondo Lift Bridge. The road had various widths with some bordering to alleyways.

technically becomes the building's 6th floor. This added floor plate was recessed from the original line of the façade thereby making this addition hidden from view from people below. Available archival photographs dated 1931 show the pavilion to be open faced along Calle Dasmariñas. Along Calle Juan Luna photos from the 1930's show square headed openings. The machine room or stairwell reached the 6th level. This was enclosed by a clearstory that extended above. The 6th floor pavilion had a hip roof supported by a low clearstory from where a peripheral skirt roof was attached. Galvanized iron sheets appear to have been used to roof this part of the building.

Aerial photo of Binondo in c.1921. Clearing site for China Banking Corporation Building.

Aerial photograph of Binondo showing Calle Dasmariñas in the mid-late 1920's. Here Calle Dasmariñas was still in the process of expansion with some areas



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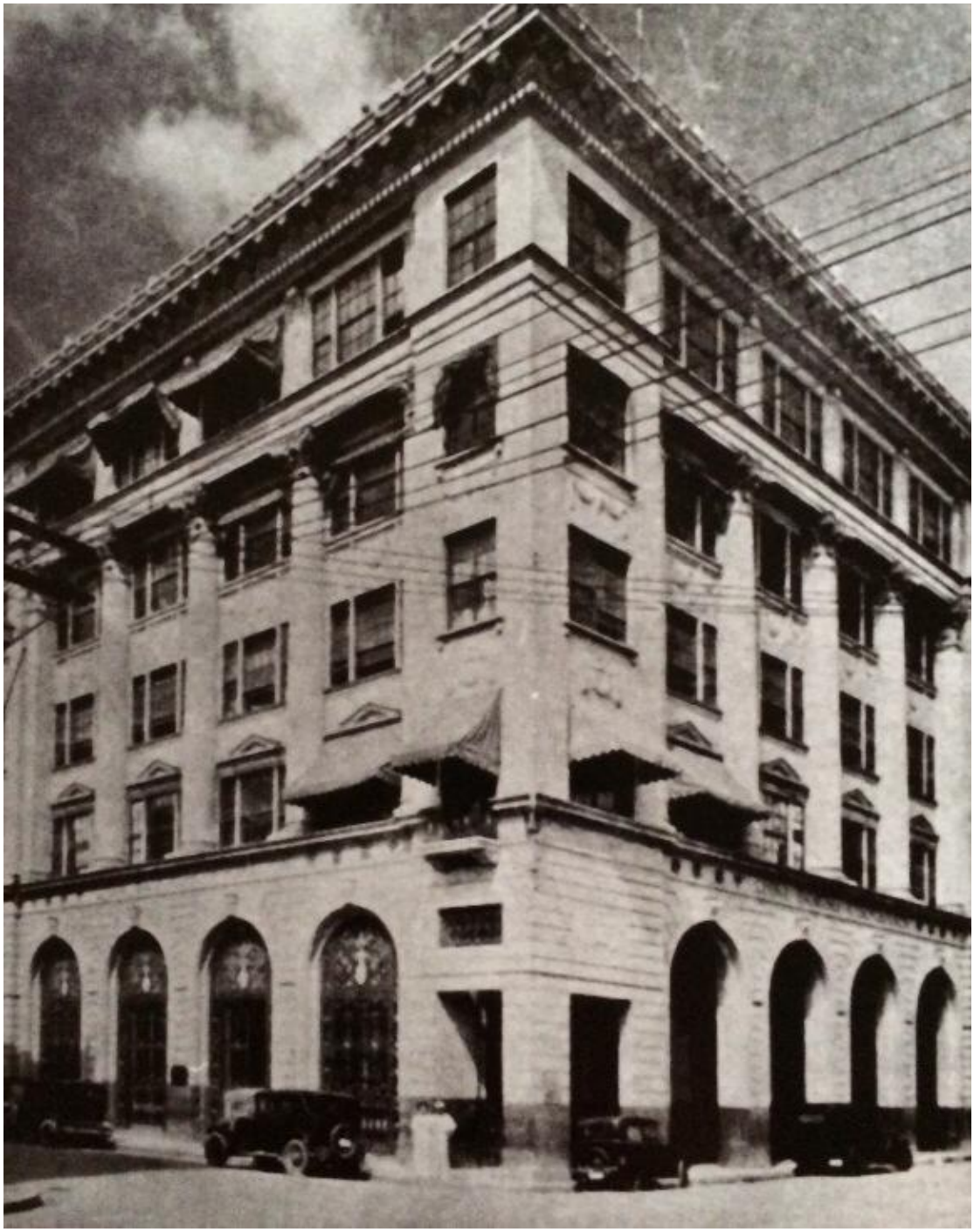
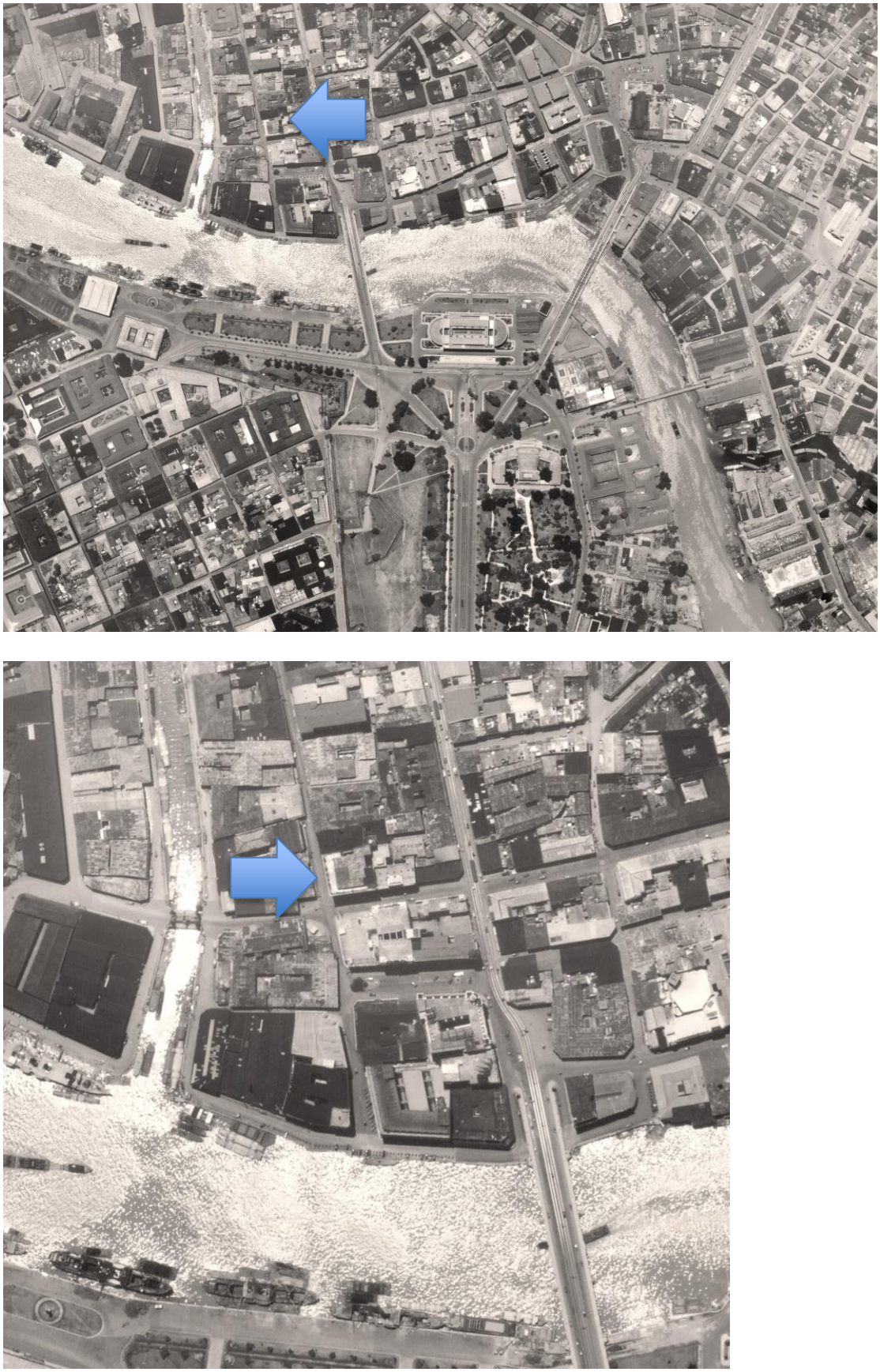


