THE CHINESE PERANAKAN WOMEN’S JOURNEY AMIDST TRADITION, COLONIALISM, ASSIMILATION, AND NATIONALISM IN A DIFFERENT SKY, THE WOMAN WHO BREATHED TWO WORLDS, AND ONLY A GIRL

A Thesis Presented to
The Graduate Program in English Language Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Magister Humaniora (M.Hum)
in
English Language Studies

By
Vania Williany
186332001

THE GRADUATE PROGRAM OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES
SANATA DHARMA UNIVERSITY
YOGYAKARTA
2020
THE CHINESE PERANAKAN WOMEN'S JOURNEY AMIDST TRADITION, COLONIALISM, ASSIMILATION, AND NATIONALISM IN A DIFFERENT SKY, THE WOMAN WHO BREATHE TWO WORLDS, AND ONLY A GIRL

A Thesis Presented to
The Graduate Program in English Language Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Magister Humaniora (M.Hum)
in
English Language Studies

By
Vania Williany
186332001

THE GRADUATE PROGRAM OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES
SANATA DHARMA UNIVERSITY
YOGYAKARTA
2020
Life can give everything to whoever tries to understand and is willing to receive new knowledge.

(Pramoedya Ananta Toer)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would say my utmost gratitude to Jesus Christ, my Savior and my Shepherd, who has given me unending strength, peace, and blessing during the struggle of writing this thesis.

Secondly, I would express my deepest and earnest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dra. Novita Dewi, MS., M.A. (Hons), Ph.D. I am indebted to her shared valuable knowledge and continuous encouragement throughout the thesis writing process. Thank you for always inspiring me to keep writing and do my best. My great gratitude also goes to Paulus Sarwoto, Ph.D., who has always been an insightful lecturer and a critical mentor in all Literature subjects. I would extend my gratitude to all honorable lecturers of ELS department, Dr. J. Bismoko, F.X. Mukarto, Ph.D., Dr. B.B. Dwijatmoko, M.A., Dr. E. Sunarto, M.Hum., and Dr. Fr. Borgias Alip, M.Pd., M.A.

Thirdly, I humbly thank my classmates in Literature 2018 (Roza, Asep, Tanto, Sigit, and Natan) for the animated discussions in class and lively talks outside the class, which instigate me to think, to read, and to write even more. I also thank fellow students of the A class ELS 2018, especially Manis Manja study group (Desy, Fennie, and Taqwa) for the constant motivations and warm friendship. Moreover, I appreciate the prayers and spiritual support from community leaders in GMS Yogyakarta, Teddy, Bang Victor, Kak Wanti, and Kak Yoka.

For my beloved parents, Wahyudi Halim and Lili Ekowati, and my dear sister, Felicia Febrian, words are powerless to describe my endless gratitude for their forever love and support. This thesis is dedicated to them.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

A THESIS .................................................................................................................. ii
A THESIS .................................................................................................................. iii
MOTTO ....................................................................................................................... iv
STATEMENT OF WORK OF ORIGINALITY ............................................................... v
LEMBAR PERNYATAAN PERSETUJJUAN PUBLIKASI KARYA ILMIAH
UNTUK KEPENTINGAN AKADEMIS ........................................................................ vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................ vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .............................................................................................. viii
ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. x
ABSTRAK .................................................................................................................... xi
CHAPTER I .................................................................................................................. 1
INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................... 1
   A. Background of the Study .................................................................................... 1
   B. Problem Formulations ..................................................................................... 8
   C. Benefit of the Study ......................................................................................... 9
   D. Chapter Outline ............................................................................................... 9
CHAPTER II ............................................................................................................... 11
LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................................................................... 11
   A. Review of Related Studies ............................................................................. 11
   B. Review of Related Theories .......................................................................... 21
      1. Postcolonial Feminism: The Approach ...................................................... 21
      2. Subalternity and Strategic Essentialism Theories by Gayatri C. Spivak 25
      3. Asian Feminism Theory by Mina Roces .................................................. 29
   C. Theoretical Framework ................................................................................. 31
CHAPTER III ........................................................................................................... 32
COLONIAL ENCOUNTER: CHINESE PERANAKAN WOMEN’S GAIN AND LOSS
................................................................................................................................. 32
A. Chinese Peranakan Women’s Gains.................................................. 32
   1. Female Negotiation with Filial Piety........................................ 32
   2. Female Education .................................................................... 40
   3. Female Economic Independence............................................... 48
B. Chinese Peranakan Women’s Loss ................................................. 58
   1. Racial Prejudice ....................................................................... 58
   2. Prohibition on Intermarriage .................................................. 66

Chapter IV ....................................................................................... 71

CHINESE PERANAKAN WOMEN’S TURN TO NATIONALISM:
CONTRIBUTIONS AND STRUGGLES............................................... 71

A. PERANAKAN WOMEN’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO ASSIMILATION
   71
   1. Peranakan Food ........................................................................ 72
   2. Peranakan Dress ....................................................................... 75
   3. Peranakan Language .................................................................. 82
B. PERANAKAN WOMEN’S AMBIVALENCE TO NATIONALISM.. 88
   1. Political Awareness on National Struggles and Independence ....... 89
   2. Conferment of Indonesian Names .......................................... 94
   3. Politics of National Language .................................................. 102

CHAPTER V ..................................................................................... 112

CONCLUSION .................................................................................. 112
   Suggestion .................................................................................. 118
   Bibliography ................................................................................ 120
ABSTRACT


This thesis analyzes the Chinese Peranakan women’s journey amidst tradition, colonialism, assimilation, and nationalism in three Southeast Asian historical novels entitled *A Different Sky, The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*, and *Only A Girl*. Two main questions are stated as the basis of analysis. Firstly, this thesis reveals the ways the colonial encounter shapes the Chinese Peranakan women’s identities. Secondly, this thesis evaluates how the assimilation with non-Chinese culture influences the formation of Chinese Peranakan women’s nationalism. To answer the problems, this thesis uses Postcolonial Feminist approach, with two main theories, i.e. Gayatri Spivak’s subalternity and strategic essentialism, as well as Asian Feminism theory by Mina Roces. There are two main findings in the analysis. Firstly, the colonial encounter leads to progress to Chinese Peranakan women’s identities. It encourages Peranakan women to negotiate with filial piety, get education, and gain economic independence. However, the colonial encounter weakens the Chinese Peranakan’s identities, due to the racial prejudice and the intermarriage. Consequently, Peranakan women turn to nationalism. They contribute to the assimilation of Peranakan culture to non-Chinese culture of the host countries, i.e. Peranakan food, Peranakan dress, and Peranakan language. Besides, they are in the ambivalent phase towards nationalism. They attempt to being aware of the national struggles and independence, to confer the names to Indonesian names, and to deal with politics of the national language. In the end, it is found that the Chinese Peranakan women are varied entities, having distinct and layered identities, influenced by different experience of colonialism.

*Keywords: Chinese Peranakan women, Southeast Asia, tradition, colonialism, assimilation, nationalism*
ABSTRAK


Kata kunci: Perempuan Peranakan Cina, Asia Tenggara, tradisi, kolonialisme, asimilasi, nasionalisme
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Chinese Peranakan is a dynamic society. Indeed, Chinese Peranakan society residing and living in three countries of Southeast Asia; i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore have similarities as well as discrepancies that are worth studying.

‘Peranakan’ refers to the Malay label for ‘local-born people’ (Clammer 3) and the offspring of foreigner-native union\(^1\). The Chinese Peranakan has got several labels, such as: ‘Baba’ for men, ‘Nyonya’ for women, ‘Straits Chinese’ and ‘Straits-born Chinese’, and there is also ‘Peranakan Chinese\(^2\)’.

Similarities of Chinese Peranakan in Peninsular Malaya and Indonesian Archipelago can be traced from the background and development of their society in each area. There are geographical, historical, and political resemblances among Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Geographically, they are located in the “island” of Southeast Asia, as “a string of archipelagos to the south and east of the mainland (insular Southeast

---

\(^1\) The male ancestors of the Peranakan Chinese mostly came from Southern China in Fujian province, while their female ancestors were predominantly from the indigenous populations of the Malay Archipelago and, in smaller number, mainland Southeast Asia.

\(^2\) The meaning of each label is revealed throughout this thesis. See Thienny Lee’s “Dress and Visual Identities of the Nyonyas in the British Straits Settlements; mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century”, Diss. University of Sydney, 2006, 1-3.
Asia)³. Then, the political movement and decolonization in these countries are comparable. They were under European colonizers for decades and used to undergo the brutal Japanese occupation. They gained independence in the same decades as well⁴.

Furthermore, Ding Choo Ming⁵ discovers that there are generally three ways of looking at the Chinese Peranakan as an ethnic group in Peninsular countries. First, the Chinese Peranakans live in small and self-organizing community above the notion of state and citizenship. Second, their identity as Peranakan meaning they are ethnically Chinese but they have adopted the local culture in Malay world. Third, Chinese Peranakan has power of ethnic belonging and loyalty; this differs Peranakan from other Chinese ethnic namely Sinkek, the newcomers from Mainland China in 19th century whom Peranakans perceive as an enemy for a long time.

Differences then, can be explored from the migration history and development of the population, including the flourish of Peranakan literature. Chinese-Indonesian Peranakan immigrated to Java approximately 1000 years ago⁶. They established the immigrant communities throughout. Although their demography is not as large as the Malaysian and Singapore Peranakan, the

---

⁴ Indonesia had been colonized by the Dutch and several European countries, and the independence was proclaimed on 17 August 1945. Malaysia happened to be British colony in the end of 18th century and it declared the independence on 31 August 1957. Meanwhile, Singapore was firstly colonized by the British governor Stamford Raffles on 28 January 1819 being the British new port, and reached independence on 9 August 1965. See John Paxton’s The Statesman’s Year-Book 1990-91, 2016.
Chinese communities in Indonesia grew notably in urban society due to the inter-marriage of male Chinese immigrants with local women. Later they grew the Peranakan communities.

Two characteristics are found in Indonesian Peranakan communities, especially in Java, during the colonial Indonesia/Dutch East Indies in the end of the nineteenth century until the twentieth century. First, their links with China, especially with Manchu (the Qing dynasty), was very weak, because of Manchu’s discouragement of the emigration and prohibition of the emigrants re-entering China. Also, most of the immigrants were moving due to the political instability and famine, thus they aspired to settle down to explore the economic potential in Dutch East Indies. Second, the majority of Indonesian Peranakan in Java have assimilated with the indigenous cultures and traditions due to their long settlement in the archipelago. Most of them cannot speak and write in Chinese. However, they are still affected by Dutch colonial segregation policies as a relatively distinct group from native Indonesian population. Encouraged by Dutch policy, the Chinese Peranakan mostly

---

8 In addition, there is a different specificity between male Indonesian Peranakan explained as above with Indonesian Peranakan women. Historically speaking, "In the late eighteenth century, women joined their husbands in their journey to the [Indonesian] archipelago. They were probably Han men who fled the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty for political reasons and who took their families along. They joined their compatriots in the Chinese quarters in various cities. In addition, apart from the men who worked in the harbors and who collected taxes, and artisans who supplied goods to the Europeans and other non-Chinese people, their womenfolk and children could live their entire lives seeing only or mainly fellow Chinese. The only indigenous people these women and children saw on a daily basis were those who worked in their households, such as their domestic servants and guards. While the ties between them and the domestic servants and guards were often and to varying degrees personal, complemented with emotional depth, the image they subconsciously had of the indigenous people was that of people of inferior social class." This is to say that there is a dimension of heterogeneity amidst Peranakan males and females residing in Java during Dutch colonialism. See Dewi Anggraeni, “Does multicultural Indonesia include its ethnic Chinese?” Wacana Vol. 13 No. 2 (October 2011): 256-278.
worked as intermediary traders, serving Dutch on one hand and the indigenous on the other hand.

Indonesian Peranakan Chinese involved actively in newspaper publication and modern organization. Following this, Thomas Rieger argues that Chinese Peranakan literature in Indonesia began to develop as a manuscript by Chinese-Indonesian Peranakan communities. This literature includes the earliest novels and short-stories written by Peranakan, also some translated works from Chinese stories. Novels of the Peranakans progressed in Indonesia following the founding of Balai Pustaka as the national printing house.

Meanwhile, the Peranakan Chinese born in the Straits Settlements of Peninsula Malaya (Penang, Singapore, Malacca) is called Babas. The term Babas often used interchangeably with the term Peranakan though they are quite different. Peranakan refers to the locally-born Malaysian with mixed parents. Therefore, a Baba can be a Peranakan but a Peranakan must not be a Baba. Besides, Babas are male descendants of the Straits-born Chinese, whereas Nyonyas are female Strait-born Chinese. The Babas are engrained to three different races, including Chinese, Malay and English. Due to these cultural backgrounds, Babas expressed a unique cultural mix in the clothes, the culinary skills, the style of architecture, and in the language and literature. Babas managed to publish stories in Romanized Malay language. They succeeded publishing newspapers, magazines, books, and translated Chinese

---

10 According to Suryadinata, as Peranakan population grew in Java, the Peranakan press got advanced and Peranakan literature bloomed. There were large quantities of Peranakan writings, both translations and original literary works.
stories. Baba literature was popular in 1894 until 1950, and the novels got famous in 1950s, or post-World War II\textsuperscript{12}. Nonetheless, Shin Mun Ng\textsuperscript{13} mentions that the 1890-1930 period is chosen for being the ‘golden age’ of the Straits-Peranakans and the flourish of its literature. This timeline indicated one of shifts and ambiguity with the Straits Chinese Reform Movement\textsuperscript{14}, Chinese Revolution of 1911\textsuperscript{15}, and World War I.

Despite the different record about the peak of Peranakan literature, Chinese Peranakan literatures provides an opportunity to understand how culture and identities of Chinese Peranakan society revealed as a strategy for survival\textsuperscript{16}. In other words, through literature, Peranakan writers and society explore their status as ‘diaspora’ and their complicity to colonial seclusion policy as the second class citizen. Peranakan publications, too, reveals Peranakans’ identity, that is distinctive to Chinaborn-Chinese. This is because Chinese Peranakan has identified themselves as British/ Dutch subject, yet Chinese.

\textsuperscript{12} S.K. Yoong & A.N.Zainab, 42-43
\textsuperscript{13} Shin Mun Ng, “How can the Cosmopolitan World of Peranakan Singapore be Best Defined?” Online, Academia.edu 2016. Online Document. Internet, 17 December 2019.
The aforementioned identification corresponds with Chan’s explication that points out how the Western colonialism brought new experiences for Chinese Peranakan. The colonial encounters gave betterment, i.e. better educational opportunities, increasing Western influences, and improved communications with the rest of the world. Agreeing Chan’s point, Shin Mun Ng describes that the Peranakan’s identification to their ‘modern’ identity contains a negotiation of an intermediate identity of socio-political standing and post-colonialist theories on hybridity.

Moreover, within the Chinese Peranakan literature’s study, there is a fascinating discourse about women. Chinese Peranakan women had never got really weakened by colonial oppression. In other words, there is different degree of oppression(s) and defeat(s) seen in Chinese Peranakan women compared to indigenous women. Chinese Peranakan women mostly, are the middle class, who are financially stable and are educated.

However, there is an unavoidable tension, realizing the fact that Chinese Peranakan women got the oppression from their own tradition—Chinese patriarchal system. According to Karal and Banerjee, patriarchy is the system where male dominants all sphere of life. They explain that in Chinese Confucian society, men rule over the family. Women have very low status in Chinese patriarchal society. Women have no voice to speak, only have to be silent and obey whatever was dictated. The question still remains, though,

---

whether the West is the true ‘messiah’ for Peranakan women in liberating them against the patriarchal tradition.

Responding the intricate issue above, the journey of Chinese Peranakan women amidst tradition and colonial encounter is significant to explore. They indeed obtain gains and losses that shape their identities variedly. Thereafter, their interactions with non-Chinese society in each country form their awareness of nationhood.


*A Different Sky* (2011), is a historical fiction by Meira Chand. The novel covers the era of transition in Singapore from 1927 to 1956. The story goes to tell the Chinese female protagonist, Mei Lan who educates herself to rebel against negative traditions. She leaves her privileged family and rejects arranged marriage. Instead, she decides to be an auxiliary nurse in World War II and survives the Japanese brutal rape, until she becomes the British-graduate lawyer and defends the rights of marginalized women.

Afterwards, *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds* (2016), is a historical novel by Selina Siak Chin Yoke. Set in the Malayan colonial of 1870s to 1940s, it tells Chye Hoon’s struggle, who is forbidden to go to school, but trained to cook and be a Nyonya. Chye is arranged to marry Peng, a Chinese immigrant and both lead a good life. However, Chye is left alone when Peng
left her to China. In time, Chye can raise her large family and provide for them in clever ways.

The following is *Only a Girl* (2010) by Lian Gouw\(^{20}\). The story spans from the early 1930s until 1950s. The main protagonist of the novel is a Dutch educated Carolien Ong, a well-off Chinese woman enjoying the privileges granted by the colonial government. The political situations during Dutch and Japanese colonization affect Carolien as well as Nanna, Carolien’s mother, and Jenny, Carolien’s daughter.

In brief, the journey of Chinese Peranakan women amidst colonial encounter and interaction with non-Chinese population correspond with the postcolonial realm, as represented by the novels. Hence, postcolonial feminist approach consisting of Gayatri Spivak’s theories on subalternity and strategic essentialism, as well as Mina Roces’ Asian Feminism are applied to provide critical analysis of the three novels.

**B. PROBLEM FORMULATIONS**

Referring to the background of the study, there are two main questions to answer in this research:

1. In what way does colonial encounter shape the Chinese Peranakan women’s identities?

2. How does assimilation with non-Chinese culture influence the formation of Chinese Peranakan women’s nationalism?

---

\(^{20}\) The novel is also available in Indonesian version as *Menantang Phoenix*, published by Gramedia Jakarta, 2009.
C. Benefit of the Study

This study aims at dismantling the different dimensions of Chinese Peranakan women’s journey in postcolonial peninsular Southeast Asia (Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia). The aim would be achieved by discussing Chinese Peranakan women’s gain and loss amidst tradition and colonial encounter, as well as Peranakan women’s assimilation with non-Chinese culture which affects their nationalism. It is hoped that the analysis can reveal the transformation capacity of literatures within the realms of Southeast Asian literatures, Chinese diasporic studies, and Southeast Asian studies.

D. Chapter Outline

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter focuses on the background of the study, problem formulation, benefit of study, and thesis outline.

Next, Chapter Two consists of three parts. First, it is Review of Related Studies, highlighting the prior similar studies to locate how this thesis fulfils the gap. Then, Review of Related Theories explains the theories used in this thesis. It includes review of Gayatri Spivak’s theory on subalternity and strategic essentialism and Mina Roces’ explanation on Asian feminism. The theoretical framework follows suit.

Thereafter, Chapter three answers how Chinese Peranakan women undergo the journey of gain and loss amidst the Chinese tradition and colonial encounter. Then, chapter four analyses how the assimilation with non-Chinese
society influences Chinese Peranakan women’s nationalism. Lastly, chapter five supplies conclusions of this study. The suggestion to explore the issue not yet pursued by the thesis is also offered.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

This section reviews several studies that have been conducted on Chinese Peranakan literature’s study, on South East Asian literatures’ voice, on the selected novels, and on women in postcolonial world. The purpose is to emphasize the gap this thesis tries to fill in.

There are three studies reviewed related with the issue of Chinese Peranakan literature’s study and Southeast Asian literary voice. The first study is “From Sojourners to Residents: Transformation of Chinese Peranakan’s identity in Indonesia and Malaysia” by Ding Choo Ming21.

As Ding Choo Ming suggested, one important source to analyze the transformation of Peranakan from being sojourners to residents is through their literature which to a certain extent reflects the Chinese Peranakan’s sense of collective identity and cultural awareness. According to Ming, from the documentation and study done over the decades, there exist a group of writers, young and old, fighting for freedom, civil rights and social justice from the Dutch in Indonesia and express their feelings.

In pre-independent and colonized Indonesia, Peranakan were badly treated, almost as slaves, and denied all the privileges given to an ordinary “citizen”. The awareness of their political difficulties and rights, as obedient tax payers, led many of Peranakan leaders and writers to fight hard for their basic civil and social rights to welfare, security and acceptable standards of living. Things were different with their counterparts in the Straits Settlements. Many successful Peranakan in the Straits Settlements were given “special rights” and even awarded as British subject. This allowed them to think of each other as sharing the same national identity and culture, what Benedict Anderson called as “imagined community”.

The Peranakan in Indonesia underwent suffering in silence and agony, in the form of the injustice shared by other Pribumi and the “non-whites”. As their life became unbearable, they tried to escape the hardship, despair and emptiness by writing, one of the peaceful actions, also as a way of identifying themselves with the rights, privileges and many other things that only the Dutch had, that were denied to them. Their non-violent and non-destructive verbal and literary protests were made to bring reconciliation with the Dutch who controlled the society with an iron fist.

