

## Oei Hiem Hwie

*Memoar Oei Hiem Hwie: Dari Pulau Buru Sampai Medayu Agung*. Surabaya: Wastu Lanas Grafika, 2015, x + 258 pp. ISBN 9786028114561. For further information, contact Medayu Agung, tel. +62318703505, e-mail: perpus\_ma@yahoo.com.

Compared to biographies of “national heroes”, there are only a few biographies or memoirs dealing with the lives of Indonesia’s ethnic Chinese. This does not mean that the Chinese or *Tionghoa*—as I would like to address the Indonesian Chinese based on their own preference—have not made any contribution to the nation. On the contrary, it only reflects the exclusion of *Tionghoa* in our historiography, as a result of New Order policies directed against this particular ethnic group. However, some biographies on progressive *Tionghoa* individuals have succeeded in countering this legacy. Among them is Oei Tjoe Tat’s *Memoir* (Toer 1995), who was one of the Ministers under Sukarno. The other is Siauw Giok Tjhan, who was the head of BAPERKI (*Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia*; Deliberative Association for Indonesian Citizenship), an organization that emphasized the participation of the *Tionghoa* community in nation-building. Both Oei Tjoe Tat and Siauw Giok Tjhan were imprisoned after the so-called 30 September Movement (*Gerakan 30 September*) in 1965 because of their involvement in BAPERKI. The organization was accused of cooperating with the PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*; Indonesian Communist Party), which was blamed for the killings of six generals on October 1, 1965. This act has been repeatedly stressed by the state as a form of treachery by the communists, while excluding the resultant killings of around 500,000 Indonesians in the military-led anti-communist operations. This has made these biographies valuable, as they add a different narrative not only to the events of 1965, but also the role of *Tionghoa* in the formation of Indonesia.

Under these circumstances, *Memoar Oei Hiem Hwie: Dari Pulau Buru Sampai Medayu Agung* (The Memoir of Oei Hiem Hwie: From Buru to Medayu Agung) is a major contribution to Indonesia’s historical narrative. While Oei Tjoe Tat and Siauw Giok Tjhan were both political elite figures and spent most of their activities in government bodies, Oei Hiem Hwie was a journalist in the Surabaya-based newspaper *Trompet Masyarakat* and a BAPERKI activist in Malang. His experience in the region is precisely the most appealing element of his memoir, which was not very much exposed in the previous two memoirs. Hwie’s memoir does not focus much on elite political dynamics; instead he manages to describe the story of everyday life in Malang, including local dynamics which are not usually captured within accounts of centralized national politics.

Hiem Hwie was born in Malang, on November 26, 1935 in a family who owned a small grocery store in Malang's Chinatown. The first part of his memoir described his family's experience during the Japanese occupation and the Indonesian revolution. His childhood experiences were informed by his parents' covert resistance acts. For example, when the Japanese ordered cessation of jewelries in order to finance their government, Hwie's father hid his mother's jewelry in a wall in order to avoid 'strengthening fascist power in Indonesia and China'. His father also managed to hide a commandant of the Chinese Kuomintang organization during the Japanese occupation. Hiem Hwie then retells his experiences in Malang, a city that was scorched by the Dutch during the Revolution. He recalls the Chinese Malang Red Cross (*Palang Merah Tionghoa Malang*) who distributed food and medicine, and treated the victims in different districts in the Malang regency. The interesting part in this section is Hwie's description of the racist tensions during the Revolution. He shows that although the elites of the military and the Chinese Youth Generation (*Angkatan Muda Tionghoa*) already held a successful meeting, fights between Tionghoa and the Indonesian "natives" often occurred in the streets. Tionghoa were widely accused of supporting the Dutch army, which became the reason for most anti-Chinese violence during the Revolution.

The second part of the memoir focuses on Hwie's organizational work, especially his activities for BAPERKI Malang and his journalistic work for *Trompet Masyarakat*. He was impressed by BAPERKI's mission to be involved in Indonesia's nation-building process, and one of the organization's means was to provide educational institutions for the Tionghoa. In 1963, BAPERKI Surabaya built their first university, Universitas Res Publica (*Ureca*), to accommodate young Chinese-Indonesians who had completed their education in Chinese high schools but could not be admitted to existing state universities because of the 10% quota of ethnic Chinese in those places. Ureca is a prototype of a university built with communal work by various different people. The land for Ureca Jakarta in Grogol, for example, was given by Jakarta's governor Sumarno. Ureca in Surabaya was built through public donations, and Hiem Hwie was involved in manufacturing the fences around these sites. Moerachman, Surabaya's major at that time, became the rector of Ureca. Meanwhile, an Ureca branch in Malang was planned to be built in early 1965. But the plan evaporated along with the 1965 violence, which not only meant the end of BAPERKI, but also the confiscation of all the land intended for Ureca.