China Banking Corporation in the late 1920's, and the newly widened Calle Dasmariñas to the left.

Immediately after the liberation of Manila, aerial photos show what appears to be a partially burned out China Banking Corporation Building. Fire damage appears to be most severe in the added 6th floor, as this as well as its roof appears to have been made of wood. Interior shots show scarring as well as twisted window frames, an indication of heat related metal fatigue.

Immediately after the Liberation of Manila, the building, upon inspection and return to China Banking Corporation was rehabilitated. The 6th and an added 7th floor were installed. Following the original alignment, the 6th floor was recessed.



Aerial Photograph of Binondo District 1930's. Showing the newly opened and expanded Calle Dasmariñas. In the corner of Dasmariñas and Juan Luna is the newly built China Banking Corporation Building.

This alignment was continued further to the added 7th level, which was crowned by classic Greek ornamentation along its cornice parapet. An addition to the façade is seen in the placement of coupled columns supporting trellises along the 6th level. This was installed above the terminating cornice of the 5th floor.

By the late 1960's, another renovation work commenced. Two major changes were introduced. Marble cladding was added along the whole ground floor façade, resulting in the covering of the arches along Calle Juan Luna and the internal arches along Calle Dasmariñas. Similarly, the marble cladding hid the rustication along both façades, and the molded surround of the arches. This cladding may have been undertaken due to the expansion of China Banking Corporation on its adjoining property, which itself shows the same materials in its ground floor façade treatment or, the elevation of the road along both Calle Dasmariñas and Juan Luna by about a meter from its original grade level. The other visible change is seen in the 6th floor trellised deck, which was removed/integrated to an extended 6th floor façade. This expansion resulted in the 6th level aligning to the main façade leaving just the 7th floor recessed. In this expansion, the coupled columns that lined the façade remained in place albeit clad in the new concrete wall. A new overhanging roof covered the new 6th floor.

In the interior, four dramatic changes occurred in the building's history. The first is the inclusion of an elevator; the second is the change in floor elevation of the ground level; the third is the removal of one of the elevators to allow clear access to the adjacent expansion; and the fourth is the addition and evolution of the mezzanine floor.

For the first, it appears that the building originally did not have an elevator and was accessed solely through stairs. Evidence of this could be seen inside the existing elevator shaft where traces of the stairs are still visible. In fact, three trace elements suggest the elevator well used to be the main vertical access of the building. The first as mentioned are trace elements of the stairs inside the present shaft. The other is the existence of what would be the concrete stair landing, which today forms part of the flooring of the present electrical room, and the third is the remains of rounded moldings mimicking those of the arched openings along both façades. As no information was retrieved as to when the Otis elevators were installed, it is assumed that during the building's early history, the area which is now the elevator lobby and core was the edifices main stairway.

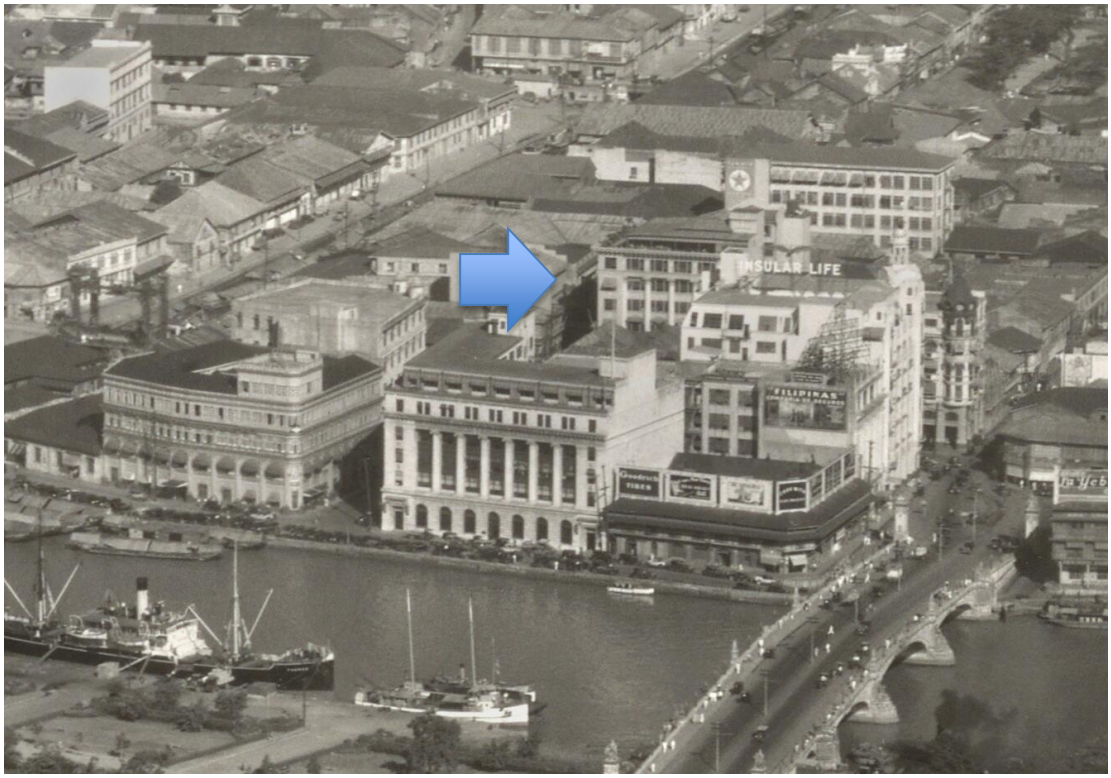
The second change is the partial elevation of the ground floor line from its original level to almost 1.10 meters above. This is seen in the building's main entrance and elevator lobby as well as partially at the entry portion of the banking hall. This realignment was undertaken during the 1960's together with the expansion of the bank towards the adjoining building. The realignment, which resulted in the original floor height becoming 1.10 meters lower than the street level was to address both the perennial flooding experienced in Binondo during the 1960's up to the 1970' and DPWH's elevation of the street level from

its original grade. Today, entering the building is a series of slight accents leading to a dramatic decent to the banking hall.