Meanwhile, after independence, Ding Choo Ming argues that the Chinese Peranakan’s stories in Malaysia should be recognized, instead of being subordinate to the master narratives of colonialism and capitalist expansion. This flourished of literary writings gain sociological and anthropological interests in terms of social

---

movements, cultural experiments, the practice of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity, a variety of identity politics and cultural citizenship. Malaysian can be benefitted when they move the study of Peranakan culture and literature from the periphery to place Peranakan literature in the center. Peranakan’s peaceful coexistence and development of their unique culture were witnesses of the diversity and variety of cultures in the Malay World.

Upon the elaboration of the designation of Chinese Peranakan literature and the debate around them, Ming’s study still has left a space to fill in. Ming’s study elaborates the debate and historicity of Peranakan literature without specific discussion on a Peranakan stories to represent them. Accordingly, this thesis gives exemplification to the aforementioned Chinese Peranakan literature’s definition through the study of A Different Sky, The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds and Only a Girl; and how these novels problematize heterogeneous experiences of Chinese Peranakan women’s journey pre-, during, and post-Independence of Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia.


The translated works of Baba stories reached a peak in 1930-1939. There were 38 titles of the translated stories and 14 translators involved in the project.

---

Furthermore, the study discovers that between 1899 and 1950 the Baba translated works from Mainland-China stories were the favorite reading materials among the Baba communities. Members of this community were financially capable and some held political positions in the colonial offices in the Straits Settlements. They were loyal “British subjects” and gradually assimilate the British culture, lifestyle, and that includes reading.

While Yoong and Zainab focuses on the emergence of translated Baba literature and its influence to Malaysian literature, this thesis would enhance the discussion from the representations of Chinese Peranakan women’s journey in contemporary novels. In fact, the selected contemporary novels revisit the historical and social realities during colonialism/postcolonialism of Peninsular Southeast Asia. This issue has not yet been narrated at the peak of Baba literature in 1930s. Therefore, it is significant to see how historical specificity, geographical boundaries, and socio-political issues influence the representations of Peranakan women in the contemporary novels.

The third study is “Contemporaneity in Southeast Asian / ASEAN Literature(s): Transcending or transgressing national borders?” by Manneke Budiman24. There are two important arguments of Budiman.

First, Budiman argues that talking about literature in the Southeast Asian region under the recognition of ASEAN literature is problematic. The regional ‘common culture’ or common aspirations inspired by the ASEAN spirit is

---

questionable. Also, the idea of ASEAN as a regional community existing with—or even replacing—older and more culturally-rooted ‘traditional’ communities, is difficult to reach.

However, Budiman offers a gap that could be filled by researchers about South East Asia’s common voice. He explains that it is appealing to find out if ideas concerning the emergence of something that resembles a common regional consciousness have begun to take shape in the literature(s) of the region.

Second, Budiman rebuts the use of singular form of ASEAN literature. SEA literature(s), Budiman highlights, is still built on national literatures written by authors from various national backgrounds. It may not directly show the concern of formation of regional literature. Yet, Budiman suggests that further studies can explore how local issues on each region may get revisited, re-understood, and rearticulated in ASEAN regional framework.

Indeed, this thesis responds the niche offered by Budiman. This thesis elaborates that Chinese Peranakan literatures written by Chinese diaspora authors residing in Southeast Asia countries can be one of commonalities contributive to the establishment of Southeast Asia’s voice. Furthermore, this thesis investigates whether the local issues depicted in contemporary historical literature about Chinese Peranakan have reevaluated, recognized, and reformulated the ASEAN as its regional context.

Next, there are three studies reviewed which discussed the issues of the novels chosen, namely on Chand’s A Different Sky and Gouw’s Only A Girl. The first study
under review is entitled ‘Forests and ecocultural disequilibrium in two postcolonial novels from Cameroon and Singapore’ by Chitra Sankaran and John Nkengasong.\(^{25}\)

Sankaran and Nkengasong look at the ways the two contemporary authors, one Cameroonian and the other Singaporean, depict the forest in their novels. They argue that in Linus Asong’s *Crown of Thorns* and Meira Chand’s *A Different Sky*, the nature/culture binary is shown as fundamental. Both narratives highlight the essential inhospitability of the forests for human habitation.

*A Different Sky*, set in Second World War Singapore, reveals how, when the cultural territory is made inhospitable to man due to cultural terrain and human brutality, the forest appears as a shelter. However, the paper contends this is misleading, for the essential disequilibrium between nature and culture is too deep to be overridden or resolved. Nature therefore becomes a contested site, both as exterior and separate, and also as refuge. At the end, both novels confirm that the nature/culture binary is primal, entering all cultures and cannot be neglected in literary analysis.

While Sankaran and Nkengasong analyze the relation between nature and human in the postcolonial-ecocriticism, this thesis has different interest. I would examine the Chinese Peranakan journey in facing tradition and colonialism, cultural assimilation and nation-building. The analysis would use postcolonial feminist lens, and it would enrich the critics and discussion of *A Different Sky*.

The second study to review is “Identitas Tionghoa dalam Sastra Diaspora Indonesia Only A Girl Karya Lian Gouw” by S.E. Indah Peni Aji. This article analyzes the identity of three Chinese Peranakan generations (Nanna, Carolien, Jenny) as Chinese diaspora living in Bandung, Indonesia during the transition era of Dutch and Japanese colonialism.

Using Hall’s theory on identity, Aji discovers three identities obtained by three Chinese Peranakan generations. First, the social identity of Chinese diaspora is Dutch-oriented and ambivalent. Second, economic identity of Chinese diaspora women is upper hand than Indonesian natives. Third, the identity of the generations Chinese diaspora women is varied depending on the generation. Aji concludes that identities of three Chinese Peranakan generations are based on the identity of migration and efforts of avoiding racial prejudice.

As Aji emphasizes the Chinese Peranakan women’s diasporic identity, I would expand the analysis by scrutinizing how Chinese Peranakan women as diaspora faced the colonialism and traditional patriarchy. I would also add how the Peranakan women negotiate their status with cultural assimilation with non-Chinese population. Finally, I would analyze how Peranakan women’s journey contributes to nation-building in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

The third study is “Chinese-Indonesians and Subalternity in Four Novels” written by Purwanti Kusumaningtyas. This paper argues that Chinese-Indonesian people remain subaltern as narrated by Bonsai (Pralampita Lembahmata), Ca Bau Kan (Remy Sylado), The Pathfinders of Love (Richard Oh), and Only A Girl (Lian Gouw).

Kusumaningtyas underlines that in Only A Girl, Nanna’s family shares the life of the Chinese-Indonesian people. The Indonesian government’s policy decides the kind of life they have to have. What they can do is only to adjust with whatever situation they are subjected to. For instance, despite the wealth they have, during riots in Indonesia, Nanna’s family relies their safety on their Pribumi servants’ kindness. Thus, in their own home, they are powerful. However, when they must face external issue, they do not have much power to control the situation as they do inside the house.

If Kusumaningtyas explicates the situation of Chinese-Indonesian as subaltern, I would specify the discussion into the journey of Chinese Peranakan women living in Indonesia during mid of 1920s-early 1950s. I also add a layer of discussion as I compare the polemical situation in three countries—Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

---

Next, there are two studies related to women in postcolonial world. The first paper is “Women’s and Feminist Activism in Southeast Asia” by Sharon A. Bong.\textsuperscript{28} This essay explains how women’s/ feminist activism in Southeast Asia proposes a critical relativism standpoint and practices. It incorporates the universalism of women’s human rights and the specificities of cultures and religions to fulfill gender equality and gender equity more effectively. Thus, it is beneficial to see the dynamic of local value and global virtue of woman activism/ feminism.

Bong’s argument justifies that feminist postcolonial theory can be an appropriate framework to problematize woman’s/feminist issue in Southeast Asia. Agreeing upon her argument, I would consolidate how postcolonial feminism theory is critical to analyze the selected Chinese Peranakan novels which depict woman subordination and survival in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Secondly, it is Karen Teoh’s paper, “The Burden of Proof: Gender, Cultural Authenticity and Overseas Chinese Women’s Education in Diaspora”\textsuperscript{29}. Teoh mentions that until the present days, overseas Chinese women have selectively been absent from the official national narratives of late-colonial Malaysia and Singapore.

Teoh adds that scholars attempt to dig up the stories of Chinese Peranakan women in a more diverse setting of socio-economic, political and personal roles. One category of everyday female activity that stands out as a rich field to mine is female


education. Teoh continues explaining that in Malaya and Singapore, the increase of formal female education and the tensions developed between the two main types of institutions—English-medium and Chinese-medium—led to an intra-ethnic schism among the Chinese community. As a complex ‘classic’ problem of tradition versus modernity, the politics of cultural belonging dominated debates over political identification and paths to modernization in relation to modern femininity.

This explanation opens up the niche on problematic status of Chinese Peranakan women in family as well as in negotiating the colonial encounter and the effect of assimilation with local culture. Hence, I am interested to extend the discussion on exploration of Chinese Peranakan’s women political recognition and direction to modernization in accordance with modern femininity.

The wealth of studies on Chinese Peranakan in literature focuses on history and definition of Peranakan literature. Such studies reviewed are Ding Choo Ming and Yoong and Zainab. In fact, there is still a niche left to explore—it is to give exemplification of such definition, with relation to its contemporary publication. This study, therefore, would explore the issue. The history and social realities of Chinese Peranakan women’s journey, from the early until the mid of 20th century, manifested by selected novels (A Different Sky, The Woman Who Breathes Two Worlds, and Only A Girl) are analyzed.

Furthermore, none of the reviewed studies on the selected novels (Only A Girl and A Different Sky) talk about Chinese Peranakan’s women journey amidst colonial encounter, cultural assimilation and nation building, with the exception of Aji and Kusumaningtyas’s studies. While Aji and Kusumaningtyas examine the identity of
Tionghoa-Indonesia due to colonialism and traditional patriarchy, and subalternity of Chinese family in Indonesia, they hardly touch on the issues of cultural assimilations and nation building. They also focus on one country only (Indonesia), whereas this thesis scrutinizes the situations of Chinese Peranakan women in three countries of Peninsular Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) in colonial/postcolonial setting.

Finally, the niche of Southeast Asian contemporaneity from Manneke Budiman, to discover the common regional consciousness amidst Chinese Peranakan literature would be addressed by this thesis. It is hoped that the analysis of three Chinese Peranakan novels set in three Peninsular Southeast Asia would reveal the similarity and differences of the regional literary voices of ASEAN literatures.

B. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

1. Postcolonial Feminism: The Approach

The struggle of women against multifaceted oppressions including economy, traditions, and patriarchy have become apparent within the postcolonial world. It is the effect of colonialism experience in terms of cultures and societies. Nowadays, under the situation of globalization and the ultimate extreme of capitalism, the condition of women has become a more urgent issue than ever. Gender issues are, therefore, inseparable from the project of postcolonial criticism.

---

30 Deepika Bahri, Feminism and Postcolonialism in a Global and Local Frame (Geneve: Graduate Institute Publications, 2009), pp. 193-212.
To begin, the review on the understanding of terms ‘postcolonialism’ and ‘postcolonial’ is presented. According to Ashcroft, ‘postcolonialism’ has been utilized by critics referring to a variety of cultural effects of colonialism\(^\text{31}\). ‘Postcolonial’, then, refers to resistance to ‘colonial’ power and its discourses that persists to shape various cultures, including decolonized countries\(^\text{32}\). Hence, postcolonial theory focuses on disrupting the colonial discourse which has misrepresented colonial experience and realities, and has penetrated inferiority on the colonized people in order to establish and maintain colonial power.

Postcolonialism also studies the production of literature by colonized peoples that articulates their identity and reclaims their past in facing the normalization of ‘otherness’. The task of a postcolonial theorist is, thus, to reveal the often ‘absent’ colonized into the dominant discourse, in a way that it resists the authority of the colonizer.

While postcolonial theorist struggles against the initial colonial discourse that aims at misrepresenting colonized as being inferior, Tyagi\(^\text{33}\) argues that the task of a postcolonial feminist is far more complicated. Decolonization cannot be regarded as an end to the oppression of women in the former colonies. Toward this, Antonia Navarro Tejero\(^\text{34}\) adds that postcolonial feminist criticism examines how women are

---

33 R. Tyagi, 45
34 Antonia Navarro Tejero, “Postcolonial Feminism: Teaching How to Avoid Prejudices About Muslim Women In An ESL Classroom.” *Universidad de Córdoba* (nd): 254.
represented in colonial and postcolonial literature, and challenges assumptions which
are made about women in both literature and society.

In addition, postcolonial feminism concentrates on construction of gender
difference in colonial and anti-colonial discourses, representation of women in anti-
colonial and postcolonial discourses with particular reference to the work of women
writers (Tyagi). It also points out that postcolonial feminism emphasizes the ways in
which women continue to be stereotyped and marginalized, ironically sometimes by
postcolonial authors who might claim to be challenging a culture of oppression
(Tejero).

Moreover, postcolonial feminists must undo how a woman suffers from
“double colonization” as she simultaneously experiences the oppression of
colonialism and patriarchy. She has to resist the control of colonial power both as a
colonized subject and as a woman. Tyagi35 concludes that postcolonial feminist
criticism gives fundamental impact towards literary studies by intertwining many
disciplines, disputing western ethnocentricity, and returning plural subjectivities to
literary history.

It is important to see the relation of postcolonialism to feminist theory.
According to Deepika Bahri (195), there is a critical driving force, embodied in the
ability to read the past and present, and the here and there together, as the foundation
of a postcolonial critique which is still relevant to understand anticolonial feminisms
and women’s movements. In fact, postcolonial studies, including Orientalism theory,
have been interrelated with gender and the woman question from its very origin, both

35 R. Tyagi, 45
with the overall interests of postcolonialism, and with the revision, interrogation, and supplement of its notion.

Firstly, as Said’s Orientalism (1978) explicated, there has been the characterization of the oriental in feminized terms; and by extension that of native, colonized peoples in mainstream colonial discourses. Hence, this ‘Oriental’, made based on the Oriental’s difference with its weakness to confirm the Occident’s superiority, marks the early importance of gender in the colonial project.

The next essential notion to understanding colonial logic is how the status of native women is used to justify the colonial project as a civilizing mission. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously describes British intervention in the Sati practice in India as “white men saving brown women from brown men” (297). This shows an “epistemic violence” whereby the truth the individuals get is constructed from knowledge that is tainted by the interest of the producer and that knowledge is not neutral. The epistemic violence, which subtly subjugates colonial subjects compliant to the colonial rule, manufactures the knowledge about gender.

Having grasped the overlapping notions of Orientalism and feminism as above, it is important to weigh their tension. Postcolonialism and feminism have come to share a tense relationship. Some feminist critics point out that postcolonial

---

36 According to Said, “In the nineteenth century writers…, the Orient can be characterized as exclusively manifest differences, differences in form and personal style, rarely in basic content. Every one of them kept intact the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability.” See Edward Said’s Orientalism, 1979, p. 206.
theory is a male-centered field that has not only excluded the concerns of women, but also exploited them\textsuperscript{37}.

For instance, Edward Said’s seminal study on Orientalism itself accorded little attention to female agency and discussed very few female writers\textsuperscript{38}. Also, Homi K. Bhabha’s work on the ambivalence of colonial discourses explores the relationship between a “colonizing” subject and a “colonized” object without reference to how the specifics of gender might complicate his model. Postcolonial feminists, therefore, consistently draw attention to the interconnection between colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism.

2. Subalternity and Strategic Essentialism Theories by Gayatri C. Spivak

Gayatri Spivak, as a ‘practical deconstructionist Marxist feminist’ has suggested a significant question in criticizing postcolonial studies. In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak\textsuperscript{39}” she tries to topple the binary opposition between subject and object, self and other, Occident and Orient, center and marginal and the majority and minority. Instead, she strongly inquires whether the subaltern can speak. The subaltern she addresses is the marginalized peoples in India, particularly the Indian women, whom did not belong to colonial elite. Indian subalters can have a variety of heterogeneous status, from being minor rural aristocracy, needy landlords, rich

\textsuperscript{37} Ritu Tyagi, 45-46
\textsuperscript{38} Ritu Tyagi, 46
peasants and upper-middle class peasants. Indian subalterns specifically women, then, posit in ambiguous relation towards power assigned to them.

In reality, these subalterns have never been fully compliant to the colonial rule nor taking the colonial subjectification as a part their own resonant identity. Due to the existence of the question on gender and sexual difference in the discourse of subaltern, Spivak is certain that it is impossible for the subalterns to speak up about their aspirations because they are separated by gender, class, caste, region, religion and other narratives. These separations do not let these subalterns stand up in unity. Therefore, Spivak further asks the suitable actor who will pronounce the subaltern’s difference and the effective way to articulate the subaltern’s difference. Spivak believes that the minority position of the subaltern can be persisted by violence and discourse. The subalterns, then, become the object of writing. They become rewritten, translated or analyzed by ruling class, thus, they lose their voice at the end.

To exemplify her notion about subaltern, Spivak writes about Sati, the practice of the Hindu widow in raising the fire of the dead husband and sacrificed herself upon it. Based on Indian men’s perspective, Indian women perform Sati ritual voluntarily in order to show their loyalty and love to the dead husband. However, British colonizer believes that Sati is a degrading ritual; it is a murder veiled by tradition. From this, it is clear that Indian women have never been asked about their consent on Sati. Indian women’s voice about their perspective on Sati is absent; thus, it is unclear if Indian women do Sati because they want to preserve the ritual or they are pressured to conduct it. The only voices about Sati is from British colonizer and Indian men.
Supporting her idea, Spivak\textsuperscript{40} explains another example about Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri who hung herself in her apartment in North Calcutta in 1926. Some people argued that Bhuvaneswari’s suicide was due to her illegitimate pregnancy and unrequited love. However, it was the fact that Bhuvaneswari was menstruating while dying. Almost a decade later, Spivak\textsuperscript{41} stated that society then understood that Bhuvaneswari committed suicide due to her inability to execute a political assassination, a task given to her, following her involvement in the armed struggle for Indian Independence.

Spivak’s elucidation on Sati and Bhuvaneswari’s suicide emphasizes the success of the internalization of value to Indian women, that they have to be silent in every situation. The subaltern indeed is unable to voice their aspiration and despair since patriarchy and colonialism shut them. Consequently, it is impossible for the subaltern being a subject for themselves. Thus, Spivak proposes the subaltern to take over an intellectual intervention to voice out their thoughts. Spivak called this as “Strategic essentialism”, a strategy in essentializing the subaltern as the other or the inferior one to demonstrate the existence and articulate their thoughts and voice. Spivak\textsuperscript{42} highlights the idea of strategic essentialism in the following:

So I am fundamentally concerned with that heterogeneity, but I chose a universal discourse in that movement because I felt that rather than define myself as repudiating universality—because universalization, finalization, is reducible moment in any discourse—rather than define myself as specific rather than universal, I should see what in the universalizing discourse could

\begin{footnotes}
\item[41] G. C. Spivak, 103.
\item[42] G. C. Spivak, 11.
\end{footnotes}
be useful and then go to see where that discourse meets its limits and its challenge within that field.

Spivak further explains that:

I think we have to choose again strategically, not universal discourse but essentialist discourse. I think that since as a deconstructivist—see, universal just took a label upon myself—I cannot on fact clean my hands and say “I am specific”. In fact, I must say I am an essentialist from time to time.

From above explanation, Spivak suggested ‘strategic essentialism’ as a significant solution to the subaltern’s voice. By ‘strategic essentialism’ she means “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak). A sensible understanding of ‘strategic’ here is ‘pragmatic’, since Spivak sees this essentialism as having little to do with theory, it rather defines a certain political practice. Hence, ‘strategic essentialism’ can gain awareness of the actualities experienced by the subalterns.

For example, Spivak proposed the term ‘feminization of poverty’ focusing on the highly-gendered nature of poverty referring to the fact that more women are submitted as poor adults due to employment policy, as well as divorce and settlement regulations. Applying this, Spivak believed the resistance towards poverty of women, as disenfranchised sex will be more tangible. It can be seen that, the bias of the intellectual speaking for the subaltern will not lose at once; yet, the bias of intellectuals is reasonable as long as those intellectuals do not work on their own self-interest and speaking on the behalf of the subaltern voice.

Strategic essentialism may thus be seen as a political strategy whereby differences (within a group) are temporarily moderated and unity is expected for the
sake of achieving political goals. Instead of rejecting the risk of the intellectual speaking for them, subalterns’ acceptance of the temporal essentialism can be a discursive way-out to carry out subaltern voice.

