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MARGREET VAN TILL

In Search of Si Pitung

The History of an Indonesian Legend

Introduction

Anyone living in Jakarta who happens to be interested in the local culture will sooner or later be confronted with Si Pitung, perhaps by chatting with a taxi driver, by watching television, or merely by walking into a bookshop. Si Pitung is the hero of the *orang Betawi*, or autochthonous Jakartans. According to tradition he was one of the robbers who roamed around Jakarta and its surrounding countryside at some undefined period in history. He distinguished himself by his supernatural powers and his cunning, and gave the Dutch colonial government a tough time by outsmarting them each time they thought they could lay their hands on him.

In 1931 the first movie was made about Si Pitung, but in the 1970s the folk-hero was brought to the attention of a broader public by a novel and several films detailing his adventures. Although the Si Pitung craze has now largely blown over, there continues to be a television series devoted to his life and adventures, while the Si Pitung museum attracts many visitors each year.

In spite of all this, so far no systematic research has been conducted into the legend of Si Pitung. The present article is intended to fill this gap. It will focus on the differences and similarities between Pitung as he emerges from the colonial records and his image in Indonesian narratives, films, and printed literature. Each source seems to have its own version of Si Pitung. The Indonesian, Dutch and Chinese sections of the population each formed their own idea of him, either as a hero or as a rascal, and these images have furthermore changed in the course of the years. In addition, Pitung's enduring popularity among Indonesians, from his own time to the present day, will be analysed. Finally, the article will try to place the case of Pitung in the historical context of criminality and banditry in the Dutch East Indies and investigate the threat it posed to the colonial government.

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Oral traditions and some modern printed Indonesian literature

The story of Si Pitung has been passed down to the present-day indigenous inhabitants of Jakarta as part of their cultural heritage. Besides being one of the popular tales people like to tell each other, the Si Pitung legend very frequently also is the subject of a *rancak* (kind of ballad), a *sair* (story in verse form), or a *lenong* (improvised folk-play staged by semi-professional actors). The *lenong* theatre arose in the 1930s as a typically Betawi performing art and experienced its heyday in the fifties. The Chinese often took care of the business side of performances by lending money and buying equipment. Sometimes they also added songs and stories to the repertory. *Lenong* declined in the sixties under the influence of newer media and the massive influx of non-Betawi immigrants in Jakarta. In the Si Pitung *lenong*, Pitung is portrayed as a typical, down-to-earth Betawi hero: he is loyal, a pious Muslim, and a champion of social justice (Koesasi 1992:2-7).

Si Pitung, as the story goes, was born in Pengumben, a village in Rawabelong, near the present-day location of the Jakartan railway station Palmerah.¹ His parents were Bung Piung and Mbak Pinah. Pitung received his education in a *pesantren*, or Islamic boarding school, run by one Hadji Naipin. He traded in goats for a living. One day his money was stolen after he had sold his father's goats at the market in Tanah Abang. This incident marked the beginning of Pitung's criminal career, as he was made to compensate the loss as a result of the theft. According to some, it was his efforts to recover the money from the robbers that established his reputation as a *jago* (which literally means 'fighting cock').

Together with three other men, Dji-ih, Rais and Jebul, Si Pitung later formed a gang and set about robbing Hadji Sapiudin, a wealthy landowner in Marunda, a village north-east of Batavia (whose house currently accommodates the Si Pitung Museum). Legend has it that the gang used a clever ruse to trick him out of his money: disguised as civil servants, they handed the hadji a letter instructing him to place his money at their disposal. They offered the excuse that he was under suspicion of forgery; therefore the money had to be taken to the office of the *demang* (a local government official) to have its authenticity checked. The hadji complied with the request, and the gang made off with his money.

Naturally crimes like this soon attracted the attention of the commissioner of police of Batavia, *schout* Heyne, whom the Betawi people refer to as '*schout* Heyne', '*schout* Heijna', 'Scothena', '*tuan* Sekotena', and so

¹ Palupi Damardini, a student of the Universitas Indonesia, has analysed the story of Pitung from a literary point of view with regard to its characteristics as a typical folk-tale. Damardini interviewed five men ranging in age from fifty to eighty years, who were all involved with some traditional Betawi art form, such as *lenong* or *rancak*. I will use Damardini's interviews as a basis to retell the story of Si Pitung and to reconstruct the image that older Jakartans have of him (Damardini 1993).

on. Undoubtedly these names refer to the police officer A.W.V. Hinne, who was stationed in Batavia from 1888 to 1912.² He began to pursue Si Pitung relentlessly. He did actually catch him once, but the bandit managed to escape with his comrades from the prison in Mester – that is, Meester Cornelis, then a village south-east of Batavia. This escape was generally believed to have been effected by magical means.

Subsequently Hinne forced Pitung's *guru* (instructor), the above-named Hadji Naipin, to reveal Pitung's *jimaat* (talisman) to him, so that he might pursue Si Pitung more effectively. According to other versions of the story, Si Pitung was eventually betrayed by his friends (excluding the ever-loyal Dji-ih), although details of these betrayals remain vague. One story has it that Si Pitung's *jimaat*, his *keris* (dagger), was taken away from him, which consequently stripped him of his magical powers. In the end he was killed by a golden bullet. Other versions again have his magical powers disappear after he had had his hair cut or, rather less romantically, after someone had thrown a rotten egg at him.

After his death, Si Pitung's grave had to be guarded by soldiers because people believed he would rise from the dead. The following fragment from the popular ballad *Rancak Si Pitung* relates the events after his death as follows.

