

EUROPEAN DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION BULLETIN

NATHANAEL ISKANDAR (Tan Goan Tiang)
An Indonesian demographer 1916 - 1977

Nathanael Iskandar, whose real name was Tan Goan Tiang, was born in the small town of Cianjur in West-Java in 1916, in what was then known as the Netherlands East Indies. His family was poor and as the eldest son he had to help supplement the family income by selling sweet cookies made by his mother. In this way he was able to attend both primary and secondary school.

The educational system of the Dutch colonial administration at the time was one of separate, and therefore unequal educational opportunities for the three categories of European, Chinese and "natives". In this system a flawless knowledge of the Dutch language had become the touchstone of all achievements. So when Tan had to pass his final examinations at the H.C.K. (Hollands-Chinese Kweekschool or Dutch-Chinese Teacher Training School) there were two examination committees present. One had to conduct the conversation, the other, hidden behind a screen, had to listen to the candidate's Dutch pronunciation. Tan was the only one to pass out of a group of seven. He became a teacher at several Protestant schools in Jakarta.

It was only after the formal recognition of Indonesian independence by the Netherlands in 1949 that Tan could resume his studies at the newly founded Faculty of Economics of the University of Indonesia at Jakarta, where I at the time taught demography. Although my senior in years as well as in other respects, he insisted on being treated as a normal student. He obtained his M.A. degree with honours in 1954 and worked as a research assistant at several institutes. In 1968 he got the chance to continue his studies at the famous Office of Population Research at Princeton University, where he obtained his Ph.D. with a study on "Several alternative implications of future population developments on the composition of the labour force and number of students in Indonesia".

When the Demographic Institute was created at the Faculty of Economics in 1964, Tan was the man to become its first Director. Although a member of the Chinese minority, his identification with the Indonesian

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people and his goodwill with the Indonesian authorities was never in doubt. It was not widely known that he used to spend the greater part of his spare time doing social work at the village level in the kampungs in and around Jakarta.

Tan was one of the very few professors of Chinese descent at the University of Indonesia. The University honoured him and itself by conferring on him the title of "profesor teladan" (lit.:exemplary professor).

As Director of the Demographic Institute his publications were numerous. He outlined the task and programme of the Institute in a booklet entitled Arti dan tudjuan demografi (The sense and significance and demography). Some of his publications were later compiled under the title Some monographic studies on the population of Indonesia (1970). He also wrote the monograph on Indonesia in the well-known CICRED-series.

Tan was a gentle and friendly man a a person of high integrity in a world of corruption. I will always remember how he sat at my bedside brewing tea when I fell ill during the Bucharest conference. His final wish was that his ashes be brought to rest in the Netherlands.

H.J.Heeren

Nous avons le pénible devoir de vous informer du décès de notre membre, professeur Luigi Solari, directeur du Département d'économétrie, Université de Genève, survenu le 10 novembre 1977.