Even though strategic essentialism is effective to challenge oppressive structures and decrease suffering, Spivak reminds this essentialism should not be allowed to influence world views and encourage reductive views against the human dignity. Spivak\textsuperscript{43} clearly states the intellectual stance: “avoiding in some ways becoming someone who takes on a master discourse.” Therefore, the resistance against Spivak’s view is no longer blaming the antagonism of the dominant colonial rule. Fascinatingly, she makes use of the practical essentialist opposition to empower the marginalized subaltern resisting colonial discourse.

3. Asian Feminism Theory by Mina Roces

In \textit{Asian Feminisms: Women's Movements from the Asian Perspectives} (2010), Mina Roces describes that Asian women disliked the word ‘feminism’ because it is associated with ‘Western feminism’. The problem is that opinion leaders and rulers putatively homogenize unique Asia experience, in nationalist and sometimes anti-colonialist projects which denied Asian women’s patriarchy experience. However, the attempt of liberating women by mimicking Western feminists as ‘bra-burning’, ‘manly and unfeminine women’, is not compatible with Asian cultures and religion.

\textsuperscript{43} G.C. Spivak, \textit{The Postcolonial Critic} 6.
To solve the issue, Asian women activists produce their own ‘home-grown feminism’. This leads to the development of each Asian’s country’s unique feminist theory, self-conscious affirmation of their difference than West. For instance, according to Maltrayee Chauduri, Indian feminism is a “claim for an indigenous feminism”, being the flip side of Indian persisting legacy of an uneasy relationship with Western term.

In Asian context, the periodization of feminist theory is problematic, unlike the Western’s. This is due to the unstable democracies or fluctuations between democracy and dictatorship such as in Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. It also occurs because of Singapore’s political and economic movement from Third World to First World in the last few decades of 20th century. However, just because the activists and researchers were uncomfortable with the term ‘feminist’, they were in reality, practicing feminism. This is since many of them would agree that they were participants of their particular country’s women’s movements.

Mina Roces further describes that there is evolving meaning of feminism in women’s movement in Asia and in Southeast Asia. In other words, there is an elastic definition of feminism in Asia for in reality, women activists in Asia have involved in feminist activism and have been proactive in the project of producing their own brand of feminism appropriate to their local context. Thus, Asian women activists are eager to look back and reflect on the history of women’s movement in the region, for improvement of the women status based on the particular national case study, which

---

44 Mina Roces, Feminism and Transnational Activism, (New York: Routledge), 2010, p. 4
45 Mina Roces, Feminism and Transnational Activism, (New York: Routledge), 2010, p. 5
is ‘modern’ but still ‘Asian’. Asian activists indeed are engaged with and challenged or modified international feminist theories, and organized national borders on behalf of ‘national women’ and women around the world. To be more precise, Asian feminism is an indigenizing feminism and a product of more national than global-influenced.

C. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

After situating the theories of subalternity and strategic essentialism by Gayatri Spivak, as well as Asian feminism by Mina Roces, I believe that postcolonial feminist approach as elaborated in this thesis is advantageous as the tool to answer the problem formulations. Firstly, the use of the theories is beneficial on analyzing the ways the colonial encounter shapes the Chinese Peranakan women’s identities. Secondly, the application of the theories is significant to evaluate how the assimilation with non-Chinese culture influences the formation of Chinese Peranakan women’s nationalism.
CHAPTER III

COLONIAL ENCOUNTER: CHINESE PERANAKAN WOMEN’S GAIN AND LOSS

This chapter presents the answer to the first formulated problem. The analysis is divided into several parts. The first subtopic discusses the Chinese Peranakan women’s gains. There are three highlighted discussions under this subtopic explaining the advancement the Peranakan women get because of the colonial encounter. They include female negotiation with filial piety, female education, and female economic independence. The second subtopic analyzes the Chinese Peranakan women’s losses. Two important issues depicting Chinese Peranakan women’s decline due to Western colonization are presented, namely: racial prejudice and prohibition of intermarriage. Henceforth, all citation from the novels use initials ADS (A Different Sky), TWWBTW (The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds), and OAG (Only A Girl).

A. CHINESE PERANAKAN WOMEN’S GAINS

1. Female Negotiation with Filial Piety

Filial piety is the virtue derived from Confucius.⁴⁶ It refers to great honour to ancestral rites and related family virtues. In filial piety, women’s roles were mainly kinship roles, such as being the daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, and mother-in-law. In all these roles, it was obligatory for women to ac-

cord with the wishes and needs of closely-related men through Three Obediences: their fathers when young, their husbands when married, their sons when widowed. In other words, based on Cheung, Liu, and Henonen, Confucius teaching has embodied a rigid patrilineal kinship system and the subordination of women to men.

Ebrey continues that the Chinese and philosophers after Confucius commonly talk about gender in the binary of ‘yin’ and ‘yang’. Women were addressed as yin. ‘Yin’ was soft, obedient, sensitive, submissive, introspective, and quiet. Meanwhile, men were considered ‘yang’, associated with characteristics like hard, dynamic, aggressive, and controlling. The differences within ‘yin and yang’ concept to distinguish men and women are conformed as the part of the universe natural order; it is not a socially-constructed concept. If yin is made upper hand than yang, the order at the universe and community are endangered.

In addition, according to Ikels as cited by Eklund, the term filial (xiao) in Chinese consists of the Chinese character for “old” (lao) and the character for “son” (zi), with old on top of the son. Thus, based on Croll as cited by Eklund, in intergenerational contract, sons are regarded as primary and cannot be substituted, yet, daughters are secondary and supplementary to sons. It is also true that women lost their belonging to biological families upon marriage. This, too, contribute to the notion that daughters are secondary and sons are essential, as there

---


50 Eklund, 2-3.
are many Chinese proverbs indicating that raising a daughter is such a waste, such as: “married daughter, splashed water” (jiachuqu de nuer, po chuqu de shui)\textsuperscript{51}.

The chosen novels, however, problematize the notion of filial piety. Firstly, in A Different Sky, there are issues on the suffering that the Peranakan women get because of the Chinese patriarchal tradition. Such issues happen in Lim Villa, including: foot binding, concubinage, husband’s abandonment to wives, and polygamous marriage. First, Mei Lan’s First Grandmother was found died because of suicide, after her disappointment towards her husband, Lim Hock An’s second marriage. Also, Second Grandmother was bought to be Lim Hock An’s wife to fulfil his sexual desire towards her bound feet; and for that, she must bear the permanent pain of binding her feet in her old days to please the husband\textsuperscript{52}. Then, the beautiful and young servant namely Little Sparrow is dismissed from Lim Villa to nunnery because she is pregnant with Lim Hock An. Finally, Ei Ling, Mei Lan’s mother is died from dengue fever due to her despair in dealing with her husband’s gamble addiction and affairs with other women (see A Different Sky, 49-54; 63-68).

Indeed, half of the women in Lim Villa are the first generations of Chinese migrating to Singapore (Chwee Gek, the First Grandmother\textsuperscript{53} and Second Grand-

\textsuperscript{51} Eklund, 3.
\textsuperscript{52} Second Grandmother was now breathing hard for the pain of release seemed almost to equal the pain of confinement. ‘My feet were bound at the age of five… The master married me for my feet. Feet as small as mine can drive a man crazy. Look at my beautiful little red dumplings, my golden lilies, my lotus buds.’ Second Grandmother stuck out her legs and crooned to her mangled feet. (ADS 51&52).
\textsuperscript{53} First Grandmother Chwee Gek was brought by her husband Lim Hock An to Singapore from Mainland China as the first generation of Chinese in Singapore. Despite this, the writer does not specify her ethnic: “When Lim Hock An’s parents died he brought his wife Chwee Gek from China to join him. She handled the money, paid the coolies and did the accounts for she had some slender education. An American missionary couple in her home village had opened a school for
mother\textsuperscript{54}) and the others are Strait-born Chinese (Ei Ling\textsuperscript{55} and Little Sparrow\textsuperscript{56}). Regardless of their class and social status (First, Second Grandmother, Ei Ling are spouses of rich Chinese-man, and Little Sparrow is a needy servant), they still live in traditional patriarchy and cannot escape from it. They are not represented and their voice is absence in Chinese patriarchy. They are ‘yin’, being passive and submissive counterpart of the ‘yang’ (male). It can be inferred that those women are subalterns, which Spivak addresses as the oppressed subjects or more generally those “of inferior rank” (283). Spivak further adds that “In the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (287).

However, there is different perspective taken by Mei Lan, as the third generation of Chinese who was born and raised up in colonial Singapore. Mei Lan, indeed, has been exposed to Westerner’s beliefs, way of thoughts inspired by her girls; Chwee Gek had been allowed to go for a while to learn about numbers and letters. In later years, Lim Hock An got himself teachers and more education than his wife (See ADS, 48).

\textsuperscript{54} Second Grandmother’s family story remains mysterious to the readers. “Second Grandmother always swept aside questions about her family. She had no stories to tell of her village in China like Ah Siew, and never mentioned brothers or sisters. Everyone, even Gold and Silver and Little Sparrow, had memories of a former life to root them in the world. Only Second Grandmother’s past appeared hermetically sealed. It was as if she had sprung from nowhere into marriage with Lim Hock An. The only thing that Mei Lan knew was that, before she became Second Grandmother, her name had been Lustrous Pearl.” (See ADS, 52). This is to indicate that Second Grandmother’s background story is not important, or is being left out on purpose, as what matters most is she is now the spouse of a rich tin mining owner, and her life is submitted to him.

\textsuperscript{55} “Ei Ling was a Straits Chinese, the daughter of an established and educated family that, unlike Lim Hock An who had arrived in Singapore as an illiterate coolie, had left their country generations before to settle in Malaya. Although proudly Chinese in beliefs and ritual, the Peranakan Straits Chinese did not look back to China as a homeland as Lim Hock An did, nor did they oppose colonial rule; instead, they adapted to its ways, educating their children in English missionary schools, adopting westernized ideas and habits.” (See ADS, 63-64). This is to say that being Peranakan Straits Chinese, Ei Ling is an educated woman who complies with western education and colonial rule, and has regarded Singapore as her homeland.

\textsuperscript{56} “Where is Little Sparrow?” Mei Lan asked. Little Sparrow was Second Grandmother’s prettiest slave girl. “Little Sparrow gas gone to the nunnery, she was getting too fat. When she is thin she can come back,” Second Grandmother answered tartly... Her own grandfather had paid money for children and then filled Little Sparrow’s body with a baby (See ADS, 50, 57). This is to say that Little Sparrow’s personal background story is also very few described. She is told as the most beautiful slave girl. However, she is dismissed to nunnery for being pregnant.
Western colonial education background at Chinese Girls’ High School. She knows that she does not want to trap in such bad condition of marriage. Therefore, she rejects the arranged marriage and she strives to pursue the education instead (see A Different Sky, 133-134).

In fact, Mei Lan shows her negotiation. She does not flee away from her patriarchal family and she still holds on her Chinese identities as she still wants to listen to her Grandfather’s advice to join the activism of China Relief Fund (see A Different Sky, 136). But, Mei Lan is aware that she aims for a better condition for herself, by not being trapped in intoxicated patriarchal arranged marriage. Here, Mei Lan negotiates her status and position. On one hand, she still preserves her Chinese identities but her open-mindedness inspired by western way of thinking can—to an extent—liberate her in chasing her dream to be an educated woman instead of getting married at early age. This case corresponds with what Spivak said that:

“What was happening was a universal solution was being looked for, and since I believe that one shouldn’t throw away things but use them, strategically I suggested that perhaps rather than woman inhabiting the spaces of absence, perhaps here was an item which could be used as a universal signifier57.”

In contrast, The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds depicts how the young Chye Hoon is consumed with patriarchal beliefs to get married in teenage. Although deep in heart, she aspires not to get married too soon, she is anxious when all of her sisters get married and she is just being the object of society’s gossip for being an ‘uncontrollable’ spinster because of her straightforward and firm attitude (see The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds, 44-45).

57 G.C. Spivak, The Postcolonial Critic 10
In fact, Chye marries a Chinaman trader, Peng Choon and live happily. Yet, when her spouse dies in China and never returns to Malaya, Chye is in despair for there is no patriarch supporting her family (see The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds, 145,146). In fact, according to Xuewen Sheng\textsuperscript{58}, since ancient times, Chinese rigid gender roles is represented by the old sayings “men plough the fields and women weave” and “the husband sings and the wife follows.” Chye’s oldest son is very young at that time, so, it is impossible to address him a family head. Losing her spouse gives Chye hard time.

When finally, Chye has been able to stand up being the matriarch of Nyonya\textsuperscript{59} supporting her family by opening kueh business channelling her passion, she must see her first daughter, Hui Fang, suffers because of the arranged marriage she goes through. Eventually, Wei Fang’s husband is unfaithful one; he lingers to other women and is addicted to gambling. Chye understands how Wei Fang cannot divorce but should follow her husband, to maintain the honour of the marriage and fulfils the Three Obediences\textsuperscript{60}. Chye then realizes that she is just

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item One day, I asked Mother where we came from. Mother began to tell us about our ancestors. We heard that Father’s great grandfather many times over had been a trader from Amoy in southern China. He arrived a long time ago in a boat with a huge eye painted on its prow. ‘Our ancestors,’ Mother whispered, ‘were different.’ I waited, watching for any change of expression in Mother’s eyes. ‘They married Siamese Malay women and became Babas and Nyonyas,’ Mother said, almost to herself. ‘What mean that?’ I asked. Mother answered that she was a Nyonya and I too would grow up to be one. She said I would dress in Malay clothes but worship Chinese gods, wear my hair in chignon and become known for spicy cooking. She told me Father was a Baba, equally at home in Mandarin-collared jackets or with sarongs around his waist, comfortable speaking many languages – Hokkien, Malay and Siamese – and, with the arrival of the white devils, even English (See TWWBTW, 12-13). This is to say that Chye Hoon’s family is a Nyonya/ Baba Peranakan, whose ancestors came from Amoy, Southern China marrying Siamese Malay woman. They have adopted to Malay world by wearing Malay clothes but still worship Chinese gods, and they speak many languages including Hokkien, Siamese, Malay, and English.
\item ‘Daughter,’ I said looking directly to Hui Fang, ‘you and Wai Man, everything good-mah?’ Blushing my daughter nodded. ‘Why you ask, Mama…’ Hui Fang said in a weak voice, ‘I no complaints so far, Mama.’ It should have been clear to me then. But I had been the fortunate ones. For many women marriage meant nights of violence, putting up with stinking drunken breath or
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
lucky for getting a good husband and good marriage life. However, not every woman is as lucky as her, since at that time, women is situated to be ‘yin’, to be the passive and silent party; and being the husband’s follower even in toxic marriage relationship confined by Chinese rigid patriarchy. Again, the Chinese Peranakan women at that time are considered subaltern whose voices are abandoned and unwanted to be heard by society.

A different issue is problematized by Only A Girl. Carolien, a daughter of rich Chinese family in Indonesia, living in 1930s has received Dutch education. The exposure to western way of thinking and beliefs has helped her resist arranged marriage obliged by her brothers and mother. Instead, Carolien marries Po Han, the man she loves the most despite his lacking of financial stability. Carolien repeatedly questions the validity of holding Chinese traditional marriage values promoted by her mother, Nanna, and her brothers. Carolien believes that total and uncritical complicity to the marriage tradition, has failed to recognize the importance of a woman (see Only A Girl, 13-14).

Given that Lian Gouw herself is a Fujian (Hokkien) who writes Only A Girl based on pieces of her experience living in colonial Indonesia, the characters in the novels, such as Carolien and her family is a Hokkien family too. According to Mely G Tan, this specific Chinese ethnic “has some distinct urban characteristics, such as more receptive to new ideas and approaches, better education and better health condition. Most of them are in urban occupations that are better remunerated, such as business, trade, services, the professions. The wives are also better-educated, are often a partner in the business or are themselves in some profession. These characteristics are conductive to the development of a more pragmatic attitude, facilitating the ability to live in a more rational way, as in planning the number of children to have and the future education of these children.” This is to say that Chinese-ethnic family in Indonesia has been more educated, more open-minded towards gender equality in family, and more rational in taking care about family’s health and family planning. See Mely G Tan, “The Role of Ethnic Chinese Minority in Development: The Indonesian Case.” Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 25, No.3, December 1987).
However, after the divorce, Carolien, who has seemingly left the tradition, revisits her family to get protection and security. She goes back to Nanna’s house after the divorce. Carolien learns that Nanna, her mother especially shows how to negotiate the tradition with colonial virtues by staying firm as the one who sustains the unity of the family by letting Carolien and her daughter to stay (see Only A Girl, 70-71).

With her exposure to western education and way of thinking, strategically, Carolien’s decisions to marry the man she loves and let go of the marriage when she and her spouse are struggling due to financial issue are in line with Spivak’s statement. Carolien is able to “see what in the universalizing discourse could be useful”. In this case, she can let go of the husband, and reconcile with her brother and her mother although it is not suggested by the traditional filial piety that obliges women to respect the husband and leaves her natal family. Carolien grasps that her condition not to fulfil the discourse of Three Obediences (being subordinate to husband) is the best decision and she reunites with her nuclear family instead.

In conclusion, the three novels problematize the different issues of women residing in colonial Malaya, Singapore, and Indonesia in dealing with oppressive Chinese patriarchal values of filial piety. The older generation of Peranakan women living in 1900s of Singapore (Mei Lan’s First and Second Grandmother, also her mother) as well as in 1910s of Malaysia (Chye Hoon’s daughter Hui Fang) are still confined with strict Chinese patriarchy. Although they know they are suffered in the marriage and they must surrender their life to the patriarch, they still stay in

62 G.C. Spivak, The Postcolonial Critic 11
the relationship to fulfil The Obedience to their husbands. Meanwhile, more modern Peranakan women such as Mei Lan and Carolien, living in the end of 1920s of Singapore and Dutch East Indies respectively, have exposed themselves to western’s way of thinking, beliefs, and education. Hence, they are more open-minded and are brave to negotiate their position with filial piety, by rejecting the arranged marriage and making decision about their personal life more independently.

2. Female Education

Education arouses conflicting views among the female main characters and their family. This issue is problematized by the selected Chinese Peranakan novels. All female characters have attempted to pursue education for herself and for her daughters, in order to get better opportunities in life, despite the dispute with their family.

To start, Lim⁶³ as quoted by Teik⁶⁴ explains that Peranakan culture is embedded upon the socially constructed gender roles for Peranakan women: “Once a girl turned twelve, her life of freedom ended. She would … be instructed on the finer points of her future role as a respectable wife in a Peranakan family. She would pick up essential lessons in proper behavior, cooking, sewing, embroidering, bead-work etc.” Therefore, the position of a Peranakan woman is limited within the house and rigid patriarchal virtues restrained them from pursuing education.

---

This corresponds with the problem in *The Woman Who Breathes Two Worlds*. As a Nyonya girl living in 1886, Chye Hoon was prohibited to go to school because she is a girl. Her Nyonya family believed that there was no point of sending girls to school when the girls will only get married and have children. Nyonya community also expects women to be skillful in women’s work: cooking, sewing, and homemaking. Thus, Chye’s wish to enter school is refuted by her parents, although her younger brother has been admitted to school (see *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*, 31).

Teoh then explains that there was a steady improvement on female education among the Malayan society by mid-twentieth century, especially within the ethnic Chinese65. Girls and women of Chinese ethnic were seen predominant as students and teachers in many English- and Chinese-medium schools. More of young Chinese women obtained formal education. Those women were able to earn decent payment and reputable work outside the house.

*The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds* captures the next decades of Chye Hoon’s life with her daughters depict the phenomenon. One scene in the novel exemplifies factors which encourage the more open-minded Nyonya like Chye in 1910s allows her daughters to go to school. Chye’s hesitation about sending her girls to school is answered by the importance of female education she learns from the exposure of modernity.

Chye is first introduced to modernity by Siew Lan, her best friend who celebrates interracial relationship and is excited to learn Western ways of life, believ-

---

ing that the world is changing to be more modern. Siew is certain that Peranakan female must get educated, able to read and write to prepare their best future (see *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*, 187). Moreover, Miss Win-Te, the woman missionary teacher, convinces Chye to “bring the girls in, that it was never too late, that no girl was too old to learn.” Miss Win-Te also begs Chye faithfully, to give the daughters the best chance in life by educating them at school (see *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*, 236). Moreover, Chye is impressed by the confident and smart Flora, Siew’s daughter, who can speak perfect Hokkien, because she has already been educated.

Finally, Chye lets her daughters educated at Anglo-Chinese girl’s school after pondering upon the gain that her girls may get in the future. Chye, Siew Lan, and Miss Win-Te welcome Chye’s decision. Then, seeing Hui Lin and Hui Fang, her second and third daughter learn at class, Chye is proud to know their progress in reading and writing.

…My two younger daughters and I stood under the main verandah of the Anglo Chinese Girls School... Hui Yang and Hui Lin were placed in a special Primary One for older girls. I smiled... pleasantly surprised by my first experience of the girls’ new school. (TWWBTW 245-247).

