

# Between ideology and experience

## Siauw Giok Tjhan's legacy to his daughter Siauw May Lie

MAYA H.T. LIEM AND ING LWAN TAGA-TAN

### ABSTRACT

The principal objective of this article is to focus on the life-story of Siauw May Lie and her views about her past. She is the daughter of the well-known, influential politician, Siauw Giok Tjhan. Between 1945 and 1965 Siauw Giok Tjhan was member of the Parliament of the Indonesian Republic and chairman of Baperki (Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia, 1954-1965). Her life-story fits into the category of respondents with a cumulative migration history. As the Chinese Indonesian Heritage Center (CIHC) of the KITLV believes that the recording of life-stories is a valuable addition to the collection of material heritage, the interview with Siauw May Lie about her life and opinions is an example of the interviews and part of the research conducted by the Oral History Project of the CHIC.

### KEYWORDS

(oral) history; Indonesian Chinese; biography.

### CIHC ORAL HISTORY PROJECT AND INTERVIEWS WITH SIAUW MAY LIE

The principal objective of this article is to focus on the life-story of Siauw May Lie as the daughter of the well-known Indonesian politician Siauw Giok Tjhan, and the way she looks at her past.

Siauw May Lie (1943) grew up in Indonesia imbued with the ideals of her father, Siauw Giok Tjhan, a politician in the nascent Republic of Indonesia and chairman of Baperki from its establishment in 1954 until its demise in 1965. From her father, she learned that Indonesian Chinese belong to the society and are obliged to integrate into their homeland. From early

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childhood, she was also inculcated with the spirit of her father's socialistic ideals: Soberness in private life, service to society, and equality for all. In 1960 she was given the chance to study in China and remained there until 1978. Her personal experience of the Cultural Revolution made her realize that the ideals propagated by socialism and communism were a utopia. Although this marked a turning-point in her life, she has always been faithful to the basic principle of her father's ideology: Remain faithful to your homeland Indonesia and its society. Although Siau May Lie moved to the Netherlands in 1978, she decided to return to Indonesia in 2013. Before she left, Siau May Lie (Picture 1) agreed to be interviewed as a participant in the Oral History Project of the Chinese Indonesian Heritage Center (CIHC) because she had an important message to pass on: The past educates us in the ways to build a better society.

If what I am going to tell you might be of use, because from history we learn to build a better society [...], I am agreeable to it. The important thing is not just to record facts which happened in the past, but to learn from mistakes and not repeat them in the future.<sup>1</sup>



Picture 1. Siau May Lie, Amsterdam, 2013 (photograph by Ing Lwan Taga-Tan).

The Chinese Indonesian Heritage Center (CIHC), established in 2011, focuses on Chinese from Indonesia who have settled permanently in the Netherlands. Why is this target group so interesting? After all, the group it concerns is relatively small, about 18,000 people, including the fourth generation (Rijkschroeff, The, and Verlaan 2010: 97). Nevertheless, the research of Li Min

<sup>1</sup> “Als wat ik jou verteld heb nuttig zou kunnen worden, want we leren van de geschiedenis om beter te kunnen voortzetten de bouw van de maatschappij in educatie, maatschappelijk en de economie, en in de politiek dan vind ik dat wel goed. Het gaat niet alleen om de feiten die ooit gebeurd zijn op schrift te stellen, zodat het niet zomaar vergeten wordt, maar ook een les voor de volgende periode, dat de fouten en de ellende niet herhaald worden”. (Interview with Siau May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.)

Huang (1998: 170) shows that this tiny minority is interesting for many reasons. The group is composed of the Chinese who have come to the Netherlands in various waves of migration during the past century and have settled here permanently. The Chinese from Indonesia have adapted the best to the Dutch society: Culturally and socially. Their smooth integration is signalled by their use of the Dutch language, their life-style, and their professional careers. When all these accomplishments are taken into consideration, this minority is considered the least “problematic” migrant group in the Netherlands. However, there is a lurking danger: From the perspective of the preservation of cultural heritage and historical awareness, good integration can be disadvantageous if, from both internally inside the group and also externally from Dutch society, no attention is paid to the cultural and historical background of this group. This smooth integration can lead to the complete loss of cultural heritage. Moreover, the lack of attention paid to this group might also result in the loss of a segment of the colonial and postcolonial history of the Netherlands and of Indonesia, of which the Chinese are a part. The small number of publications about the Peranakan Chinese in the Netherlands bears witness to the scant attention paid to this group up to the present. An inventarization produces just a short list of twenty titles at the most, including the studies by Van Galen (1989), Li Minhuang (1998), Rijkschroeff, The, and Verlaan (2010), and the memoirs and biographies of such figures as Oei Hong Kian (1998), Anny Tan (Blussé 2000), Kwee Hin Goan (Kwee 2004), P.J. Thung (Thung 2004), Hiu Pay-Uun (Hiu 2008), Yap Tjok King (Yap Kioe Bing 2011), Han Hwie-song (Han 2012), and Lu See Lee (Lu 2014), set against the backdrop of the political developments which have influenced their lives. The CIHC believes that the recording of life-stories is a valuable addition to the collection of material heritage, because both initiatives will contribute towards a deeper knowledge and understanding of the experiences of the group, its migration history, and the significance of the group in the colonial and postcolonial history of both the Netherlands and Indonesia. The project is supported by the KITLV (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies), which also conducted an oral history project on Indonesia (SMGI, Stichting Mondelinge Geschiedenis Indonesië) between 1997 and 2001. The CIHC interviews were not held by asking a list of specific questions, but focused on three key issues: Why did you leave Indonesia? How was your country of emigration determined? How do you look back on your life? In the choice of respondents, the project has striven for as wide a variety as possible in education, profession, gender, birthplace in Indonesia as well as current address in the Netherlands.

#### RESULTS OF THE CIHC ORAL HISTORY PROJECT SO FAR

Between 2013-2016 the project has conducted 26 interviews. In 2016 sixteen interviewees were older than 80 years of age (born before 1936), five persons were between 70 and 80 years of age (born between 1936-1946), and four persons were younger than 70 years of age.

Their periods of arrival in the Netherlands are presented in Table 1, including professions and cumulative migration countries.

Period	Numbers (Male, Female)	Profession	Cumulative
1945-1949	4 (M)	economist, physician, engineer, lawyer	
1950-1959	3 (2 M, 1 F)	restaurant-owner, architect	Brazil
1960-1969	13 (4 M, 9 F)	lawyer, dentist, sociologist, entrepreneur, astronomer, engineer, housewife	Suriname, People's Republic of China
1970- ...	6 (4M, 2 F)	physician, bank employee, engineer	People's Republic of China, Vietnam, Germany

Table 1. Periods of interviewees' arrivals in the Netherlands.

The number of interviews is insufficient to draw firm conclusions. Nevertheless, the answers to the three key questions have revealed the following:

#### *Period 1945-1949*

Four respondents came to the Netherlands for their studies and have stayed for the remainder of their lives. They look back on their lives with satisfaction. All three respondents chose to stay in the Netherlands.

#### *Period 1950-1959*

One respondent was still a child when she moved to the Netherlands and the other came to the Netherlands as a student. Although he completed his studies, he remained because his parents also came to the Netherlands and began a restaurant and a shop, which he helped to run.

#### *Period 1960-1969*

This group consists of two generations. Four respondents of the older generation had already lived in the Netherlands as a child or studied there, returned to Indonesia, and returned to the Netherlands because of the

deterioration in their quality of life. The younger generation also left Indonesia for the same reasons. The reasons mentioned were: Peraturan Pemerintah/PP 10 (Government Regulation 10) in 1960; the student riots in Bandung in 1963; G30S and the persecution of Baperki members in 1965, plus harassment in public places and the lack of access to higher education for their children. For the majority, the Netherlands was the obvious country of migration because of their previous experience of having lived or studied there. On the whole, the respondents in this period are satisfied with life in the Netherlands, but not all respondents feel completely at home. Ties with family in Indonesia are still close, and the extended family life still also plays an important part in their social life in the Netherlands. The respondents are grateful that their children have been able to have a good education and are integrated into Dutch society.