The third major change is brought about by the expansion of the bank to the adjacent property. With the need for a seamless connection between the two buildings, the architects or engineers engaged for the renovation opted to pierce open the party wall that divided the two structures. This resulted in the removal and demolition of the right most elevator shaft of the old historic building. This likewise made the 2nd elevator curiously floating and serviced only from the 2nd level to the 7th floor. As the 2nd elevator was amputated, the decision to lower the ceiling level to a normal height resulted in the elegant cornice work that lined the lobby's original high ceiling being obscured. Likewise, the area created by the addition of the ceiling resulted in an airspace that today is utilized as the building's shared electrical room.

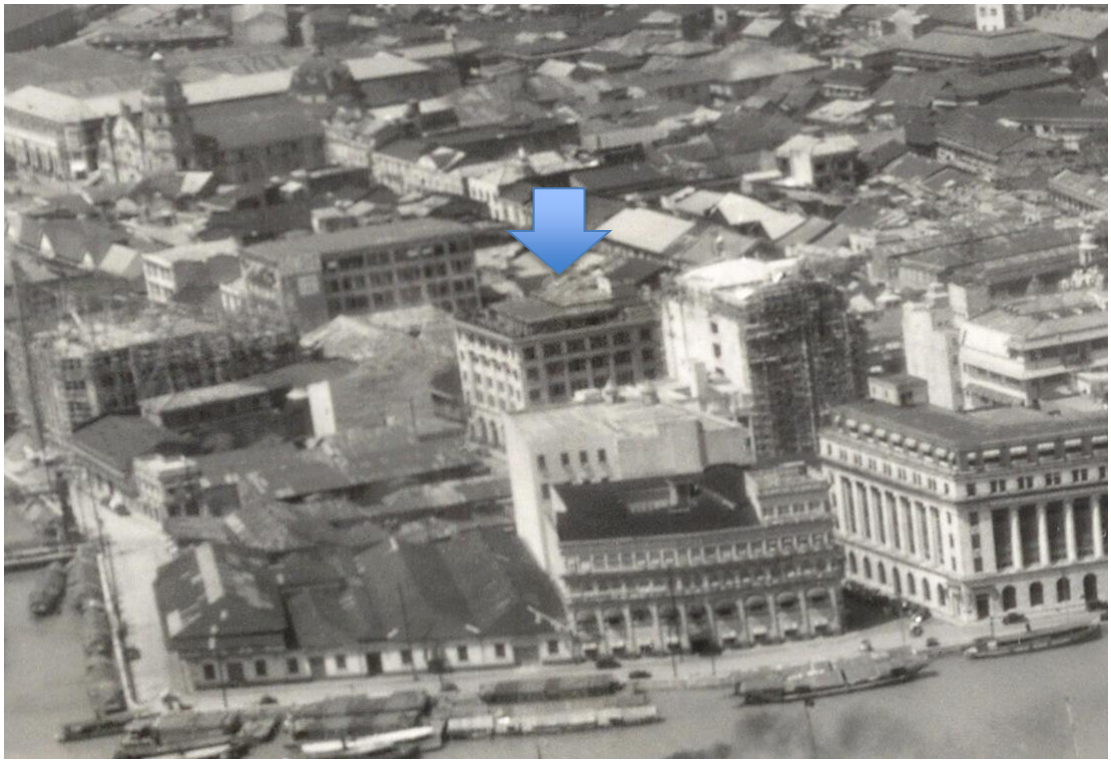
The fourth major change is seen in the original banking hall, which was designed with a very high ceiling rising almost 7.00 meters high. Graced with light coming in from the stately arches, the banking hall exudes a feeling of sophisticated elegance befitting a stable, reliable banking institution. Skirting the periphery of the space is a "U" shaped mezzanine, which served as secondary spaces accessible for the bank's massive vault. Together with the other major changes undertaken during the 1960's renovation, the clear open space in the banking hall was closed to provide a thoroughly useable mezzanine. And with the cladding of both the exterior and interior walls with marble panels, the peripheral arches were forever concealed. The banking hall as it appeared prior to the current restoration is the result of the changes undertaken in the 1960's, a submerged floor plate with a claustrophobic ceiling height, and an expanded mezzanine floor.

Other significant interior changes were seen in the provision of drop ceilings on all floor levels, resulting in the obscuring of the original ceiling cornice mold, the cladding of the columns with wood or marble tile panels, and replacement of tiles in all the floors. In the banking hall, a thick layer of concrete fill covers the original flooring, which was of red granolithic mix. In the mezzanine floor, traces of the original floor red square cement tiles are seen.

