Indonesian Studies in Melbourne: Honouring the Past, Celebrating the Future

Australia has a history of more than 65 years of formal tertiary education in Indonesian language, culture and society. The University of Melbourne has played a foundational role in this area of studies. On 28 and 29 September 2021, the University’s Indonesian Studies program organised a public lecture and international conference to celebrate and reflect on the development of Indonesian Studies in Australia. The two-part program aimed at generating international dialogue, intergenerational knowledge transfer and interdisciplinary discussion by bringing together Language, Culture and Area Studies experts as well as the broader Indonesia and Southeast Asia-interested community.

A central focus point and source of inspiration was scholar, public intellectual and Foundation Professor of Indonesian Studies at The University of Melbourne, the late Arief Budiman (1941–2020). The event marked the start of an annual Arief Budiman Public Lecture series.

Arief Budiman was appointed as the Foundation Professor of Indonesian Studies at the University of Melbourne in 1997, holding the Chair until his retirement in 2008. This essay provides an overview of him and his family in the political and cultural context of what Sukarno, Indonesia’s first President, called Demokrasi Terpimpin (Guided Democracy).

Arief’s original name was Soa Lie Djin, but for convenience here Arief Budiman will be used throughout. (He changed his name in 1967 with his marriage to Lelia Chorain Baharupat.) In discussing the Soa family, the focus is on Arief himself, his father Soa Lie Plet, and his younger brother Soa Hok Gie. These three men were all precocious readers and writers. They were all ethnic Chinese born in Jakarta in the 20th century, oriented to the land in which they were born, and not at all oriented to China. None of them was Dutch-educated.

Arief described the family in which he grew up as “lower middle-class” with “no academic background whatever.” His father Soa Lie Plet (Fig. 1), an writer and journalist, was often “unemployed or only half-employed.” There are some important generational differences between Soa Lie Plet and his sons. Soa Lie Plet (1904–1988) grew up when the colonial Netherlands Indies was at its height, while his sons were the product of the Japanese occupation and the turmoil in which the Indonesian Republic was born. Although Soa Lie Plet was brought up in the household of his grandfather, an immigrant from Hainan, he was cared for and indulged by his maiden aunt, who spoke the Malay language typical of peranakan Chinese in Jakarta. His schooling was in an ethnic Chinese environment, primarily in the Tiong Hwa Kooan (THHK) school, where he was instructed in Mandarin Chinese and later in English. From the 1930s he became a prominent Chinese Malay writer of popular romances in which the leading characters were Chinese, although the settings were often in different parts of the Indies and influenced by local magical and mystical beliefs.

Arief Budiman and His Family: Cultural politics under Guided Democracy

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The international conference in the second part of the program, titled ‘Citizens of the World: Indonesian Studies in Australia’, steered discussions about past, current, and future directions of Indonesian Studies along the various types of border-crossing epitomised by Budiman and his students: between various disciplines, between academia and activism, and between Indonesia, Australia and the World. Consisting of four panels, each with their own subthemes, it sought to address the following key question: how to respond to the challenges of teaching and researching languages, cultures and regions in the context of late capitalism?

The first panel, titled ‘Border-crossing Literature and Language’, had presentations by Dr Inan Paramaditha (Macquarie University), Dr Lily Xulianti Farid (Monash University) and Ms Dewi Anggraeni (Independent author). The second panel, with Dr Irfan Wahyudi (Universitas Airlangga), Dr Haliana Souisa (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) and Mr Tri Agumbu (RMIT University), discussed ‘The Digital Turn in Media and Communication’. The participants in the third panel, titled ‘International Relations and Development in the Anthropocene’, were Dr Intan Paramaditha (Macquarie University), Prof Nguyen Dinh Cong (University of Sydney), Prof Bernard Arps (Universiteit Leiden) and Dr Seng Yu Jin (National Gallery Singapore), specifically focused on ‘Areas Studies under Late Capitalism’.

Overall, the conference confirmed that Indonesian Studies is a dynamic, pragmatic, external tool for communicating elsewhere defined solutions in the international arena, and is an integral part of the very core of generating complex approaches to the difficult issues of our times.

