Book Reviews


Daradjadi is a man with a mission. Born as KRMH Daradjadi Gondodiprodjo into the noble Mangkunegaran family of Surakarta, he has been familiar with the history of the origin of this principality from a young age. When he was a child, his mother used to sing him a lullaby. One of its lines was ‘Alun-alun Kartasura geger kepati’ (There was a riot at the town square of Kartasura). His history teacher at elementary school told his students during a study tour to the palace of Surakarta that it was once destroyed by Chinese troops (2008: xiii).

The boy grew into a man who was intrigued by the story. It motivated him to learn more about this *gerer kepati*. He discovered that there was a time that the Chinese fought together with the Javanese against the troops of the Dutch East Indies Company, the VOC. This Sepanjang War, called Geger Pacinan in Javanese, began in 1740 and ended in 1743. ‘A tale for my grandchildren’, is Daradjadi’s dedication. But *Geger Pacinan* is not a fairy-tale. Consisting of ten chapters, a prologue and an epilogue, it tells the story of the alliance of the Chinese and Javanese warriors in the fight against the VOC and the Mataram and Madura troops, who were also engaged in skirmishes between them. *Geger Pacinan* is a revised edition of *Perang Sepanjang 1740-1743; Tionghoa-Jawa lawan VOC* (2008) (The Sepanjang War 1740-1743, Chinese-Javanese Against VOC). The cover displays a painting of the Sepanjang War that can be seen in the *kelenteng* Cu Hwie Kiong in Rembang. It features Chinese and Javanese warriors, recognizable from their headgear and weapons, fighting against the VOC army.

The reader is provided with a sixteen-page chronology in the book as well as a shorter one on a loose leaf, to guide him through the events. The loose leaf one is accompanied by a map, indicating the places where the battles took place, with numbers that refer to the description of the events,
making it possible to see the magnitude of the war at a single glance. The chronologies begin with the year 1690, when the VOC established a quota for Chinese immigrants who came to the Archipelago. They describe the Sepanjang War, following the victories and losses of the Javanese-Chinese troops in their battles against the VOC soldiers, who were assisted, by choice or by force, by indigenous troops.

Vital roles in these battles are played by Raden Mas Said and Sunan Kuning (the Yellow Sunan), an alias for Raden Mas Garendi, who was crowned Sunan Amangkurat V, King of Mataram, when he was sixteen years of age. Presumably, he got the name Sunan Kuning because he had an army of Chinese soldiers. Raden Mas Garendi was a grandson of Sunan Amangkurat III. He became the opponent of Paku Buwono II, an uncle of his, who was the legitimate ruler of the Mataram Kingdom. Paku Buwono II is portrayed as a hesitant king, vacillating between supporting the Chinese and fighting against them. Like Raden Mas Garendi, Raden Mas Said had personal reasons to oppose Paku Buwono II. He was a grandson of Amangkurat IV. Raden Mas Said fought on the side of the Chinese, who were led by Singseh and Sepanjang. After separating from them, Raden Mas Said continued the struggle.

In 1740 thousands of Batavian Chinese city dwellers were slaughtered by the Dutch. Then and there Sepanjang led a Chinese army who battled against the VOC. This rather mysterious figure is said to be a half-brother of the Chinese emperor, Kian Liong. Suspected of planning a revolt, he was banned from China. The VOC called him Khe Panjang. Khe of Singkek is a general name for Chinese who just arrived from their homeland. Sepanjang led his army of Chinese, often reinforced by Javanese troops, from Batavia in the west to Blambangan in the east, on the far end of Java. In the domain of Mataram, Singseh or Tan Sin Ko joined forces with Sepanjang.

In the Prologue, Daradjadi expresses his hope that knowledge of the Chinese-Javanese war will ‘reduce the levels of suspicion arising between the bumiputra and the ethnic Chinese. Other than that, the historical facts are useful in recognition of the role of the ethnic Chinese in the national struggle. It feels a bit absurd that [. . .] Mangkunegara I has received the title of national hero, but the nation does not know the Chinese warrior who fought beside him against the VOC’ (p. xxvi).

Geger Pacinan is a valuable and important addition to the books that have been written on the Chinese Indonesians since the Reformasi. Their