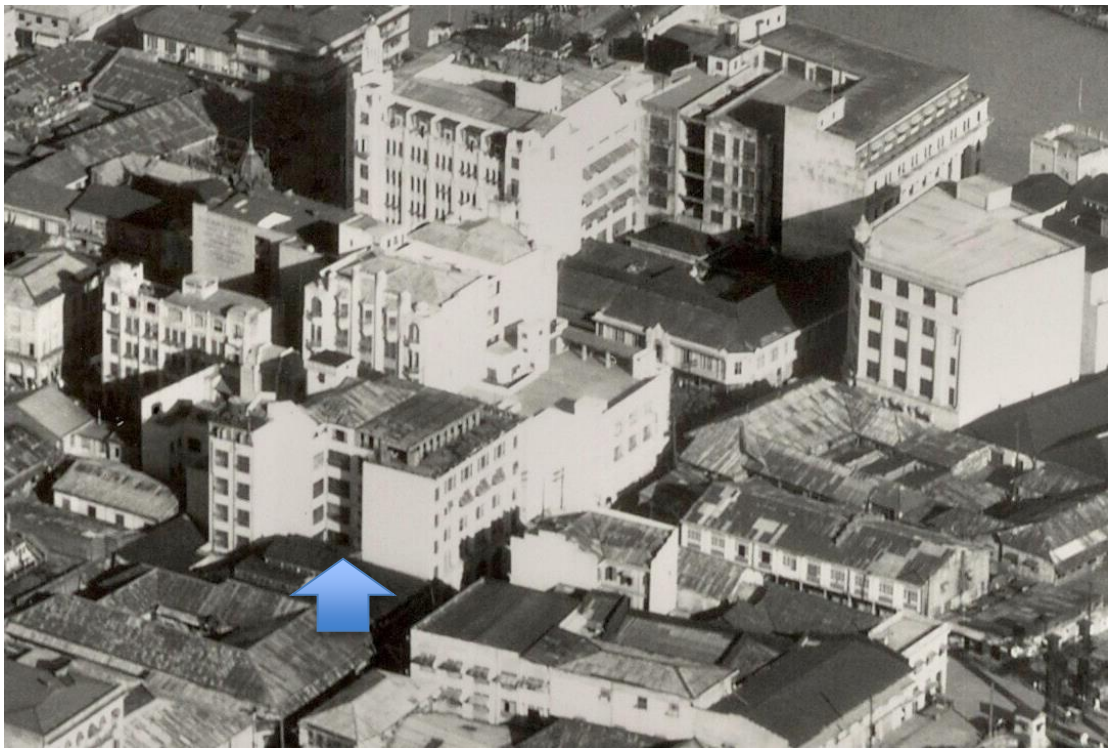


China Banking Corporation in 1931 showing pavilion like structure on the 6th floor.

China Banking Corporation in August 1932. Aerial Photographs from the War Department US Army Air Forces, US National Archives. Picture shows 6th floor pavilion with window and door placements. Visible as well is the 6th floor hipped roof with lateral aprons.



Aerial Photograph of 1935 showing CBC building at center with Berenguer-de los Reyes building (situated in front) still under construction.

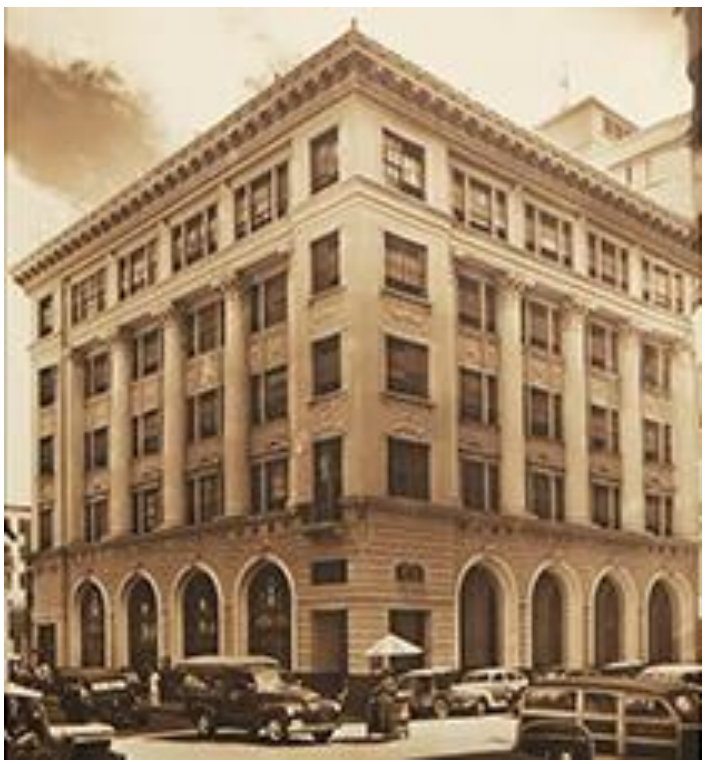


Aerial photo of Binondo dated 1936.

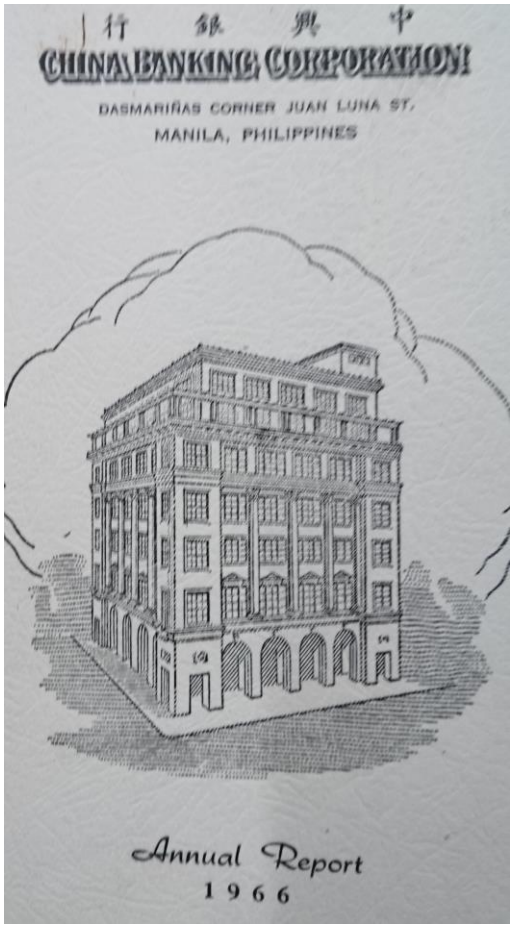
Left: CBC preparing for the winds of war, with its arches blocked with plywood sheets in preparation for Manila's total black out. Bottom: The bombed-out ruins of Manila during the bloody Liberation of the city. China Banking Corporation Building was a casualty of this mayhem, with the building partially burned, its interiors and contents destroyed.

Aerial photograph shows the extent of the damage incurred by China Banking Corporation Building. The 6th floor was totally ruined and the interiors singed. The most notable damage is seen in the northern neighbor, which was burned and destroyed totally.

Post Liberation 1945 side picture of China Banking Corporation Building. Shows burn marks on retaining wall.



Restored CBC building after the Second World War. Note jeeps and wood paneled Studebaker Vans of the 1950's.



Left: By 1966 the upper floors have been integrated with the building. The 6th level now has a trellised deck. Likewise, a 7th level has been extended.
Bottom: War damaged 5th floor lobby. Today, the staircase has been converted into a fire exit with an enclosing firewall built around the staircase. Wall to the right covered with a *sawali* mat is the elevator.