From Chye’s decision in letting her daughters study as above, Paul Bailey’s66 explanation as quoted by Wei-an Yang67 is relevant. Observing from the Chinese nationalist viewpoint, the admission of Peranakan female students in schools is connected to the changing perspective within Chinese society themselves. After reformation from the Qing regime and the nationalist government led in 1870s, People’s Republic of China was established, and the women were regarded as the

---


mother of the country. Addressing this shifting belief, education was considered the most effective tool for making overseas Chinese more China-oriented, and it indirectly endorsed the development of female education. In fact, many Chinese girls’ schools were founded in the 1910s, the year when Chye started sending her girls to school.

Bailey adds that female education got more popular among Peranakan society because Chinese female education focuses on supplementing women’s traditional virtues with modern knowledge. The education is aimed at cultivating skilled, diligent, efficient women as household managers who might help to create social stability, family harmony, and national prosperity. This ideological shift can encourage a lot more Peranakan parents to send their daughters to study and get knowledge formally. It is because the expected outcome is very tangible: women can be the manager of the family, the smallest unit of the society.

Meanwhile, the issue of prohibition on the pursuit of female higher education is problematized by A Different Sky. Reaching nineteen years old, Mei Lan has embraced modernity and wanted to plan her future by getting higher degree at Raffles College, rather than being trapped into confining marriage custom. This shows the Western virtues Mei Lan obtained from her surrounding, especially from her Chinese Girls’ High school, helps her liberate to be a woman that she wants to be— to pursue education (see A Different Sky, 133).

Wei-an Yang explains that indeed only few of Chinese women got a higher education in Singapore, and the progress of the female education reform was no-

---

68 Paul Bailey, 107.
69 Wei-An Yang, 125-126.
tably slow. In this condition, Wei-An Yang (125) suggests that the first step in improving female higher education is to emphasize that women have the equal right as men to be educated, and that women must be freed from the Chinese patriarchal traditions. In other words, women should be aware of the advantages of being educated and claim this as their right. Then, men can cooperate by not accomplishing this mission for women, but to help women to put this idea into action. This was because that there were few educated women in the colony and that they need to rely on the men’s assistance.

Philip Holden70 further explains that as Chatterjee notes, the battlegrounds for nationalism were not only political or military arenas, but also disciplinary institutions in society, such as schools and colleges; the field where the public and private spheres encountered ("Disciplines" 12). In relation to this, supporting Peranakan female education can be one of the effective endeavors. Wei-an Yang71 concurs by mentioning well-known Strait Chinese leaders, such as Lim Boon Keng and Tan Kah Kee, started to advocate the significance of promoting women’s emancipation activities in Chinese community. They believed that realizing educational reform for both educated and uneducated women was the best solution to improve Chinese women’s life and Chinese society as a whole.

In addition, Teoh mentioned that educated Peranakan women in Malaya and Singapore had to beat the burden of proving their community’s modernity in order to achieve some social and cultural equivalence with their Western rulers. This

71 Wei-An Yang, 126.
issue is similar to the condition in Dutch East Indies/ Indonesia, represented by *Only A Girl*.

Living in the era when Indonesia was occupied by Dutch and Japanese, Carolien is a Dutch-educated Peranakan woman. The education given to her is a privilege for the service of her father to Dutch government. Carolien’s identification to Dutch due to her education background is correlated with what Kwartenada\(^\text{72}\) said as “Dutchification”, a rapid social change that had occurred among Peranakan parents and their children, directed towards being equal to Dutch colonizer in status and position.

Kwartanada further explains that “Dutchification” happened by the end of the nineteenth century, due to rising Chinese Peranakan’s concerns of their status and position. Indeed, they were thriving economically, but were nevertheless seen in disrespect by the Dutch, encountered legal discrimination and faced challenges if they wanted to educate their children in European schools. Their marginal status encouraged them do their best to become “civilized subjects”, on a par with Europeans, but they were also inspired to reinvent their Chinese identities.

This issue is apparent from Carolien who sees her Holland-education background as a positive trait that makes her proud. Thus, she eagerly sends her daughter, Jenny to study in Holland university, to become a lawyer. However, Jenny does not agree with her mother’s choice. She would go to the United States instead, to achieve her dreams as a veterinarian. In the end, Carolien’s complicity

---

to Dutch’s way of life seemingly inhibits her to give Jenny freedom of choice—a matter Carolien always pursues (see Only A Girl, 273).

The conflict between Carolien and Jenny in choosing the best higher education again is parallel with Kwartanada’s argument. He believes that a major shift towards equal opportunity in education did occur in Chinese families, in which it happened in the early-twentieth century. In fact, a lot more Peranakan women are educated and manage to reach degrees in various disciplines. The wave of modernity grew unstoppably. The foundation for the rapid social change was built at the beginning of the twentieth century by enlightened parents, those with open-mindedness like Carolien, who “had come to realize that it was best for Jenny’s future if she left Indonesia”. Carolien can never imagine the future held by Jenny if she stays in Indonesia and being the Chinese who were being “squeezed between the power struggle of the Indonesian communist, religious, and socialistic parties.”

Carolien’s belief crisscrossed with Anggraeni’s explanation. After Indonesian independence, Anggraeni states, the majority of ethnic Chinese were haunted by increasing doubts as political events revealing areas of uncertainty vis-à-vis the ethnic Chinese issue. This correlates also with Chinese Peranakan women like Carolien and Jenny, who thought that by siding with the modernity of the West, they can liberate themselves from the complicated political issue in Indonesia through education. This is the major reason why Carolien let Jenny studying abroad. By going to USA, the country which is not the direct colonizer of Indone-

---

73 Kwartanada, 445-446.
sia, Jenny can free herself from the polemical Indonesian politics and racial discrimination.

With all that said, the three Peranakan female characters believe that education is a way to gain emancipation as Chan argues\textsuperscript{74}. Along with open doors to female education, inspired by the Western missionaries and nationalistic movement of China, Peranakan women in the three countries can have significant progress in education.

On one hand, it is true that the female education inspired by West also co-opts the Chinese Peranakan with Western doctrines. As Kwartanada\textsuperscript{75} noted, Western knowledge had its admirers among Chinese society. Any Chinese with Western education background tend to do their best to master the Western behavior or \textit{de Westersche beschaving}, because winning the compliment of a \textit{beschaafd} (civilized) person is one of their fundamental aims in life, and this is best illustrated by Carolien’s attitude that pursues Holland education for her daughter in \textit{Only A Girl} as explained above\textsuperscript{76}.

Though there is complicity which does not fully liberate Peranakan society, still, the modernity introduced by Westerners encourage Peranakans to gain progress. By strategically accepting the needs to learn from European colonizer,

\textsuperscript{74} Faye Chan, "Chinese women's emancipation as reflected in two Peranakan journals (c. 1927-1942)." \textit{Archipel 49.1} (1995): 45-62.

\textsuperscript{75} Kwartanada, 422-423

\textsuperscript{76} In fact, Jenny herself enjoys studying at Lyceum school, one of the best Holland’s high schools in Bandung. The advantage that Jenny can get from this colonial-based school is she is able to speak and read some European languages such as: Dutch, English, French, and German (see OAG, 283). By being able to understand those languages, Jenny can get knowledge from reading a lot of resources. Thus, she can be a smart and a critical student at school. However, the disadvantage that Jenny gets is that she complies too much to Dutch’s political agenda. She does not believe that Indonesian natives or Pribumi can take over the government from Dutch easily. She is also skeptical about the fairness and justice of pro-Indonesian government policies, such as the assimilation policy and obligation to learn Bahasa Indonesia, whether those are the best policies to be conducted in Revolution era (see OAG, 265-266).
Peranakan at the twentieth century can struggle to be civilized, to be equal with the Westerners. Relating this to Spivak’s idea, it is seen that rather than dismissing [the Peranakan’s] desire as naïve and romantic, she situates their humanist aspirations as “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest”\textsuperscript{77}.

3. Female Economic Independence

All three selected novels problematize the women’s capability of entering workforce. Despite the struggles, at the end, all of women characters succeed in gaining economic independence as Peranakan female, with various experiences and extent of gains.

Chan\textsuperscript{78} explains that there were conflicting views upon the issue of Peranakan women working. Chinese Peranakan society’s opinions in regard to the presence of woman in the workforce were mixed. However, the needs for lower-class women to work was understandable because they had to contribute to family income.

\textit{The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds} highlights the issue. It is urgent that Chye Hoon works independently after the death of her husband because she needs to raise her ten children alone. Being a potential businesswoman in mind, she begins to sell Nyonya kueh (cake or sweet), developing her specialty and hobby.


\textsuperscript{78} Faye Chan, “Chinese women's emancipation as reflected in two Peranakan journals (c. 1927-1942).” \textit{Archipel 49.1} (1995): 45-62.
Selling Nyonya kueh to earn money had been my idea... People would always eat... It was simple really once I had thought about it. The work would be hard, so it had to be something I enjoyed making. I realized it could only be the passion I’d had from girlhood: Nyonya kueh. I saw also that our kueh was not then available in Ipoh. (TWWBTW, 153)

While opening the business, Chye is first undermined because of her gender. For instance, her father distrusts Chye’s plan to make money from kueh. Since there is no other woman who opens up kueh business in her town, it is impossible for Chye to survive. Her father asks her to work as a servant instead (see The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds, 153 and 155).

However, there is Chye’s female support system, including Siew and her mother that motivates her to open kueh business. Siew believes in Chye’s excellent cooking ability and Mother knows that Chye’s tasty kueh would attract customers. They also work together in the kitchen to make the first kueh. These female supporters give Chye hope to develop the kueh business confidently by their encouraging words and actions (see The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds, 151, 154, 160).

Within the book, there is a thorough elaboration of kueh. The writer, Yoke, explains⁷⁹ that kueh is a specific kind of Peranakan food. It is different from Western cakes or Chinese cakes, for its main ingredient is rice or tapioca or green pea flour as well as coconut milk. Kueh is served both sweet and savoury; some are eaten cold and others are cooked warm. As a special Peranakan dish, kueh is produced by trials and errors for centuries before it is being one of the best delicacies.

---

Yoke also illustrates Chye’s realization of the satisfaction for her mastery of Nyonya kueh as one of her best skills that makes her proud and happy:

It was in our specialty of *kueh* that I really came into my own as a Nyonya cook. Everyone told me how wonderful my *kueh* were – ‘The best we’ve ever had’. My nine-layered *kueh*, from which the individual pink and white slices could be separately peeled, became legendary throughout Penang. Nothing made me happier than making *kueh*. (TWWBTW, 34)

In her personal website Yoke emphasizes that although her great-grandmother was a Nyonya, she is not an expert of all Nyonya cultures. However, she has researched a lot of Peranakan *kuehs* and she wants to share it with the readers. In other words, through Chye’s story, Yoke manages to depict the *kueh* as one of treasures of Peranakan culture that brings identity and potential business to Nyonya like Chye. Indeed, with devotion to tradition— to preserve classic Peranakan *kueh*—Chye can find out opportunity to survive life financially.

Chye’s breakthrough as a successful businesswoman despite lots of trials, is also a challenge towards Chinese traditional view upon Peranakan women or Nyonyas. Shin Mun Ng elaborated that Peranakan women or Nyonyas were presumed to be idle; either wasting their time away at home, or goofing off at gambling. The perception on Nyonya’s lacking of self-confidence and economic de-

---

80 Selina S.C. Yoke, 35.
81 According to Selina S.C. Yoke in her personal website, “The delicacies known as Nyonya kueh or cakes formed the crux of Chye Hoon’s world. Although my own great-grandmother was a Nyonya, I cannot claim to be an expert on all things Nyonya! In fact I learned a lot during my research on The Woman who Breathed Two Worlds” and will share some of that here.” (Retrieved from http://www.siakchinyoke.com/chye-hoons-category/food, online, Internet, 29 March 2020)
82 Shin Mun Ng, ‘Peranakan identity at the crossroads of Empire, the Malay World and the Sinophone Worlds c. 1900-1930,’ Online, Academia.edu Online Document. Internet, 29 March 2020. (Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/27367843/Peranakan_identity_at_the_crossroads_of_Empire_the_Malay_World_and_the_Sinophone_Worlds_c._1900-1930)
83 This notion of problematic idleness may lie in Liang Qichao’s increasingly popular ideas of women. Based on Barbara Molony et al., Ling Qichao famously stated that “[Chinese] women sit in in idleness while men toil”, See Barbara Molony, Janet Theiss, and Hyaeweol Choi’s *Gender in Modern East Asia*. 2016.
pendence triggered the economic deterioration, as women were seen as parasites of Chinese society. The story of Chye’s triumph, backing by her female relatives, has proven that Peranakan women are able to be productive and financially independent (see The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds, 171).

Meanwhile, as Chan84 argues, middle-class Chinese Peranakan woman still had difficulty to welcome the involvement of Peranakan women working in public sphere. It is because the Peranakan women would have contact with unknown men, meaning, men of all races, and it is inappropriate to Peranakan tradition.

Such issue is represented by A Different Sky, which scrutinizes Mei Lan’s decision to enter workforce as an auxiliary nurse in World War II. Her well-off Chinese family prohibits her doing so. However, Mei Lan is determined to apply for the job (see A Different Sky, 190-191). It can be inferred that Mei Lan’s enrollment to be the auxiliary nurse is her personal revolt against her patriarchal family. She does not deny that she has a material privilege as a woman raised by a rich Chinese family. However, when she sees herself alike ‘any other people who is able’, she knows that she is able to doing something virtuous and contributive to the society, despite being looked down as a woman.

Therefore, the job as the additional nurse does not give Mei Lan a ‘true’ independence, albeit her struggle is not the economic one—she has obtained it and financial issue is not her problem. Instead, being the voluntary nurse helps Mei Lan realizes that she has her own life, thus it is her right to articulate her voice to work and not being silenced by the patriarchy. This is in line with Misses Gouw

Lie Moy and Kwa Lim Nio’s argument in *Mandblaad Istri*\(^{85}\), that women had every right to find out descent job to help their families and those women show “a strong sense of duty”.

Moreover, regarding the job choice, Mei Lan faces another challenges when she finally works as a lawyer at a Singaporean law office after World War II started to end. There, she is undermined by Mr. Cheong, her Chinese boss, due to her status as a woman. Mei Lan is given only a minor law cases out of Mr. Chong’s interest, which involves difficult women. The other tasks would include transportation issue and it does not give Mei Lan job satisfaction.

She wrote to Mr. Cheong of Bayley McDonald & Cheong who had always handled Lim Hock An’s legal business. Mr. Cheong agreed to take her into the firm although he made it clear that he was setting a precedent by employing a woman. Whenever Mr. Cheong had a case concerning a difficult female, Mei Lan was called in to participate; she was the only woman in the office… Otherwise most of her work centered upon the bread and butter issue of conveyancing, and was not what she had imagined herself doing. (ADS, 390)

It is seen that the gender discrimination happens in workplace. This issue is related to Chan\(^{86}\) who continues her argument saying that many Peranakan Chinese men also were uncomfortable with women entering workplace and few of them embrace women’s voice to pursue their best at work. Although the reasons are not stated clearly, it is likely that men are fear of losing their own jobs.

Nevertheless, Mei Lan manages to be a successful lawyer defending the marginalized women’s cases. She firstly defends Fang Ei Ling, who is imprisoned for the attempted murder of her husband. Mr. Cheong, Mei Lan’s boss, is hesitant to defend such case, for he thinks there is no way to defend a poor concubine who

---


stuck a knife against an educated-and-rich husband. However, Mei Lan who has talked to Ei Ling, understands that Ei Ling only performs self-defense against her abusive husband who divorced her without her knowing to have another woman, beat her and her babies, and took her children away from her. Mei Lan recalls the memories of oppression in her own family, towards Second Grandmother and her own mother Ei Ling, when listening to Fang Ei Ling’s story. Then, Mei Lan successfully convinces the judges that Ei Ling is innocent. This issue got media exposure and Mei Lan is famous for defending the rights of Chinese marginalized women (see A Different Sky, 401).

With the triumph of her first case, Mei Lan reflects that she has empathy and compassion to help lower-class women get out from violence within their family. She opens her house to build a shelter to protect those deprived women. She actualizes herself through this independent activism and she is happy when the other women are not living in fear (see A Different Sky, 408).

In brief, Mei Lan has managed to be an independent lawyer defending marginalized Chinese women’s cases despite her own struggle to be recognized equally in her workplace. This is compatible with the Asian feminism spirit by Mina Roces. Within Asian feminism context, women activists in Asia have involved in feminist activism and have been proactive in the project of producing their own brand of feminism appropriate to their local context. Mei Lan has gone ahead not only achieving economic independence and self-actualization for herself. She also helps other needy Peranakan women in her nation achieve justice against Chinese patriarchal virtues which normalizes the oppression on low-class

87 Mina Roces, Feminism and Transnational Activism (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 5.
Peranakan women who are being confined with the polygamous marriage, concubinage, husband’s abandonment, as well as sexual and physical harassment.

Asian Feminism, in fact, differs with the notion of ‘double consciousness’ responded by Feminism of Color. In specific, Feminism of Color addresses the multiple issues of colored women who experience double oppressions in multicultural countries in western world; both as second class society of disenfranchised sex, and as minority race\textsuperscript{88}. In contrast, Asian feminism has argued for the rewriting of history based on the specific experiences of women as formerly colonized people, who are oppressed by their fellow men in the colonized country and the women’s various strategies for survival.

Comparably, \textit{Only A Girl} complicates the issue of woman working especially through the main character, Carolien. As it is set in Indonesia, the economic context of Peranakan family has to be understood. Manderson\textsuperscript{89} explicates that below Dutch rule, Peranakan had been given a higher social status than the average Javanese and had been permitted and afforded facilities to flourish in some sectors such as commercial and trading.

This context is manifested by \textit{Only A Girl}. Carolien, before her marriage, has been working in Dutch colonial office, thanks to her late father and brother’s support to the colonial government. Having Dutch-education background, she is a

\textsuperscript{88} Feminism of color focuses on the historical relationship between white feminism and racism. Feminism of color came to being to criticize how First Wave Feminism in United States of America for inconsistency; First Wave Feminist in USA supported the anti-slavery cause but threatened to withdraw its support if black men should be upper hand than white women. See Deborah Madsen \textit{Feminist Theory and Literary Practice}, p. 214.

\textsuperscript{89} Lenore Manderson, \textit{Women's work and women's roles: economics and everyday life in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore} (The Australian National University distributed by ANU Press, 1983), p.23.
career-woman who works hard and maintains good relationship with her Dutch supervisors.

All these make her proud and complicit to Dutch virtues. For example, after the divorce, Carolien looks for job in Dutch colonial office, and gets it. Carolien feels worthy for she is able to be the provider for Jenny, her daughter, after leaving her ex-husband, Po Han who is financially struggling.

Backed by her brother’s support. And a glowing reference from her former employer, Carolien was soon hired as a private secretary to a department head in Chip’s office. Carolien loved being employed again. When she joined her brother to leave for work in the morning, she left Jenny in Nanna’s hands. (OAG, 72)

In fact, Carolien also faces challenges in terms of adapting with having new job after divorce. She does not have enough time to play and talk with Jenny, then their relationship grows apart. Jenny is closer to the grandmother, Nanna, instead. Also, due to World War II, Carolien is assigned to work in Dutch intelligence division and must live separately with her family. Carolien is worried of Jenny’s safety, yet, she is taking the job to get financial aid and scholarship for Jenny from Dutch government in the long run (see Only A Girl, 160-161).

Upon this, there are representations of different women’s roles manifested by Carolien and Nanna. On one hand, Carolien is the ‘modern’ Peranakan woman; she is educated under Holland-education and works for Dutch government, and so, she is conscious that she owes so much to Dutch colonizer in surviving life. Her fascination and aspiration towards everything that is of Dutch also triggers

---

90 Ditunjang oleh dukungan kakak-kakaknya dan referensi cemerlang dari bos lamanya, Carolien segera mendapat pekerjaan sebagai sekretaris pribadi seorang kepala departemen di kantor Chip. Carolien senang bekerja kembali. Setelah dia berangkat kerja bersama kakak-kakaknya di pagi hari, Jenny diasuh Nanna. (OAG, Menantang Phoenix, 83)
her to expect that her daughter Jenny to be a younger girl like herself—an educated and a liberated girl who will learn great lessons from Dutch modernity. What Carolien misses is that Jenny is still immature; she does not have sufficient knowledge to grasp the situation of war, and needs time to adapt with sudden change like separation with her mother. Carolien’s strict independency and long for modernity fails to favor Jenny.

On the other hand, Nanna, as a nurturing, a loving mother and grandmother who dedicates her life as a housewife, comes to help as a caring figure to Jenny. With all that happened during war, including the material loss and the death of her older son, Nanna has learned that the only way she negotiates her Confucian tradition with Carolien’s modernization is by asserting her power as a matriarch subtly through playing her roles well in domestic sphere in taking care of Jenny.