'Si Pitung sudah mati dibilangin sama sanak sudaranya
 Digotong di Kerekot Penjaringan kuburannya
 Saya tau orang rumah sakit nyang bilangin
 Aer keras ucusnya dikeringin
 Waktu dikubur pulisi pade iringin
 Jago nama Pitung kuburannya digadangin
 Yang gadangin kuburannya Pitung dari sore ampe pagi
 Kalo belon aplusan kaga ada nyang boleh pegi
 Sebab yang gadangin waktu itu sampe pagi
 Kabarnya jago Pitung dalam kuburan idup lagi
 Yang gali orang rante mengaku paye
 Belencong pacul itu waktu suda sedie
 Lantaran digali Tuan Besar kurang percaye
 Dilongok dikeker bangkenye masi die
 Memang waktu itu bangke Pitung diliat uda nyata
 Dicitak di kantor, koran kantor berita
 Ancur rumuk tulang iganya, bekas kena senjata
 Nama Pitung suda mati Tuan Hena ke Tomang bikin pesta
 Pesta itu waktu kelewat ramenye

² According to Mr. Hinne's *stamboek* (service record), he began his career with the Dutch colonial government as a clerk. He subsequently became a deputy forester, a postmaster and a policeman in various places in the archipelago. He had several serious illnesses, after which he had to return to Europe to convalesce. In the late 1880s he became a police officer in Batavia. He was usually in debt. Source: *Stamboek van Burgerlijke Ambtenaren in Nederlandsch-Indië en Gouvernements Marine*, ARA (Algemeen Rijksarchief), Den Haag, register T, f. 274.

Segala permainan kaga larangannya
 Tuju ari tuju malem pesta permisiannya
 Sengaja bikin pesta mau tangkep kawan-kawannya
 Nama Pitung mau ditangkep kawan-kawannya.

Translation:

Si Pitung is dead; and his relatives have been told.
 His bier was carried from Krekot; he was buried in Penjaringan.
 I know someone in the hospital who spread the story
 That his guts were preserved in spirits.
 At his funeral the police provided an escort.
 The grave of champion Pitung was guarded;
 Those keeping watch on Pitung's grave through the night
 Were forbidden to leave until their reliefs had arrived.
 For the night guard
 Had told the story that Pitung had come to life again in his grave.
 The convicts in chains who had to dig him up said it was very hard,
 Even though picks and shovels had been provided.
 They had to dig him up because the commissioner was suspicious.
 Looking into the grave with a telescope they saw that it was still Pitung's
 corpse.
 You could see clearly that it was Pitung's body.
 It was printed by the newspaper, of the news agency,
 That his ribs were shattered where the bullets had struck.
 When Pitung died, Mr. Hinne ordered a feast at Tomang,
 To which hordes of people came,
 And where all kinds of games were permitted.
 The feast was permitted to go on for seven days and nights.
 The aim of the feast was to catch Pitung's band of men,
 It was planned to capture Pitung's band.'
 (Grijns 1991:25-7.)

Opinions are divided about the nature of Pitung's robberies. According to many stories he was a hero who stole from the rich to give to the poor. One *lenong* actor who was interviewed was rather cynical about his motives, however, saying:

'Pitung memang perampok. Mungkin saja Haji Samsudin dipukuli ketika itu. Kalau menurut istilah sekarang, Pitung itu pengacau, dan dicari oleh Pemerintah. Pitung memang jahat. Pekerjaannya merampok dan memeras orang-orang kaya. Menurut kabar, hasil rampokannya dibagikan pada rakyat miskin. Namun sebenarnya tidak. Tidak ada perampok yang rela membagi hasil rampokannya dengan cuma-cuma, bukan? Menurut kabar, Pitung menyumbangkan uangnya pada mesjid-mesjid. Saat itu mesjid hanya ada di Pekojan, Luar Batang, dan Kampung Sawah. Tidak ada bukti bahwa Pitung mendermakan uangnya di sana.'
 (Damardini 1993:148.)

[Pitung was really a robber. Quite possibly he maltreated Hadji Samsudin on that occasion. In today's terms, Pitung was an outlaw, and he was wanted by the authorities. Pitung was a really bad guy. He went about robbing and extorting rich people. They say the booty was distributed among the poor. But in fact this

was not so. No robber will voluntarily share his booty for nothing, will he? They say Pitung gave his money to the mosques. At that time the only mosques were in Pekojan, Luar Batang and Kampung Sawah. And there's no proof that Pitung donated his money there.]

The *lenong* actor who made these assertions showed himself to be extremely well-informed about Si Pitung. So he corrected an interviewing student when the latter talked about the house of Pitung in Marunda: 'No, that wasn't Pitung's house, it was the house of the robbed Hadji Sapiudin' (Damardini 1993:145). There is a widespread belief among the inhabitants of Jakarta that Pitung lived in the house that is now called the Si Pitung House or Si Pitung Museum in Marunda. This belief has been incorporated in certain publications on Jakarta (Heuken 1989:95; Abeyasekere 1989:67; Lombard III, 1990:188). In the research for this article, no evidence came to light that the so-called Si Pitung House ever was Si Pitung's dwelling; the indications are rather that, as the above-said *lenong* actor stated, it was indeed Hadji Sapiudin's.

The same *lenong* actor linked the current admiration for Si Pitung with Pitung's commercialization by the Indonesian movie industry. Si Pitung's depiction as a hero fits in well with the modern period of *merdeka* (freedom, independence), and this is what attracts large crowds to the cinemas (Damardini 1993:144). In general, the story-tellers proved to be well aware of the dominance of Pitung's adventures as represented in the movies over their own versions.

Pitung first seems to have been cast in the role of a Robin Hood by the Indonesian author and scriptwriter Lukman Karmani, as the latter indicated in an interview I had with him on 23 September 1994. This writer in the sixties published a novel about Si Pitung in which the social aspects of his story were emphasized. He also wrote scripts for several quite successful Pitung films. These films, based on stories passed down by generations of Jakartans, are still in circulation, although the novel by Karmani has unfortunately been lost. In the seventies there were also many comic strips about Si Pitung on the market, but they can no longer be found today.

The story of Pitung is even so included in *Cerita Rakyat Betawi* (Ali 1993), a volume in a series of monographs containing folk-tales from the Indonesian archipelago. Each tale comes complete with a moral, which in Pitung's case is:

'Pitung sebagai tokoh kisah Betawi masa lampau memang dikenal sebagai perampok, tetapi hasil rampokan itu digunakan untuk menolong orang-orang yang menderita. Dia adalah Robin Hood Indonesia. Walaupun demikian pihak yang berwenang tidak memberikan toleransi, orang yang bersalah harus tetap diberi hukuman yang setimpa.' (Ali 1993:7.)

[Pitung as a former Betawi folk-hero is indeed known as a robber. But he used the loot from his robberies to help the indigent. He is the Robin Hood of Indonesia. Even so the authorities had no tolerance for him; offenders must always be given fitting punishment.]