Left: Unidentified war damaged room inside the building. From the annals of China Banking Corporation: *"The havoc and destruction caused by the battle for the liberation of Manila during the early parts of 1945 did not spare the bank. Extensive damage was caused to its building. Equipment and valuable records were destroyed. Its losses were so staggering that cone despaired to think of it ever being rehabilitated."*

Revealing the Past

The restoration and rehabilitation of China Banking Corporation Building in Binondo follows the recent move of rehabilitating historic buildings in the country. The adaptive reuse of The Army-Navy Club in Luneta into the Rizal Park Hotel, or the restoration of various historic edifices in the city of Ilo-ilo into museums are just some fine examples of how old buildings can be given new life for present use. Not to mention historic edifices that are being rejuvenated to meet the demands of today, such as the Metropolitan Theatre in Mehan Gardens and the historic Art Deco buildings inside FEU to name a few. Though Manila is rather late and slow to restoration and conservation projects, the China Banking Corporation Building is a good example of the way to proper conservation and restoration principles of historic buildings. Compared to other restoration projects, CBC is neither an adaptive reuse project nor a renovation work. As the building is owned by China Banking Corporation formerly as its historic Head Office and today its Binondo Business Center, its use as a bank and banking office building still remains the same.

The building's path to historic revitalization is not an easy one. As the building is in use, careful planning is necessitated to ensure continued operations of the building. The documentation for the architectural, engineering and historical as-built blue prints was needed, as such this involved not only a complicated process of moving people and equipment from one staging area to another but more importantly creating detailed drawings of all the buildings element, from architectural, structural, electrical, mechanical, sanitary and water as well as telecommunication and computer lines. The As-Built plans, sadly absent from the beginning will enable the restoration of architectural and engineering team a thorough guide to the building's past, current and eventual future development. This process together with other documentary procedures would complete the historic narrative of the building rich glorious history.

Much change has happened in the buildings more than 90 years of existence. From varying levels of renovation, addition to alteration works happened in various periods and eras. Some visible changes can be seen in the façade, with the covering up of the ground floor grilled arches with marble cladding, or the elevation of the street level beyond the original ground line. The replacement of most window frames into more modern aluminum casement technologies of the 1980's and the addition and integration of floors and buildings to address the needs and demands for space. But most of the dramatic changes occurred inside, with the creation of a full floor in what was once the mezzanine, the lowering of the ceiling in all floors, to the removal of the ground floor elevator access to connect the two adjoining buildings into one, amongst others.

As the street level increased in time, a meter in some areas, the original ground floor today has sunk. Also, in the history of the building, further filling of the original floor to about a foot slightly compromised the interior height of the banking hall. From its historic height of 6.80 meters or 22 feet to today's 6.50 meters. Other notable changes include inclusion of drop ceilings in all floors to maximize the efficiency of modern air-conditioning, and due to the demands of space, the mezzanine was expanded to become an inclusive floor. Beyond the obvious, rewiring, replumbing, partitioning and replacement of fixtures became a normal process of updating and renewing a buildings purpose.

One of the main tasks of the restoration team was to uncover the past. This was done in two stages. The first was through an investigative process where exposed or partially exposed elements were recorded. As the building was occupied, this was done carefully with as little intrusion to the building occupants as possible. Peaking, peering, probing was employed to view what was hidden from sight. In some areas, architectural detail is visible, while in most, slight details were only visible. Though the information provided by this method is small, it does provide the restoration/design team a suggested and academic look of how the building once was. The second phase called for the demolition of the 1960's interiors. This in itself was a complicated process, as the building was utilized. Only after the occupants of the floor were relocated to designated transfer zones can demolition commence. As the most significant floor of the building happens to be the main banking hall, the relocation of this,

the Binondo Branch had to be undertaken with as little disturbance to bank operations as possible. Fortunately, China Banking Corporation Building in Binondo occupies two buildings, the historic edifice and its less significant neighbor, allowing thus the relocation of the branch from one building to the other.

Once the branch has been relocated, the careful demolition of the banking hall commenced. Demolition of this nature is different from traditional wrecking ball type clearing as the site is viewed as an archeological dig with elements carefully recorded and movements monitored. Once the obvious modern additions were eliminated, such as plywood partitions, acoustical ceiling tiles, glass casements and the like, the careful revealing of historic elements started to manifest itself. First to be taken out are the peripheral cladding that covered the stately arches that the building originally contained. These arches which served as both access, ventilation as well as glass and grille cladding revealed themselves gradually. Hidden for almost 60 years the arches are layered with an inner metal mullions and transoms glass paneled grill. This shields the interior from the outer intricate grillwork, which in some areas were filled in with cement. Beyond this is the marble cladding applied in the late 60's.

What is interesting about the revealed arches is the discovery of the original banking hall access. As the current access is located along Calle Dasmariñas, the historic find shows that the original banking hall entrance was along Calle Juan Luna. This discovery made a lot of sense as Calle Dasmariñas in the 1920's as seen in archival photographs was a narrow side street as opposed to the broad avenue it is today. Of the four arches found facing Calle Juan Luna, the two central arches still contained wooden jambs that support double leafed glass doors. These doors are divided into two, with both the lower main door and upper arch operable. What is curious to note is that the doors, as seen through their hinges open inward, suggesting that the mezzanine floor above was added much later. Proving that the mezzanine was an added feature and that the mezzanine was expanded to its current "C or U" shaped configuration at a later date.

The arches along Calle Dasmariñas, on the other hand, are operable double hung windows. Popular during the period, these fenestrations operate with an internal counterweight mechanism that allows the windows to open on both the upper and lower portions enabling air to circulate freely on both the top and bottom of the frame. The glazing, on the other hand, meet and merge in the center of the tall window frame. Today, this type of window mechanism is a rarity, with only the Main Administrative Building of the University of Santo Tomas still employing and maintaining it. The glazing of the openings for both the doors and windows used a variety of ¼ thick glass panes, with some employing patterned glass, others plain translucent glass and even others structural glass.

The arches are protected and decorated with elegant Beaux Art metal grilles utilizing a series of twisted bars and curved serpentine patterns. The main interest in the grillwork is the placement of an etched plate or escutcheon

bearing the letters CBC on the central frame of the upper arch, indicating the ownership of the building. Sadly though, as the lower façade of the building was renovated in the late 1960's with heavy marble cladding, the arches were covered and filled-in with cement. Some portions though are visible and untouched while others elements are hardly decipherable. Also, further damage can be seen along Calle Dasmariñas particularly with the insertion of a night deposit box. This necessitated the partial demolition of the grillwork.

The documentation of the grillwork is a lengthy and timely process as only portions of it are peaking to give the documentation team a picture of the original pattern. With the gradual removal of the heavy marble cladding on the outer facade, further revelations provided a clearer design path to this very important decorative feature.

The lower façade is articulated both inside and outside with simple line moldings. In the inside, the spandrel, the area surrounding the arches are defined with heavy line molding, while the external façade line grooves provide interest. Defining the extent of preservation of these design elements depended on the delicate removal of the marble cladding. As the demolition was taking an archeological pace, determining the quality and condition of these has become a pressing matter. Of particular concern is the treatment of the arcade wall along Calle Dasmariñas. As no historical image were unearthed to give an impression of how the wall was treated, resulted in the pressing concern of the marble cladding being removed in haste.