At the end, looking up at Nanna, Carolien learns that since her family is Peranakan Chinese of Dutch East Indies, the ways to overcome the economic struggle as well as to negotiate with patriarchy and colonialism is unique and different from European women’s strategy. In fact, European women tend to struggle and work against the cultural imperialism that stick to a Western (particularly white) location; addresses the middle-class, privileged White and tends to ignore the nuances of gender equity and women power’s in other cultures.91

The abovementioned issue corresponds with Spivak’s92 iconoclastic rewriting on feminism. To Spivak, all women are not the same and there are a lot of varie-

---

92 Chapter 3 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, retrieved from https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/22597/10/10_chapter3.pdf
ties existing even among women with regard to class, color and principle. The European women are more or less liberated from their patriarchal domination, but, women from the Third World countries are struggling to be in-par with the European women. It would be very difficult to create a universally compliant female gender, and the time has now come for the people to respect the differences within the gender.

In conclusion, there are dimensions on female economic independence in the novels that reflect Asian feminism. In The Woman Who Breathes Two Worlds, Chye manages to be economically independent by being a businesswoman selling Nyonya kueh. Meanwhile, in A Different Sky, through her job, Mei Lan voices out her own voice and other deprived women’s against Chinese patriarchal traditions. Finally, in Only A Girl, Carolien by times, learns that her being Peranakan Chinese of Dutch East Indies makes the ways to overcome the economic struggle and to negotiate with patriarchy and colonialism which are different from the Western women’s.

Thus, Southeast Asian Peranakan women coming from different countries, backgrounds, and financial struggles can enact various roles to reach economic independence. It is different from Western’s first and second waves of feminism which tend to universalize women’s aspiration suitable to fulfill White women's needs, to celebrate individual autonomy in the economic sphere and equal opportunity, and to embrace women's decision to partake in sexual equality and abortion.93

---

93 The First Wave of Feminism managed to uphold the right of most women in industrialized countries to vote. The spirit of feminism glorified by this wave is the importance of the individual
B. CHINESE PERANAKAN WOMEN’S LOSS

1. Racial Prejudice

The three selected novels complicate the issue of racial prejudice between Chinese Peranakan society and the Western colonizer. Ashcroft et al.\(^94\) notes that race continues to be relevant in post-colonial theory for two reasons: first, because it is so central to the growing power of imperial discourse during the nineteenth century, and second, because it remains a central and unavoidable fact of modern society that race is used as the dominant category of daily discriminations and prejudice (207).

In *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*, the prejudice towards white settlers in Malaya is depicted. This prejudgment is due to the shifting in the control of power in Ipoh’s tin mines. It is illustrated by Peng and Chye’s discussion. The white man is placed as Peng’s boss and it causes displeasure to Peng, because lots of Chinese think the White has higher status than all other races in Malaya, and White is more modern and cleverer race (see *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*, 98)

---

In fact, Gomez, Hsin-Huang and Halao\textsuperscript{95} explained that among western colonizers, British consolidated the territorial expansion in Malay Peninsula by dominating the tin mining in terms of legal administration and introduction to sophisticated mining technology. However, it was the Chinese who was predominant in the tin industry of Malay peninsula, since Chinese could mobilize labors in tin mining. The control shifting to British then affected the white collar Chinese employee as Peng, who thinks that his job is taken over by more enlightened and considered superior White settlers\textsuperscript{96}.

For Chinese Peranakan woman as Chye, her husband’s racial prejudice influences her perspective. She remembers that even from her childhood to her marriage life, White is indeed an exclusive race who excludes themselves from Malay society. To Chye, White has always undermined Chinese Peranakan society of Malaya; they live exclusively and look down on Peranakan people (see \textit{The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds}, 101-102).

The other loss while struggling with the West colonizer is when Chye Hoon realizes the ‘side effect’ of sending his boys to Western education. Her sons use English all the time and refuse to wear ‘Baba’ clothes. Specifically, her first son, named Weng Yu, is intelligent and talented in music but is very much absorbed to Western world. Weng Yu is brave to talk back to Chye because of her rejection to buy him an expensive piano which he loves very much (see \textit{The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds}, 195-196; 207).

\textsuperscript{95} Terence E. Gomez and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao (eds.), \textit{Chinese business in Southeast Asia: contesting cultural explanations, researching entrepreneurship}, (Routledge, 2013).

\textsuperscript{96} According to Gomez and Hsiao, even though there was the racial prejudice to White superiority, this did not really influence the migrants from China to come to Malaya, working as a tin miner (64).
The dispute between Chye Hoon and Weng Yu can be said rooted from the conflicting philosophy on Western education and Eastern education. Based on Hassan and Jamaludin\(^7\), Western education where Weng Yu is trained, fosters the students to be active in giving and sharing the ideas, and maximizes the student’s role than the teacher. Therefore, whenever there is something he dislikes, Weng Yu says his rejection out loud. Weng Yu’s action, is considered as ‘talking back’ and it is out of Chye’s favor. Chye is attached to Eastern education’s philosophy that is closer to Confucianism. Hassan and Jamaludin adds that in Eastern education backdrop, students are not incited to voice out their own opinions and perspectives. Therefore, the clash of perspectives upon Western and Eastern philosophy of education becomes the factor separating mother and son, Chye and Weng Yu.

On top of that, after World War I has ended, Chye Hoon learns that changes have already taken place in Malaya. Colonial rule forces Christianity, European virtues of education and behavior. The eroded old-age Peranakan customs and traditions, also affects Chye’s family. Weng Yu, her first son, is depressed due to his failure on becoming a great civil engineer of Malaya despite his London education and, he fails marrying a European lady. Weng Yoon, the younger son left home to pursue higher education in Britain and marries a girl in a church. Weng Koon, marries a Cantonese girl without informing Chye Hoon. They all bring the terrible pain to Chye, who thinks she falls short for not passing on the beauty of Peranakan culture to her children. It is the most painful defeat to Chye as a Peranakan woman.

Meanwhile, a distinctive representation is seen in *A Different Sky*. The main character, Mei Lan, complies with Western values as she is educated in Chinese school for girls. Mei Lan also involves in a political activism namely China Relief Fund, an organization aims at freeing China from Japanese invasion. Initially, she does not have any political agenda; she is there only to help her grandfather, and his colleague, Tan Kah Kee, the well-known and respectable Chinese man, collecting the funding to release China from Japanese control with the donation from Chinese society in Malaya (see *A Different Sky*, 136).

The issue of racial prejudice also happens in *A Different Sky*. The founders of China Relief Fund are hopeful towards the strong and well-equipped British colonials, which already got a battleship *Prince of Wales* to Singaporean port, to be able to protect Malaya and save the Chinese from Japanese occupation. However, there is no help from the British government to save Chinese people from Japan, although they are backing the British to fight against Japan. At that time, British troops have already been defeated and sent back from Singapore.

This issue correlates with the historical fact notably written by the historians Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper as reviewed by Toh Boon Kwan98. They mention that from the local people’s viewpoint, there are dilemmas faced by the subject populations as a result of their conflicting loyalties, forced to choose sides in the midst of the deadly conflict destroying their homes and livelihoods. In specific, the war between Britain and Japan incorporated various civil wars involving an increasingly radicalized Asian population, armed and brutalized by both sides. As a result, ‘inter-community conflict were common following the fighting and per-

sisted for at least a generation”\textsuperscript{99}. This happens to Mei Lan also, whose family is related to the China Release Fund, affiliating with Communism, Anti-Japan activism, and British colonials.

\textit{A Different Sky} further suggests the impact of the Singapore’s war to local Peranakan woman like Mei Lan. She is finally kidnapped and gets the brutal physical and mental torture from the interrogation by Japanese troops. She is imprisoned and beaten harshly every single day (see \textit{A Different Sky}, 299).

In fact, in the war situation, the voice of woman like Mei Lan is unheard, even unarticulated due to the dominant system of political and economic account\textsuperscript{100}. Mei Lan is indeed pressured by Japanese brutal leader, Nakamura, to mention other names involving in Communism with the threats of being ruthlessly tortured. Despite the violence, she rejects to do so; and she screams to keep silent as she is unable to think nor voice out what she really wants to say. To Nakamura, Mei Lan’s screams and silence are unheard. They are counted as rebellions, thus, more abuse and violence are given to discipline her.

Upon this, it is seen that \textit{A Different Sky} shows war violence against woman. Based on Gloria Jacobs\textsuperscript{101}, violence against women at war suffers women with gender-based violence. Women’s bodies become a battleground over opposing


\textsuperscript{100} According to Morton in explaining Spivak: “In Can the Subaltern Speak? Spivak would certainly not want to deny the social agency and lived existence of disempowered subaltern women. The crucial point, however, is that these disempowered women receive their political and discursive identities within historically determinates systems of political and economic representation.” (66-67).

\textsuperscript{101} Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, \textit{Women, war and peace} (New York: UNIFEM, 2002).
forces struggle. Women also have been raped and tortured as a form of interrogation.

Inside her and outside, Nakamura invaded her, lived in the deepest corner of her being, in unspeakable intimacy. She had become his object and he called for her now each day. The beatings had ceased; he was the inflictor now of the new agony. She knew the vile scent of his breath, every pore and pit of his face, the spittle on his rubbery lips, the feel of his hands and his body upon her… There was no space between her thoughts and the looming shadow of Nakamura; he had ripped the skin of her mind away. (ADS, 301)

The above details can be seen as the most crucial loss to Mei Lan as English-educated Peranakan woman. This loss is parallel to Spivak’s elucidation on subalternity. Spivak mentions that subaltern who cannot speak marks the success of the internalization of value to subaltern women, that they have to be silent in every situation. Mei Lan as a subaltern cannot voice out her aspiration and despair since patriarchy and colonialism shut her. Consequently, it is impossible for the subaltern being a subject for themselves, as Mei Lan realizes she turns to be the sexual object of Nakamura.

Similarly, in Only A Girl, Carolien regards Dutch as a superior race and she politically defends the Dutch. Carolien’s support to Dutch can be correlated to the historical context that during colonialism, there is a Chinese-Indonesian group involving Dutch-educated and wealthy Chinese who were Dutch nationality-oriented. Although the Indies Chinese were Chinese citizens or immigrants, they must admit that they live in the Dutch territory, and they must obey the law of Dutch East Indian citizens (Wet op het Nederlandsche Onderdaanschap).
It is likely that Carolien belongs to that group. It is proven by her complicity with Dutch colonial law and her work to colonial government. It can be implied that the thing Carolien expects to be given by Dutch is the security, at the very least, to her and Jenny, her daughter, in the post-war Indonesia.

Carolien’s insecurity and worry are reasonable. Her identities as Chinese Peranakan Indonesian is problematic during and after war of independence in Indonesia. Based on Aryodiguno\textsuperscript{104}, scholars and Indonesian officials believe that the Chinese problem is "ethnic and national identity recognition." Referring the “national identity,” the question is whether Indonesian Chinese are reluctant to integrate in Indonesian society or separate themselves from their Chinese identity, or are Indonesian natives rejecting Chinese-Indonesians\textsuperscript{105}. Towards this puzzling issue and at the dangerous war situation, Carolien chooses to get herself closer to Dutch colonial. It is because as a superior race and a colonial ruler, Carolien thinks there is a hope that Dutch is strong enough to save Indonesian Chinese Peranakan like her and her family from the danger of war—although she is not totally sure of that (see \textit{Only A Girl}, 112-116).

In fact, when there was a turbulent conflict with Japanese troops in 1945, Carolien’s family as a Chinese-Peranakan family was not protected by the Dutch. Even Chip, Carolien’s eldest brother working at Dutch office is killed by Japan without Dutch’s intervention. Thus, under Dutch colonialism, it is seen that the freedom the Dutch gives to Chinese as an ethnic-based organization, is a part of

\textsuperscript{104} Harryanto Aryodiguno, "Changes in Chinese-Indonesian Identity: Indonesianization or Re-Sinicization?" \textit{AEGIS: Journal of International Relations 3.1} (2019), p.4
\textsuperscript{105} Interview with Dr. Sunardi Mulia, 24-25 November 2015 as quoted by Harryanto Aryodiguno, see "Changes in Chinese-Indonesian Identity: Indonesianization or Re-Sinicization?" \textit{AEGIS: Journal of International Relations 3.1} (2019), p.4
divide-and-rule policy that discouraged the interactions amidst the Chinese and the indigenous society of Indonesia\(^{106}\).

It is then Nanna who grasps that Dutch is a corrupt colonizer, and Dutch is not a savior who can overcome Chinese problems. Looking at the achievement and gift granted to Chip from Dutch, Nanna learns that what Dutch gives to her family is something useless, yet, Dutch asks for huge sacrifice from her family. Dutch can no longer give their family protection but misery (see *Only A Girl*, 165).

It can be inferred that Nanna as Indonesian Chinese Peranakan, has different belief and ideology with Carolien. Nanna is likely belong to the group of Chinese Indonesian who tends to identify themselves with China. She believes that her family is always Chinese and must remain loyal to the motherland. She also convinces that Chinese Confucianism is critical to Chinese residents in the colonial land, including in Dutch East Indies (Aryodiguno). Therefore, there is advocacy to the transmission of Chinese culture education. This is especially true to Nanna who is worried about her decision to support her sons to go to war defending Dutch, and so she asks the mercy of her ancestors’ spirits to protect her and her family (see *Only A Girl*, 111-112).

The two perspectives of Indonesian-Chinese Peranakan women indicate that there is a problem of racial prejudice to Peranakan in Indonesia, who are not fully protected by Dutch colonizer. Also, there is different ideology on journeying with Western colonizer, from the Chinese Peranakan who is hopeful to Dutch like Carolien and the Chinese Peranakan who is skeptical to Dutch like Nanna.

Therefore, all these cultural and political tensions trigger Peranakan’s scepticism towards the West as the true messiah for them. First, the colonial rule in Malay grinds down the preservation and practice of Peranakan cultures, that conservative Nyonya like Chye comes across in despair seeing her sons leave Baba/Nyonya traditions for conducting Westernized customs. Also, British colonials fail to protect Mei Lan, who is brutally raped by the Japanese and accused as communist, though her Chinese-nationalist activism is allied with British colonials. Finally, the Dutch colonizer falls short to protect the Chinese-Indonesians against Japan, though Dutch-oriented family like Carolien’s always stands for the colonials.

2. Prohibition on Intermarriage

Prohibition on interracial relationship, to different degree, leads to loss of Chinese Peranakan women. The three selected novels scrutinize this issue.

Firstly, *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds* reflects how intermarriage between Peranakan and Westerner could cause erosion to Peranakan culture. This is shown by the conflicting view of Chye Hoon and her best friend, Siew Lan. Siew has fallen for See-Too-Wat, the Scottish plantation owner to whom she is working. Chye calls See-Too-Wat as the ‘white devil’, associating him as the arrogant foreigner who exclusively lives in Malaya and look down on Peranakan and Malay society. However, Siew sees See-Too-Wat as the descent man, despite his drinking habit.
‘Good heart open your eyes-lah,’ I said. ‘With white marry, how can-ah? I ask you.’
‘In town have Eurasians,’ Siew Lan declared.
‘You think they let you into their club-ah? Your Nyonya-Baba relatives, then how? You think they also happy-ah?’ (TWWBTW, 99)

The above quotation shows that Chye’s fear about the conflict of Siew’s intermarriage is logical. In fact, as argued by Lee Su Kim,\(^{107}\) intermarriage took place between Straits Chinese and non-Straits Chinese, leading to a dilution of Nyonya culture. With modernization and the introduction of Western ideas, the clannishness of the Babas and Nyonyas gradually eroded, and family ties became weak. This becomes the strong reason why intermarriage is prohibited by a traditional Nyonya like Chye Hoon.

However, to a more ‘modernized’ Nyonya as Siew Lan, changes in culture is inevitable. She cherishes the intermarriage and the love of See-Too-Wat. He brings Siew a pretty daughter named ‘Flora’, whom Siew refuses to teach Nyonya culture. Siew realistically says that in changing world, not all culture can be preserved; even Nyonyas- Babas can disappear (see The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds, 118).

Siew Lan’s reflection can exemplify the debate about preservation of Peranakan, Nyonya Baba/ Strait Chinese culture. Based on Vaughan\(^ {108}\), as quoted by Lee Su Kim\(^ {109}\), there is a competition between Peranakan (Nyonya/Baba/ Strait Chinese) with sinkehs or 19th century newcomers from Mainland China, but Peranakan/ Strait Chinese are happy to be called as British subject. This shows the

---


complicity of modern Nyonya like Siew Lan to Western culture as they proudly see themselves as “British subject”, and this results in ironic corrosion on identifi-
cation of Peranakan/ Baba Nyonya/ Strait Chinese culture.

Therefore, it is to the fear of cultural disappearance that a strongly devoted Nyonya like Chye Hoon prohibits the intermarriage between Peranakan and Westerner. However, Siew Lan’s thoughts also spark a question to Chye Hoon, as an admittance of Nyonya’s defeat for not being able to stop the shifting modern world (see *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*, 118-119).

The similar notion on refusal of interracial relationship happens in *A Different Sky*. Ah Siew, Mei Lan’s personal servant, prohibits Mei Lan to meet Howard, her Eurasian neighbour from the Belvedere house. When Mei Lan forces Ah Siew not to restrict her, Ah Siew counters that a stubborn girl like Mei Lan would be let down by the world.

‘I know,’ Ah Siew screamed. ‘Girls of good family do not behave like this, running out to meet boys. Remember who you are… He is not of your race; you are Chinese and he is Eurasian. If the elders find out, I cannot protect you,’ she warned. (ADS, 75-76)

Based on Lee Su Kim¹¹⁰, by time, there are more Strait Chinese Peranakan women like Mei Lan, who have received education in English-medium schools during the British colonial period. They eventually become more liberated from their former constrained lifestyles. This led to a situation where they no longer grasp how to observe much of their cultural heritage. Many modern Peranakan Strait Chinese cannot pass on the language to their children, customs and rituals were less practiced, and the Peranakan language is transmitted less across genera-

---

tions, for the replacement of English. More modern Strait Chinese women do not conduct the demanding rituals and customs and prefer to wear modern clothes rather than the Nyonya costume, except on special occasions. Mei Lan, for example, wears a tomboy Western clothes and has her hair cut very shortly, ‘British-lady-like’ (see A Different Sky, 134-135).

Comparably, Only A Girl problematize the intermarriage of Peranakan. Especially Nanna, as the conservative Peranakan, is bothered to let her grandchildren Els, marries Mr. Bouwman, a Dutch man. The strong alignment to Confucianism hinders Nanna to accept the intermarriage. Jenny herself, feels strange to embrace the westerner marrying her relative, whilst, Carolien welcomes him.

“What Dutchman?” Jenny stared at Nanna. “Why did he bring shame to us by marrying Els?”
“Jenny, we are Chinese. Our family doesn’t have any other blood and that’s the way it’s going to stay. We don’t mix blood.” (OAG, 212)

Therefore, as Clammer explains quoted by Lee Su Kim, the Peranakans have been trapped on the projection of their own cultural dilemma. This is because some of the Indonesian Peranakans are more associated to the Chinese ethnically, socially and religiously, but there are other Indonesian Chinese believing in different ideologies (Dutch-oriented and Indonesian nationalist-oriented). Peranakan residing in Indonesia, therefore, must decide the most effective endeavour to get political and social shelter and belonging. One of the most practical action is to turn into Indonesian nationalism. In other words, some sort of “resin-

---

111 “Orang Belanda mana?” Jenny menatap Nanna. “Kenapa keinginannya menikahi Els membawa aib pada kami?”
“resinification” has taken place where the Peranakan have had to increasingly identify themselves with the larger Indonesian community. This ‘resinification’ too, occurs in Malaysia and Singapore with different degree, by times.

To conclude, this chapter has discussed the gains and loss of Chinese Peranakan women while struggling against Western colonialism. The Peranakan women’s gains owe to education and economic independence. It creates the basis for Foucauldian positive power. In this case, the journey with colonialism has led to female negotiation with filial piety, female education, and female economic independence to Peranakan women. Furthermore, Peranakan women’s loss as the effect of colonial encounters produces seeds of nationalism through interaction with non-Chinese cultures. A more exploration of Chinese Peranakan women’s awareness of cultural assimilation influencing their nationalism would be provided in the fourth chapter.