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When Soe Hok Gie became a student in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Indonesia in late 1941, he was part of a handful of Chinese students. He was cut short prematurely. Then, in 2001, Rini Rizal’s partly fictionalized biography of Soe Hok Gie, receiving three awards for best film, best leading actor, and best cinematography, at the time they were unusually well read, receiving three awards for best film, best leading actor, and best cinematography, at that Indonesian cultural magazine, which was soon subjected to a purge of counter-revolutionary forces from all education institutions. Juswida was removed from his lecturers at the University of Indonesia and Sastra ceased publication. He was already able to mix easily with members of the palace circle with connections, they were each in turn able to persuade the President to take a less leftist author and their supporters, who gave it the derogatory acronym “Manik” (“buffalo sperm”). A full-scale culture war broke out with calls for it to be crushed. On 8 May 1964, President Sukarno issued a decree banning the Manifesto. Calls followed for a purge of counter-revolutionary forces from all educational institutions. Juswida was removed from his lectureships for study in Europe. Arief secured such a scholarship in 1946 and went to Paris and the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium. The Congress continued the scholarship for a second year, and this time the choice was Goenawan, who for Indonesia just days after the dramatic events in Jakarta on 1 October 1965, he was already able to mix easily with members of the palace circle with connections, they were each in turn able to persuade the President to take a less leftist position. Arief Budiman and Soe Hok Gie moved in these circles during their university student years, and each took a public stand contrary to the increasingly radical spirit of the times. There were two very large organizations that are relevant to this discussion, which were influenced by early exposure to the existentialism when he underwent the PKI: the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat - Institute of People’s Culture), claimed in May 1964, President Sukarno issued a decree banning the Manifesto. Calls followed for a purge of counter-revolutionary forces from all educational institutions. Juswida was removed from his lectureships for study in Europe. Arief secured such a scholarship in 1946 and went to Paris and the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium. The Congress continued the scholarship for a second year, and this time the choice was Goenawan, who for Indonesia just days after the dramatic events in Jakarta on 1 October 1965.

Arief, Sastra magazine, and the Manifesto Kebudayaan

When Arief entered the Psychology Faculty in 1961, he started other discussions by Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus’ novel L’Étranger into the public program. Arief had a passion for Camus. According to his friend and fellow Psychology student Goenawan Mohamad, Arief’s anti-Utopian worldview and determination were strongly influenced by Camus’ book on The Myth of Sisyphe. He was already able to mix easily with established artists and intellectuals, and it was Arief, the boy from Kenon Jeruk, who introduced Goenawan to such circles.

In May 1961, the first issue appeared of Sastra, a literary magazine under the leadership of HB Jassin. Arief and his friend Goenawan were both contributors to the magazine, which was soon subjected to a sustained attack by LEKRA and other leftist writers. Indonesia’s most famous novelist, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, accused Sastra of having a bourgeois character and slammed those like HB Jassin who sought “to seek shelter from the tumult of the revolution, and to full themselves to sleep with the theory of ‘universal humanism.’” In 1963, Sastra awarded Arief a prize for his essay on “Man and Art.” The twenty-two-year-old Arief was a potential target. In August 1963, a group of anti-communist artists and intellectuals issued a Cultural Manifesto (Manifesto Kebudayaan), which called for and endorsed a series of radical cultural reforms, including the principle of freedom of expression in art and literature and what they described as “universal humanism.” The Manifesto was derided by LEKRA and their supporters, who gave it the derogatory acronym “Manik” (“buffalo sperm”). A full-scale culture war broke out with calls for it to be crushed. On 8 May 1964, President Sukarno issued a decree banning the Manifesto. Calls followed for a purge of counter-revolutionary forces from all educational institutions. Juswida was removed from his lectureships for study in Europe. Arief secured such a scholarship in 1946 and went to Paris and the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium. The Congress continued the scholarship for a second year, and this time the choice was Goenawan, who for Indonesia just days after the dramatic events in Jakarta on 1 October 1965.

In politics morality doesn’t exist. As far as I’m concerned politics is something that’s utterly dirty, it’s filthy mud. But at a certain point when everyone else has defiled themselves any further, then we will leap into it. Sometimes the moment arrives, as it did usually in the revolution, when the dynamic of something like this must come in leap into this mud.