With the ceiling removed, the simple but elegant cornice was revealed. Utilizing a simple plastered Cavetto molding, the main banking halls ceiling is a statement of classic puritanism compared to the more intricate Corinthian cornice found in what originally was the building's elevator lobby. This molding repeats itself in all the ceiling bays, except the outer periphery where the edges are rendered with an added Cavetto strip mold. With the ceiling removed, ghostly traces of the spaces original lighting fixtures also appeared.

Other important revelations to emerge include the original opening of the now lost spiral staircase that led to the upper mezzanine level. Today, only a round orifice is left of this access.

After almost four months of careful demolition works and with all the added partitions and later renovations removed, the original rounded columns emerged. Prior to demolition, the columns of the banking hall were cladded in glazed white tiles. Square in plan, these columns looked massive for the lowered ceiling height of the banking hall. In the mezzanine level, the columns were similarly clad, though compared to below, done in plywood. As the plywood was accessible, and as certain areas in the mezzanine floor was vacant, the partial exposure of the columns provided the team a peak of the historic form. As assumed, the columns show a rounded profile. A simple square capital also emerged. As the demolition of the banking hall commenced in full steam, the confirmation of the columns profile appeared. A round gracefully tapered column with a simple block capital supported the whole building. The stripping

off of the lower cladding though proved challenging as concrete encased the lower column. These had to be done meticulously and carefully, with placed drill holes bored from the top down. This allows the workers a guide to the profile of the column. Slowly but surely the original column emerged in all its graceful form. The column appears to have no classical base. Though with the flooring raised during previous renovations, it is not a surprise if the column originally contained such.

The 1960's renovated floor of the banking hall is of commercial tiles. And through an initial archeological dig, the emergence of the original floor was revealed. This was identified to be lower by a few inches and covered with red granolithic pour. This can be seen particularly along the periphery of the hall, notably inside the vaults and along the termination of the grilles. The total removal of the latter tile flooring though was not conducted.

Work on the façade involves the thorough documentation of all the architectural elements and the removal and replacement of those damaged. Likewise, the exposure of the arches and the reconstruction of the original grooved lower level is a priority in bringing back the historic integrity of the building. Further architectural intervention would include the replacement of all window glazing by mimicking the original casement, as well as creating a new glazing for the restored arches.

Restoring the elevator lobby exposes a different challenge to the design team as the upper area of the elevator lobby, which corresponds to the mezzanine floor is utilized as the joint electrical room for both buildings. Here, electrical tapping points are located and where branch lines are distributed. Restoring the elegance of the elevator lobby and subsequently the main lobby of the building can only commence once the new electrical tapping points are repositioned in its original location along Calle Juan Luna.

Further intervention of the building involves the introduction of Greek letter Lambda "" frame retrofitting supports. A thorough structural analysis of the building was conducted and scientific findings suggests that, though the building is safe, its strength is compromised by the event of a very powerful earthquake. Added to this the age of the building, the need to ensure safety to the buildings occupants is paramount.

As the slow and meticulous process of revealing, documentation, and eventual restoration, rehabilitation and re-use is undertaken, the buildings true historical value emerges. Many more aspects of the building's re-birth need to be addressed. From the new banking hall design, as rendered by the team of Sonia Olivares, which merges the old with the new, to the eventual functions of the various floors that make-up the rest of the building, and the eventual integrations of function and history through the curatorial narration created by the team of Marianne Pastor-Roces, the buildings new role as the Historic Binondo Business Center merges with the reinvigorated desire of the City of Manila to restore its faded glory through its efforts of revitalization and historic renewal.

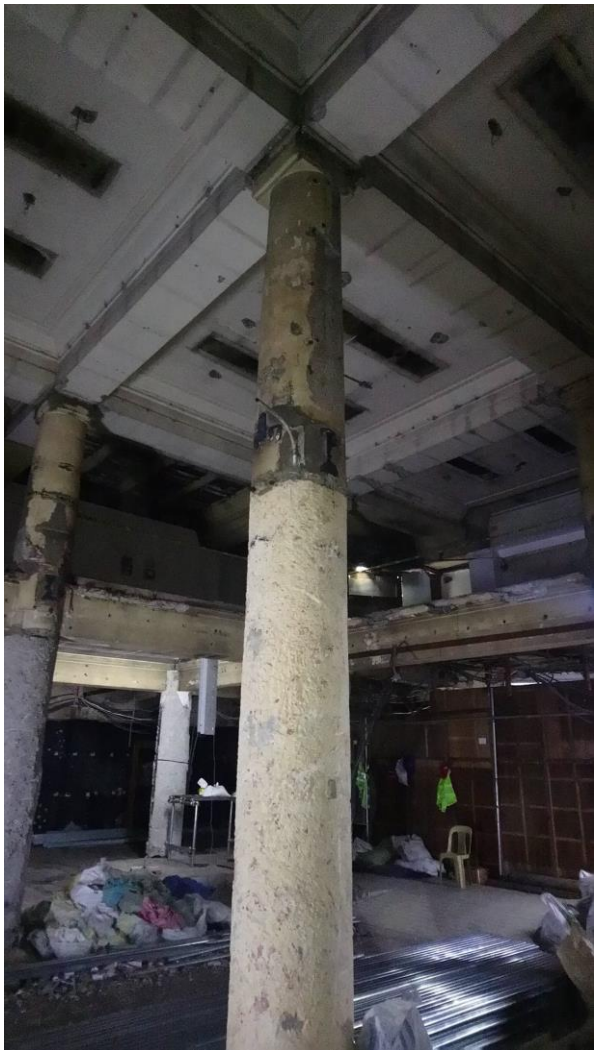
The second arch from the corner of Calle Dasmariñas and Juan Luna along Calle Dasmariñas. The opening is framed by a metal casement with Double Hung Windows. The upper arch is protected by ¼ thick glass on a metal frame. Protecting the opening are grillwork's, covered with thick cement.

The third opening along Calle Dasmariñas with parts of the glazing gone. Showing the extent of cement filling on the grillwork. Also showing is the wooden jambs supporting the panels.