---

113 Within Foucauldian positive power, Foucault sees power works hand in hand with resistance, as a productive factor, because it has positive effects such as the individual’s self-making, see Sergin Balan’s “M. Foucault View on Power Relations”. 2017.
CHAPTER IV

CHINESE PERANAKAN WOMEN’S TURN TO NATIONALISM: CONTRIBUTIONS AND STRUGGLES

This chapter is presented to answer the second research question. The analysis is grouped into two subtopics. The first subtopic is Peranakan women’s contributions to assimilation. It discusses three assimilated cultures the Peranakan women contribute to bring about that encapsulate their nationalist spirit, namely Peranakan food, Peranakan dress, and Peranakan language. The second subtopic discusses Peranakan women’s ambivalence to nationalism. There are three issues presented, i.e. political awareness on national independence and struggles, conferment of the Indonesian name, and politics of national language.

A. PERANAKAN WOMEN’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO ASSIMILATION

According to James G. Martin and Clyde W. Martin as quoted by Leo Suryadinata, “assimilation” refers to "a blending process whereby two distinct groups form a homogeneous entity"\textsuperscript{114}. The three novels represent how Peranakan women contribute in the blending of Chinese Peranakan culture and non-Chinese culture. Three assimilated cultures are born from the prolonged con-

tact of both cultures. They include Peranakan food, Peranakan dress, and Peranakan language.

1. Peranakan Food

The first example of Chinese Peranakan assimilated culture is food. Peranakan food is a Nyonya’s creation in cuisine, from the hybridization of Malaya and Chinese cultures.115

Based on Tan as quoted by Chien Y. Ng and Shahrim Ab. Karim, Nyonyas, or Peranakan females staying at home are famous for their excellent cooking talent.116 This special capacity is inspired by the traditional Nyonya’s belief that the main standard of a good woman is their outstanding cooking performance.

Since their teenage lives, Nyonyas were taught by the matriarch to work in the kitchen.117 They learn to grind spices, prepare sambal belachan (chili with shrimp paste), and cut vegetables before they are allowed to cook by themselves.118 Nyonya’s hardworking and passion to food can also be found through their work ethics while cooking, that they avoid gossiping in the kitchen.

---

Out of the three analyzed novels, Peranakan food is most depicted in *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*. Through Peranakan food, Chye Hoon manifests her Nyonya root. Chye has been trained to master Nyonya food since she was a teenager. For years, Chye and her friend, Hooi Peng, work in the kitchen all day. They chop, pound, scrap and grind lots of local ingredients to make Peranakan food such as *kueh*, *sambal* and *laksa* (see *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*, 34).

Chye is aware of her assimilated Peranakan culture through her ability to cook Peranakan food. Chye discovers that she can combine Chinese and Malay styles of cuisine because she is a Nyonya, and feels fortunate for that.

Hooi Peng and I were already proficient cooks when I made a chance remark to her. ‘We so lucky,’ I said. ‘We cook Chinese style, Malay style. We make pork dishes, spicy dishes. We use wok to fry, hands to eat. We are really champor-champor, a mixture of things. I very much like.’ (TWWBTW, 35)

From above quotation, the domestic work that Peranakan women involve in contributing to Peranakan culture’s assimilation. According to Ng and Karim, Peranakan women are confined by patriarchy. The territory of Peranakan women then, is only within the house and especially kitchen¹¹⁹. However, Peranakan women’s activities in the kitchen are regarded important. First, it is from the kitchen that the Peranakan women do the household activities and take care of the family. The kitchen, therefore, is warmly called as *perut rumah* or stomach of the house. Second, the kitchen is the place where Peranakan women produce Peranakan food. Through cultural borrowing and cultur-

---

al innovation, Peranakan women can create a strong and spicy new dish uniting indigenous ingredients with Chinese cooking principles.

The local ingredients used in Peranakan food are Malaysian and Indonesian spices, like pandanus leaf, butterfly pea flower, and banana tree blossom, as represented by *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds* (34). Then, some examples of Chinese cooking preparations include the use of wok and frying pan. What distinguishes Peranakan food with local Malayan food is the pork dish, whilst, the different ingredient to Chinese food is the usage of indigenous spices.

More importantly, after reflecting on her training to cook Peranakan food, Chye can figure out the essential meaning of being a Nyonya. It is more than just being a Chinese woman in Malaya doing the habitual activities related to all visible signs of Peranakan cultures, such as cooking the Peranakan food, wearing Peranakan clothes, and using Peranakan tableware. Chye discovers that she is, as the novel’s title shown, “a woman who breathed two worlds”. She has the identities of both Malay and Chinese, two lively cultures mended and assimilated into one, rectified over the centuries.

Upon Chye’s reflection and self-discovery, it is inferred that Peranakan women incorporate their knowledge of varieties of food from their Chinese ancestors and their observation from the Malaya environment\(^\text{120}\). Peranakan women’s careful skill and detailed creativity in food preparation and presenta-

tion also play a pivotal role to cook such an elaborate fusion dish. Florence Tan, a professional chef from Malacca, explains the fusion cuisine comes from the Peranakan women’s kitchen, though there is no document about Nyonya food’s importance on Malaysia's culinary. It shows that Peranakan women’s invention of Peranakan food contributes to the Peranakan’s assimilation to Malayan culture, regardless it is often overlooked.

To conclude, The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds show more Peranakan women’s effort in assimilation through Peranakan food. Meanwhile, the Peranakan food and its assimilation process are less obvious in the two other novels, A Different Sky and Only A Girl.

2. Peranakan Dress

Peranakan Nyonya assimilate their way of dressing up to indigenous culture’s style of clothes. By examining Peranakan dress across time, the Peranakan women’s contributive attempt in assimilating their dress to local cultures can be discovered. The three novels depict this issue.

A description of specific Peranakan dress is apparent in The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds. Entering womanhood, Chye who lived in 1878-1898 wore baju panjang and sarong as special Peranakan Nyonya clothes for her daily activity, including as her wedding dress.

I was already a young lady then, a smaller replica of Mother, with a basket in one hand and a long-sleeved tunic—the baju panjang—flowing down to my calves. I wore a sarong around my waist and clogs on my feet… That

---

121 Florence Tan, Recipes from the Nyonya kitchen cooking, 4th ed. (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Cuisine, 2009), as quoted by Chien Y. Ng (95)
morning I was dressed in the delicate red baju panjang and Pekalongan sarong I had worn on the eve on my wedding (TWWBTW, 37)

Indeed, based on Gumulya and Octavia, Chye’s dressing choice in the novel, baju panjang is matched with sarong or batik. Also, Lee mentions that batik Pekalongan as Chye’s undergarment comes from Indonesia, and it is matched with v-shaped neckline of baju panjang. They became the identification of Peranakan dress which matches European, Chinese and indigenous styles. Upon this, Lee argues that the earlier influences of the Nyonya Peranakan dress such as the batik and baju panjang mark connections with the inhabitants of Sulawesi, particularly the Bugis.

The assimilation of baju panjang to indigenous local dress style, as Lee contends, could have made the Nyonyas undistinguishable among indigenous people. In other words, Peranakan women would appear to be similar to other local women in the Malayan archipelago. Thus, Lee believes that this is the Nyonya’s hybrid visual identities embodied by their dress styles which were locally based. By highlighting this style, the Nyonyas had decided their “base” or “stable identities” as local women in the visual sense. However, because of their relationship with Chinese men as their spouses, fathers or male ancestors, the Nyonyas’ visual identities were made over a variety of lo-

---

124 T. Lee, 117, 136.
125 T. Lee, 136.
126 T. Lee, 137.
cal backgrounds, Javanese or Bugis for instance, to a single, particular identity as ‘Nyonyas’.

The other kind of Peranakan dress depicted as a sign of Peranakan assimilation is seen in *A Different Sky*. Ei Ling, Mei Lan’s mum who is a Peranakan woman, wears *sarong* and embroidered *kebaya*:

Ei Ling wore a sarong and embroidered *kebaya*, her round eyes and the lift of her nose indicating a mix of origin as a Peranakan Straits Chinese. Her hair was fashionably coiled, pearls hung from her ears, diamonds encircled her fingers but her beautiful face worn a wistful expression, as if life held back its true harvest. (ADS, 68)

Based on Lee, “*kebaya sulam*” literally means embroidered *kebaya*. They were well-known in the Straits, but “*kebaya bordir*” was worn in the Dutch East-Indies. It shows that embroidered *kebaya* was famous among other local women in the Straits such as the Malays and the Jawi Peranakan women (the Indian Muslim and local women’s offspring).

Lee contends that the color of embroidered *kebaya* was subtly introduced with pastel colors. This marks the beginning of colorful embroidered *kebaya*. Also, the motifs of embroidered *kebaya* incorporated European and Chinese influences. Firstly, they made a combination of floral, figural and motifs similar to the flora and fauna motifs in batik sarongs. Such motifs had European influences, like the use of roses, irises, and lilies. The latter embroideries, made in the mid twentieth century, presented different motifs than Batik Nyonya. This following embroidered *kebaya* showcased Chinese-inspired

---

127 T. Lee, 215
128 T. Lee, 168
flower motifs, including peonies, plum, chrysanthemum and lotus, together with small birds like magpies and sparrow.

Lee admits that it is hard to locate the origin of embroidered kebaya\textsuperscript{129}. It could come from either in the Straits or in the Indies. Yet, as the Nyonyas’ dresses were much inspired by Java, it is not a surprise if this trend was brought over from Java. Kwa strengthens this, “kebaya bordir was exported to the Nyonyas in Singapore and Malaysia\textsuperscript{130}”. Therefore, embroidered kebaya influenced by European, Chinese and Java shows that Peranakan Straits Chinese fashion worn by Ei Ling has been assimilated.

Another Peranakan dress is represented in Only A Girl. Nanna’s Peranakan clothes in her death bed are kebaya and jewelries.

“If we do the chemise and kebaja together we only have to turn her once.” Carolien reached for the clothes and the chair. After they finished dressing Nanna, Sue took the largest of the pearls out of the box and placed it under Nanna’s tongue. (OAG, 280)\textsuperscript{131}

According to Gumulya and Octavia, the kebaya worn by Chinese society, including Nanna, appeared in Java around the end of 19th century\textsuperscript{132}. It was called as ‘kebaya encim’ or ‘kebaya nyonya’. The word ‘encim’ refers to the majority of the Nyonya wearing this dress; they are Chinese women who have been married and are middle-aged.

\textsuperscript{129} T. Lee, 215
\textsuperscript{131} “Jika kita memasang dalaman dan kebaya bersama-sama, kita hanya perlu membaliknya sekali.” Carolien meraih pakaian di atas kursi tersebut. Setelah mereka selesai memakaikan baju ke Nanna, Sue mengambil mutiara terbesar dari kotak perak itu dan meletakkannya di atas lidah Nanna (OAG, Menantang Phoenix, 362).
\textsuperscript{132} D. Gumulya and N. Octavia, 18
Moreover, based on Lukman et al., kebaya and batik sarong were attracting phenomenon those days\textsuperscript{133}. It is because they were worn by women from three different ethnicities in Dutch East Indies\textsuperscript{134}. These clothes were initially worn by indigenous women in Indonesia, and then, they were also worn by Tionghoa Peranakan and Indo Belanda women.

Lukman et al. explain that at first, kebaya was worn by indigenous Dutch East-Indies women at the early of 19\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{135}. The document showed that kebaya of local women was dark in color, matched with batik sarong. Then, at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, a lot of Dutch women began to wear kebaya. They wore luxurious fabric of white thin cotton imported from Europe, decorated with white lace. This choice was to adjust the hot weather and humid climate of Dutch East-Indies. Also, it is an attempt of reverse mimicry (going native), whereby the colonizer want to look-alike the colonized\textsuperscript{136}. Not long after, many Peranakan women from rich family followed the trend; they mimic the similar model of kebaya worn by Dutch women. This is an effort to indicate the Peranakan women’s new higher status in colonial society.

However, Peranakan women in Dutch Indies realized that they had a different taste with the Dutch’s, and it was mainly in color preference. Dutch women regarded white color with cleanliness, purity and holiness, and it did


\textsuperscript{135} C. C. Lukman et al, 18

not have negative meaning in their culture. White clothes were also cool to wear in tropical regions since it can block the hot air, thus, Dutch women like to wear white kebaya. Meanwhile, Chinese Peranakan women in Dutch Indies referred white as the color of bereavement. They only wore it when their close relative passed away. Therefore, wearing white kebaya every day was like always mourning, although it could be used to indicate their equalized status with Dutch women.

To overcome this, Chinese Peranakan women modified the Dutch kebaya becoming kebaya encim, which is similar to embroidered kebaya. The Peranakan women choose more colorful embroidered threads and fabrics, with Chinese decoration motifs, such as phoenix, chickens, butterflies, and graceful peonies. Upon this, Lukman et al. consider kebaya encim showed a phenomenon of hybridity. Such hybridity occurs because Chinese Peranakan women of Dutch Indies want to mimic the Dutch women’s style of kebaya; in which it was first worn by indigenous women. Throughout time, Chinese Peranakan women add accentually Chinese decorations and suit the color and motifs to reiterate their identity as ‘Peranakan’.

Summing up, there has been a nuance about Peranakan dress (i.e. kebaya) worn by Peranakan women residing in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia represented by three novels. The Peranakan kebaya worn by Peranakan women in Malaysia and Singapore shows more amalgam of Chinese culture and

---

137 C. C. Lukman, 21-22.
local culture. This indicates the Peranakan women’s effort to assimilate their way of dressing style of *kebaya* in Malay up similar to the indigenous world.

Moreover, Peranakan women have contributed to Peranakan assimilation by making the local dress style their own. As explicated by Lee¹³⁸, Peranakan women in Malaysia and Singapore emphasized their visual identities in their own hands. Peranakan women have their own control to choose what was and was not suitable to wear. Interestingly, this decision was not only of individual preference but of a collective decision. Although the influences came from various ethnicities, none of the ethnicities was a dominant feature in the Peranakan’s local dress style. Therefore, this becomes “Nyonya’s” or Peranakan women’s specific style of dress.

However, a rather different portrayal of Peranakan *kebaya* is shown by Peranakan women in Indonesia. The reason the Peranakan women in Indonesia dress up in ‘kebaya encim’ is because they would mimic the Dutch colonizer’s “going native” that they choose to wear similar clothes to local people. In this sense, Peranakan women in Indonesia tend to be ‘distinct’ than the local people, to show their complicity and alignment with Dutch colonizer, as the second-class citizens—their socially constructed disposition.

Even so, it cannot be avoided that Peranakan women in Indonesia also shows the willingness of “going native”, to wear similar clothes as local people for more pragmatic reasons; to adapt with the local customs and weather. For that, still, the intense cultural contact between Chinese culture and Indo-

¹³⁸ T. Lee, 117
nesian local culture brings about the blending process manifested in the style of clothes worn by Peranakan women in Indonesia that chooses to wear local *kebaya* with some innovative adjustment on adding Chinese and European features. It can safely be said that Peranakan women in Indonesia also assimilate their style of clothes by deciding to wear *kebaya* which was firstly and famously worn by local people, although there is a different degree of assimilation with Peranakan Nyonya residing in Malaysia and Singapore.

3. Peranakan Language

Peranakan language, or sometimes called Baba Malay (Bahasa Melayu Baba), is a creole dialect of the Malay Language (Bahasa Melayu). It has many of the words from the Chinese Hokkien dialect.\(^ {139} \) Peranakan language shows the identities of Peranakan culture also because it contains many of Melayu words. Three novels exemplify the use of Peranakan language as a means of communication, mainly between Peranakans and indigenous people.

Among the three novels, *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds* displays examples of Peranakan language with the most number of words. Peranakan language is mainly used when explaining various Peranakan customs. For instance, *chin-chuoh* (marriage in which the bridegroom moves in with the bride’s family) and *champor-champor* (a mixed bag).

\(^ {139} \) Retrieved from https://www.peranakanlife.com/baba-nyonya-culture/language, online, Internet, April 1, 2020.
Furthermore, many other Peranakan words are utilized to describe Peranakan food. They include: *ang koo* (a type of Nyonya kueh), *kuay-teow* (flat rice noodles), *laksa* (a noodle dish in a spicy soup base with prawns or chickens), *otak-otak* (Nyonya dish of parcels or fish in a creamy paste, scrapped in banana leaves and steamed), and *seri muka* (a type of Nyonya kueh with an olive-green top and glutinous rice base).

It is worthy of note that *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds* is set in Songkhla (now in Thailand), Penang (Northwest Malaysia), and Ipoh, Perak (North Malaysia). Covering these areas, it can be concluded that Chye Hoon and her family belong to the Penang Peranakans who speak “Baba Hokkien”. This particular Peranakan language is based on Hokkien with slang of Bahasa Melayu and expression. Since the Malay population is smaller in these areas, there is not much Malay influence that is absorbed by “Baba Hokkien”.

Meanwhile, there is another variety of Peranakan language. It is called “Baba Malay”. This specific Peranakan language is a creolized Bahasa Melayu with borrowing Hokkien and English words. Malacca was the center of the Sultanate Melaka and its dominant regional population has been Malay since their settlement in the fifteenth century; this added strong influence in the frequent usage of Bahasa Melayu in “Baba Malay”.

Thus, the comparison of Hokkien and Malay language usage gives language difference between the Penang and Malacca Peranakans. This distinc-
tion is represented by *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds* on Chye Hoon’s reflection: *Before Penang, I had assumed all Nyonyas and Babas were the same; meeting Hooi Peng thought me otherwise. She spoke mainly Hokkien, while we spoke more Siamese and Malay*.

Chye’s reflection shows that Peranakan language is a creolized language. As Tan Chee Beng explains, creolization can be used to refer to “the kind of significant transcultural formation that brings about a distinctive new cultural heritage, not just cultural transformation expressed within an existing cultural heritage”\(^1\). In the case of the Baba Malay, the language has been formed out of early Chinese settlers using the Malay trade language in the Malay Archipelago, and during the colonial period, it was a respectable Malay language, although in contemporary era, its status is degrading\(^2\). It can be concluded that Nyonya Peranakan like Chye Hoon, family, and friends contribute to the familiarization of the Peranakan creole language, through the intense use of “Baba Hokkien” and “Baba Malay” in their daily conversations.

Meanwhile, there is no huge details of Peranakan language depicted by *A Different Sky*, except the fact that Ei Ling, the Peranakan Strait Chinese

\(^{142}\) Selina Chiak Shin Yoke, 33


\(^{144}\) According to Tan Chee-Beng, although, today the use of Standard Malay as the national language has been marginalized the Baba Malay Creole to an illegitimate status. See Tan Chee-Beng’s “Localization and the Chinese Overseas: Acculturation, Assimilation, Hybridization, Creolization, and Identification.” *Cultural and Religious Studies* Vol. 6 No. 2 (2018): 73-87.
woman character adapts English language. She also educates her children, including Mei Lan, in western way of life.

Ei Ling was a Strait Chinese, the daughter of an established and educated family… although proudly Chinese in beliefs and rituals, Peranakan Strait Chinese did not look back to China as a homeland, nor did they oppose the colonial rule; instead they adapted to its ways, educating their children in English missionary schools, adopting westernized ideas and habits (ADS, 63-64).

It is implied that Ei Ling is a Peranakan Strait Chinese woman who is British subject. Indeed, the ethnic groups had been segregated by the British colonial administration to serve their goal of divide and rule. Economic disparity, cultural differences and language become the distinctive aspects that separates Chinese with Malays in Singapore. By speaking English and educating her children with English way of living, Ei Ling wants to solidify her status as Peranakan Straits Chinese/ British subject that is different from Malay, Indian, and other ethnic groups in Singapore.

Similarly, Peranakan language is very few mentioned in Only A Girl. However, Nanna and Carolien’s Peranakan Chinese family in Indonesia speak Dutch, and they are induced to western education and practice.

We sent you to Dutch school so you ‘d be an asset to some decent man’s household,” said Chip. “Your education would enhance his position and in turn secure yours. A typewriter salesman has little security to offer.” (OAG, 14)

---

146 “Kami mengirimmu ke sekolah Belanda agar kamu menjadi asset yang berharga bagi seorang lelaki terhormat. Pendidikannya akan meningkatkan martabatnya dan sebaliknya, jabatannya juga akan menjaga kehormatannya,” kata Chip. (OAG, Menantang Phoenix, 5)
It is inferred that Nanna and Carolien’s family choice to speak Dutch reiterates their status as the intermediary “Foreign Orientals”, the second class citizen benefitted from the Dutch master and is of higher status than the indigenous society. What is more, Nanna’s family has been granted a special citizenship from Dutch government for her late husband’s loyalty and dedication to Dutch government. Indeed, as Dewi Anggraeni explains, throughout Dutch occupation, this socially and politically constructed situation shaped the development of Chinese communities, altogether with their collective consciousness and self-perceptions. As a definitely different race and a different cultural and ethnic group, the Chinese stood out from indigenous groups and other foreign Orientals such as Arabs and Indians.