#### *Period 1970 -*

Four of the six respondents have migrated to the Netherlands via another country. Two migrated first to the People's Republic of China, one to former North Vietnam, and one to Germany before settling in the Netherlands. The respondents look back with mixed feelings. Although at home in the Netherlands, the respondents feel more Chinese or Indonesian than Dutch.

Generally speaking, most of the younger respondents would have preferred to remain in Indonesia, but the political developments, combined with reduced legal security and social wellbeing, have turned the Netherlands into their second home.

Siauw May Lie (1943, Malang),<sup>2</sup> belongs to the respondents in the last group. Her life-story reflects the category of respondents with a cumulative migration history. She studied medicine in China, lived in the Netherland from 1978 to 2013, where she ran a successful acupuncture practice, but decided to move back to Indonesia, where she now resides in Jakarta. Siauw was interviewed at her home in Amsterdam, a fortnight before she left, but she graciously gave us her time during three interview sessions, which resulted in 4 hours of interview.

From the beginning, she emphasized that she was less concerned with her own life and with the political and public life of her father than with the life lessons he taught her from early childhood. Secondly, she explained in depth about the lessons she learned during her life in China. Initially, she believed that socialism and communism were the best ideologies on which to build a new world, but later she witnessed the failure of these systems in China. A less tumultuous time in the Netherlands followed and gave her the opportunity to look back at the past and, with lessons learned, to continue to strive for a better and fairer society. Importantly, in the interview a broader picture of cumulative migration of the Chinese from Indonesia, who came to the Netherlands via other countries, is sketched. In this way the objective of

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Siauw May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.



the CIHC Oral History Project, namely: To acquire a better understanding of the history of migration of Indonesian Chinese in the Netherlands through individual life stories, is being achieved.

Part of this article is dedicated to Siauw Giok Tjhan because his personal life, his political career, and his involvement in the destiny of the Chinese in Indonesia has greatly influenced and continue to influence the course of his daughter's life and affect the choices she made. The main sources of information for this overview are Siauw's own autobiography, *Lima jaman* (1984, first print 1981), and the thesis of his son, Siauw Tiong Djin, *Bicultural leader in emerging Indonesia* (1999). The memories of his daughter fill in the personal aspects of his life, which have been expanded on by the memories of Tjoa A Li (1943),<sup>3</sup> friend of the family from early childhood. A Li is the son of Tjoa Sik Ien (1907-1987),<sup>4</sup> who was the early adulthood mentor of Siauw Giok Tjhan (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 46). Their families were close, especially during the Republican years in Yogyakarta. This second perspective turned out to be a valuable addition to add depth to May Lie's life-story, especially about her early childhood. We are indebted to Tjoa A Li for his co-operation. We should also like to thank Go Gien Tjwan (1920),<sup>5</sup> good friend of Siauw Giok Tjhan since the war years in Malang and closely involved in the formation and expansion of Baperki, for agreeing to be interviewed as well.

In 1943 when Siauw May Lie first saw the light of day, there was no Indonesia, and the government of the Netherlands East Indies had under duress ceded the power of its dominion to the Japanese invaders in 1942, not long before the family in which Siauw May Lie would grow up had moved from Semarang to Malang. This move was a response to the activities and work of her father, who was being hampered by the presence of the Japanese in the Netherlands East Indies. Later it turned out that May Lie's father had been decisive not only in the choice of the place in which she was born and grew up, but that he also put a significant stamp on her upbringing and the course

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Tjoa, A Li (73 years), Purmerend, 4-5-2016 (interview by Ing Lwan Taga-Tan).

<sup>4</sup> Tjoa Sik Ien (Surabaya 1907-1987) was educated at Leiden University. In 1932 he and two other Peranakan students founded the Sarekat Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia as a counterpart to the Chung Hwa Hui (CHH)-Netherlands. After finishing his medical studies, he returned to Indonesia. In 1939 he served as the president of the central board of the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (PTI) and editor-in-chief of *Sin Tit Po*. During the movement for Indonesian independence, he was involved in the SOS (Servant of Society) and supported the side of the Indonesian Republicans. In 1949 he was a delegate of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations. From 1950 to an unknown date he served as the director of Republic (Surabaya). In 1959 he was appointed as a member of the Dewan Perancang Nasional (National Planning Council), which represented Indonesian citizens of foreign descent (Suryadinata 1995: 207).

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Go Gien Tjwan (95 years), Amstelveen, 4-4-2016. Go Gien Tjwan (Malang 1920) received a master's degree in Sociology from the Rijksuniversiteit Leiden and PhD in Sociology from the Vrije Universiteit (Brussels 1962). 1945: leading member of Angkatan Muda Tionghoa; 1952: head of Antara Amsterdam branch; 1955: head of Antara News Agency; 1954-1955: secretary-general of the central board of Baperki; 1963-1966 lecturer at the URECA (Universitas Res Publica, Jakarta). After the 1965 Coup, he went to the Netherlands where he was appointed lecturer at University of Amsterdam and retired in 1985 (Suryadinata 1995: 23).

of her life. To understand this, it is necessary to offer a brief explanation of what Siauw Giok Tjhan's activities were and what kind of social and political conditions prevailed. Taking pride of place is what is known as "Chinese Issue" because this is a scarlet thread which ran through the life of Siauw Giok Tjhan.

#### PERIOD PRIOR TO 1943: "THE CHINESE ISSUE"

May Lie is the second child of Siauw Giok Tjhan and his wife, Tan Gien Hwa, both of Chinese descent. May Lie's father was descended from a Hokkien family which had lived in the archipelago for several generations and had adapted to the cultural life of the locals. May Lie's mother was also descended from a Hokkien family. In the pre-war period, the position of the Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies was already problematic, as has been pointed out in earlier books and studies (Siauw Giok Tjhan 1981; Coppel 1983; Siauw Tiong Djin 1999). In the first place, it was anchored in the lingering socio-cultural problems of integration into and assimilation with the local population, the consequences of which can be felt even to this day. Coppel (1983: 13) writes that, despite the acculturation of the Chinese with local traditions, the Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies were always treated as a separate social group, and this was one of the main reasons that real integration or assimilation was out of the question, even after the colonial period. These issues were very close to the heart of Siauw Giok Tjhan, and throughout his life he continued to dedicate himself to the Chinese population's rightful claim for a place in the new Republic of Indonesia, a commitment for which, both within his family and outside, he has won high praise and great admiration, but at the expense of his personal life (of which more later).

The fact that the integration and/or assimilation of Chinese was difficult, Coppel (1983: 13) blames on colonial policy. In a nutshell, Coppel asserts, the main barrier was formed by the segregation policy which divided the Netherlands East Indies society into three distinct groups, namely: Europeans; Foreign Orientals; and the natives, all of whom had different rights and privileges. The Chinese were assigned to the group Foreign Orientals which gave them better social, economic and legal standing than the natives. Coppel maintains that, no matter how great the Chinese people's wish to assimilate with the locals might have been, it was hampered at every turn by the colonial segregation policy. Assimilation would mean an immediate drop in social status.

Another factor which hampered integration and/or assimilation was called the *passen- en wijkenstelsel* (pass and district system), which remained in operation until 1919. This system obliged Chinese to live in segregated quarters and require a pass to leave those areas. Even Chinese who had already been fully integrated and lived with the locals were obliged to move to the Chinese districts, making contact with the locals almost totally out of the question (Coppel 1983: 14). One argument which was always used for the establishment and maintenance of this system was that it supposedly protected indigenous people from the Chinese (Tjiok-Liem 2009: 643); an

argument which needless-to-say was entirely based on negative perceptions of the Chinese.

The Chinese were regarded by the Netherlands East Indies government as “a problem”, not least because it had a great deal to fear from this group commercially. Although, since the time of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the Chinese (especially those appointed Chinese officers) had been of great importance to the colonial government because of their intermediary role in trade and tax collection - a role which cast them in the light of the “accomplices of the colonial government” - after the retraction of the opium monopoly in 1896, followed in rapid succession of other monopolies, a growth in their trading activities in order to restore their loss of income from the opium lease subsequently gave the colonial authorities pause to think.