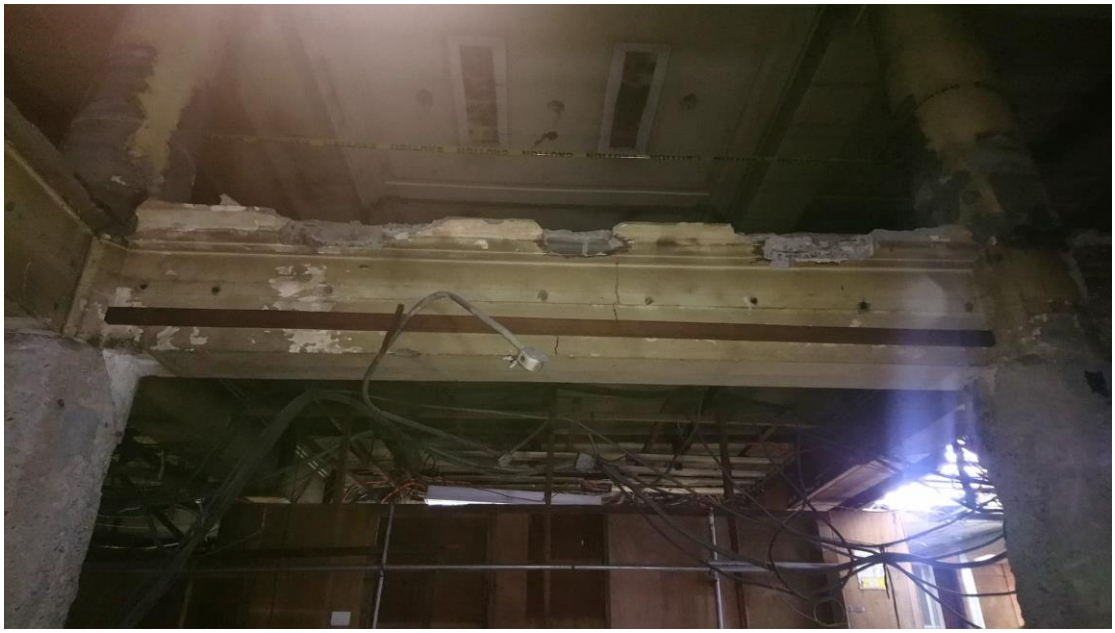
The fourth arch along Calle Dasmariñas supporting the Night Deposit Box. With the insertion of the Box, the grilles were cut to accommodate the mechanism.

Each ceiling bay is lined with Cavetto molding except for the peripheral bays which has a further "C" shaped panel along the periphery.

Revealed along Calle Juan Luna are the original entrance doorways to the banking hall. These are provided with hard wood frames and jambs supporting grilles and glazing. Opening inwards, these doors were sealed off when the mezzanine floor was added. Left: Door along Grid C-D. Bottom: Door along Grid D-E



The stripped off columns show the graceful entasis of its classical features. The columns are Capped by a simple block capital.



Damaged Cavetto mold seen on the mezzanine floor.

With the removal of the mezzanine expansion the clear view of the banking hall shows the elegant height of the interior space. Furthermore, ghostly traces show original placement of lighting fixture.

The Restored Historic China Banking Corporation Building

As China Banking Corporation celebrates its 100 years in August 2020, a major part of this centennial celebration is the unveiling of the revitalized historic Head Quarters now converted into the Binondo Business Center. The building, completed in 1923 will showcase a restored façade, strengthened and retrofitted structural members, and its restored historic elevator, all part of a revitalized vigor fit for the building's renewed role of providing banking excellence to the community and the country. The restored building will herald the role of China Banking Corporation as the sole remaining historic bank still in Binondo, which was the original heart of business in the Philippines.

The building's restoration included revealing and repair of lost historic elements such as the stately arches as well as its elegant grillwork's. The rusticated façade, the repair of weathered, lost and damaged decorative plasterworks, is meticulously restored by the able hands of the House of Precast. The 1930's era Otis Elevators was rebuilt and made operable by Elecol Engineering Equipment Supply & Service while structural retrofitting was undertaken by the team from RBRA. The overall engineering works which includes electrical, sanitary, structural, mechanical and Fire and Telecommunications was contracted to Schema Konsult, Inc. The lead consultant for the project including the overall architectural works, the Heritage documentation, investigation, restoration and design was headed by yours truly Ar. Manuel Maximo L.C. Noche and his team from Noche Architects. This included the repainting of the building's original white façade, which like true classic buildings utilized the severity and plainness of white as a backdrop for the enhancement of classic details, through light, shade and shadowing effects.

In the interiors, highlight of the restoration efforts is seen in the original 7.00-meter-high banking hall. Today, re-utilized and modernized for the present banking needs. Visit to the new historic banking hall would definitely be awe inspiring as the interiors shows not only a lofty airy space but also one that is full of architectural elements of the past, from the graceful grillwork, to the stately arches, and the imposing yet slender columns. A new sense of openness will prevail in the restored banking hall, an experience once regular but now repeated for a new banking generation. Rendering the new interior space is through the team effort of Maja Olivares-Co of SSoA.

Further adding story to a rich historical building is the team of TAO Inc., headed by Marianne Pastor-Roces. The brief for her team is to tell the story of China Banking Corporation through a curatorial exhibit. Transforming public spaces such as lobbies into galleries. With a wide array of architectural and banking artefacts, a unique way of presenting China Banking Corporations 100 years history would be made accessible to the general clients, history buffs and ordinary users alike.

And finally, the whole celebratory event would not be made possible without China Banking Corporations Chairman Hans Sy and President William Wang,

who through inspired historical concerns led the way in ensuring continuity of service through the restoration of this important historical landmark. Leading the team directed to implement the historic narrative is Mr. Alexander Escucha, and Engineer Baldwin Aguilar. Who through their guiding light ensures a continuation and expansion of the Binondo Business Center beyond the current 100 years of Banking history.

The façade of China Banking Corporation Binondo Business Center prior to renovation with the cladded marble hiding all historic architectural elements

The restored rusticated façade as on January 2020 along Calle Juan Luna showing the original arches graced with the revealed and restored grill work. Unfortunately, due to the rising street level, the historic height of the arches was compromised. Also seen is the original etched name of China Banking Corporation. Revealed when the plastering was removed.

Renovation work inside the banking hall, showing the almost 7 meter high grand ceiling. The main columns had to be stripped of concrete casing, trimmed, and finished to regain its original shape. Similarly attached metal frames which supported the added mezzanine had to be cut and smoothed. The space simiarly was given a new paint job which serves as the backdrop of the grand space. Revealing the purity and clarity of the classic beauty.

Scaffolding work being prepared at the start of the renovation work in July 2019. Marble tiles installed sometime in the 1970's hid the original arches. Cladding most likely was a result of the raising of the street level in Binondo area which increased in height by more than a meter in some areas.

The new entrance to the restored banking hall along Calle Dasmariñas. An elevated platform connecting the new entrance to the previous provides a seamless link between one and the other. Sadly, with the decision to provide a new access the inevitable compromise had to be undertaken regarding the lower portion of the grill work, which was entombed with the additional platform.

The elevated pathway links the banking hall with the elevator lobby to the left.

The new cleared and cleaned Banking Hall. Waiting for the new interior interpretation. Current and future clients of the Bank would surely be surrounded with a majestic feel. Worthy of the rich history of the bank and its building.

Grill work on the lunette along Grid 5-6 of Calle Dasmariñas. The Banks initials are emblazoned in the central escutcheon surrounded by curlicues, rosettes, scrolls and other romanticized grills.

