



Siauw Giok Tjhan

IN MEMORIAM: SIAUW GIOK TJHAN (1914-1981)

Go Gien Tjwan

(Translated by the editors)

On November 20, 1981 SiauW Giok Tjhan died quite suddenly, far away from his beloved *tanah air* Indonesia. He was to have participated in an open-forum discussion of Leiden University history students and Dutch Indonesianists. In his contribution, SiauW had intended to treat the theme of the failure of the parliamentary-democratic experiment in Indonesia. He would have done so on the basis of his own experience and his unique record of virtually unbroken membership in the Indonesian legislature from 1946 to 1965, when democracy, and even Guided Democracy, ceased to exist in Indonesia. Half an hour before the scheduled delivery of his courageous, if perhaps somewhat overoptimistic, credo that military force will not be able to hold back the Indonesian Revolution and that democracy will eventually triumph, he fell dead on one of the beautiful old bridges of Leiden.

The place of his death--on the way to one of Leiden University's buildings--assumes a symbolic dimension in the light of postwar history, if we recall that in the Netherlands open spiritual resistance to Nazi racism began in this university, when the then rector Cleveringa called on the academic staff and all the students to go on strike in protest against the expulsion of Jews from the university; and that in Indonesia SiauW Giok Tjhan was the charismatic leader of political and social opposition to racial discrimination against the Chinese. The symbolism, however, ceases to apply at one crucial point in any historical-sociological comparison between the position of the European Jews in previous centuries and the Chinese in underdeveloped Indonesia: namely, the political solution chosen by an important segment of the discriminated-against Jewish minority group as well as by many Chinese in their struggle for emancipation.

At the end of the last century the Austrian journalist Theodor Herzl provided the impulse for a Zionist movement which, after five decades of bitter struggle and the Nazi-era holocaust, was finally crowned by the creation of Israel. At the beginning of this century, the Chinese of Indonesia attempted to improve--not to abolish--their segregated position by strengthening their communal unity, and by contributing, as Chinese nationalists, to the creation of a strong China more capable of protecting the Chinese of the diaspora. In 1934 the young journalist SiauW Giok Tjhan, who had only recently been graduated from the HBS in Surabaya, opted for a different solution. He joined the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (PTI--Indonesian Chinese Party), founded in 1932 by Liem Khoen Hian, which regarded Indonesia as the motherland, and which, shortly before the Japanese Occupation, supported an Indonesia Merdeka Sekarang (Indonesia Independent Now!) along with the Indonesian nationalists. His participation in the Indonesian independence movement during the colonial period was still within the framework of a peranakan-Chinese party, a political party of Indonesia-born Chinese who considered that they had little or no common interests with the totok-Chinese (in a broad sense, the China-born Chinese), whom, indeed, they regarded as having interests opposed to their own.

As editor of the peranakan-Chinese daily newspaper *Mata Hari*, which, like the PTI, championed Indonesia Merdeka, and which during the Sino-Japanese War of 1937 was violently anti-Japanese, Siauw was in danger of internment after the Japanese invasion of the archipelago. But, surprisingly enough, the Japanese left him undisturbed to make his living as a small shopkeeper in the East Java hill-town of Malang. The Occupation years were for him a time for reflection and preparation for what might be expected to transpire once the war was over. He foresaw an independent Indonesia with dominion status within a Dutch commonwealth. It was in this period that he first emerged as a capable leader of the Chinese community. Using his position as local head of the Keibotai, a sort of "Chinese police" instituted by the Japanese Occupation authorities, evidently as a counterweight to the Indonesian paramilitary organizations which they had earlier summoned into being, he worked hard for close cooperation with these Indonesian organizations. He predicted to the Chinese community in Malang that these organizations would play an important role after the withdrawal of the Japanese.

His prediction proved correct. The revolutionary struggle-organizations of 1945 emerged from these wartime paramilitary groups, and cooperation between Chinese and Indonesians initiated under the Japanese Occupation now bore fruit. Educated politically in the PTI, Siauw Giok Tjhan now emerged as the most qualified leader of the Chinese community, initially in East Java--for there were then so few peranakan leaders with any real experience. He warned the Chinese community, peranakan and totok alike, that the future happiness of the Chinese ethnic group could only be guaranteed by active participation in the Indonesian Revolution. In October 1945 he founded in Malang a struggle-organization of young Chinese peranakan, called Angkatan Muda Tionghoa (Young Generation of Chinese). To demonstrate that the Chinese were not sitting on the fence, on November 9 he set off for the battlefield of Surabaya with a small group of this AMT. On Heroes' Day, November 10, 1945 the Malang group discovered that in Surabaya too a number of young Chinese peranakan were fighting in the Republican ranks. But according to Siauw's political vision fighting for the Indonesian Revolution as a distinct and separate group was an error. Among former PTI leaders it had already been decided that an ethnic-based political party of this kind could not and should not exist in an independent Indonesia. Accordingly, in 1946 he joined the Socialist Party, a fusion of Sjahrir's and Amir Sjarifuddin's Marxist socialist parties.

In 1946 Siauw was appointed a member of the Working Committee of the KNIP (Central Indonesian National Committee), and from July 1947 to January 1948 he acted as Minister without Portfolio, with the task of mobilizing the social and economic potential of the peranakan Chinese. During this period he took part in the Inter-Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi. In spite of short interruptions occasioned by his imprisonment during the Madiun Affair and the two Dutch military actions, he maintained his membership in the KNIP. After the transfer of sovereignty he continued as a member of the Indonesian legislature. In this capacity, he joined a small progressive fraction in the parliament--the Sarekat Kerakyatan Indonesia (Indonesian Democratic Association)--attracted by the fact that its leaders belonged to the Batak minority group.