The Si Pitung Museum in Marunda (photograph by R. Habiboe)

Si Pitung's grave at Jalan Raya Kebayoran Lama (photograph by R.J. van der Veen)

Obviously the editor, Rahmat Ali, has his own personal ideas about Pitung's stealing from the rich and giving to the poor.

Lukman Karmani, in the interview I had with him in 1994, further stated that there is a difference between stealing from the rich in the past and at the present. Formerly the rich were rich at the expense of the *kampung* (village, town quarter) people. These days, however, people derive their wealth from their own labour, according to him. In the 1990s stealing from the rich in order to reduce the socio-economic gap has become a sensitive, politically loaded issue in Indonesia. For this reason it is becoming increasingly difficult to find the kind of free creativity that surrounded the figure of Si Pitung in, for example, the movies of the seventies.³

One of the few people who have searched for the genuine historical Si Pitung is the Indonesian anthropologist Mulyawan Karim. In 1993, exactly one hundred years after Si Pitung's death, he published an article in the Indonesian journal *Jakarta, Jakarta* in which the historical Pitung plays a minor role (Karim 1993:62-9). Here he contrasts the years 1893 and 1993 with each other, concluding that not much has changed over the past century. His descriptions of fires, traffic accidents, damaged roads, floods and crime in the year 1893 are based on articles from the Malay newspaper *Hindia Olanda*. In his discussion of crime, Mulyawan Karim mentions Si Pitung in passing. He refers to the price placed on Pitung's head and says that he shot one of his betrayers, but then proceeds to talk of crimes committed by non-native Indonesians, especially criminals of Chinese origin. The Chinese receive ample attention from Karim in this article. He associates them with 'Betawi', in which he is not entirely wrong. Around the turn of the century the Betawi culture was strongly influenced by the Chinese, partly as a result of intermarriage between the two groups. Betawi and Chinese people often were similar in appearance, while the former had adopted Chinese marriage customs, interior decorating styles, and so on (Tideman 1933:149). This relationship between the Chinese and the *orang Betawi* may account for Chinese sympathy for Si Pitung, a theme discussed in more detail below.

The cinema

In 1931, at the dawn of the Indonesian film industry, the Wong brothers produced a movie with the title *Si Pitoeng*. The movies of the Wong brothers, who were Chinese Indonesians of American descent, were aimed at a wide local audience. Perhaps because of the American background of the producers, the Wong films are characterized by much action and slapstick. Unfortunately, hardly anything is known about this Si Pitung movie. Indonesians who have seen it remember it as a kind of western, in which Si

³ The Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, in his novel *Rumah kaca* (1988), several times refers to Si Pitung, who to him symbolizes resistance to colonialism and social injustice.

Pitung was portrayed as a real bandit. The part of Si Pitung was played by a Chinese named Herman Shin, while the leading lady was Ining Resmi, a well-known *keroncong* (Portuguese-inspired style of Indonesian music) singer of those days (Abdullah et al. 1993:125-6).

A second film, also entitled *Si Pitoeng*, appeared almost four decades later, in 1970.⁴ Judging by its box office performance, this version enjoyed great popularity: 141,140 people viewed the movie the year it was released, making it by far the best attended film that year (Said 1991:103). In this picture, Pitung is portrayed as in most *rancak* and *lenong*: as a loyal friend, a pious Muslim, and a campaigner against social inequality. This movie for the first time portrays Pitung's supposed romance with a girl named Aisjah. The principal theme, however, is the cat-and-mouse game between Heyne and Pitung. Dutch dominance is depicted with a good pinch of humour. The part of *schout* Heyne is played by the Indonesian actor A. Hamid Arief, who staggers across the screen cursing and swearing in broken Dutch. In one scene Heyne is lying in bed with his concubine Marietje when he is disturbed by a subordinate bearing the message of Pitung's escape from the prison in Meester Cornelis.

'Heyne: Djangan omong soal Pitung. Ia orang sudah tida berdaja dibelakang tralli pendjara. Ini malam saja mau senang-senang.

(Suara pintu diketok.)

Heyne: Verdomme ... siapa itu ...? Kurang adjar ...!!!! Zoo, ada apa, kowe?

Polisi: Pitung ... tuan ... Pitung ... kabur dari pendjara ...

Heyne: Waatt? Pitung ... kabur ...?? Kowe tidur, ja ... semua ...!!!!

Heyne: Verrrdomme ... donder op ... jij ...! Terlalu ... zeg ... Pitung ...!!!!'

(Script *Si Pitung* 1970:67-8.)

[Heyne: Don't talk about this Pitung business. He's been put out of action behind bars. I just want to relax tonight.

(There's a knock at the door.)

Heyne: Damn it ... who is it ...? Haven't you got any manners ...!!!! Well, what is it?

Policeman: Pitung ... sir ... Pitung ... escaped from prison ...

Heyne: What? Pitung ... escaped ...?? You must have been asleep, yes ... the lot of you ...!!!!

Heyne: Damn it ... sod off ...! It's more than anybody can stand ... Pitung ... !!!!]

Besides this comical use of Dutch, there are jokes depicting the relationship between the Indonesian village people and their Dutch colonial masters. One of the standard gags in this film is that about some young girls whom Heyne, after losing track of Pitung in the village, asks about his whereabouts, answering to confuse him: 'Kiri, kanan, kiri, kanan, kiri, kanan ...

⁴ A PT Dewi Film production, its producer was Malidar Hadiyuwono, and the director Nawi Ismail. The story was by Lukman Karmani, the script by S.M. Ardan. The script and a video of this movie are available at the Sinematek Indonesia, Pusat Perfilman H. Usmar Ismail, Jakarta (Sinematek).

teruuuus lagi' (Script *Si Pitung* 1970:53) [Left, right, left, right, left, right ... straight ahead]. The story seems to head for an ending with the marriage of the *demang* (district head) and Pitung's fiancée, but eventually the bride turns out to have been switched and Pitung runs off with his own girlfriend after all.

The film *Banteng Betawi* (The Bull of Batavia), released in 1971, is a sequel to the above film. This time the main theme is the betrayal and death of Pitung. The collaboration of the locals with the Dutch also receives ample attention. At the end of the film Pitung is shot after being separated from his talisman. He dies in Heyne's arms.