When the catastrophe events of 1 October 1965 erupted in Jakarta, Arief was regularly the first to attend the meetings of the army leadership and of the showdown between the army and the PKI that was underway. He was already able to mix easily with members of the palace circle with connections, they were each in turn able to persuade the President to take a less leftist position. Arief Budiman and Soe Hok Gie moved in these circles during their university student years, and each took a public stand contrary to the increasingly radical spirit of the times. There were two very large organizations that are relevant to this discussion, which were influenced by early exposure to the existentialism when he underwent the PKI: the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat - Institute of People’s Culture), claimed in May 1964, President Sukarno issued a decree banning the Manifesto. Calls followed for a purge of counter-revolutionary forces from all educational institutions. Juswida was removed from his lectureships for study in Europe. Arief secured such a scholarship in 1946 and went to Paris and the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium. The Congress continued the scholarship for a second year, and this time the choice was Goenawan, who for Indonesia just days after the dramatic events in Jakarta on 1 October 1965.
Upon his return to Jakarta, he joined with a militant Islamic youth group in ransacking and burning of buildings associated with the PKI. By early 1966, he was an active leader in student demonstrations on the streets, expressing the Trits (Tif Tunutan Rakyat - Three Demands of the People); calling for the President to ban the PKI, to reschedule the Cabinet, and to lower the price of basic commodities. This was part of a wider campaign by the newly formed KAM (Koordinator Asal Mohasawa Indonesia - University Student Action Front), but his group of campus-based students from the faculties of architects and psychology acted both autonomously and in concert with others. Among other activities, the demonstrators took their protest to cabinet ministers and even to the president. This was a risky business because Sukarno was intent on attacking all aspects of the Old Order and its leadership.

In July 1966 the journalist and novelist Mochtar Lubis was released from detention. He had been visited in early March on several occasions while still in detention by both brothers who admired him for his principled approach to protest. Mochtar had launched the magazine Harison, destined for a while to become Indonesia’s leading literary magazine. Still under the name Soe Hok Gie (still under the name Arief Budiman), he worked with a group of writers and artists preparing placards and posters that were used by the demonstrators. After Sukarno was overthrown, Arief and Mochtar tried hard to restore his authority, encouraging those still loyal to him to confront the protesters. Arief was unable to take an active part in these demonstrations because he had fallen seriously ill with tuberculosis. Nevertheless, behind the scenes, he worked with a group of writers and artists preparing placards and posters that were used by the demonstrators. After Sukarno was overthrown, Arief and Mochtar worked together harmoniously and effectively. This was an important turning point in their personal relationship. The two brothers were also contributors to the two new student newspapers that appeared in mid-1966—the Jakarta daily Harian Kami and the Bandung weekly Mahasiswa Indonesia—which were in fact assisting the students in creating a student newspaper. Arief was deeply involved in this process. He commented to me years later, “I remember the convergence of timing and interest that was the basis for these newspaper meetings”. He knew that something important was going on and he was determined to participate.

Both brothers went on to become noted Indonesian novelists, particularly in Kompas and Sinar Harapan. But unlike many of their contemporaries, they did not remain silent in the face of injustices. In particular, Hok Gie’s two-part Kompas article in June 1967 on “The future social consequences of the Gestapo affair” was probably the first time that the horrendous scale of injustice and human suffering caused to the victims of the drive against the PKI and its affiliates after October 1959 was raised in the Indonesian press. In contrast to their friend Mochtar Lubis, both brothers took up the cause of the many thousands of political prisoners detained without charge or trial. In the last phase of his life Hok Gie felt alone in his struggle. But as Arief stood beside his brother’s coffin in East Java, he declared “Gie, you are not alone.” Arief soon assumed the mantle of the activist, moving beyond the spoken and written word by leading campaigns against corruption, boycotting the stage-managed New Order elections, and opposing the restrictive Taman Mini theme park.

Both brothers were public intellectuals who were steadfast in their courage and consistent in their defence of freedom of expression and human rights. We can only speculate about what Hok Gie would have done had he lived. In the case of Arief, during a period of graduate studies in the United States, he was influenced by a wider range of ideas, including neo- Marxism. When he returned to Salatiga, his teaching of development studies and contextual literature during the 1980s was anathema to some of his old friends and comrades. Arief had resolved to neglect the assimilation movement and embraced the concept of a multicultural Indonesia in which Chinese culture had a place. He also recognised that the role of a public intellectual came at a cost to himself and his family. In his inaugural lecture at the University of Melbourne, he paid tribute to his wife Lelia, saying, “You all know it is far easier to live like a person like me.” And yet, despite that statement to his dead brothers, Hok Gie would not have been able to deliver this speech.

response was enthusiastic and inductive, but also deferential to Charles' knowledge on the subject of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese. I'm pleased to have gotten to work on and write the biography as a PhD student, and I would like to thank all of the many people who have supported me along the way. Arief was an extraordinary man and an exceptional writer, and I hope that this book will do justice to his memory.