In brief, through the three assimilated cultures as above—Peranakan food, Peranakan dress, and Peranakan language—Peranakan women have displayed their concrete contributions to assimilation. Although their efforts are minimally recognized in the discourse of the nation, they play a significant role in blending Peranakan and indigenous cultures, on its domestic sphere. Such successful blend of cultures is found in the universally accepted feminine sphere, the area where Peranakan women are restrained by patriarchy. However, through their practice in the feminine area, Peranakan woman are aware of blending the Chinese and Malay cultures, to get assimilated with locals. This results in Peranakan own cultures, such as Peranakan food found out from their kitchen, Peranakan dress combining Chinese and Malay fash-

---

ion, and Peranakan language invented as a creole. This successful endeavor is in line with strategic essentialism of Gayatri Spivak:

Even as we talk about feminist practice, or privileging practice over theory, we are universalizing – not only generalizing but universalizing. Since the moment of essentializing, universalizing, saying yes to the onto-phenomenological question, is irreducible, let us at least situate it at the moment, let us become vigilant about our own practice and use it as much as we can rather than make the totally counter-productive gesture of repudiating it. (PC, 11; emphases in original)\footnote{Sangeeta Ray, 108.}

What is more, according to Diane K Mauzy\footnote{Diane K. Mauzy, "From Malay nationalism to a Malaysian nation." After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States 45 (2006): 54.}, it is true that within Malaysian nationalism, there are still tensions to define “who belongs to the nation”. Therefore, the issue towards “who was the Malay” often informally points out to some categories of culture, religion, and language. A Malay is commonly defined as a Muslim practicing Malay customs daily and speaks the Malay language. Upon this tension, it can be inferred that Peranakan Nyonya women are aware of the needs to assimilate to Malay world. Peranakan Nyonya women indeed admit that Malay is their home. Therefore, they create the amalgam of Chinese and Malay cultures to Peranakan cultures of feminine sphere (i.e. food, clothes, and language) to highlight their contributive attempt towards the nation-building tasks\footnote{Selina Yoke, the writer of The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds, shows her positive gesture about Peranakan Nyonya’s contribution to Malay world. In her personal website, she stated that “the major theme of identity made me re-examined my tortured identity in a positive way.” See Selina Yoke’s personal website: http://www.siakchinyoke.com/about/why-i-started-to-write}. This is also to say that Peranakan Nyonya can participate to Malaysian nationalism, similar to their fellow male counterparts (Peranakan Baba).
However, different nuances of Peranakan women’s assimilation and nationalism are shown by *A Different Sky* and *Only A Girl*. It should be noted that there are fewer details on Peranakan Nyonya’s assimilated culture that can be contributive to nationalism. What can be inferred from these few details is that Chinese Peranakan women in colonial/postcolonial Singapore and Dutch-East Indies/Indonesia were still compliant to British Empire and Dutch colonial respectively. In *A Different Sky*, Strait-born Chinese Peranakan women who culturally isolated in Malay surrounding were willing to differentiate themselves from other society by learning English and cooperate to backing the colonials. Furthermore, Chinese Peranakan women in Dutch East Indies, were portrayed in *Only A Girl* as being “isolated” from indigenous population, still.

**B. PERANAKAN WOMEN’S AMBIVALENCE TO NATIONALISM**

Peranakan women characters in the three novels set in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore are in the state of ambivalence towards the emergence of nationalism. Based on Ashcroft et al., rather than presuming that Chinese Peranakan women are ‘complicit’ and some ‘resistant’, ambivalence addresses that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject\(^{151}\). Chinese Peranakan women indeed attempt to turn to nationalism, with different extent of supports and struggles. Accordingly, the analysis of this subtopic is divided into three subsections. They are political awareness on

---

\(^{151}\) Ashcroft et. al., 10.
national struggles and independence, conferment of the Indonesian names, and politics of national language.

1. Political Awareness on National Struggles and Independence

The Peranakan women’s political awareness on national struggles and independence are mostly depicted by *A Different Sky*. Meanwhile *Only A Girl* follows suit, and the least apparent issue is seen in *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*.

To start with, Philip Holden explains that through reading Singapore’s literature written in English, there would have been seen the way race has been historically embedded in the model of modern subjects in Singapore. A literary history of race in Singapore can lead the readers and critics to realize that ideological structures which may have originally had progressive elements (such as anti-colonial nationalism) can become fixed and conceptualized; for yesterday’s tactical solutions have become today’s strategic problem. The paradox for the future will be to think through race in a way that acknowledges its presence and its histories, but also begins the work of disembedding it from structures of representation and power.

The novel *A Different Sky* encapsulates that sense. The last scene of the novel where all characters from different races, Mei Lan, Howard, and Raj come together and help each other when dealing with the riot at the People’s

---

Action Party meeting represents it. The riot was presumably due to political sabotage from the radical communist. This shows the heated political situation in Singapore, where there is a competition between two ideologies: the democratic union represented by People’s Action Party and the national-socialist ideology supported by radical communist activism (see A Different Sky, 479).

Despite the problem emerges from the rising racialized governmentality, the characters see the occurrence as a new beginning which will take Singapore to “a different sky”, a more hopeful and peaceful condition of Singapore post-war and post-election.

Here, it is revealed that the title A Different Sky refers to a new world of Singapore mix up with the aspiration of change. Importantly, the shift addressed include the growth of feminism realized and practiced by Mei Lan. This feminism movement conducted by Mei Lan as third generation of Chinese in Singapore is in line with a modern Chinese belief promoted by communist leader Mao Zedong that explicitly enforces gender equality, saying that “woman can hold up half the sky”. To many people, compared with China’s Confucian patriarchal system that had oppressed women for so long and that had tricked the whole generations of people, it is a welcome change153.

Furthermore, “a different sky” refers to the struggle of the guerilla war against the cruelty of colonialism and imperialism done by Howard, and new political opinions of nationalism that yearns for Independence supported by

---

Raj, Howard and Mei Lan (led by the late Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew). In short, the title of the novel signifies the story of Singapore in maturation.

Meanwhile, *Only A Girl* shows that Nanna as the first generation of Chinese Peranakan has realized that there has been a progressive nationalist movement after the Indonesian independence was proclaimed by Soekarno. Despite her skepticism whether the indigenous can take over the government and rule smoothly, she learns that Soekarno’s speech has burnt the spirit of the Indonesian people, including her servants. Nanna does not directly support that national movement by heart, yet, she allows her Indonesian servant, Mundi, to attend the nationalist meeting.

“Grand Madam, may I please leave for a couple of hours after dinner? I’d like to attend a Progressive Meeting in the nearby native village.”

“Why do you have to do that?” Mundi bowed deeper and said, “Grand Madam has been good to my family and me, but the population is suffering. You allowed me to go to school. I can read and write, but most of the people are kept in ignorance.” Nanna reluctantly granted Mundi’s request. “Stay out of troubles and keep safe,” she warned. (OAG, 124)\(^{154}\)

In fact, based on Leo Suryadinata, along with Indonesian independence, the Indonesian nationalists started to get concerned with their national identity.\(^{155}\) While Indonesia was searching for its national identity, the various ethnic groups still remained as actualities. The Indonesian Chinese, as one of the ethnic groups, were divided in their views about their position and identity in


new-born Indonesia. However, the seemingly positive gesture of Nanna towards her nationalist servant Mundi shows that Nanna is sympathetic to the movement, hence it is an indication of her free, liberal spirit. Although she is reluctant to become Indonesians, Nanna still respects the Indonesian national movement.

Although it is shown in small proportion, *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds* conveys the Peranakan women’s wakefulness upon the Malayan national struggle. Chye realizes the phenomenon when the Great War occurred. Her business as well as all economic sectors in Ipoh are impacted. Also, she learns to understand why Malay people are hopeful about British protection in Malaya during the Great War in 1914.

It was the middle of 1914... a war had broken out in which many countries were involved, including Britain. Within weeks, our *kueh* sales declined. Unlike the other problems I was facing, this war that was being fought so many miles away seemed unconnected to me. It was too remote, too much of a white man’s war. I realized then that the white man’s war, despite being fought a distance away, was having an impact on Ipoh. Whether or not I liked it, our destinies were intertwined and for the first time I understood why many locals supported Britain in their war efforts. (TWWBTW, 193-194)

Indeed, what really happened was not as good as the expectation of Malay people’s to the British represented by the novel. According to Harper, the Great War exposed many of the tensions and ruptures in the colonial regime. There had been a regional rice crisis that led Malaya peasants anxious of the land shortage. The war itself rouse an outburst of demonstration of empire-
loyalty through which they affirmed their privileged status. In fact, British indirect rule in the name of the traditional Malay rulers only worked for a matter of political practicality. This issue, eventually, is not explored further in *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*. It is seemingly because the backdrop of the Great War is used by the writer to beautify and to spice up the struggle of Chye Hoon in her entrepreneurship journey as a *kueh* business owner, only.

All in all, the three novels indicate the seeds of nationalism growing in the Peranakan women. By recognizing the occurrence of national struggles and national independence, Peranakan women develop the awareness upon the ‘imagined’ of a nation as Benedict Anderson mentions. Although they never met the fellow members, or even hear about them, they imagine that they live in communion. Furthermore, Peranakan women’s turning to nationalism is significant to mark their sense of belonging towards the nation they live in. Based on Craig Calhoun who addresses Ben Anderson in “Imagined Communities”, nations and nationalism matter because a sense of belonging together is basic to investments in shared institutions and social welfare. Therefore, the analysis on Peranakan women characters in three novels suggest that the sense of belonging upon their nation exists through their alertness of national struggles and national independence.

---

159 Craig Calhoun, “The Importance of Imagined Communities – and Benedict Anderson”, *DE-BATS · Annual Review, 1 · 201*: 11-16.
2. Conferment of Indonesian Names

The issue of changing the Chinese name into an indigenous sounding name is depicted by Only A Girl, which set in Indonesia. Meanwhile, there is no such issue described by Malaysian novel, The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds, and Singaporean’s A Different Sky.

In Only A Girl, there is a particular issue on naming for Chinese Peranakan living in Indonesia under Dutch’s influence. Carolien and her family have two names: Chinese name and Dutch name. Carolien herself is more comfortable to be called so, a nickname given by her Dutch teachers rather than her given name, Ong Lien (see Only A Girl, 5).

Carolien’s complicity and acceptance to Dutch name triggers her to give her daughter a Dutch nickname as well. She agrees to have the Chinese name given to her daughter by the Buddhist bhiksu of Nanna. But, she wants to add a Dutch name so that the daughter will get easier to adapt at school in the future. Her husband Po Han and her mum say yes to this idea (see Only A Girl, 61-62).

As Lie and Bailey mention, when Dutch colonial ruled in Indonesia (1667–1949), ethnic Chinese had always been distinguished from the indigenous Indonesians. Dutch law categorized the Chinese-Indonesians as “Foreign Orientals,” although like all people below Dutch rule, they were recog-

---

nized as “Netherlands subjects". Chinese often performed as economic middlemen in trade and commerce, and received favourable treatment from Dutch colonial administrators (Coppel). However, indigenous Indonesian (i.e., non-Chinese) businessmen—most of whom were Muslim—were let down by this condition.

Hence, the opt of taking Western names for Chinese family like Carolien’s, was indirectly linked to the attempt to resist assimilation with indigenous Indonesian, realizing the fact that there had been urgency from Suharto’s government that ethnic Chinese must adopt indigenous-sounding names. Instead, based on Ling, the decision is derived from the positive social associations of education and prestige that Western names carried for Chinese family with Buddhism background. Names with Christian/Dutch associations helped to differentiate Carolien and Jenny, as Chinese Indonesian family from (non-Chinese) Indonesians embracing Muslim.

Problems arise when Jenny grows older and attends Lyceum middle school in 1949/1950, after Indonesian Revolution. At that time, Indonesian politics has shifted; President Soekarno is a nationalist leader imposing assimilation program for non-pribumi, including at school curriculum. Thus,
the ethnic Chinese, including Peranakan gets impacted. First, Lyceum school is made more multicultural, by allowing Dutch and Chinese pupils study together with the Indonesian-Pribumi, and accept Indonesian-Pribumi teacher. Second, there is a promotion of assimilation program in the school subject. Assimilation program introduced by the subject includes the affirmative policy for pribumi to obtain strategic position in government and state company, as well as the campaign for intermarriage. These policies really bother Jenny and she says her concerns out loud in front of the class confronting her strict Indonesian teacher, Mr. Sardjono (see Only A Girl, 263-265).

On top of that, there is an assimilation policy to confer the Chinese name into indigenous-sounding name, which Mr. Sardjono claims, it will be okay to Chinese student like Jenny doing so. Jenny is strongly against this policy, as she does not want to change her identity. However, at home, Jenny has just realized that she has two names.

When checking her birth certificate, her birth name is a Chinese name, Lee Siu Yin, given by a Buddhist priest. Yet, in her daily life, she is called Jenny Lee, because her parents think it suits her personality, and so, Jenny never thinks she has other names. Jenny feels strange and confused about her identity. Jenny’s confusion on her identity emphasizes the significance of the novel’s title, Only A Girl. Jenny, a privileged Chinese Peranakan attached to Dutch, who is raised up by her rich Chinese protective family of-
ten takes Indonesian colonialism for granted. She eventually is aware, that she cannot escape from the effect of Indonesian Revolution\textsuperscript{165}.

“I felt so weird. It’s like all this time I wasn’t me. If it wasn’t for Mr. Sardjono, I still wouldn’t know that my real name is Lee Siu Yin. And if something happened where I had to prove that I was Jenny Lee, I couldn’t, ‘cause that name isn’t even on my birth certificate.” (OAG, 210)\textsuperscript{166}

Regarding Indonesian assimilationist policy in persuading the ethnic Chinese to change name, Leo Suryadinata’s explanation is worthy to note\textsuperscript{167}. He explains that the Indonesian ruling government introduces the assimilationist policy to enable ethnic Chinese forms a homogenous entity with the indigenous population. In the case of Indonesia, "incorporation" assimilation has been used more, and it aims at achieving the minority group assumes the identity of the major-ethno group. Such assimilation is manifested through the urgency for ethnic Chinese to changing their name becoming more indigenous-like. The policy is able to be conducted due to Indonesian’s small proportion of ethnic Chinese population (3%).

Evaluating this assimilationist policy of changing the Chinese name to more Indonesian-sounding, Tan Chee-Beng argues that such approach is

\textsuperscript{165} The information is taken from the thesis writer’s interpretation of the novel and Lian Gouw’s personal talk video entitled “Lian Gouw: My Life and My Book Only A Girl”. Gouw mentions, "Listening to my characters’ voices, I noticed their life parallel my own. However simply recording their story without interjecting my own opinion provided me with a different lens from the one I used to feel my own experiences.” The video was uploaded to Youtube by Hayward Public Library, published on 13 December 2013 (https://youtu.be/yXbF4imlXPM).


able to be adopted by Indonesia\textsuperscript{168}. However, this is not possible to be applied in Malaysia which has a much higher proportion of Chinese who have some share of political power, although they are subordinated to Malays. Tan adds that the "Chinese problem" in Indonesia is very much linked to the citizenship issue. In fact, the so-called Chinese problem is actually one of government attitudes and policies, and not a Chinese problem by itself.

In addition, based on Lauren Carter\textsuperscript{169}, there are some differences between the positions of Chinese Peranakan in Malaysia and Indonesia. She emphasizes that the particular divergence is, agreeing to Suryadinata and Tan, related to the proportion of ethnic Chinese general population in both countries. In Indonesia, there are only 3.4\% of Chinese Indonesian, and so it has been easier for the government to apply strict assimilation laws, such as name change requirements and the residency limitations.

However, in Malaysia, the ethnic Chinese belong to significant part of society comprising almost thirty percent of the total populations of Malaysia. For this reason, the Chinese community in Malaysia has been capable to preserve both their ethnic language and cultural characteristics; they also are more critical towards the alienation. Because of distinctive political systems, the Malaysian Chinese also have some political representation and some in-


\textsuperscript{169} Lauren Carter, “The ethnic Chinese variable in domestic and foreign policies in Malaysia and Indonesia,” diss., University of British Columbia, 1995, pp. 40-42
sights towards decision-making process, although the Chinese ethnics in both countries’ participation to politics were much less than in the former era.

Moreover, compared to Singapore, Carter\textsuperscript{170} explains the government of the nation has adopted Confucianism officially as a state ideology, with Mandarin Chinese becomes one of the official languages. The principle of equivalence, selectively setting race, culture, history and specific spaces like a series of close-fitting Chinese boxes, emphasizes multiracialism’s high level of ideological equivalence.

It can be understood that conferment to Indonesian names is one significant remark of assimilation in Indonesia, but not in Malaysia and Singapore. The law to change Chinese name to be more indigenous sounding seems to be a form of ‘forced assimilation’ in Indonesia to gain nationalism based on the ruling government.

Upon this issue, it can be inferred that Lian Gouw expresses the inner battle of Chinese Peranakan women’s identity in Indonesia, in which they are confused about how to act upon the sudden policy of changing the Chinese name into more Indonesian-sounding name\textsuperscript{171}. Indeed, it is reckoned that there has been complicity and normalization of Dutch’s policy within Chinese Peranakan ethnic in Indonesia. It is represented by Carolien and

\textsuperscript{170} Lauren Carter, 69-70.

\textsuperscript{171} In one interview with VOA Indonesia, Lian told that when President Soekarno announced that Indonesian was our language and only the language was permitted to be used, the Dutch books were all burned, confiscated and burned. The article is retrieved from https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/lian-gouw-penulis-novel-sejarah-di-san-mateo/3724535.html, accessed on June 14\textsuperscript{th} 2020.
Nanna’s welcoming the more Europeanized name for Jenny, and that they have been comfortable with practicing Dutch culture to distinguish themselves from local people. Also, Jenny herself accepts her Europeanized name, for she can mingle and adapt with Dutch culture surrounding her more easily. Then, when Indonesian Revolution commenced, there was a new policy imposed by President Soekarno, and it is seemingly a ‘forcing’ approach of assimilation for them. Lian Gouw cautiously expresses such ambivalent concern and aspiration through her Indonesian Peranakan women characters and plot of the story.\(^{172}\)

As explained by Ashcroft et al., Gayatri Spivak “drew attention to the dangers of assuming that it was a simple matter of allowing the subaltern (oppressed) forces to speak, without recognizing that their essential subjectivity had been and still was constrained by the discourses within which they were constructed as subaltern”\(^{173}\). In this way, the subalternity of Chinese Peranakan women in Indonesia such as Nanna, Carolien, and Jenny were constrained; their identities were depending upon the government’s policy above them. When Dutch owns the authority, Chinese Peranakan women like Carolien, Nanna and Jenny are favored as ‘Foreign Orientals’ or second class

---

\(^{172}\) Interestingly, Lian Gouw herself, now in her more mature age and more seasoned writing, admits that she has taken up a more nationalistic way of thinking and practice in her writing and publication career. She told VOA Indonesia, that as the evidence of her love for the world of writing and Indonesia, Lian has now established Dalang Publishing, which has translated 8 Indonesian novels into English. “I only publish historical and cultural writings. If there is no connection with history and culture, I will not announce because there is a lot of work, and a lot of money, and those all will be on me,” Lian said. The article is retrieved from https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/lian-gouw-penulis-novel-sejarah-di-san-mateo/3724535.html, accessed on June 14th 2020.

\(^{173}\) Ashcroft et al, 74-75.
citizen having higher position than indigenous people of Dutch Indies. However, when the revolution happens, they should adjust with sudden political changes and assimilate their identity by changing their Europeanized or Chinese names to a more Indonesian-sounding names all way too sudden.

Despite that, analyzing this issue from strategic essentialism lens, it can be concluded that assimilation is the most strategic way-out for Indonesian Chinese Peranakan to accept and to be accepted as the part of Indonesian citizens, the land where they were born, sustain living, and continue to bear generations. In fact, it is unrealistic if Peranakan women are being essentialist of their identities by living as an exclusive ethnic, and aligns with the past Dutch colonial’s policy whose authority had been gone. It is more strategic to them to turn to assimilation and celebrate their assimilated identities as Chinese ethnic in Indonesia. This corresponds to what Spivak mention about strategic essentialism, ‘I think it’s absolutely on target . . . to stand against the discourses of essentialism, . . . [but] strategically we cannot’ (184).

Meanwhile, the Chinese Peranakan in Malaysia and Singapore retain their Chinese name and add some Western name if they want to. The political and racial discrimination is relatively less shown in these two countries, due to its higher proportion of ethnic Chinese population.
3. Politics of National Language

There are different problems on the politics of national language in the selected novels. Firstly, in *Only A Girl* whose set in colonial until post-independent Indonesia, the issue of national language happened at Jenny’s Lyceum school in 1950s, during Indonesian Revolution.

While Bahasa Indonesia has been recognized as a national language and must be taught at school, Jenny resents to learn it. Jenny identifies herself being more Dutch than Indonesian, and so, she hates talking and reading in Bahasa Indonesia. The other students, who are Indonesian and Chinese, undermines Jenny’s action. On top of that, her Indonesian teacher, Mr. Sardjono expels Jenny when she resists to speak Bahasa Indonesia in class.