'Pitung: Lu ... Heyne. Gue haus ... minum Heyne.

Heyne: Jaja, vooruit.

Pitung: Lu ... sekarang menang Heyne ... dibalik. Lu sebenarnje baik ... tapi andjing-andjing lu djahat ... Terima kasih Heyne.

Heyne, urus-urus baik-baik orang-orang kampung.' (Script *Banteng Betawi* 1971:72.)

[Pitung: Hey ... Heyne. I'm thirsty. ... give me a drink, Heyne.

Heyne: All right, there you are.

Pitung: Well ... you've got me beaten now, Heyne. You're not such a bad guy after all ... but your dogs are vicious ... Thank you, Heyne.

Take good care of the *kampung* people.]

The chief constable has tears in his eyes and salutes when Pitung dies. Considering the animosity between the main characters, Pitung and Heyne, this display of mutual respect between them at the end of the movie is remarkable.

A third movie about Si Pitung, with the title *Pembalasan Si Pitung* (Si Pitung's Revenge), followed in 1977.⁵ This production was focused mainly on Pitung's friend Dji-ih, as Dicky Zulkarnain, who had played the part of Pitung in *Banteng Betawi*, was not satisfied with the salary he was offered and refused to play this role now.

The fourth movie about Si Pitung, produced in 1981, had the title *Si Pitung bangkit kembali* (The Resurrection of Si Pitung) or *Si Pitung beraksi kembali* (Si Pitung Back in Action).⁶ The fact that the producers were of Chinese descent may explain why the Chinese section of the Betawi population received full attention. The film shows how Si Pitung and the Chinese *kampung* people co-operated together, with much attention being given to the martial arts, and with almost no humour. In this movie Pitung is cast firmly in the role of a national hero. He becomes the

⁵ Also a PT Dewi Film production, Malidar Hadiyuwono was its producer and Nawi Ismail its director, while the script was again by S.M. Ardan. The script and a video of this movie are available at the Sinematek.

⁶ This was a PT Dipa Jaya Films production, with Nani Dipa as producer, and Lie Soen Bok as director. The story was by Lukman Karmani, and the script by R. Djoko Lelono. The script and a video of this movie are available at the Sinematek.

guru of some *pemuda* (revolutionary youth). There is a rebellion against the Dutch, and soldiers of the *compagnie* (Dutch East India Company, and later the Dutch colonial administration) burn down a *kampung*. A *pemuda* climbs up a flagpole to pull down the Dutch flag, but he is shot and falls, tearing away the bottom blue part of the flag, leaving the red and white sections (= the Indonesian flag) intact. Si Pitung mourns the victims of the fighting, but his girlfriend Siti comforts him with the words: 'Sejarah berulang kembali Bang! Tak sia-sia pengorbanan rakyat membantu abang.' (Script *Si Pitung bangkit kembali* 1981:48.) [History repeats itself, brother! The sacrifices the people made to help you have not been in vain.]

At the moment the Indonesian movie industry is no longer flourishing. Many producers and scriptwriters, among them Lukman Karmani, have turned to writing short television plays. In 1994, Si Pitung was still to be seen on TPI, Indonesia's educational broadcasting station, every Tuesday evening. On TV, the characters of Pitung and Hinne seem to be less colourful, while these cheaper productions are less pleasing to the Western eye. However, they do show that the Indonesian public is still interested in Pitung.

Material remains

Driving eastward from Jakarta, one enters an expanse of wasteland after leaving Tanjung Priok behind. In this deserted area, which lacks the usual abundant vegetation, there are only a few villages left. The Indonesian government has planned a large harbour in this area, and the small local communities are still negotiating compensation for their land. About five kilometres east of Tanjung Priok is a river which can be crossed to *kampung* Marunda by *prahu* (boat). Marunda is an interesting village from a historical point of view. Here one finds the grave of *kapitein* Jonker, an Ambonese officer who got into trouble with the VOC authorities and was executed. After his death, *kapitein* Jonker became a symbol of the ambivalent attitude to Dutch rule of many Ambonese soldiers in the colonial army. Furthermore, quite a number of folk-tales are set in Marunda, including that about Si Ronda, a bandit who is reputed to have stolen from the rich and given to the poor, and about Si Mirah, nicknamed 'the lioness of Marunda' because she was skilled in martial arts.

As the presence of the Si Pitung House here suggests, Pitung was also active in this village. The house is built in the Bugis style and in the 1970s was restored because of its architectural value. We asked the village people about its history and its relation to Pitung. Their stories varied in important ways: one informant stated that Si Pitung often used to stay here; another said it was Pitung's base in this area; while a third opined that it was a house that had once been robbed by Pitung. After visiting the house, I went to the nearest *hadji* in the village to obtain further clarification. He did not seem to be very interested in the history of the place, but

possessed a copy of the *Sejarah Kampung Marunda* (History of Marunda Village), published by the municipal cultural service of Jakarta. The authors of this state that the owner of the Si Pitung House was Sapiudin, who was robbed by Si Pitung. It is not certain if Pitung has ever been an inhabitant of Marunda.

Crossing the river on our way home, we were told by a village boy who accompanied us that Marunda itself was threatened by the new harbour, and that the villagers were in conflict with the government over this plan. We tried to imagine what this place would look like a few years hence, with the grave of *kapitein* Jonker and the Si Pitung House surrounded by piles of containers.

Jakarta houses another relic of Si Pitung. A few weeks after our trip to Marunda, we tried to locate his grave, which is supposed to be somewhere in the *desa* (village) of Sukabumi, an area now totally absorbed by the city of Jakarta. Most people, although sometimes almost literally sitting on this grave, say they do not know its whereabouts. However, an energetic old lady told us in Betawi dialect where it was. Si Pitung's last resting-place lies along the busy Jalan Raya Kebayoran Lama, on the premises of the state telephone company, TELKOM. The grave site measures about two by five metres, and is overgrown with bamboo. According to the company's security officer, there had once been a complete cemetery around this spot, but it had been cleared away to make way for the TELKOM building. They had not dared to remove Si Pitung's grave, however. He further informed us that there are still visitors who occasionally spend the night on the grave in the belief that they may absorb some of Si Pitung's magical powers. Some distant relatives of Pitung are supposedly living next door to the TELKOM building. In the adjacent flower and plant shop there are in fact some men who claim to be descendants of one of Si Pitung's brothers. During Lebaran, at the end of the annual Muslim fasting month, the whole family still comes together to honour their illustrious forebear.