In her thesis, Tjiok-Liem (2009: 45) indicates that the end of the monopolies can be seen as a “caesura” in the history of the Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies. Not only did this put an end to the dubious status of the Chinese elite as the “accomplices” of the colonial government, it also offered the Chinese a more or less clear track to oppose the restrictive and discriminatory measures imposed on them. This was the prevailing situation during the so-called “emancipation struggle” of the Chinese at the late-nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a period in which they began to express their dissatisfaction with the extremely restrictive *passen- en wijkstelsel* (pass and district system), their “unsatisfactory” status, lack of educational opportunities, etcetera. Fortuitously, this “emancipation struggle” occurred virtually the same time as the time at which the government in China was beginning to show an interest in the fate of overseas Chinese. The growth of this concern was accompanied by an intensification of contacts between the Chinese government and Chinese citizens in the Netherlands East Indies through the appointment of consuls and the determination under Chinese law, which came into effect in 1909, by which all people descended from a Chinese father were considered “Chinese subjects” (*ius sanguinis*).

Anxious to ensure that in particular the Chinese who were born in the Netherlands East Indies (known as the Peranakan Chinese) were not made subject to the laws of China and seek refuge with the Chinese government, the colonial government put in place various measures to satisfy the demands of the Chinese people. Among other amendments, the colonial government (1910-1919) introduced the phased dismantlement of the hated “pass and district system” and introduced improvements into the status of the Chinese: In 1824, the rights of the Chinese were made completely equal to those of the indigenous population; in 1917 the Chinese population of the Netherlands East Indies was included under European law (family and inheritance law) (Tjiok-Liem 2009: 641-642). However, this still did not mean that there was full legal equality with the European population.

One measure which was certainly not appreciated was the constitutional position of the Dutch-Indonesian Chinese. Whereas the natives, and with them the Chinese, had been legally Dutch before 1892, after the introduction



of the *Wet op het Nederlandschap* (Netherlands Nationality Act) in 1892, which deprived them of Dutch citizenship, they had in fact become “foreigners”. When the colonial government began to fear the effect of the influence of China on the Chinese citizens in the Netherlands East Indies, in 1910, the *Wet op het Nederlands Oonderdaanschap* (Act on Dutch Citizenship) was passed, under which both natives and the Chinese born in the Netherlands East Indies were considered “Dutch subjects - non-Dutch” (*ius soli*) or by birthright only. This new law placed the Chinese people in a double constitutional position, namely: Chinese nationality, defined under *ius sanguinis* and “Dutch subjects - non-Dutch”, defined by *ius soli* (Tjiook-Liem 2009: 522). Many Chinese regarded the position in which the latter placed them as disadvantageous, since they were thereby deprived of an important part of the backing they were receiving from China to endorse their demands for improved status and the attainment of legal security in the Netherlands East Indies. The passing of the Act on Dutch Citizenship was considered to be a forcible incorporation into a Dutch state union without having achieved any improvement in their legal position.

The situation of the Chinese was made even more humiliating because the Japanese had already been entirely assimilated with Europeans by law since 1899; a privilege denied the Chinese. Japan, which was considered to be at war with China, was just as much an enemy of the Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies. Full assimilation of Chinese with Europeans was still disallowed, ostensibly to prevent any such decree leading to feelings of discontent among the indigenous population. In fact, this new law would actually increase the alienation between the Chinese and the indigenous peoples because the feelings of disgruntlement and the nascent and waxing nationalist sentiments fostered by the Chinese population united them more comprehensively as a Group, emphasizing its own cultural identity distinct from that of the local population. When it is all said and done, the Act of Dutch Citizenship actually succeeded in bolstering segregation.

In the field of education, the colonial government also took measures to curb the growing influence of China within its boundaries. In 1900, as an expression of dissatisfaction about the disadvantages of the Chinese people in comparison to the Europeans, the Chinese association *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan* (THHK), with which schools were affiliated, was established. The principal goal of the association was: A return to Chinese cultural traditions; a return to Confucianism. At THHK schools, the children were taught to read and write the Chinese language in order to read books on Confucianism. What began as a cultural aspiration later burgeoned into an emancipatory movement, providing education for Chinese young people, in a determined effort to eliminate the educational backlog in contrast to the children of Europeans. This move was supported by China (Tjiook-Liem 2009: 49-50). Chinese teachers were even sent to strengthen the ties between Chinese children and China. As a counter-measure, in 1908, the colonial government founded the first Dutch-Chinese schools at which Chinese children would be given a Dutch education. This move was made not only to meet the demands of the Chinese

people, but also to curtail their orientation towards China and to loosen their bonds with the Chinese Nationalist movement.

Developments in the years after 1920 would reveal how effective these measures were in splintering the unity of the Chinese people. Although the quest for equality was still steadfastly pursued, the China-based group (in the form of the Sin Po Group) began to diminish in strength and size, thwarted by the emergence of an elite who had enjoyed a Dutch education, often followed by tertiary study in the Netherlands. This group was represented by the students of the Chung Hwa Hui society established in the Netherlands, who did not expect any support from China in their efforts to improve the position of the Chinese and their demand for equality with Europeans. Therefore they confined their search for a solution to means available within the colonial framework. Furthermore, as the striving for Indonesian nationalism strengthened, a small group arose which sought contact with the Indonesian nationalists and were proponents of the integration of (Peranakan) Chinese with the natives. This group, which was founded in 1932, was called the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia (PTI, Chinese-Indonesian Party) and it attracted the sympathy of Siauw Giok Tjhan. Thereafter he dedicated the largest part of his life to the realization of the ideals of this group and other organizations which championed this cause. He was one of the visionaries who recognized that, for the majority of these Netherlands East Indies or Indonesian-born Chinese, their homeland was no other place than that in which they had been born; the many problems, tragedies, and human lives sacrificed notwithstanding.

#### SIAUW GIOK TJHAN

In order to paint a picture of the life of Siauw Giok Tjhan and how he left a lasting mark on the lives of his children, particularly on his daughter May Lie, with his ideas, a great deal of information has been retrieved from *Lima jaman* (1984), the autobiography in which Siauw Giok Tjhan writes in detail about his own life, the problems of the Chinese in Indonesia, his ideals, and the solutions which he had tried to imagine. Another large slice of information has been extracted from the thesis of his son, Siauw Tiong Djin (1999), in which he writes a political biography of his father. These two sources seem to be the two documents *par excellence* which preserve the memories of Siauw Giok Tjhan and his ideals and through which these can be transmitted to his descendants. Where these two documents need to be supplemented, other sources have been incorporated.

Born in Surabaya in 1914, Siauw Giok Tjhan grew up in a multicultural world. His father was from a Hokkien family and his mother from a Hakka family. Although they were familiar with Confucianism and Chinese traditions, they also showed an interest in the local culture and lived in the fashion of many Peranakan Chinese: They spoke Malay, dressed as locals and adapted to Javanese habits, liked eating Indonesian food, and enjoyed gamelan music and wayang performances (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 28-29).

When they came to consider the education of their children, Siauw Giok

Tjhan's parents chose a Dutch education. Consequently Siauw attended a European Primary School (ELS) and the HBS. However, the not inconsiderable influence of his grandfather, Kwan Sie Liep, had also taught the young Siauw much about China. In his younger years Kwan, a first generation (*totok*) Chinese trader, had been a fervent supporter of Chinese nationalism and held the office of Chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (Tiong Hoa Hwee Siang) in Surabaya. Tiong Hoa Hwee Siang meetings, in which the young Siauw helped out, were regularly held in his shop. In this fashion, Siauw Giok Tjhan became acquainted with the world of (*totok*) Chinese traders and their involvement in the political developments in China.

