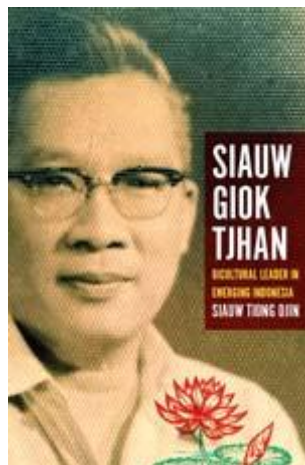


Review:

Bicultural leader Siau Giok Tjhan



Saskia E Wieringa

For engineer-turned-political scientist Siau Tion Djin there was no better subject for his PhD thesis than to analyse the political career of his renowned father, Siau Giok Tjhan.

Fortunately that thesis has now been turned into a full length biography in which we learn the trajectory of his father's efforts to fight for the interests of people of Chinese descent who lived in Indonesia and for Indonesian nationalism in general. The precarious position of the biographer has been well understood, the result being that the political analysis is fair, while the readers profit from the intimate knowledge the son acquired about his father. When father Siau was imprisoned in Suharto's gulag, the son visited him and had occasion to question him extensively about his political aspirations and trajectory.

Siau Giok Tjhan (1914-1981) lived through the turbulent years of the end of Dutch colonialism, the Japanese occupation and independence. He helped shape Indonesia's trajectory, convinced that only the recognition of the diversity of the people of this archipelago could bring stability and peace. He firmly believed in the integrationist approach for Chinese Indonesians in Indonesian society, whether they were *peranakan* or *totok* Chinese. The *totok* Chinese generally spoke a Chinese language and adhered to its culture, while *peranakan* Chinese were more integrated into Indonesia.

Siau's organisational talents were recognised early on. He entered politics soon after independence was declared, while also playing an important role as a journalist. He firmly believed that Sukarno's dream of a socialist Indonesia with prosperity for all

would be best for Chinese Indonesian people as well. As a member of parliament until 1965 he defended the interests of the largest organisation of Chinese Indonesians, Baperki (Consultative Body of Indonesian Citizenship), which he co-founded. Education and citizenship were major issues in this association.

During the tumultuous last years of Sukarno's presidency, Baperki strongly supported Sukarno's policies, including his backing of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI). When the PKI was annihilated by Suharto's military after the murder of six generals in the early morning of 1 October 1965, Baperki came under attack as well. Its offices and schools were confiscated or destroyed, its university burned. Siauw Giok Tjhan and other Baperki leaders were imprisoned without trial - as indeed there was nothing they could be tried for. In the massacres that accompanied the coming to power of General Suharto many Chinese were also murdered - whether as members of Baperki or because of racist motives. Under the New Order military dictatorship expressions of Chinese culture were suppressed.

In the last chapters the author reflects on the question of whether his father may have carried guilt for the fate of Baperki. Such is the power of the New Order propaganda, that its victims and survivors have long felt they are to be blamed. When I did research on Gerwani, the Indonesian women's organisation associated with the PKI, some of the senior leaders also agonised over this question. Could they be held responsible for the fate of the many young women who were sexually tortured and murdered? No, of course not. The murderers and rapists who committed these crimes must be held responsible and particularly their leaders who incited them to murder.

This book is a major contribution to the history of the Chinese Indonesians, and their most important organisation, Baperki. It also gives a fascinating picture of a crucial period in Indonesian history, from 1945 until 1965. To look at Indonesian modern history through the eyes of a person both deeply involved in those politics yet aloof from it, is an enriching experience.

[Siauw Tiong Djin, *Siauw Giok Tjhan: Bicultural Leader in Emerging Indonesia*, Clayton, Victoria, Monash University Publishing, 2018.](http://www.publishing.monash.edu/books/sgt-9781925523362.html)

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