Colonial accounts

The character of Si Pitung is definitely based on that of an actual person living in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first newspaper reports about this person, namely in the Malay paper *Hindia Olanda*, can be traced to the summer of 1892. The different spellings of his name show that at that time he was not yet widely known: sometimes he is referred to as 'one Bitoeng', at other times as 'Pitang'. After a few months the editors consistently referred to him as 'Si Pitoeng', however (*Hindia Olanda* 28-6-1892:3; 26-8-1892:2).

The first reports in the said newspaper show that he was indeed a colourful figure. On 18 July 1892 the *schout* of Tanah Abang searched the house of 'one Bitoeng' in the *desa* of Sukabumi, south of Batavia. Among the stolen goods found were a black coat and a police uniform and cap in

A scene from a Si Pitung movie with Dicky Zulkarnaen as Si Pitung (left)
(photograph by courtesy of Sinematek Indonesia, Pusat Perfilman H. Usmar Ismail)

A scene from a Si Pitung movie (photograph by courtesy of Sinematek Indonesia,
Pusat Perfilman H. Usmar Ismail)

which Pitung or some of his companions would dress up in order to rob *kampung* (*Hindia Olanda* 28-6-1892:2).

A month later the police searched his house again, and this time found 125 guilders – a considerable sum of money in those days – hidden in a hole under the building. This constituted the loot of two major robberies, one of Nyonya De C. and the other of Hadji Sapiudin, a Bugis from Marunda (*Hindia Olanda* 10-8-1892:2; 26-8-1892:2). The latter had been an extremely violent robbery, in the course of which Pitung and his five accomplices had used guns. It had taken place on the night of 30 July 1892, when Si Pitung and five of his friends (Abdoelrachman, Moedjeran, Merais, Dji-ih, and Gering) had broken into Hadji Sapiudin's house, threatening the owner with a gun and firing shots to keep the neighbours at a distance.⁷

In August 1892 Pitung and his gang were caught by the police after a tip from the village head of Kebayoran, who received fifty *ringgit* for his information (*Hindia Olanda* 26-8-1892:2). Less than a year later, in the spring of 1893, Pitung and Dji-ih managed to escape by mysterious means from the prison in Meester Cornelis. An investigation into this was led by the *assistent-resident* himself, but it was not very successful. The prison wardens were under strong suspicion, but did not confess to anything. However, in the end one fellow-prisoner confessed that he had lent Pitung a pickaxe. It appeared that the fugitives had used a roof gutter to climb over the wall (*Hindia Olanda* 25-4-1893:3; *Lokomotief* 25-4-1893:2).

So Pitung was free again. Rumours of his adventures were rife. It was alleged that he had been seen disguised as a woman on board the mail boat *Prasman*. Detectives were dispatched to check this out, but they were unable to find him among the crowd on the ship (*Hindia Olanda* 12-5-1893:3). The price on the heads of Si Pitung and Dji-ih rose steadily to four hundred guilders (*Hindia Olanda* 2-5-1893:2).

Si Pitung's escape posed a delicate problem for the government of the Dutch East Indies. While still in prison, Pitung and his gang had appealed to the governor-general for clemency, and this official had had the intention of granting it. But what could he do now about an appeal by two escaped prisoners who had immediately returned to their former pursuits? Endless discussions ensued about the nature of clemency and the gravity of Pitung's and Dji-ih's crimes. Some officials suggested that the government should make an example of Pitung and Dji-ih by putting the two to death, thereby hopefully stemming the wave of increasingly violent robberies in and around Batavia. Others suggested that Pitung would become

⁷ President Hoogerechtshof van Nederlandsch-Indië, Batavia, aan Z.E. de Gouverneur-Generaal, 18-4-1893. In file MGS 13-5-1893, Bt 11-6-1893, MGS 19-8-1893, MGS 9-9-1893, MGS 7-10-1893, Bt 7-12-1893, Algemene Secretarie Bogor, Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia.

even more reckless knowing that he would certainly be put to death if caught again.⁸

One striking detail of Pitung's letter of appeal is a small cross where his signature should have been, showing that Pitung was illiterate. The document further reveals his real name: Salihoen. According to an oral tradition, the name Si Pitung was a derivative of Javanese *pituan pitulung*, 'group of seven'. All the members of this group supposedly dressed exactly the same as Pitung in order to confuse his enemies (Koesasi 1992:6).

While the officials were discussing his appeal, Pitung set about taking revenge on his enemies. At least, that is the impression one gets from the subsequent series of violent robberies involving the frequent use of fire-arms. Together with Dji-ih, he waylaid a certain known police spy, Djeram Latip, and killed him (*Hindia Olanda* 23-9-1893:2). He also robbed a native woman, Mie, the loot including some men's clothes and a revolver with pin-fire bullets.⁹ Women were by no means safe from the robberies staged by Si Pitung or his colleagues. Besides the aforementioned Nyonya De C. and Mie, a tradeswoman at Kali Besar became his victim when Pitung stole some sarongs worth a hundred guilders from her *prahu* (*Hindia Olanda* 22-11-1892:2).

Dji-ih was eventually recaptured. He was compelled by illness to come to the *kampung* to get treatment. Here he moved into the house of an old acquaintance. The *djoeragan* (chief) got word of this, however, and reported it to the *demang*, who went with a group of armed men to the house where Dji-ih was staying. Though his revolvers lay within reach, he was too ill to defend himself (*Hindia Olanda* 19-8-1893:2). He surrendered and was led away with an impressive display of power:

'Het was de demang van Kebajoran, die Dji-ih oppakte, waarna de schout van Meester-Cornelis gezonden werd om den man te helpen overbrengen naar de gevangenis. Dat overbrengen geschiedde met een escorte van kampong-hoofden, terwijl de demang en de schout met ontbloote sabel vooropliepen. De optocht trok veel bekijks.' (*Java-bode* 15-8-1893:2.)

[It was the *demang* of Kebajoran who apprehended Dji-ih, whereupon the constable of Meester Cornelis was sent to help take the man to prison. This took place under an escort of village heads, while the *demang* and police constable walked on ahead with drawn swords. The procession drew a lot of attention.]