During the Japanese attack on Manchuria in 1931, grandfather Kwan Sie Liep played an active role in the boycotting of Japanese goods (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 31-32) (J. Zwaanswijk N.d.: 20). To express their opprobrium, Chinese people instigated a movement which became known as the "Japanese boycott". The boycott was not confined to Japanese products, but was also directed towards the Japanese in the East Indies (for example, the termination of rents, making many Japanese homeless). The Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies also held major fundraisings for the victims of the war and the Red Cross, as well as producing a steady stream of anti-Japanese propaganda in Chinese newspapers and the pro-Chinese Malay newspaper *Sin Po*. In 1936, when the conflict between Japan and China broke out in full fury, fundraising committees were set up everywhere. One special action was organized to raise money for ambulances to be used in the war zones in China which resulted in the sending of an ambulance group consisting of doctors - the leader, Go In Tjhan, would later play an important role in May Lie's life - nurses, technicians, and drivers (Go Tiong Han 2014). The boycotts were continued on a wider scale (Zwaanswijk N.d.: 32-33).

His grandfather's influence encouraged in Siauw an interest in organizations and politics. In 1932 an introduction to Liem Koen Hian, a famous Peranakan journalist with the newspaper *Sin Tit Po* in Surabaya and the founder of the organization PTI (Chinese-Indonesian Party), brought him into closer contact with politics, especially with the Indonesian struggle for independence from colonial rulers. In fact, the the main objective of the PTI was to win adherents for Indonesian independence among the Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies. The objective of the PTI meant it was shouldering a huge task, as most Chinese people wanted to remain aloof from politics and tended either to be more concerned about the developments in China or were still pursuing an improvement in the legal position of the Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies, rather than setting their sights on the struggle for Indonesian independence. Undeterred by the magnitude of its task, Siauw Giok Tjhan joined the PTI and became one of its youngest members. Its orientation in favour of the new Indonesian nation was not well understood by the majority of the Chinese, but his goal is precisely what was so special about Siauw Giok Tjhan.

In 1933 he also followed in the footsteps of Liem Koen Hian and was

employed as a journalist on the daily newspaper *Sin Tit Po*, which was in fact an extension of the PTI. Initially Siauw Giok Tjhan worked in Surabaya but, at the end of 1934, he moved to the branch office in Semarang, where he worked under the mentorship of another well-known *Peranakan* journalist, Kwee Hing Tjiat. It was in his capacity as a journalist that Siauw Giok Tjhan met the main Indonesian nationalist leaders Soekarno and Dr Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo and struck up an amicable rapport with them, which encouraged him to absorb the ideals of these leaders. One of these was Dr Tjipto's vision of an Indonesia in which all citizens, including the Chinese, had the same rights and obligations, regardless of which race they belonged to (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 43). In his further political career, Siauw would always pursue the same ideal.

Also influential in the further formation of Siauw Giok Tjhan's visions and expectations for the future of Indonesia and the position of the Chinese was his encounter with two men who had studied in the Netherlands, Tan Ling Djie and Tjoa Sik Ien, who introduced Siauw to Marxism. As stated by Siauw's son in his dissertation on his father, it was a common occurrence for young Indonesian and Chinese *Peranakan* who studied in the Netherlands to feel attracted to Marxism (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 44-46). Siauw came into contact with Tan Ling Djie and Tjoa Sik Ien when he was commissioned by Kwee Hing Tjiat to return to Surabaya for a time to set up a branch of the newspaper *Mata-Hari* in 1937. After their return from the Netherlands, Tan and Tjoa had taken over the leadership of the PTI and the newspaper *Sin Tit Po* in Surabaya from Liem Koen Hian. Their frequent meetings resulted in a turn towards Marxism in Siauw's nationalist vision. Moreover, Tan infected Siauw with his admiration for Mao Zedong and his successes in China. The achievements of China in the field of technology especially won Siauw's tremendous admiration. In spite of this, as a member of the PTI, Siauw continued to try to engage the Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies in the Indonesian struggle for independence with undiminished energy. After all, the future of (especially *Peranakan*) Chinese lay in their homeland, the East Indies, and not in China or the Netherlands. Unfortunately the PTI stirred up only meagre interest in the Chinese community.

In 1939, Siauw Giok Tjhan returned to Semarang and became editor of the newspaper *Mata Hari*, into which he introduced an increasingly anti-Japanese line in addition to the continued support he expressed for the Indonesian nationalist movement and communism in China through the paper. The Japanese invasion in 1942 put an end to the publication of various Malay newspapers known to express anti-Japanese sentiments, including the *Mata Hari*. Siauw fled to Malang where he would remain throughout the Japanese occupation. It was in this city that Siauw Mei Lie (1943) was born.

Siauw (Siauw Giok Tjhan 1981: 67-94) reports, confirmed by his son (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 57-66), that although the framework had changed, he continued his previous activities during the Japanese occupation. One important factor which had a lasting effect on Siauw's further activities was the Japanese policy of uniting the Chinese in one organization, the *Kakyo Shokai*

(Chinese diaspora), under the leadership of Chinese presidents. This grouping of the Chinese people was seen as a means to exercise control over the actions of the Chinese and to counter anti-Japanese resistance. Ironically, it was this policy which pushed the Chinese in the direction of remaining faithful to their Chinese cultural identity, as it insisted that they had to use their Chinese first names (instead of Dutch first names) and their children had to be sent to Chinese schools. Dutch schools were closed and Indonesian *volkscholen* (public schools) did not accept Chinese children (Siauw Giok Tjhan 1981: 71-72). One of the secondary tasks of the Kakyo Shokai was to invite the young people to join an auxiliary force, called the Keibotai, to back up the police. The Keibotai was instructed to ensure the safety of the Chinese by protecting them against criminals and troublemakers. Siauw was thought to be a suitable person to assume the leadership of the Keibotai in Malang. However, his critical spirit meant that he refused to see the Keibotai as a counterpart to the Keibodan, staffed by young Indonesian people, because in it he saw the intention of the Japanese to use the Keibotai, and hence the Chinese, as a shield during riots that might be stirred up among Indonesian people. As he always had done, Siauw's objective was precisely the opposite, namely: To co-operate with these young Indonesian people and freedom fighters.

After the Japanese had withdrawn came the arrival of the Allies followed by the (re)arrival of Dutch soldiers between 1946 and 1949. In this period, the Chinese were subjected to a litany of problems stemming from the legacy of the segregation policies of both the colonial government and the Japanese occupation; as a rule they were distrusted by various Indonesian forces and paramilitary groups as they were perceived to be accomplices of the Dutch. In the first months after the Declaration of Independence and during the Military Actions, many Chinese fell prey to the excesses of the *pemudas* and of some Muslim groups. In Malang it was deemed necessary to replace the Kakyo Shokai with the newly created Hua Chiao Tse An Hui (Support Group for the Safety of the Chinese) and the Angkatan Muda Tionghoa (Chinese Youth Group) formed to protect the Chinese people from terror and aggression. The former Keibotai underwent a transformation and, on Siauw's initiative, was converted into the Palang Biru (Blue Cross) to protect not only the Chinese but also to provide medical assistance to refugees and those who had been wounded in the freedom struggle. Siauw continued to endeavour to exert a positive influence on the relations between the Chinese and the Indonesian population and to make a steadfast effort to persuade the Chinese to support the new Republic. The persistent anti-Chinese hate campaigns and the inability of the new government to take measures to deter them hampered his efforts. Nevertheless, Siauw Giok Tjhan refused to be defeated and began to look for a way to enter politics. In December 1945, he became a member of the Socialist Party, then the ruling party (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 72). Problems emerged when the Socialist Party was merged with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia) and during what is known as the Madiun Incident in 1948. Members of the PKI were arrested and Siauw also had to



go to jail (Wirogunan Prison in Yogyakarta), although he had in fact already resigned from the Socialist Party (SP). Even while he was still a member of the SP, Siauw had been elected a member of the Central National Committee (KNIP, Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat) in 1946 and its Working Body (Badan Pekerja) in 1947. The KNIP had been founded on 22 August 1945 to assist Soekarno to make preparations for the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. It was a forerunner of the Dewan Rakyat Perwakilan (DPR), the Indonesian Parliament.

