Ravando

Dr. Oen, Pejuang dan Pengayom Rakyat Kecil. Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2017, 272, pp. ISBN 9786024122058. Price: IDR 71,200.00 (paperback).

Up until the present day, Indonesian Chinese people still occupy a marginal position in Indonesian historiography. The burgeoning historical studies and publications about this 'minority' since the fall of Suharto's New Order in 1998 have not substantially changed the 'historical fate' of this group. Their existence is still fairly unrepresented in the national curricula, historical textbooks, museums, and other forms of state-sponsored memorial institutions. So it is both frustrating and unsurprising that many Indonesians still hold such seemingly outdated perceptions about this group as 'economic animals', opportunistic, exclusive, etc. Ravando's book challenges these prejudices and stereotypes. The book is important for at least four reasons: first, it presents an extraordinary ethnic Chinese figure whose life, career, and dedication was antithetical to other ethnic Chinese in his time but also to present day Indonesians; second, it reveals other aspects of Indonesian Chinese history from a more 'humanist' perspective; third, it is written from the perspective of a young generation of historians of Indonesian Chinese; and fourth, it contributes appreciably to a 'more pluralistic-democratic' construction of Indonesian history.

The book successfully presents an extensive picture of Dr Oen Boen Ing, whose life spanned the important period of modern Indonesian history from the late colonial until the New Order period. It starts with a description of Oen Boen Ing's childhood, showing how he chose a different path of life from his father, a successful businessman. Oen found inspiration in his grandfather, a traditional Chinese physician and philanthropist, to go to medical school. However, according to Ravando, his grandfather initially opposed Oen's idea of becoming a doctor, worrying that Oen would become a 'materialist' doctor and profit off of the suffering of his patients. This view expresses more than a cultural or anachronistic perspective, since during that period a doctor was a highly market-oriented profession (see Hesselink 2011), which Oen's grandfather believed lacked the virtue of doctors adhering to traditional Confucian principles.

In any case, in 1923 Oen Boen Ing continued his education at STOVIA (School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen, or 'School for the Training of Native Physicians'). This was a very critical period, both for Oen and for Indonesia, when colonial society underwent a radical change. It was 'an age in motion' (Shiraishi 1990) due to the rise of activism among Indonesians, but also among ethnic Chinese (see Somers 1964). In keeping with the times, Oen Bing Ing immersed himself in Batavian cosmopolitanism, becoming part of the new generation of

educated ethnic Chinese, and becoming politically active. Ravando discusses in detail how the young Oen was inspired by the pan-Chinese nationalism joining the Chinese private hospital *Jang Seng Ie*, the Chinese youth organization, *Chung Hsioh*, and the Chinese student organization, *Chung Hsioh Tsa Chih/Ta Hsioh Sing Hui*. At the same time, Oen sat on the redaction board of *Orgaan der Centrale Chung Hsioh*, the official media of the *Chung Hsioh*, during which Oen actively wrote and shared his ideas mostly about Chinese nationalism. Unfortunately, Ravando mentions only briefly Oen's relationship with Indonesian student activists who later became prominent nationalist figures, without tracing further the origins of his sympathy to Indonesian Independence struggle in mid 1940s.

Such 'social-political activism' did not stop Oen from realizing his true ambition. In November 1932, he completed his study and graduated as a medical doctor. Dr Oen immediately started his career in Kediri by joining the *Gie Sing Wan* clinic, the medical division of *Hua Chiao Tsin Ning Hui*. In this city, Oen met Corrie Djie Nio, the daughter of Djie Thay Hien, the ethnic Chinese Major of Kediri, and in 1934 they married. After spending six years in Kediri, Oen and his wife moved to Surakarta, where he continued his service until the end of his life, going through difficult periods of regime change and political turmoil. As in other cities, in Surakarta Dr Oen got involved in social-philanthropic organizations, joining the *Ziekenzorg* hospital and *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan*, while providing medical service (often for free) to the city population in his own clinics, and becoming the family doctor of the Royal House of Mangkunegara.

After safely surviving the Japanese Occupation, Dr Oen displayed a historic and memorable role during the revolutionary period of 1945–1950. In the midst of social revolution and armed conflicts between Indonesian fighters and the Dutch army, Dr Oen risked his life to lead the Indonesian Red Cross and emergency hospital, to give medical treatments to the wounded Indonesian fighters at the front, and to smuggle medical supplies to Indonesians fighters, including to General Soedirman, the supreme commander of the Indonesian army, who was ill for Tuberculosis in his guerrilla war campaign. For his role, the Dutch intelligence service included his name on the list of 'dangerous persons' to be watched. While among Indonesians, he got respect as a patriotic doctor, a 'doctor specialist for everything' who could heal any kind of sickness and served everyone. That was also the reason why he was protected from the anti-Chinese persecutions that were rampant during this period, but also why he was not allowed to leave Surakarta until the war's end in 1950.

During the rest of his life, Dr Oen proved himself to be a 'man of integrity', that is, a doctor who consistently works for the sake of humanity, despite the changing regimes of various unfavorable political policies. In the 1950s, he

was more engaged in the socio-philanthropic organization *Chung Hua Tsung Hui* than politics, and to develop *Tsi Sheng Yuan*, later becomes Panti Kosala Hospital in Surakarta. When the issue of Chinese assimilation emerged in the mid 1950s and then the ban of Chinese culture after 1965, Dr Oen rejected the policy of compulsory name changes and insisted on keeping his original name. The example of Dr Oen's life teaches an important lesson about the viability of the multi-ethnic state of Indonesia: namely, that being 'Indonesian' is not about one's name or other particular ethnic attributes, but rather about different kinds of people making valuable contributions to society. Living in Surakarta, Dr Oen showed his affinity extended beyond local ethnic Chinese to the Javanese culture and to the Mangkunegaran Palace, for which he received a Javanese noble title *Kanjeng Raden Mas Tumenggung Obi Darmohoesodo* in 1993. And as a philanthropist, the biggest honor that Dr Oen received for his lifetime service is the love and heart of Surakarta and Indonesian people, who will always remember his legacy through the Dr Oen Hospital of Surakarta and, of course, through his many contributions chronicled in this book.

Despite the paucity of information on Dr Oen Boen Ing's personal life, (notably, regarding his wife Corrie Djie Nio), Ravando has presented a readable portrait of Dr Oen against the historical backdrop of Indonesia. He is right to emphasize Dr Oen as an example of an Indonesian Chinese figure who proves his 'Indonesianess' through a concrete social contribution; and to bring forward his 'humanist-philanthropist' activities as a righteous doctor who can be a model for present day physicians who struggle to provide care to ordinary people in Indonesia's neoliberal health system today. This book is a must-read for doctors in training, students of history, and surely as well, for all Indonesians.

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