The press concluded that Dji-ih had been helped by the *kampung* people, and that this might also apply to Pitung. One Dutch-language newspaper hinted at even wider ramifications when it referred to the threat of the internationalization of crime: Dji-ih had escaped to Singapore once before! (*Java-Bode* 15-8-1893:2.) The informant responsible for Dji-ih's arrest did

⁸ For a record of the relevant discussions, see the file mentioned in the previous note.

⁹ Resident Batavia aan Z.E. de Gouverneur-Generaal van Nederlandsch-Indië, 1-9-1893; see the file mentioned in note 7.

not enjoy his success for long. He was shot by Pitung in a remote place just a week later.

'Itoe djoeragan koetika ketemoe Si Pitoeng betoelan tempat sepi troes. Si djoeragan menjikip pada Si Pitoeng dan dari tjipetnja Si Pitoeng troes ambil pestolnja dari pinjang, lantas tembak si djoeragan itoe menjadi mati itoe tempat djoega.' (*Hindia Olanda* 1-9-1893:2.)

[When the chief came upon Pitung, he happened to be walking in a remote spot. The chief followed him, and Si Pitung immediately drew his pistol and shot the chief dead in that very spot.]

A few months later, in October, chief constable Hinne learned from an informant that Pitung had been sighted in Kampung Bambu, somewhere between Tanjung Priok and Meester Cornelis. On his way there, Hinne was informed that Pitung had moved in the direction of the graveyard in Tanah Abang (*Hindia Olanda* 18-10-1893:2). A Dutch-language newspaper afterwards wrote that Pitung had been lured to Tanah Abang by a local detective in an attempt to make him run amok. Hinne and his assistants surrounded the cemetery so as to make Pitung's escape impossible. Two assistants spotted Pitung between the graves. He was dressed in shorts and had a cartridge belt around his waist. A skirmish ensued and Pitung fled in the direction where Hinne had laid an ambush. The chief constable did not immediately recognize the running figure, and asked the local chief next to him who it might be.

'Anak ketjil, zeide deze. Doch toen "'t kleine kind" zich omdraaide, staan bleef en den schout toeriep om eens bij hem te komen, waaraan deze onmiddellijk voldeed, loste het wurm een schot uit zijn revolver. Onmiddellijk daarna gaf de schout op dezelfde manier antwoord. Beide schoten misten. Een volgende kogel drong Pitoeng door den arm. Hij bleef evenwel op zijn plaats en schoot weder terug, doch zonder succes. Een derde schot doorboorde den misdadiger de borst en deed hem ter aarde storten. Hierop liep de schout naar hem toe, doch vlak bij den gewonde gekomen, richtte deze zich op en zond nogmaals een kogel in de richting van zijn vervolger, welken deze evenwel door een vluggen zijsprong wist te ontwijken. Op hetzelfde oogenblik kwamen oppassers, die het knallen der schoten hadden gehoord, aangeloopen, waarna een van hen Pitoeng nog een kogel in 't onderste gedeelte van den rug schoot, die door het lichaam drong en den buik weer uitkwam. Dit schot maakte hem onschadelijk. Hij werd onmiddellijk naar het stadsverband vervoerd. De voor hem minder vleierende opmerkingen van de oppassers, die het transport begeleidden, beantwoordde Pitoeng door zoo nu en dan eens een vroolijk liedje te zingen. Hij heeft, zooals reeds gezegd, niet lang meer geleefd.' (*Lokomotief* 19-10-1893:2.)

[Just a little boy, he said. But when the 'little boy' turned around, came to a halt, and dared the chief constable to come near, which the latter immediately did, the little mite fired his revolver. The chief constable immediately paid him back in kind. Both shots missed their mark. The next bullet hit Pitung in the arm. But he stood his ground and returned fire, though unsuccessfully so. A third bullet hit the ruffian in the chest and struck him to the ground. The chief constable then went over to him, but when he had got near the wounded man, the latter sat up

and fired another shot in the direction of his pursuer, who evaded it with a quick sideways jump, however. At that same moment the assistants, who had heard the shots, also advanced, whereupon one of them fired another bullet through the lower part of Pitung's back, which penetrated his body and exited through the abdomen. This shot put him out of action. He was immediately taken to the city hospital. To the unflattering remarks of the police assistants accompanying the transport Pitung replied by now and then singing a merry little song. As was already noted, he did not live much longer after that.]

Just before he died, Pitung asked for some *towak sama ijs*, palm wine with ice (quite a surprising last request from a Muslim bandit). According to a Dutch newspaper, this request was granted (*Lokomotief* 19-10-1893:2), whereas a Malay newspaper claimed that it was refused (*Hindia Olanda* 18-10-1893:2). Relatives of Pitung's came to carry the body away, after their request accordingly was initially refused. On Sunday, the day after his death, Pitung's body was finally taken to the cemetery of Kampung Baru at five in the afternoon. The above-mentioned Malay paper additionally wrote that Si Pitung had been seen at Pasar Senen, where he had had his hair cut, some hours before his death on the Saturday (*Hindia Olanda* 18-10-1893:2). This apparently irrelevant remark can be linked to the popular belief that his power had been destroyed by a haircut which we still come across in modern versions of the Si Pitung story (Damardini 1993:142).

Meanwhile, chief constable Hinne was having high praises heaped upon him. The medal he was subsequently awarded – the Broeder van de Nederlandsche Leeuw – was well-deserved, wrote *Hindia Olanda* (18-10-1893:2). The Dutch newspaper *Lokomotief* went even further than this, saying:

'Het gedrag van den heer Hinne in deze zaak is boven allen lof verheven. Nachten en nachten bleef hij in het kreupelhout verscholen om den schavuit te arresteeren, doch tevergeefs. Ruim 6 maanden heeft die kerel de politie aan den praat gehouden. Ieder was bang voor hem, en rilde reeds wanneer hij dien naam hoorde, en het volk leverde hem alles wat hij eischte.' (*Lokomotief* 19-10-1893:2.)

[Mr. Hinne's conduct cannot be too highly praised. He spent nights on end hiding in the undergrowth for the sake of arresting the rascal, but in vain. The fellow has kept the police busy for more than six months. Everyone was afraid of him and had the shivers at the very sound of his name, while the common people gave in to his every demand.]