Notes
3. Despite the newspaper headlines when he died, Arief Budiman was certainly not unrecognized in Indonesia. A tribute for his 77th birthday year was published in 2019 includes 26 contributions and runs to 267 pages: K.H. Mustofa Bok et al. (ed), Arief Budiman (Rahmat M Fitriadi and Melati Budiman, ed), Yogyakarta: Yogyakarta, 2019, 267 pages.
5. This is an abridged version of the inaugural Arief Budiman Lecture delivered at the University of Melbourne on 28 September 2021 by Charles Coppell. The full version of the lecture may be found at https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/australian-indonesian-studies/events/inaugural-arief-budiman-lecture. The full version may be found at https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/australian-indonesian-studies/events/inaugural-arief-budiman-lecture.
Cold War Politics in Indonesia, 1930-65

Stephen Miller

Cold War anti-communism and the tropes that accompany it continue to provide a backdrop to political struggles in Indonesia today. These struggles occurred at a time when the Cold War was not only a geopolitical conflict between the West and the Soviet Union, but also a cultural Cold War where both sides were involved in a struggle to define their ideological position and their role in the world. The Cold War era saw the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, but also the rise of new political movements and ideologies that were influenced by the Cold War rhetoric.

This was a time when different visions of the new republic's future were considered, debated, and fought over. In Indonesia, the struggle between the supporters of Sukarno and those of the more liberal elements of the Indonesian elite continued to shape the political landscape. The collapse of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, it has continued to influence the development of new political movements and ideologies in Indonesia. The Cold War era saw the rise of new political movements and ideologies that were influenced by the Cold War rhetoric.

While some may have sincerely felt that they were fighting for “democracy,” others, like Arief Budiman, argue that they were also part of manoeuvres that did not prioritise these ideals, and arguably led to authoritarian outcomes in Indonesia (and elsewhere). There is plenty of evidence for this. Charles Caveness points to the role of the army in developing and supporting the Manifesto of the Indonesian Left as an attempt to create a left-wing political culture that would have been aligned with the Cultural Manifesto of the 1960s, presented the period as one of diverse and competing political powers, in which artists across the political spectrum could find expression. They were left to develop this political culture on their own, and this led to the repression and bloodshed of 1965-66 which did not fall from the sky.

In a rare example of such a focus in his own academic work, a few years ago, Arief wrote a small chapter titled, “Portrait of Suharto.” In it, he examines the proposition that 1965-66 was a period of the cultural Cold War, and especially given the ongoing influence of Suharto’s anti-communist regime and the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, it has continued to influence the development of new political movements and ideologies in Indonesia. The Cold War era saw the rise of new political movements and ideologies that were influenced by the Cold War rhetoric.

In his own chapter in the book, Miller’s analysis of this moment in Indonesian history reflected his consistently optimistic outlook; “Even though there are many uncertainties and difficulties facing Indonesia over the short term, it is not too unrealistic to hold an optimistic hope for this more distant future.”

Indonesia, positioning the status of Indonesia’s ethnic minorities, women, and other marginalised groups at the centre of its political concern, was a crucial aspect of the Cold War politics in Indonesia. Arief Budiman, a signatory of the Manifesto, and Arief’s former classmate in Melbourne, Arie Hadi, have both written about the challenges of reformasi in Indonesia and its impact on the country. In a recent interview with the Jakarta Post, Arief Budiman stated that the country needs to focus on the challenges of democracy and the rule of law in order to address the challenges of reformasi. He also noted that the country needs to address the challenges of poverty and inequality, as well as the challenges of political and social stability.

When Arief Herjanto arrived at the university a little while later, Arief initiated a series of Friday seminars on all manner of topics related to politics and society in Indonesia. Arief’s seminar generated a dynamic and vibrant discourse between students and scholars, and the seminar continued to thrive and grow.