Siauw Giok Tjhan drew his great historical importance from his approach to the problem of the Chinese minority. When, in 1954, a number of peranakan notables conceived of a plan to solve the then urgent problems facing Indonesian citizens of Chinese origin by founding a Baperwatt (Badan Permusyawaratan Warganegara Turunan Tionghoa--Consultative Body of Citizens of Chinese Origin), they requested his assistance. At the body's founding congress, held on March 12-13, 1954 in Jakarta, he was unanimously elected general chairman. Preeminent among the participants in the Congress in terms of political understanding and experience,

and thanks to the authority he had gained from his role in the Indonesian Revolution, he was able to make fundamental changes in Baperwatt's draft statutes. He proposed that the problem of the Chinese minority was a problem in the building of the Indonesian nation. Many political leaders had forgotten this historic task. They thought only of the interests of their own political party, which, in addition, for many of them, served only as a means for enriching themselves by means of import licenses. That these leaders, in their greed for material gain, discriminated against the Chinese middle class, including even Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent, who by law shared the same rights and duties as all other Indonesians, was a violation of the Indonesian constitution. This discrimination, with its racist overtones, had to be combatted, but in a positive manner, by impressing on the entire Indonesian people the fact that only one nation existed within the nation-state of Indonesia. For this reason there should be, not a Baperwatt--an organization exclusively composed of Indonesians of Chinese descent--but a Baperki (Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesian, Consultative Body on Indonesian Citizenship). Racist misconceptions of Indonesian citizenship had to be corrected, and "we must ourselves make a start by inviting so-called 'native' Indonesians to join our organization tomorrow, when we establish its first branch in Jakarta." Thanks to Siauw's endeavors, on March 14, 1954 this Jakarta branch was founded with his old friend and fellow-journalist Sudaryo Tjokrosisworo as chairman. But it was too late!

Baperki has unjustly come down in history as an organization of Indonesians of Chinese descent. Siauw's declaration that the segregation of Indonesian ethnic groups was a legacy of colonial racism, and that the solution supported by Baperki --the political integration and social involvement of peranakan Chinese with all other Indonesians in promoting the well-being of Indonesia's masses--offered the sole means of protecting the social and economic position of the peranakan community, found some well-disposed listeners, not least the nationbuilder President Sukarno (but not in all political and economic interest-groups). Yet under Siauw's inspiring leadership Baperki grew to be the preeminent organization (for historical-sociological reasons) of mainly peranakan Chinese, who found in it political protection for their social-economic as well as cultural interests. Baperki became the largest organization of the peranakan in the history of the Chinese in Indonesia--and its leader was Siauw Giok Tjhan. This fact and the warm sympathy that Baperki enjoyed with Sukarno and the leftwing parties in Indonesia, especially the PKI, meant its downfall and that of its leader when, in 1965-66, General Suharto's military seizure of power took place.

As a Marxist, Siauw Giok Tjhan was well aware that racism and discrimination against the Chinese did not originate in a vacuum. It developed out of the social and economic structures of colonialism. In Baperki's early years he expressed the wish that "a climate be created in our society such that racial discrimination cannot flourish," a formulation sufficiently vague to be generally acceptable. After 1959 the phrase "Indonesian socialism" was repeatedly on Sukarno's lips, and accordingly this "society" became an explicitly socialist society; and as the verbal violence of "Revolution" became almost deafening during Guided Democracy, so "the integration of the peranakan group within the Indonesian nation" became "revolutionary integration." Sukarno's adversaries saw in this formulation a communistic tendency. Among these enemies were to be found a number of Catholic peranakan intellectuals, as well as others, who fought for a "total assimilation" of the Chinese minority into the Indonesian population, rather than "integration." Anti-Sukarno officers gave their backing to this political solution. What the assimilationists propagandized for was no deeply thought-out political program. In practice, they wanted merely the changing of Chinese into Indonesian-sounding names and the self-destruction of

the cultural identity of the *peranakan* Chinese--certainly not conversion to Islam and certainly not forced, interethnic--or, to their way of thinking, interracial--marriages. What they had in mind was outright anticommunism, and it was this that made sense of their program.

With the fall of Sukarno and the destruction of the PKI and other democratic parties, the end came too for Baperki. In November 1965 Siauw Giok Tjhan was arrested after he had vainly attempted to halt the anti-Chinese pogroms which accompanied the events of October. He was only released in May 1978 without ever standing trial. And on his identity-card he bore the stigma of ET (ex-Tapol, i.e., ex-political prisoner). In September 1978, he left for Holland to obtain medical treatment: one eye was completely blind, he had only about 70 percent vision in the other, and his heart functioned badly. For the time being the assimilationists have won in Indonesia. But they have still not produced a leader of the caliber of Siauw Giok Tjhan, nor one with his broad and grand political vision. Besides, a figure such as he is unimaginable in a neocolonial environment which in principle is indistinguishable from that of German absolutism, when the anti-Semitic Frederick II of Prussia nonetheless had need of the *Hofjude* (Court Jew) Ephraim for his financial acrobatics. All that are imaginable in contemporary Indonesia are the historical counterparts of the Ephraims and the Rothschilds: the Chinese *cukong*.

Siauw Giok Tjhan's struggle for an Indonesian nation--which he described in his speeches and writings as "free of racial prejudices, and in which every man is free of the fear of the stepchild's fate" is--again in his own words--a "perjuangan yang memerlukan waktu panjang [a long-term struggle]." This belief, to which he held steadfastly till his death, made him a nationbuilder who died as a patriot, albeit an "alien patriot"; not like the imperialist Disraeli, but a socialist who desired to bring his own group into the Indonesian nation without a betrayal of its cultural heritage.