Hwie's detailed account becomes especially precious in the third part of his memoir, in which he describes his experiences in 1965. A few days after G30S in Jakarta, Hiem Hwie was assigned by the head of East Java's branch of BAPERKI, Siauw Giok Bie, to visit all Baperki branches in the Malang regency.

All of the branch chairmen were requested to avoid detention and maintain their organizational work. Using public transportation, Hwie experienced—and depicted—the tense situation in the region. For example, he encountered a group of civilians dressed in Madurese clothing and carrying traditional sharp weapons. From a conversation in a nearby food stall, Hwie was informed that those men had been assigned to kill PKI members. He realized from his journey that members of the PKI and other affiliated organizations were very passive and did not resist, and therefore, he believed that PKI could not have been involved in G30S. Following the arrest and disappearance of other BAPERKI leaders in East Java, Hwie himself was arrested, and later on transferred to a detention camp in Batu, another district in the Malang regency. In January 1966, he was moved to a prison in the city of Malang, and a year later sent to the island Buru together with more than 200 other prisoners. Hwie provides detailed descriptions of his experiences in each of these detention camps: the people he met, the food, the activities, conversations, visits from his mother, survival attempts on Buru, and his friendship with the famous author Pramoedya Ananta Toer on that island. It was not until 1978 that Hwie and other prisoners were released from Buru.

The last part of his memoir recorded his struggle as an ex-political prisoner, starting from his work as a salesman, then as a private secretary of a well-known businessman, and later his success in establishing a public library called Medayu Agung in Surabaya. This library is itself an interesting initiative reminiscent of the communal character of Ureca. Its collections and infrastructure were the result of donations from politicians, overseas Indonesian Chinese, and the children of the 1965 victims. Also included is Hwie's private collection that survived military ransacking and had been hidden by his sister. Medayu Agung also kept the original manuscript of Pramoedya's magnum opus that was secretly smuggled out from Buru.

When I visited Oei Hiem Hwie in mid-2016 at his Medayu Agung library, he gave me one of the copies of his memoir. I was going to pay for the book, but he explained that it was not for sale. He has only printed 100 copies which are distributed through Medayu Agung's network. In our conversation, he also mentioned a visit by a district military officer a few weeks earlier, with the purpose of determining whether his collection contains leftist publications. (Although Hiem Hwie indeed has many such publications, the officer did not take further actions towards him or Medayu Agung.)

In the light of these pressures, Hwie's memoir can be considered a valuable source for Indonesian history for several reasons. Hwie's stories of everyday life in Malang show local dynamics, which may differ considerably from national dynamics, and readers can learn about the effects of certain govern-

ment policies on people's lives. His activity in BAPERKI highlights the ways Tionghoa tried to contribute to the nation. Ideas promoted by BAPERKI, such as Ureca, rely heavily on cultural and educational strategies through community involvement. His memoir can thus offer inspiration for further strategies and ideas to tackle diversity problems in Indonesia. Finally, Hwie's memoir provides detailed stories of violence in 1965–1966, especially on killings and detentions. It provides a valuable source for regionally-focused studies of this violence, and dismisses the propagandistic portrayal of PKI as a dangerous threat to the nation. On the contrary, as Hwie argues, it was the PKI who became the target of massive violence. *Memoar Oei Hiem Hwie* is a well-written historical source that Indonesian Studies researchers should take into account.

*Grace Leksana*

KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies

*leksana@kitlv.nl*

### References

- Siauw Tjong Djinn and Joesoef Isak (1999), *Siauw Giok Tjhan: Riwayat perjuangan seorang patriot membangun nasion Indonesia dan masyarakat Bhineka Tunggal Ika*. Jakarta: Hasta Mitra.
- Toer, Pramoedya Ananta and Stanley Adi Prasetyo (1995), *Memoar Oei Tjoe Tat: Pembantu Presiden Soekarno*. Jakarta: Hasta Mitra.