This is not the place to delve too deeply into Siauw Giok Tjhan's political career. For present purposes, it is enough to mention that Siauw's involvement in national politics gave him the opportunity to attain positions from which, to a certain extent, he was able to influence the racial issues which were aimed at the Chinese from the inside well into the 1950s. After he had had to confront the continued extreme brutality and killings at the beginning of the decolonization period in Java from 1945 to 1949, involving not only Dutch and Eurasian victims, but also Chinese, Siauw became even more convinced he had to try to do something (Mary Somers Heidhues 2012: 381-401; W. H. Frederick 2012: 359-380). In his important position as Minister van Minderheden Zaken (Minister of Minority Affairs) in the Sjarifudin Cabinet in 1947 (for which he moved to Yogyakarta), Siauw had to deal with the "dual nationality issue" of the Chinese people (who, on the basis of *ius sanguinis*, were still citizens of China), which had to be negotiated with the Chinese Nationalist Government or the Kuomintang. The Chinese government was in favour of an "active system" which would require the Chinese in Indonesia to make an active declaration that they did not reject Indonesian nationality, but the Indonesian government clung to the "passive system" already established by law in 1946 (the Citizenship Act). Chinese who had lived continuously in Indonesia for five years or more would be entitled to Indonesian nationality, without having to actively request it, unless they deliberately opted for the Chinese (or Dutch) nationality. The passive system made it possible for more Chinese to acquire Indonesian nationality.

In 1950, Siauw Giok Tjhan became a member of the Federation of Indonesian Republic (Republik Indonesia Serikat - RIS), which required he move to Jakarta. It was in this capacity that Siauw was once again forced to deal with a national issue concerning the Chinese in Indonesia. In 1946, a law had been enacted in support of the passive system. However, in 1953, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Soenario, proposed a bill which advocated an active system in which only third-generation Chinese would be allowed to apply for Indonesian nationality on condition that they could prove that their parents had been born in Indonesia and had lived there for ten consecutive years (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 138-140). The Chinese people thought this bill highly disturbing. It would be impossible for many of them to get their hands on the requisite evidence and to submit an application for Indonesian nationality. Consequently they would automatically acquire the status of "foreigner". They foresaw that they would be put out of business and expelled from the

circulation of the domestic economic because the national economy policy promoted by the government then in power (Cabinet Ali Sastroamidjojo) had been specifically devised to put foreign companies and assets under the management of Indonesians (*Indonesianisasi*), or at least had to benefit Indonesians (Mary F. Somers Heidhues 1964: 9; 15). In order to oppose the bill, a single party for the Chinese, the Partai Persatuan Tionghoa (PT), was founded in 1948. In 1950 it was converted into the Democratic Party for Indonesian Chinese (PDTI, Partai Demokrasi Tionghoa Indonesia), a committee for united Chinese citizenship, on which sat well-known Chinese lawyers (Yap Thiam Hien, Auwyong Pen Koen Liem Koen Seng, Sie Giok Siong, Oei Tjoe Tat) and Chinese politicians among them Tjung Tin Yan (Partai Katolik), Tan Po Goan (PSI, Partai Sosialis Indonesia), and Lie Po Yoe (PNI, Partai Nasional Indonesia). It was presided over by Siauw Giok Tjhan. By joining forces and thanks to Siauw's good relations with members of the cabinet, the committee managed to get the bill removed from the agenda (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 147-148). Unfortunately, their success was short-lived, because the bill, with only minor amendments, was still passed in 1955 (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 184; Somers Heidhues 1964: 14-15).

From 1959-1960, Chinese who had not (yet) received Indonesian nationality were subjected to many trials and tribulations. Those hardest hit were Chinese small traders in villages and in the countryside, outside the autonomous regions of Jakarta and Yogyakarta in Java and outside the large provincial cities in other islands (Somers Heidhues 1964: 24). In May 1959, the Trade Minister, Rachmat Muljomiseno, promulgated a regulation which prohibited foreigners to trade outside specific areas; its underlying rationale was to stimulate and protect "national" (non-Chinese) traders (Somers Heidhues 1964: 24). In November 1959 a Presidential Regulation was appended to the regulation. It famously became known as the PP 10 (Peraturan Presiden No. 10/1959), and came into effect in 1960 with the result that small traders had to move to the cities in which they were often in caught up in turmoil and violence (especially in West Java). A secondary effect in 1960 was that a total of more than 100,000 Chinese left the country; although the vast majority were *totok* Chinese, among them were also some *Peranakan* (Somers Heidhues 1964: 26-27). One notable factor was the significant number of students. Ships were sent from China to transport the evacuees.

Although the regulation had been devised to curtail the activities of foreign traders, many were unfairly penalized because the ratifications of the treaty on dual nationality had not thoroughly thrashed out. In an attempt to soften the impact of the trade restrictions and to maintain friendship with China, Soekarno finally signed the (dual) nationality treaty in January 1960, stipulating that Chinese who considered themselves Indonesian citizens were to be given two years time to renounce their Chinese nationality (Somers Heidhues 1964: 30).

In order to protect the interests and welfare of Chinese in Indonesia, in a meeting of the PDTI in 1954 it was decided to create a mass organization, which

was eventually named Baperki (Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan - Indonesian Citizenship Consultative Board). Siauw Giok Tjhan was chosen as president. The Baperki was not a political party but was open to members of all political parties; nor was it restricted to people of Chinese descent but was open to all Indonesian citizens. Siauw stressed that Baperki was a national body whose chief aim was to combat racial discrimination, besides achieving social equality and equal rights for all Indonesian citizens. These objectives were to support Siauw's ideal: (*Peranakan*) Chinese integration into Indonesian society, without them having to forgo their Chinese identity. Until the closure of Baperki in 1966, Siauw constantly committed himself to pursuing its objectives. However, the seizure of power by Soeharto in 1965, which caused the fall of Soekarno, and the collapse of Baperki brought in their aftermath disastrous consequences for Siauw: Nine years in prison and three years under house arrest. The "Chinese Issue" ended in violence against Chinese between 1965-1967 and a failed integration which brought in its train assimilation with the loss of Chinese identity.

Siauw Giok Tjhan led a life as no other person has done. Consequently it is entirely understandable that his children continue to remember him with admiration and love, and try to keep his ideas alive.

## SIAUW MAY LIE

### EARLY YOUTH (1943-1950)

Siauw May Lie was born in Malang on 11 August 1943. In her interview she explained that she was not altogether happy about her name. May Lie could be interpreted as "might be lying" in English. This is her private little joke. Quite apart from the fact of its ambiguous meaning in English, she is also annoyed that her name is spelled in the Chinese-Indonesian way. "Why wasn't I born either as a real Chinese or as a real Indonesian?";<sup>6</sup> she sighs, summarizing the dilemma of the *Peranakan* Chinese in Indonesia in a nutshell.

After May Lie, four brothers and one sister were born into the Siauw Giok Tjhan family. She says that May Lan, the oldest sister, was a real fighter and she was a coward. The explanation of her childhood anxiety derives from her earliest memory, which was very traumatic. It was 1947. May Lie was almost four years old and her mother was heavily pregnant with Tiong Han, her second younger brother. It was the height of the first "*Politionele actie*" (agresi militer Belanda- Dutch Military Agression) and Dutch troops were advancing on Malang. A violent event which May Lie describes as the "bombardment of Malang" is forever etched in her memory, albeit in fragmentary form: She and her mother fleeing their home; an explosion behind her; people lying wounded in the streets, their entrails protruding from their stomachs. After this event, until she was an adult May Lie was afraid of the dark. Her brother was born the next day. Her father was not present. Siauw Giok Tjhan was in Yogyakarta as member of the Badan Pekerja (KNIP). The family joined him in

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Siauw, May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

Yogya shortly afterwards, after he had been appointed Minister for Minority Affairs in the Amir cabinet, as mentioned above (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 89.) Among the members of the Republican Government was Tjoa Sik Ien, good family friend from Surabaya and the mentor of Siauw Giok Tjhan in his early formative years. Tjoa's eldest son, Tjoa A Li, is the same age as Siauw May Lie. The families lived close to each other and enjoyed a warm friendship. In the wake of the Madiun affair, Siauw was arrested in September 1948 and committed to Wirogunan Prison in Yogyakarta (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 106). In December 1948 he was released by the Dutch but re-arrested not long afterwards (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 104). Tjoa Sik Ien was also imprisoned (Picture 2). Although May Lie did not elaborate on this period, A Li has given a vivid account of the difficult life endured by the families with both fathers in prison.