The lunette grillwork along Calle Juan Luna are protected by operable wooden and glass panels. The wooden frame along Grid D-E needs to be restored.

Lunette along Grid C-D still with its original glass framed panels.

Lunette along Grid B-C with intact operable wooden windows.

Buildings built by Arthur Julius Niclaus Gabler-Gumbert

A good number of building that Arthur Gabler-Gambert built were for the San Miguel Brewery, Inc.
Left Top: San Miguel Bottling Plant, Muelle de la Industria, North Harbor, 1930's
Middle: San Miguel Coca-Cola Bottling Plant, Calle Otis, Paco, Manila, 1922
Bottom Left: The Old San Miguel Administrative Building, now Malacañang Executive House, Calle Aviles, San Miguel, Manila, 1926
Bottom Right: Old San Miguel Dairy Products Factory, Calle Echague, Quiapo, Manila, 1925

The former Administrative Building of San Miguel Brewery Inc. now converted into the Executive Offices of Malacañang Palace. Built in 1926, Gabler-Gumbert used the Gründerzeit style of architecture for all the buildings he designed for San Miguel Brewery Inc.

The Old San Miguel Dairy Products Factory along Calle Echague, Quiapo, Manila, was built in1925. Following the same architectural language of the other buildings for San Miguel Brewery, the German Gründerzeit style is identified by the historicity of form. Prominent in Gabler-Gumber's architectural language is the use of the gabled pediment with rusticated arches.

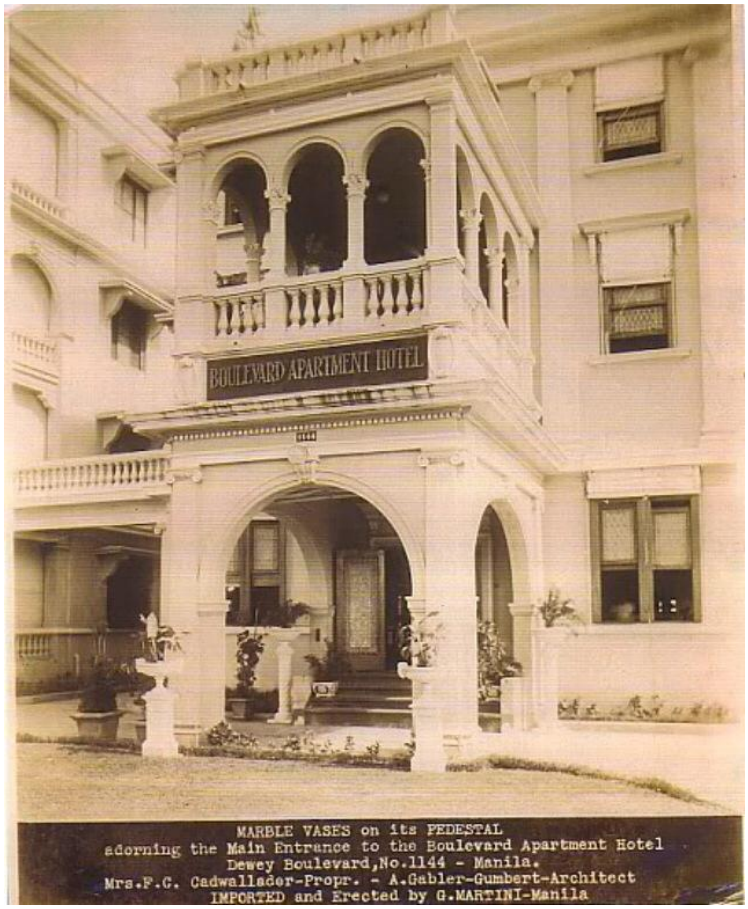
The San Miguel Brewery Bottling Plant along Calle de la Industria, Binondo was built in the 1930's following the same architectural language used in other San Miguel Brewery Buildings of the era.

The San Miguel Brewery, Coca-cola Bottling Plant along Calle Otis, Paco was built in 1922. Like the other San Miguel Commissioned building, the Otis plant followed a Historic Revivalist style.

Left: The College of the Holy Spirit, Calle Mendiola, Quiapo, Manila, 1921-1922
Bottom: The Deutscher Klub Manila. Gabler-Gumbert was president of the Club in 1923. The building sadly was one of the casualties of the 2nd world war.

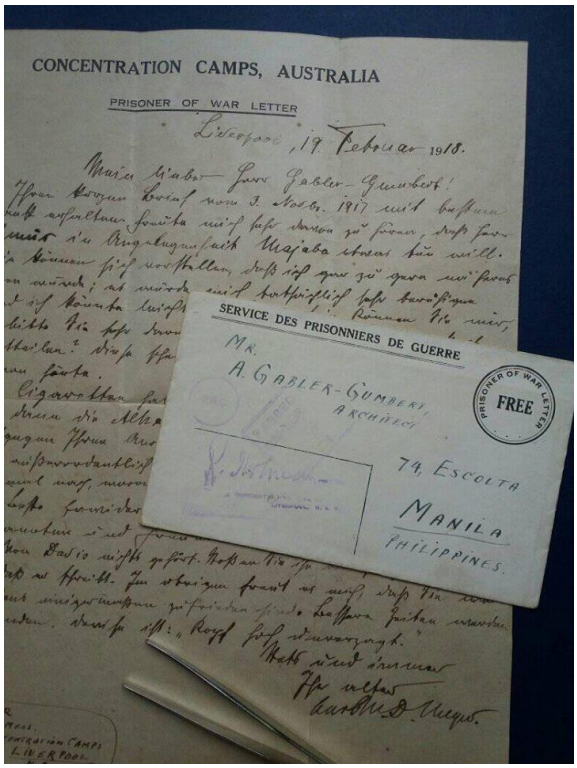
Yutivo Hardware & Co. along Calle Dasmariñas was a few years earlier than China Banking Corporation Building which was one block away. Built in 1922.

Yutivo & Sons Hardware Company building today. Like China Banking Corporation, the architectural language used in its façade is similar to those seen in the latter. Stately arches line the buildings arcade supporting above it grooved pilasters instead of rounded columns. But like the latter, the building also follows a tri-partite classic formula of base, shaft and capital, with the capital of this building being a simplified bracketed cornice.



One of the historic residences in Pre-war Manila was The Boulevard Apartment Hotel along Dewey Boulevard, Ermita, Manila. Built in the 1920's it sadly was destroyed during the mayhem of the 2nd world war.

One of the last known works of Arthur Julius Niclaus Gabler-Gumbert is the Dr. I. de Santos Building in Divisoria, Tondo, Manila. Also known as the Idess O'Racca Building it was built in the late 1935 in the prevailing Art Deco style.



Arthur Julius Niclaus Gabler-Gumbert also served as intermediary to other German nationals innocently caught in the mayhem of the 1st World War.