

= Si Tjonat =

Si Tjonat (Perfected Spelling : Si Conat) is a likely @-@ lost 1929 bandit film from the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) directed by Nelson Wong and produced by Wong and Jo Eng Sek . Based on the novel by F.D.J. Pangemanann , the silent film followed an indigenous man who , having killed his fellow villager , flees to Batavia (today Jakarta) and becomes a bandit . After kidnapping an ethnic Chinese woman , he is defeated and brought to justice .

A commercially oriented work aimed at ethnic Chinese audiences , Si Tjonat received mixed reviews ; box office proceeds are unclear . Although intended as a serial , no sequel was ever made ; the production house , Batavia Motion Picture , closed soon afterwards . However , several works in the same genre as this one were released soon afterwards , including Si Pitoeng , which used the same director and star .

= = Plot = =

Tjonat , a Sundanese youth , kills his friend and escapes to Batavia (now Jakarta) , the capital of the Dutch East Indies , where he finds work with a Dutch man . Tjonat soon robs the man of his wealth and seduces his mistress (njai) , then leaves the household to live the life of a bandit . When he asks Lie Gouw Nio (Ku Fung May) , the daughter of a peranakan Chinese farmer named Lie A Tjip , to be his lover , she refuses . Enraged , Tjonat kidnaps her , but Lie is rescued by her fiancé , Thio Sing Sang (Herman Sim) , who is well @-@ trained in martial arts .

= = Production = =

Si Tjonat was directed by Nelson Wong , who produced the film in conjunction with his business partner Jo Eng Sek . The two had established Batavia Motion Picture in 1929 . Wong had previously directed a single fiction film , the commercial flop Lily van Java (1928) , with funding from a high @-@ ranking General Motors employee in Batavia named David Wong . Jo Eng Sek , a shop owner , had never produced a film .

The story for Si Tjonat was based on the novel Tjerita Si Tjonat , written by reporter F.D.J. Pangemanann and first published in 1900 . The story had proved popular with ethnic Chinese readers . It was often adapted to the stage by Betawi stage troupes as a lenong stage performance . The story was selected by Jo Eng Sek . Several changes were introduced to the story . For instance , in the novel Lie A Tjip was a poor farmer , whereas in the film he was wealthy . Lie Gouw Nio , meanwhile , was not depicted as a poor Chinese woman , but the " a modern girl , dressed in a skirt , shoes , socks , and bobbed hair " .

The silent film was shot in black @-@ and @-@ white and starred Ku Fung May and Herman Sim . Sim , of peranakan Chinese descent , had previously acted in Shanghai , while Ku Fung May had no film experience . The martial arts sequences used in the film were inspired by Hollywood Westerns , then popular in the Indies .

= = Release and reception = =

Si Tjonat was released in 1929 . Although a work of fiction , it was advertised as based on a true story ; this had been common in works of Malay literature at the turn of the 20th century , including Tjerita Si Tjonat . The film was one in a line of domestic production targeted primarily at ethnic Chinese audiences , following Lily van Java and Setangan Berloemoer Darah (both 1928) ; film historian Misbach Yusa Biran writes that this was evident from the predominantly Chinese production team and cast . Native audiences also enjoyed the film , particularly its action sequences . Indonesian film critic Salim Said writes that it was of distinctly commercial orientation , meant only to turn a profit .

Sales figures are unclear . Said writes that it was a commercial success , while Biran ? noting that Batavia Motion Picture was dissolved not long after Si Tjonat 's release ? suggests that returns were

poor . Reviews were mixed . In general the press criticised the emphasis on murder and crime , while in Panorama magazine , Kwee Tek Hoay wrote that the film had been " fairly well produced " , emphasising Sim 's acting ? particularly his martial arts skills . Kwee concluded that what few mistakes were found in the film were , ultimately , insignificant .

Although Si Tjonat was initially intended to be a serial , production of the second instalment halted after the closure of Batavia Motion Picture . Jo Eng Sek left the industry completely , only returning in 1935 to produce Poei Sie Giok Pa Loei Tay . Wong , meanwhile , remained active in the cinema together with his brothers Joshua and Othniel . Using the banner Halimoen Film they later cast Sim in their 1931 film Si Pitoeng . Ku Fung May did not act in another film . Several films centred on bandits , including Lie Tek Swie 's Si Ronda (1930) and the Wongs ' Rampok Preanger (1929) and Si Pitoeng (1931) , followed soon after Si Tjonat .

Si Tjonat is likely a lost film . The American visual anthropologist Karl G. Heider writes that all Indonesian films from before 1950 are lost . However , J.B. Kristanto 's Katalog Film Indonesia (Indonesian Film Catalogue) records several as having survived at Sinematek Indonesia 's archives , and Biran writes that several Japanese propaganda films have survived at the Netherlands Government Information Service .

= = Explanatory notes = =