“Remember, Bahasa Indonesia is not the same as Malay. Bahasa Indonesia is the Indonesian language, our official language.” Sardjono turned to face the class. “Malay is the dialect that Dutch used to speak to Indonesians, mainly the servants,” He scanned before returned to Jenny… “Bicara Bahasa Indonesia. Jenny, speak Indonesian!” Sardjono interrupted. “Why do you always pick on me? I can speak Dutch whenever I want,” she shouted. “This is still a Dutch school!” “You’re dismissed,” he said, placing the red note on Jenny’s desk. (OAG, 221)\(^{174}\)

To problematize the issue of politics of national language in Indonesia as above, the multidisciplinary theoretical approach should be incorporated. Firstly, it is needed to clarify the theories from political science. It starts with the notions of integration into the "artificially" assembled na-
tion-state. Theorists such as Deutsch (1966), Fishman (1972), and Breuilly (1982), cited in Othman\textsuperscript{175}, distinguish between the nation-states that came into being in Europe in the 19th century (e.g., Germany and Italy) and the "new" nations of Africa and Asia that have come into being as independent entities since World War II.

For that, Suryadinata is correct in explaining that Indonesia as one of the nations in Southeast Asia that is considered as a state-nation rather than nation-state\textsuperscript{176}. This is to say that Indonesia has not been a fully-established nation but an ex-colonial state. The state is created first and a new nation is built based on the state boundary. Moreover, Indonesia is a multi-ethnic state consisting of many ethnic groups. Also, during Indonesian Revolution in 1950s, the national identity was still weak but ethnic tension was often very high.

Thus, Suryadinata argues that it is acceptable for leaders of newly independent Southeast Asian countries, including President Soekarno as the first president of Indonesia, make efforts to build a new nation based on colonial boundaries\textsuperscript{177}. However, it is commonly believed that ethnic identity is a disruptive force which may lead to political instability and eventually the disintegration of a state.


\textsuperscript{176} L. Suryadinata, \textit{Ethnic Chinese}, 5

\textsuperscript{177} L. Suryadinata, \textit{Ethnic Chinese}, 5.
In order to overcome such political insecurity and fragmentation, as explained by Othman178, there is the urgency to impose policies intended to encourage integration. Such policies generally include the establishment of an integrated national educational system, a national language, and national symbols.

Especially for the imposing policy on national language, sociolinguistics theory is worthy to look at. In specific, as cited by Othman179, Kelman believed that "language is a uniquely powerful instrument in unifying a diverse population and in involving individuals and subgroups in the national system" (21). Kelman adds that, by promoting "instrumental" and "sentimental" attachment to the new state, language can even, for short periods, maintain (a system's) legitimacy—even if it is not working effectively, is facing serious economic difficulties, or is torn by internal conflicts so that it can adequately provide for the needs and interest of only some segments of the population at the expense of others—as long as it is seen by wide segments of the population as representing their national (ethnic-cultural) identity. (23)

In fact, the national language chosen to build integration and to unite the heterogeneous society in Indonesia is Bahasa Indonesia180. In order to encourage the use of Bahasa Indonesia even to the schoolchildren of the nation, Simanjuntak shows that schools with language other than Bahasa Indonesia are closed or are not permitted to conduct teaching-learning.

---

178 Z. Othman, 5-15.
179 Z. Othman, 15.
activities during Indonesian Revolution\textsuperscript{181}. This happenstance is problematized in \textit{Only A Girl}, where Jenny feels forced to use Bahasa Indonesia as her Dutch-school, Lyceum, obliges the use of this national language, as adjustment to the official government policy. Analyzing this issue critically, on one hand, such coercive policy seems forceful and intimidating, especially for Chinese Peranakan women as the minority residing in Indonesia. On the other hand, that tough policy is convincing to be conducted to unify all people from various ethnic groups in Indonesia, and not to split them.

Furthermore, in reading closely to find out Lian Gouw’s attitude in problematizing the issue of national language, it is inferred that she firstly speaks out about the indifferent feeling of Peranakan women like Jenny, Carolien and Nanna, the characters compliant to Dutch education to learn Bahasa Indonesia. Nonetheless, it is also revealed that in the era of Indonesian Revolution, the leader of such newborn state-nation must execute an obliging policy of integration to fulfill the nation-building task\textsuperscript{182}. When there has been such understanding upon the needs of unifying language to contribute to nation-building, the Chinese Peranakan women’s should have not resented to learn Bahasa Indonesia\textsuperscript{183}. In addition, as explained by Sunarto et al, under the politics of the national language, namely the use of

\textsuperscript{182} L. Suryadinata, \textit{Ethnic Chinese}, 5-6
\textsuperscript{183} In one interview with VOA Indonesia, Lian told that she was extremely disappointed when President Soekarno announced that Indonesian was our language and only the language was permitted to be used, the Dutch books were all burned, confiscated and burned. She stated, “That's where I believed, I was silenced, but now I understand. And years ago, I went to Bung Karno's grave and I said I'm sorry.” The article is retrieved from https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/liangouw-penulis-novel-sejarah-di-san-mateo/3724535.html, accessed on June 14th 2020.
Indonesian language as the national unifying language, there is such expectation to contribute to the promotion of human dignity, in this context, through the unification of Indonesian people across ethnic groups\textsuperscript{184}.

Meanwhile, \textit{The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds} problematizes the issue of national language rather differently. Rather than exploring the conflicts of unifying national language, \textit{The Women Who Breathed Two Worlds} delves into the extensive use of Malaysian English by Peranakan characters.

Indeed, the Peranakan characters in the novel speak the mix of the most common Chinese dialect in Malaysia (Hokkien, Hakka, and Cantonese) which they combine with English or Malay\textsuperscript{185}. For instance, the sentence that was spoken by the little Chye is ‘You find something I want, I give you,’ (Malaysian-English) instead of ‘I’ll give it to you if you find me something I want’ (standard English).

According to Mahir et al.,\textsuperscript{186} it should be understood that the learning of English language in Malaysia started during the colonial times as a tool of socio-economic mobility and education enhancement.\textsuperscript{187} Though, after independence, the role of the English language in Malaysia has increased. English language does not only become a tool of international so-


\textsuperscript{185} Selina C.S. Yoke, “Notes on Language”, \textit{The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds}.


cio-political correspondence and involvement, but also as a global medium of interaction and exchange of knowledge. For that, Malaysia as a rich multilingual country can be categorized generally as diglossic or polyglossic. Thus, the use and development of English is influenced by the national language of Malaysia, Bahasa Melayu and its regional dialects, that exists with other languages like Indian and Chinese. These languages have influenced the verbal repertoire of English language in Malaysia, creating the local variation of English called Malaysian English.

It is also important to note that the status of English is as the second language in Malaysia. As the Malays, Chinese, Indians have their own mother tongue language, the need for acquiring English vary from the second language for the Malays and the third language for the Chinese and Indians— as Bahasa Malaysia is the official language. Hence, Malaysian English arises to be the lingua-franca (used in an informal setting) to this multi-racial society.

Therefore, it can be inferred that the writer, Selina Yoke emphasizes the use of Malaysian-English language by Peranakan/ Baba-Nyonya characters like Chye Hoon in The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds, to point out the Chinese Peranakan women’s assimilation with Bahasa Malaysia as the second and the national language, Chinese as the mother tongue, and English as the third language. The Peranakan’s daily use of Malaysian English emphasizes their assimilated endeavor to be familiar with being Malay-

---

oriented while learning to embrace English-education and get the British colonial’s influence and allegiance.

In contrast, *A Different Sky* explores the use of English language as the main language of communication and national language in Singapore. Almost all the characters speak standard English, for they are educated, or, at least, literate.

Seeing its context, Singapore as the new nation had to adopt a neutral and of essentialist, a brand of multiculturalism based on four “founding races”—Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others—the CMIO model to disseminate the tension. To actualize the multiculturalism in the context of the official language, Chang notes that Singapore’s policy is "to continue the rich cultural diversity into a richly textured nationalism." All four of Singapore's languages—English, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil—are used in the parliament, schools, and cultural and religious activities. Following this, the education system in Singapore is characterized by bilingualism, in which English becomes the language of instruction, and the mother tongues subjects are taught.

Nevertheless, according to Leimgruber, English remains the main language of Singapore ever since its foundation of the modern city in 189.

---

Leimgruber also states that English is the language of the colonial power. English was considered the language of administration, of government, and of the elites. At start, the number of English native-speakers in Singapore was minimum, including: the few British civil servants, soldiers, and businessmen. Nevertheless, the language was always recognized positively, due to its association with the colonial-ruling class and with upward mobility.

By focusing more on the use of English as the main language of the characters in the novel despite the fact that characters come from various ethnicities, class, and gender (for instance, Raj is a successful Indian businessman and Howard is an idealist Eurasian ex-militant and social researcher), it can be inferred that Meira Chand as the writer of *A Different Sky* supports multiculturalism, multiracialism, and multilingualism in Singapore. Importantly, Mei Lan as the third-generation Chinese in Singapore embraces the multiculturalism introduced by the government.

This multiculturalism is embedded and celebrated through characterization of Mei Lan, as (a) Straits-born Chinese/Peranakan but raised up more into Chinese by culture, (b) as British subject during British colonial times, and (c) as Singapore citizen and is proud of this status, especially

---


193 This inference is supported by the fact that according to David Burleigh in his book review called “The future lies in different sky”, Meira Chand gives her characters a bright and hopeful future of Singapore as a nation, for one of the characters, Howard, prophetically observes: “The future lies under a different sky.” See David Burleigh, “The future lies in different sky,” Retrieved from: https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2010/08/08/books/book-reviews/the-future-lies-under-a-different-sky/ accessed on June 15th 2020.
when Mei Lan decides to go home to Singapore after finishing her higher education and attends the rally of the future Singapore’s ruling party, People’s Action Party (PAP). It can safely be said that multi-lingual approach that has been taken by Singapore is related to its goal to achieve multiculturalism, and *A Different Sky* captures this spirit by the portrayal of the use of Standard English spoken by Chinese Peranakan woman’s main character, whose identities are layered.

In brief, albeit dissimilarities on politics of national language, it is seen that Indonesia is one step forward in terms of its national language policy, compared to the other two countries, Malaysia and Singapore. Indonesian government has legalized Bahasa Indonesia as a unifying language, to eradicate the bitter colonial legacy, mainly against the Dutch language as the colonial language that was used to divide and rule the people. Therefore, while grasping the importance of unification through Bahasa Indonesia, the Chinese Peranakans in Indonesia should not need to worry about learning to speak and interact with Bahasa Indonesia.

Meanwhile, Malaysia and Singapore still use English as one of their most important language. This is because of their different experience of colonialism; they had been under British colonialism for a long time and were complicit to use English as the colonial language ever since. Eventually, Peranakan women also assimilate in using English in their daily life with local varieties, such as Malaysian English and Standard English.
In conclusion, Peranakan women’s ambivalence in supporting and struggling with nationalism in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore are varied. This is due to each country’s different experiences of colonialism. The colonial experience does affect the different extent of Peranakan women’s effort to assimilate their culture to the host countries’ and to accord with the government’s nationalist policy.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued that the colonial encounter has shaped the Chinese Peranakan women’s identities in *A Different Sky*, *The Woman Who Breathes Two Worlds*, and *Only A Girl*. It asserts that assimilation with non-Chinese culture influences the formation of Chinese Peranakan women’s resort to nationalism. By applying Gayatri Spivak’s subalternity and strategic essentialism as well as Mina Roces’ Asian feminism, this thesis has already answered the two main questions. First, it explains the gains and losses experienced by the Chinese Peranakan women while journeying with the Western colonizers. Second, it answers Chinese Peranakan women’s turn to nationalism which involves their contribution to assimilate Peranakan culture with non-Chinese culture, and their ambivalence to nationalism.

In the first analysis, this thesis has shown that the colonial encounter has brought gains towards Chinese Peranakan women’s identities. This is plausible because Western colonizer has introduced Chinese Peranakan women with Western values, ways of thinking, and system of education. Chinese Peranakan women who are aware of those virtues can get benefit from them. They can negotiate their position and status with the filial piety, obtain formal education, and gain economic independence.
The first part of the analysis presents the female negotiation with the filial piety. Peranakan tradition of filial piety, in fact, overlooks the status of women as ‘yin’. Women are seen as weak, submissive, and passive; they are subalterns whose voices are unable to and should not be heard by the society. Through exposure of modernity and pressure of colonialism, there are actions taken by Chinese Peranakan women to situate themselves in a better position and status in negotiating their Chinese filial piety.

Built on Gayatri Spivak’s argument on strategic essentialism, the Chinese Peranakan women’s actions while dealing with problems of patriarchy can represent such negotiation. In specific, along with the confinement of patriarchy, the Chinese Peranakan women main characters can negotiate their status and position within the family. For instance, realizing how patriarchy has oppressed her older family members, Mei Lan in *A Different Sky* rejects the arranged marriage to pursue her higher education instead. Also, Chye Hoon in *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*, whose husband died, stands up as a matriarch to support her family although she feels bad for her daughter, Hui Fang’s unhappy marriage. Furthermore, Carolien’s decision in *Only A Girl* to go back to her nuclear family after divorce, represents her strategy to reconcile with her brothers and her mother though it is against the filial piety which obliges women to respect the husband.

Furthermore, the thesis has revealed that the Chinese Peranakan women face education problem. It is true that Peranakan culture still preserves rig-
id patriarchal values which restrict Peranakan women to obtain education. Going to school is worthless and women are not destined to so doing.

In fact, the establishment of English- and Chinese-medium school at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the endorsement of Western missionaries, had helped Chinese Peranakan women to gain opportunity to be educated. History also notes that there had been crisscross of Chinese nationalist events that supported the Peranakan women’s step to education. After the success of Chinese reformation, Chinese women are considered as the mother of the country, and by letting them receive education, they can be great managers of the family, the smallest unit in the society.

The Chinese nationalistic beliefs then also encouraged Peranakan family to send their daughters to school. For example, Chye finally sends her daughters to read and write at an Anglo-Chinese girls’ school. Moreover, a lot more opportunities were also promoted by the men of the countries to support women having higher education. They also imposed women to get awareness within themselves to advocate their rights of education. Therefore, more Chinese Peranakan women were mindful of the importance of education and they did actual actions to pursue it. In the selected novels, Mei Lan does not give up her hope to enter a law school in Britain although she is undermined due to her race and gender. Carolien also sends Jenny studying abroad, to equalize their intellectual status with the Dutch colonizer. In brief, with more access,
thanks to the colonial encounter and nationalistic movement of China, Peranakan women can obtain advancement in education.

This thesis has also discussed the Chinese Peranakan women’s development in economic independence while journeying with the West. A further contact with education has opened Peranakan women to stand on their own feet in terms of economy. Chye Hoon, for instance, manages to intertwine her devotion to her tradition of Peranakan kueh with the business world, and by this, she can survive life. Mei Lan can prove that she has all the rights to be treated equally with her fellow male colleagues at work by being an independent lawyer defending the cases of marginalized women. Then, Carolien’s achievement at working under the Dutch government, often affects her role as a single mother, yet, Nanna helps her by being a caring figure to Jenny. All these signify Mina Roces’ Asian feminism in that women from different regions with different backgrounds and financial struggle can perform a range of roles to be economically independent.

It is also proven by this study that the colonial encounter causes deterioration to the Chinese Peranakan’s identity. The conflict between colonialism and tradition leads to racial prejudice. First, colonial rule in Malaya eventually eroded the conservative Peranakan cultures, as Chye comes across disappointed to see her children leave Baba/ Nyonya customs. Second, British colonials failed to protect Mei Lan, who is brutally tortured by the Japanese and be blamed as communist, though her Chinese-nationalist activism is affil-
iated with British colonials. Third, the Dutch colonizer cannot guarantee the Chinese-Indonesians safety against Japan, though Dutch-oriented family like Carolien’s always takes side on the colonials. All these cultural and political tensions consequently ignite Peranakan’s scepticism towards the West as the true messiah for them, and so they prohibit the intermarriage with West to keep the Chinese Peranakan tradition and bloodline pure. In the end, Peranakan women’s loss resulted from colonial encounter influences them to turn into nationalism, through assimilation with non-Chinese cultures.

In the second analysis, this thesis has displayed how Peranakan women contribute to assimilation. To be more precise, Peranakan women have done so much to the hybridization of Chinese cultures towards the Malay world. It is manifested to the three assimilated cultures, namely Peranakan food, Peranakan dress, and Peranakan language. Although the Peranakan women’s endeavors are minimally recognized in the discourse of the nation, they apparently maximize their role in domestic sphere. Such thriving blend of cultures are found in the universally accepted feminine sphere, the area where Peranakan women are confined by patriarchy—Peranakan food from their kitchen, Peranakan dress to assimilate with indigenous women, and Peranakan language on their day-to-day conversations. Peranakan women have been aware of their own practice at feminine sphere and they also have done a significant work upon the domestic area, instead of totally reject to
make use of the opportunity. Such practice is in line with the strategic essentialism theory by Gayatri Spivak.

In terms of Peranakan women’s ambivalence towards the emergence of nationalism, indeed, they attempt to turn to nation-building, with different extent of supports and efforts. In specific, it is discovered that Peranakan women’s ambivalence in supporting and struggling with nationalism in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore are varied. This is due to each country’s different experience of colonialism. What is more, Mina Roces’ Asian feminism goes hand in hand with the representation of women in the novels, since there has been attempts to indigenizing international feminism values. For instance, there has been the emergence of liberal spirit within Peranakan women in Indonesia. Also, there is a representation on Indonesian Peranakan women’s criticism towards a ‘forced’ assimilationist policy such as in changing the Chinese names and learning official language. In addition, in Singapore, there has been a sense of belonging to support nationalist movement by Peranakan women. Furthermore, in Malaysia and Singapore, there have been illustrations on Peranakan women’s adoption of government’s nationalist policy with the adjustment of their layered identities.

By these, Peranakan women’s efforts to turn to nationalism are counted and their struggles to nationalism are conveyed. Then, there have been seen the different degree of women movement in three countries with their own
home-grown product, a more nationalist than global-influenced, another outcome of Asian feminism.

Finally, this thesis claims that there is not any clear definition of the Chinese Peranakan women’s identity really. My own hypothesis that all Chinese Peranakan women are the same is failed to prove. Throughout the analysis, there has been seen that there is not any uniformity of women based on their ethnic group. Apparently, the Chinese Peranakan women in three South-east Asian countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) are varied entities. Their gains and losses over colonial encounters, as well as their contributions to assimilations and struggles to nationalism are diverse. It is because they undergo various colonial experiences. This particular point, therefore, is the contribution of this thesis.

Suggestion

Chinese Peranakan women are dynamic part of society who are often overlooked and homogenized as having a singular and a communal identity. However, throughout the study of the three novels, *A Different Sky*, *The Woman Who Breathed Two Worlds*, and *Only A Girl*, the differences of colonial experience, political, social, and economic aspects surrounding Peranakan in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have proven that the Peranakan women are separate entities with different, layered identities. Moreover, Peranakan
women also have attempted to unify with the host countries, via assimilation with non-Chinese culture and attempt to adjust with nationalism, with different extent of contribution and challenge. Indeed, racial discrimination rooted from the divide-and-rule colonialism also hampers their struggle in unique ways.

Having discussed the Chinese Peranakan women’s identity shaped by colonialism and how assimilation influences the Peranakan women’s awareness on nationalism, this thesis is yet to pursue further studies on exploration of Chinese ethnic women in another part of Southeast Asian (SEA) region. It is suggested then, to study how Chinese ethnic women’s identity is affected by colonialism in other SEA countries such as in the Indochina countries (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), or comparison between the assimilated identities of Chinese ethnic women in the Philippines and Thailand, as well as their perspectives about the nations. As Southeast Asia is a regional entity which not only has commonalities, but also a special community, a lot more studies towards this issue would be rewarding to enrich the Chinese diasporic studies and Southeast Asian studies problematized by literary works composed by writers of the region.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bahri, Deepika. Feminism and Postcolonialism in a Global and Local Frame. Geneve: Graduate Institute Publications., 2009. PDF.


Calhoun, Craig. "The Importance of Imagined Communities – and Benedict Anderson." DEBATS · Annual Review, 1 · 201, (n.d.): 11-16.


—. "Nation-building and being Chinese in a Southeast Asian state: Malaysia." Changing identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese since world war II, ((1988)): 139.


Le, Wong Yong, and Rashad Yazdanifard. "The Impact of Cultural Background and Gender Differences on Malaysian Consumption Patterns." (2014).


Shin Mun Ng. "Peranakan identity at the crossroads of Empire, the Malay World and the Sinophone Worlds c. 1900-1930." academia.edu (n.d.).