A year later, when Hinne was promoted from chief constable of the district of Tanah Abang to superintendent of police for the metropolitan area of Batavia-Weltevreden, his successful arrest of Si Pitung was still mentioned as 'Een feit waartoe geen der anderen politie-beambten in staat bleek te zijn'¹⁰ [A feat which no other policeman proved capable of accomplishing].

¹⁰ MGS December 1893, Gewestelijk Bestuur Residentie Batavia, 16 November 1893, aan Z.E. den Gouverneur-Generaal van Nederlandsch-Indië, own page number 6.

Yet Pitung was not forgotten, either. At some point, his grave seems to have shown signs of becoming a place of pilgrimage, and the colonial government had to place a military guard at it to prevent this (*Hindia Olanda* 20-10-1893:2).

A letter to the editor in *Hindia Olanda* gives us another glimpse of the opinions about Si Pitung among the Batavian citizens. This letter was written in the form of a *pantun* (a traditional kind of poem of four-line stanzas) of 36 stanzas. This particular form, combined with the self-imposed censorship of the writer, who referred to himself as Kawa-Kawa (the Spider), makes the letter rather difficult to understand. The poem is about a robbery committed by somebody named Si Maoen at Kampung Fluit. Somewhere in the middle of the poem, Kawa-Kawa draws a comparison between Si Maoen, about whom he is rather negative, and Si Pitung, whom he describes with the word *tanggoe*, which may be translated as 'vigorous' or 'brave'. Talking about Si Maoen, he says:

'Terpaksa sebab di gantoeng,
Baroe dia taoe dia poenja oentoeng,
Seperti tanggoe kaija si Pitoeng,
Tida oeroeng kena di gotong.' (*Hindia Olanda* 14-11-1893:2.)

[Because he will be hanged,
And so will get his just deserts,
Just like the brave Si Pitung,
He is certain to be carried to his grave.]

Banditry in the Dutch East Indies

Si Pitung was obviously a colourful character. Yet, what can his story tell us about criminality in the Dutch East Indies?¹¹ Robbery in the rural districts generally escaped the attention of the colonial authorities, being a matter among natives (when Europeans were involved, it became a different thing altogether). This kind of rural banditry can be related to the phenomenon of the so-called *jago* in the socio-political arena of Java. The *jago* was a combination of local leader and bandit, whose status was based on physical strength and/or magical power. In olden times he might rise to a position of power at the local level, initially as a result of the weakness of the Javanese empire, and later on because of the ineffectiveness of the Dutch colonial apparatus at the lowest levels. The absence of a well-organized police force in most parts of the Javanese countryside forced the legitimate civilian rulers to look elsewhere for guarantees for peace and

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¹¹ Henk Schulte Nordholt in 1983 published an article with, among other things, a useful summary of what is known about banditry in the Dutch East Indies. Another important publication on banditry in the Dutch East Indies is that by Van Wulfften Palthe (1948).

order. This is where the *jago* stepped in. Like a Mafioso boss, the bandit offered protection to the village (partly through threats and partly through negotiations with other *jago*) in exchange for certain privileges: for example, freedom from taxation and from statute labour. And of course he was treated with consideration by the village people (Boekhoudt 1908:51-2).

A potential *jago* needed to be blessed with a strong constitution and probably also a mystical inclination. The candidate first became the apprentice of a *guru*, who taught him magic as well as the martial arts. Then he passed a period of asceticism and wandering before being accepted by the informal guild of *jago*. At this point the bandit had to concentrate on establishing a network of contacts among his future colleagues. Although he would often operate singly, his contacts with other *jago* were most important. Sometimes he would engage in joint actions with other *jago*, and not infrequently he had to negotiate with these to prevent their committing crimes in the area under his protection. The *jago* as a group constituted the main source of crime in the Javanese countryside, and their victims were almost invariably small farmers. Therefore there is reason to be sceptical about claims about the Robin Hood character of the *jago*.

Dutch authors of the colonial period writing about the *jago*¹² tend to refer to the ambivalent attitude towards this phenomenon – a mixture of fear and admiration – on the part of the indigenous population. The lack of any ethical kind of judgement of the doings of the *jago* may be an outcome of the Javanese concept of power, namely as something homogeneous and constant. Hence any discussion about the legitimacy of power is considered futile. In this context, the powerful *jago* is simply someone to admire or fear, not someone to judge.¹³

In the Si Pitung stories we can certainly identify a number of elements that are typical of *jagoism*. Pitung was skilled in magic and the martial arts. He used his magical powers to escape from prison. His reputation as a *jago* was established after his determined behaviour in the market place. In written sources we come across references to loose ties between the *jago* in Batavia. This criminal world did not exclude Chinese. Pitung's connections likewise included at least one Chinese.¹⁴

There are also some differences between the Pitung of the written sources and the bandits as depicted in the existing historical tradition. In contrast to the traditional bandit, the *jago* Pitung became 'visible' to the European citizens in the *residentie* Batavia. He received abundant coverage in the colonial newspapers, whereas his colleagues, operating further

¹² For example, Boekhoudt 1908, and Van Wulfften Palthe 1948.

¹³ On the concept of power in Javanese political theory, see Holt, Anderson and Siegel 1972.

¹⁴ Tangerang, 15-7-1893, assistant-resident Van der Ploeg aan de assistent-resident van Meester Cornelis, see file mentioned in note 7.

away from Batavia, remained unnoticed by the colonial authorities for ages. Pitung's victims no longer were only poor native farmers. The robberies of Hadji Sapiudin and Nyonya de C. indicate that a bandit like Si Pitung could not resist the wealth in the houses of the rich. Pitung's actions therefore also threatened the Europeans, indirectly or directly, so that from the viewpoint of the authorities it became imperative to stop him. From VOC times on, the colonial administration of Batavia and its immediate surroundings had lacked the typically feudal character of the remainder of Java. Therefore, after committing his crimes, Pitung was not confronted by a local ruler lacking the means to fight him, but by a determined chief constable who was directly supervised and supported by the highest civilian administrator in the capital.