While my father was in prison, he wrote my mother a letter [saying] that under no circumstances should I enrol in a Dutch school [...], so May Lie and I attended a Chinese nursery together. Sometimes we had nothing to eat but, at other times, when we opened the front door in the morning, food had been left at the door, rice or chicken. So people, just ordinary people, helped us, but anonymously. [...] Aunt Siauw told me that behind our house grew fruit trees and now and then we had nothing to eat but fruit.<sup>7</sup>

According to Tjoa A Li, both fathers had very different temperaments.

My father was really stubborn. He was totally different to Uncle Giok Tjhan, who was very compliant. For instance, in prison, if one received food from outside, it was customary to share [it] with all the others. There were people who would not share [...] but this was how Uncle Giok Tjhan reacted. If he received food from his family, he would share with that very person first. That's why among his best friends his nickname was "Jesus Christ".<sup>8</sup>

Another incident illustrates how intertwined the lives of both families were during this period in Yogyakarta: Tjoa A Li's mother played a part in the release of Siauw Giok Tjhan and her husband.

With the Dutch on the losing side, everybody had already been released, except for the hard core including Uncle Siauw and my father. There were about thirteen people [in all]. Then my mother visited the Sultan of Yogyakarta. Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX was very good. The Sultan negotiated an exchange of prisoners with the Dutch. The Indonesians released Dutch prisoners and the Dutch this so-called hard core. [...] Aunt Siauw [Tan Hien Gwa] told me this, but I had actually already heard it from my mother.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Tjoa, A Li (73 years), Purmerend, 4-5-2016.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Tjoa, A Li (73 years), Purmerend, 4-5-2016.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Tjoa, A Li (73 years), Purmerend, 4-5-2016.



Picture 2.<sup>10</sup> Fifth from left: Siauw Giok Tjhan<sup>11</sup> among the prisoners to be released by Dutch Troops, July 1949,<sup>12</sup> Salam, Java.

#### LIFE IN JAKARTA (1950-1960)

As member of the Federation of the Indonesian Republic (RIS), Siauw Giok Tjhan moved to Jakarta where his family joined him. Although the Siauw family rubbed shoulders with the political elite (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 112), their income was modest and their life-style was frugal. Siauw Giok Tjhan, who began as a journalist, continued to be very active as editor of and journalist on a range of newspapers and magazines. He considered the press a vital instrument in conveying and spreading his political standpoints and ideas. His wife nicknamed him *inktarbeider* (ink labourer). The consequences of his dual career are described by his son Siauw Tiong Djin as follows:

Until the parliamentary housing department found him rented accommodation towards the end of 1951, Siauw converted the Persatuan printing office into a temporary residence for his family of seven, including children of between 2 and

<sup>10</sup> Source: Nationaal Archief, Fotocollectie Dienst voor Legercontacten Indonesië. Bij Salam (Midden-Java) leverden de Nederlandse troepen dertien communisten uit aan de republiek. Onder hen bevonden zich Mr. Soebardjo, Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri, Dr. Tjoa Sik Ien en Ir. Tajeb. Twee van de uitgeleverden waren Chinezen. Stalins Indonesische geestverwanten wachten op de brug, die hen van de republiek scheidt, op de rep. vrachtauto's die hen verder zullen vervoeren. Geheel links een militair van de TNI. Datum: juli 1949. Translation: National Archives, Photo Collection Service for Army Contacts Indonesia. Near Salam (Central Java) Dutch troops handed thirteen communists over to the Republic. Among them were Mr Soebardjo, Mr Iwa Koesoema Soemantri, Dr Tjoa Sik Ien, and Ir Tajeb. Two of those extradited were Chinese. Indonesian Stalinist fellow- travellers wait on the bridge which separates them from the Republic, for the Rep. trucks which will transport them on their way. At the far left, a soldier of the TNI. Date: July 1949.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Tjoa, A Li (73 years), Purmerend 4-5-2016; interview with Go, Gien Tjwan (95 years), Amstelveen, 4-4-2016.

<sup>12</sup> According to Siauw's son, Siauw Tiong Djin, the hand-over took place in August 1949, see Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 105



15. During the day, the small twenty square meter office housed a number of busy journalists and at night the office desks were arranged and used as beds for the seven people. When Siauww and his family moved to the rented accommodation in the elite part of Jakarta, Menteng, some of the young unmarried journalists, like Tan Hwie Kiat and Njoto, lived in the same printing office. Apparently Siauww never took the opportunity to purchase the house in Jalan Tosari which he rented until December 1965, though tenants had the option to buy at a highly subsidized price. This modest middle class lifestyle was one of Siauww's strongest political assets, not least because it set him apart from rich Chinese. (Siauww Tiong Djin 1999: 127.)

Siauww did not have much time to spend with his family. In the morning his children woke up to the sound of the rattling of his type-writer. In the evening he came home late from meetings about the constitution. Nevertheless, May Lie remembers that her father took the time to teach her lessons which have held her in good stead for life. From early childhood, her father had a big influence on her. He taught her what progressiveness meant so that she should defend the rights of the poor. At a very early age, she already felt that she belonged to the "left" and she was indignant when an acquaintance of her father's mentioned to her that her father was actually "a little bit to the right".

May Lie was a fervent supporter of the Indonesian Republic. Indonesian was spoken at home. She resented a letter written in Dutch by her cousin and accused her of being a "Blandist".<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, her own parents spoke Dutch when the conversation was not meant for children's ears. Despite her Indonesian orientation, May Lie was sent to a Chinese School. "Our parents no longer spoke Chinese, and they wanted their eldest children to bring Chinese culture back into the family", explained May Lie.<sup>14</sup> There is a possibility that post-war conditions might have played a role in her parents' opting for Chinese education. During the Japanese occupation, Dutch schools were closed and, as said, Chinese children were forced to go to Chinese Schools. After the war this trend continued. In 1948 85% of Chinese children in Dutch-occupied territories attended Chinese education. This was a much higher percentage than before the war. This is an indication that many parents who spoke Dutch or Indonesian preferred to send their children to the newer, better Chinese schools (Somers Heidhues 1964: 20).

The Siauww family had ten children: Besides May Lie and her brothers and sisters, two of her mother's younger brothers and a younger sister, whose parents passed away young, had been taken in by the family. Siauww wanted to give all the children the best education they could afford, but they were struggling to make ends meet. Nevertheless, May Lie has very warm memories of her childhood.

<sup>13</sup> A person who favoured Dutch language and culture.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Siauww May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

We had to share; My father's salary sustained us till the third week. Then my mother had to collect old newspapers and old clothes, which she exchanged for vegetables, *tahu*, and *tempe*. From childhood I learned to share everything; that you cannot always get what you want. There were people who brought us food. My father had to ask others to take the children to Puncak on Sundays every now and then.<sup>15</sup>

#### THE FIRST LESSON IN LIFE: GIVE PRIORITY TO OTHERS

May Lie had to share her father with the politics, journalism, and her many brothers and sisters. But his frequent absences were compensated by his lessons in life during the little time he could spend with her. One day May Lie was upset because there was no money for her piano lessons. Her father explained to her there was only enough money for her older sister. She was disappointed, but she derived comfort from the fact her father had taken the time to explain to her why she should give priority to her sister. From early childhood, she felt a special bond with her father. She realized that it was also difficult for her father to ask this sacrifice of her. Even though her father was hardly ever around, family life was permeated with his convictions. Her father was a living model in little things which are not worth mentioning, but served as example to his children. They were not religious, but her father's motto was: "What you do not want that others do to you, you should not do to others". May Lie smiles: "That's my father, give priority to others, perhaps because he was a boyscout."<sup>16</sup>

At the same time he taught his children to keep both feet firmly on the ground. During her teenage years, May Lie devoured novels. Her parents found her too young for this sort of literature but their disapproval only served as an incentive to read them even more. She loved Russian novels about the war against fascism which had been translated into Chinese. Her favourite character was the sixteen-year-old heroine Dunya, who, just before she was hanged by the fascists, cries out loudly: "Long Live Bolshevism!" When May Lie told her father that she wanted to die like Dunya, her father laughed at her. "We don't struggle to die, to become a heroine."<sup>17</sup>