Was Pitung also a charismatic leader, in the same way as some *jago* tended to be? Sartono Kartodirdjo, in his book *The peasants' revolt of Banten in 1888*, elaborates on the interaction between brigandage and religiously inspired revolts. Many bandits, robbers or *jago* paid at least lip service to revolutionary ideals, and some of them developed into leaders of insurrections against the colonial regime. Kartodirdjo also states, however, that in Banten, an area to the west of Jakarta, by the 1880s the involvement of bandits in rebel movements was minimal (Kartodirdjo 1966:111).

After his death, Pitung certainly was believed to have possessed special powers, as the pilgrimages to his grave testify. Even today there seem to be people in Jakarta who believe that he will return to fight against their oppressors and to free them from injustice (Koesasi 1992:6). But the available written sources contain no evidence that Pitung ever made any attempt to gain followers during his lifetime. The authorities, always afraid of insurrections, would certainly have mentioned any signs of potential political or religious rebelliousness.¹⁵ Perhaps Pitung himself was not convinced of his mission as a political or religious leader.

The police and Si Pitung

Si Pitung's enemy, the policeman A.W.V. Hinne, has featured in scholarly publications before. Already in Gerard Termorshuizen's article 'A murder in Batavia or the ritual of power', Hinne plays the role of a villain maltreating an Indonesian to make him confess to the murder of a European citizen (Termorshuizen 1993:143-5).

The European policemen in the Dutch East Indies were not exactly known for their civilized behaviour. It was their task to exercise authority over the citizens of European origin in the archipelago. In accordance with the strict dualism of the colonial administration, the native police protected and controlled only the local people. It was impossible for an Indonesian

¹⁵ The *Laporan-laporan* 1981, a compilation of sources on insurrections in Java in the 20th century, contain examples of how accurately Dutch officials reported on potential rebels.

policeman to arrest a European suspect. Cooperation between the two branches of the police force was not always smooth. The higher-ranking Indonesian officers frequently felt offended by the uncivilized behaviour of the European policemen, who were often former military men. The European policemen, on the other hand, accused their Indonesian colleagues of being lacking in energy (Boekhoudt 1908:244). Superficially, they may have had a point. The incompetence of the native police in dealing with, for example, bandits has already been mentioned. The village head in particular, who was responsible for maintaining law and order in his village, proved a weak link in the chain of authority. Often he had connections with criminal gangs himself, or was too afraid to make life difficult for criminals (Boekhoudt 1908:112).

The European police were almost without exception stationed in places with large European communities, such as Batavia. The community of the colonial capital in several respects was an exceptional case, however: it included many inhabitants of mixed origin and almost no traditional native gentry to rule over the indigenous people.¹⁶ Moreover, crime in the city tended to undermine the sense of security of the upper and middle classes. At the turn of the century, the colonial government therefore introduced a new means of combating banditry; besides the regular police force, it instituted the *marechaussee*, or military police (*Laporan-laporan* 1981:3; Cribb 1991:31). The new force made such an impression on the Indonesians that this period is still referred to today as the *zaman maresose* (period of the military police) to distinguish it from the previous *zaman kompenie* (Damardini 1993:150).

Despite the negative impression created by some of the descriptions of Hinne, he seems to have been quite successful at capturing bandits, and was therefore praised by the members of the colonial community and held in high regard by his superiors. The way Hinne fought crime in Batavia is reminiscent of the way law and order are established in a frontier town. The newspaper reports of the feud between Si Pitung and Hinne of those days read like the descriptions of duels between bandits and sheriffs in American Wild West towns. Hinne shines as a champion of peace and order. The determined attempts by the colonial authorities to rid the city of crime may have adversely affected Si Pitung's behaviour. His position as a *jago* was effectively undermined, whereas he had followers to satisfy. His behaviour became increasingly reckless; examples of this are his elimination of traitors and the robberies he staged to obtain loot for distribution among his people.

¹⁶ Resident Batavia aan Z.E. de Gouverneur-Generaal, 17 September 1910, in *Laporan-laporan* 1981:4.

Conclusion

By the end of the nineteenth century, the images presented of Si Pitung in the Dutch and Malay press were almost identical, that is, if *Hindia Olanda* may be considered representative of the local press. After his death, Pitung was quickly forgotten by the Dutch, but not by the Indonesians, as is apparent from the stories from that period which are still circulating in Jakarta. Si Pitung's character as described in these stories varies. Generally speaking, the admiration for Pitung's power is most prominent, whereas the question of his moral character is less important. The Indonesian cinema of the 1970s simplified Pitung as a Robin Hood figure, the Robin Hood theme being ever popular with audiences. In folk-literature and in state broadcasts in the early 1990s the rogue motif was underplayed so as to give the Pitung story extra moral value.

Indonesian Chinese gradually also became involved in presentations of the Si Pitung story, for example in the production of *lenong* plays and two movies. The nature of the relationship between them and Si Pitung remains unclear, however. Perhaps a link was established through their respective positions in the lowest rank of colonial society. In the melting pot that was Jakarta, there was ethnic mixing between Chinese and the indigenous population, though without automatic identification of the Chinese with indigenous Indonesian interests. The Chinese may have used their interest in Si Pitung to prove that they were real Betawi and genuine Indonesians. Motives of commercial gain may also have influenced Chinese interest in Si Pitung movies, however, resulting in the production of a bandit movie and a movie in which Si Pitung figures as a national hero.

The Si Pitung story helps to bring some differentiation into the general picture of crime in Java. In contrast to the traditional Javanese *jago*, the *jago* in the surroundings of Batavia became visible and a threat to the Europeans.

Most of the newspaper reports and other published accounts of Si Pitung *cum suis* have probably for the greater part been ignored until now. They indicate that Si Pitung really existed and was indeed as extraordinary a man as the person depicted in Indonesian oral tradition and cinematography. Just like the oral tradition, the papers mention, for example, the robbery at Hadji Sapiudin's, the escape from prison at Meester Cornelis, and the guarding of his grave. In the Indonesian stories there is a liberal resort to magic to explain a number of events, however, while in Dutch newspaper articles and government documents rational explanations prevail. Moreover, Si Pitung's special qualities in the fields of religious and social leadership to which the narratives allude are not mentioned in the written sources. However, the Si Pitung case does illustrate how Indonesian oral history may tally with the information contained in written sources from the colonial period.

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