One day May Lie went to the cinema with her cousins, but the performance was sold out. May Lie then asked the owner, an acquaintance of her father, for tickets. Her father was very upset when he learned what she had done. "Never do that again. Now he can ask me for a favour."<sup>18</sup>

In 1957 May Lie's secondary school education was brutally interrupted. Indonesian Chinese children were expelled from Chinese schools by law and forced to attend Indonesian schools. May Lie comments: "It was a discriminatory measure of the Soekarno regime."<sup>19</sup> In 1960 she graduated from the Indonesian high school. Thanks to her Indonesian diploma and

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Siauw May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Siauw May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Siauw May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Siauw May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Siauw May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

good results she received a scholarship to attend the Beijing University of Medicine. May Lie's sister was already studying in China at the expense of the family, so the scholarship was very welcome. Considering that Baperki established Universitas Res Publica in the same year, one might wonder why Siauw Giok Tjhan sent three of his children to China to study. His son offers the following explanation:

Siauw's admiration to China's technological advancement was evident from his speeches and private statements. He was convinced that China's technological drive would make it one of the most advanced technological state. Such a positive impression had resulted in him encouraging all his children to improve their Mandarin (Kuo Yu) by taking extra lessons at home. He believed that, by mastering the language, people could access China's technology more readily. He also sent three of his children to China for their tertiary education. The first one left for China in 1957 to do an engineering course, the second in 1960 to do medicine and the last one in 1965 also to do engineering. Two of them went on Indonesian Government scholarships. (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 295.)

During her childhood and teenage years, May Lie was only dimly aware of her father's prominence as a political figure. She did not become politically aware until her student years in Beijing when she came into close contact with the Indonesian student community there. Only then did she gradually realize the importance of her father as a politician and as chairman of Baperki. "My father was member of Parliament and member of the Constituency, but that was all I knew. In the struggle against the discrimination of the Chinese, my father and his friends founded Baperki in 1954. But my political awareness dates from a much later date".<sup>20</sup>

#### LIFE IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (1960-1978)

In the 1950s, to students in Chinese schools in Indonesia, a tertiary education in the People's Republic of China, followed with a professional career, seemed an attractive option (Coppel and Godley 1990: 180). Between 1950 and 1965 about 60,000 students left for China, with a sharp increase in 1960 on account of the PP 10 measures (Somers Heidhues 1964: 26). Students arriving after 1965 were caught up in the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution and could not even begin their studies. Eventually, 80 % of the Indonesian-Chinese students felt compelled to leave China, most of them ending up in Hong Kong. But May Lie was lucky. She was able to finish her medical studies and specialize. She looks back on her studies in China with satisfaction and gratitude.

May Lie left Indonesia in September 1960. In the same period, her childhood friend A Li would also leave for China on a scholarship. In preparation for their stay there, they even did some shopping together but, the week before his departure, his father decided that his son would do better to accept a scholarship from the Soviet Union. After all, he said: "It is a bit more developed there than in China." A week after May Lie left, A Li headed

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Siauw May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

for Moscow, where he graduated in Medicine in 1966.

As recipient of a scholarship, May Lie could have travelled by air, but her father decided otherwise. He made her travel by ship which was full with migrants seeking refuge from the PP 10 measure; the majority of them Chinese people from the countryside who had to leave everything behind. Most of them could not speak a word of Chinese. Much later in life, May Lie realized that travelling together with the evacuees was another lesson her father wanted her to learn.

May Lie was very eager to commence her studies. From childhood it had been her dearest wish to become a physician. She was not apprehensive about China, although it was the time of the "Great Leap Forward", China's effort to industrialize which brought great famines in its wake. However, her father had instilled in her what a beautiful country, with a good system, Socialism, China was. Socialism would also turn Indonesia into a good country.

We longed to be able to do the same in Indonesia. But that was then, the idealism that socialism was the panacea to defeat poverty. Now we know that it is not. I am sorry that our father passed away so early. That he did not see later developments. [...] I personally experienced how poor China was. However, because of changes in the economy, even though the politics remained the same, despite all the corruption and excesses, China did begin to blossom. The old has failed and we should not repeat that again. [...] But, when I arrived in Beijing in 1960, I found everything beautiful, everybody was equal, everybody had the same rights. The country was poor, but life in those days was more austere than it is nowadays.<sup>21</sup>

#### STUDENT LIFE 1960-1966

After having spent her youth sharing everything and giving priority to others, it was difficult for Siau May Lie to accept that she, as a guest student with a scholarship, enjoyed a privileged status. She was allowed her own private room, whereas eight Chinese students had to share one room. The foreign students ate in a separate dining-hall. There was no lack of meat and special catering provided for different diets and countries. The other students lived on a very sober diet, mostly consisting of vegetables. Siau May Lan, who lived the life of a common student, visited her sister one day and indulged herself so much in the food, she made herself sick. May Lie's vision of the socialist society of China was tested against the reality. Her first lesson was the realization of how frugally students in China lived. Nevertheless, they assisted the students from developing countries as much as they could, not out of a sense of duty, but out of a sincere feeling of solidarity with the international proletariat. May Lie describes a day out of her life on campus as follows:

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Siau May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

I lived on the first floor, below me lived the Chinese students with eight of them to one room. On my floor lived students from Albania, Ceylon, Vietnam, Uganda and so on. In our canteen was a special table for Muslims and there was a separate kitchen and cook for them. Every day we had a different menu, there were no limitations. Our scholarship included pocketmoney of Yuan 80.00 per month, which was raised to Yuan 100.00. The highest amount the Chinese students received was Yuan 25.00. The monthly salary of a physician was Yuan 50.00.

Six o'clock in the morning the rising-bell rang. You had to get up and begin running straight-away. That was obligatory for all students. There was an absence-list. Then there was breakfast. In the evening the lights went out at ten. I followed eight hours of lectures with a one-hour break in the afternoon for an obligatory nap. After dinner between six and eight we had to report to the library, laboratory or to the assistant to ask questions. We were given priority with assistance because foreign students, - the secondary-education level was often inadequate -, were given extra lessons in chemistry, mathematics, and language. My professor had four assistants and the head assistant was there especially for the foreign students. These assistants were responsible for seeing that all students passed their exams, because our expenses were paid by the nation. I did not like [to comply with this], but you had to. Sometimes the assistants would visit your room to help you and I had to ask questions. You had to prepare these, because he would know from the questions whether I had studied or not. I was cunning and I just thought up questions. The assistant-professor of anatomy then told me, and this was the first time I had been criticized, "You are actually intelligent enough but, because you are smart, you are tempted to be corrupt, this is your flaw, correct it". I almost burst into tears; my questions betrayed to him that I "was not studying".

The lecturers were brimming with the duty to supervise the students, and also with ideology and politics. In my first year I was taught the history of the Chinese Communist Party and in my second year politics, the economy of socialism or Marxism, and in the third year philosophy and materialism, dialectics and history.<sup>22</sup>

Ideas other than those of her father began to influence her. The Indonesian Student Association became an important part of May Lie's life. She even went on a hungerstrike during a protest action against the Indonesian Embassy, which had sent back two Indonesian students who had got into a fight with each other. May Lie was still inspired by the example of Dunya, her Russian heroine.

The last years of her study were quite pleasant. The Great Leap Forward was over. Western opera and classical music were popular. May Lie had access to western literature, translated into Chinese: Tolstoy, Dostojevski, Balzac. Once a month the foreign students attended performances in the city ranging from opera to acrobatics and once a year the Ministry of Education organized a trip for them. May Lie also joined the outings organized by the Indonesian Student Association. She has travelled all over China with the exception of Tibet and the Uighur Region.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Siau May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.



## THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

In 1965 Soekarno was overthrown in a “*kudeta*” and Baperki was closed down. The Siauw family had to pay dearly in the subsequent persecution of Baperki members. Siauw Giok Tjhan was arrested and was imprisoned for the next twelve years. His children, with the exception of the youngest, Tiong Djin, either fled Indonesia or had already left. Tiong Djin was only five years old when May Lie left for China and, when his father was arrested in November 1965, he was nine years old. He remained in Indonesia with his mother (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 7). A year after the *kudeta*, in 1966, the Cultural Revolution broke out in China. The turmoil lasted for several years. May Lie, who graduated from Beijing University that same year, and other guest students were evacuated to the south. The guest students kept themselves occupied with their own private studies of Indonesian history and politics, attending lectures, and working on the land. In her second year, May Lie was allowed to work at the local hospital and she also studied acupuncture.

I am indebted to my professors and assistants. They were very kind and, thinking back, I realize that they treated me as one of their own. I was not discriminated against; in fact it tended to be the other way around. I did the night shifts with the chief surgeon, a very busy man. No patients during the night shift is a non-occurrence in China and, after the night shift, you have to be back at the operating-table the next day. The hospital was overflowing with patients; the hallway was filled with extra beds. I was taught everything, even how to change clothes and wash burns. I had to put the patient into a bath-tub and it stank!<sup>23</sup>

May Lie experienced the Cultural Revolution from inside and witnessed the consequences.

I was in China as a guest, but I could read and understand the language very well and I am aware that [the ideals of the Cultural Revolution] were a utopia which we initially idealized. Later we came to realize that they were impossible [to achieve]. The Cultural Revolution was a disaster for the whole nation. It left in its wake innumerable casualties and the country on the brink of bankruptcy. [...] I deeply appreciate the corrections introduced by the Chinese government: The beginning of the reforms in the economy. [...] But Deng Xiaoping also made mistakes. In the process of correcting errors, excesses occurred which resulted in the blooming of the capitalist system.<sup>24</sup>

In 1973 the Cultural Revolution faded away and May Lie was able to return to Beijing where she continued to specialize in surgery and gynaecology.

## THE NETHERLANDS (1978-2013)

On the first of May 1978, Siauw Giok Tjhan was officially released from prison, but his identity card still carried the code ET (Ex-Tapol) (Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 360).

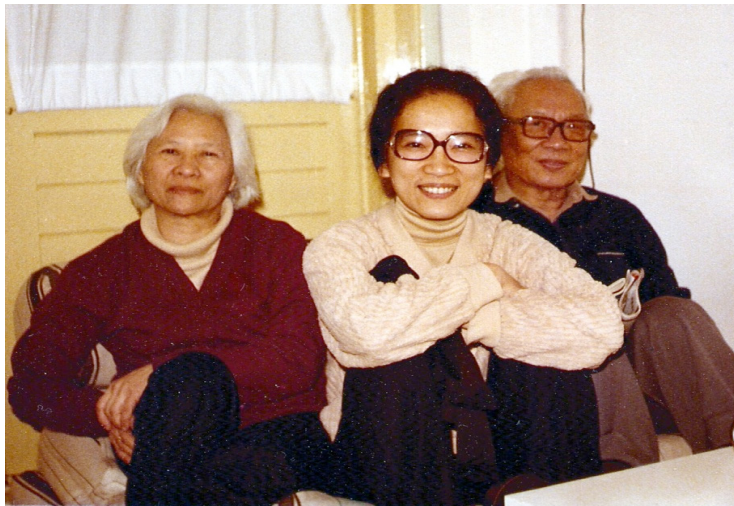
<sup>23</sup> Interview with Siauw May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Siauw May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.



Picture 3. Mrs Siau (Tan Hien Gwa) and Siau Giok Tjhan (source: Siauw Tiong Djin).

He was in poor condition and also needed an eye operation. The family decided that Siauw Giok Tjhan should be treated in the Netherlands. May Lie was considered the best equipped to take care after her parents. In preparation for the arrival of her parents, she left China and moved to the Netherlands in 1978 (Pictures 3 and 4). Friends helped the family, among them Go Gien Tjwan, who had been arrested in 1965 and had moved to the Netherlands after his release and his physician brother Go In Tjhan, who helped May Lie arrange accommodation and set up an acupuncture practice in Amsterdam.



Picture 4. Siauw May Lie united with her mother and father in the Netherlands (source: Siauw Tiong Djin).

Also a resident of the Netherlands since 1977 was her old friend A Li.<sup>25</sup> A Li and a whole circle of friends, spread over Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany (Picture 5), – mostly exiles from Indonesia – , were not only instrumental in helping with visas and accomodation for the Siauw family, they also assisted in preparing Siauw Giok Tjhan’s memoirs for publication and collecting funds to cover the printing costs of *Lima jaman* in 1981.<sup>26</sup>



Picture 5. Liem Sik Tjo, Tjoa A Li, Siauw Giok Tjhan, Go Gien Tjwan, Tjeng Tjong Djin, Amstelveen, the Netherlands (source: Tjoa A Li).

Siauw Giok Tjhan was eager to make up for lost time after all his years in prison. Tjong Djin remembered:

In Holland, he ignored the advice of his doctors to rest. He was excited by his new freedom to express his views and organise activities. He established contacts with Indonesians who had been living in Europe as political refugees. He began to campaign for the release of the tapols and for funds to assist the released tapols and their families. He also gave lectures to Indonesian students and exiled Indonesians on Indonesia in a number of European cities. In these lectures he affirmed that he would stick to the principles he had held for decades, and that the achievement of a democratic Indonesia would speed up the elimination of racism. (Siauw Tjong Djin 1999: 360.)

On 20 November 1981, at the age of 67, 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 (Go Gien Tjwan 1982: 123). May Lie remembers the day vividly.

<sup>25</sup> Tjoa A Li left for China after he graduated in Medicine in 1966, joining a group of graduates who could not return to Indonesia after the *kudeta*. They arrived in Beijing at the height of the Cultural Revolution. Some of them remained, others, including A Li, decided to travel on to North Vietnam. A Li remained in Vietnam till 1974. Eventually, he decided to move to Europe to be reunited with his family and settled in a small town near Amsterdam. (Interview with Tjoa A Li (73 years), Purmerend, 4-5-2016.)

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Tjoa A Li; interview with Go Gien Tjwan (95 years), Amstelveen, 4-4-2016.

"It was a shock to me." Her move to the Netherlands and her efforts to help her parents seemed to have been in vain. But there was no time for reflections: her mother needed been taken care of. All her married life Tan Gien Hwa had devoted herself to her husband. It had been a life marked by great hardships. May Lie and her brother, Tiong Han, who joined her in the Netherlands, made sure that she enjoyed a comfortable and peaceful old age.

Meanwhile, May Lie found the time to have her Chinese diploma recognized. This required that she obtain her master's degree in Medicine at a Dutch university. A recognized diploma allowed her to run her acupuncture practice independently. Her biggest stumbling-block was mastering the Dutch language, but she learned it quickly and was able to pass her exams. For years, her practice, run with her brother Tiong Han, who had also studied Medicine in China, had, and continues to enjoy a very high reputation in the Indonesian-Chinese community.

In 2013 May Lie decided to return to Indonesia, to follow the voice of her father. "Indonesia is the country which needs you; which you must help to build up. Although it is not easy, politically I agree with my father. At first I thought: We are Chinese, why make so much effort, if we are not welcome? But our father thought differently and I accept this."<sup>27</sup>

May Lie's life resembles a rollercoaster ride. Despite the sharp twists and turns in her life, she has shown a remarkable aptitude for adaptation. She comments: "As long as I have a little corner where I can pursue my activities, where I can survive and serve my family, I am fine." Her thoughts returned to the migrant families on board of the ship which took her to China in 1960.

Down the deck were families of three generations, surrounded by parcels, their only possessions, on their way to an unknown destination. [They were] starting from scratch. It was an exodus, actually. Much later it dawned on me what it was my father wanted me to realize: You have to fight racial discrimination; you have the right to remain in Indonesia and to integrate.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Siau May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Siau May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013.



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INTERVIEWS

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Siauw May Lie (72 years), Amsterdam, 20-10-2013 (interview by Ing Lwan Taga-Ta).

Tjoa A Lie (73 years), Purmerend, 4-5-2016 (interview by Ing Lwan Taga-Tan).