

Language and Cultural Hybridity in *Korbannja Kong Ek* (1926)

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Abstract. Hybridity is a product of cultural encounters that meet at the same time and place. Chinese peranakan literature is a cultural product that represents various hybridities within it. One of these works is *Korbannja Kong Ek* (1926) by Kwee Tek Hoaij. The drama presents the dynamics of community life in the Dutch East Indies, such as ethnic Chinese, Europeans, and natives. This drama tells about the conflict within the Chinese organization (THHK) due to the cunning and corruption of its management. This text describes the dynamics of hybridity and language in big cities in the Dutch East Indies. Through post-colonial theory, this research looks at the forms of hybridity created through the dialectics of the Bumiputera and diaspora communities, including their respective languages and cultures. A qualitative descriptive method is used to explain the data found and will describe forms of hybridity in the language and culture of the community.

Keywords: postcolonial, hybridity, *Korbannja Kong Ek*

1 Introduction

History records that the Netherlands is one of the European countries that colonized Indonesia. Its power in Indonesian territory drained the wealth of Indonesian spices and ruled all aspects of Indonesia. The Dutch colonial government also imposed a social class system based on race for everyone living in Indonesian territory. As the ruler, the Dutch placed Europeans as the first class. The Dutch placed foreigners as the second class, which included Arabs, Indians, and Chinese. Sadly, the native people as the host were placed in the third class or the lowest class. The enforcement of these social classes is undoubtedly not without purpose. The application aims to make the boundaries between races more clearly visible. So that the Dutch would be increasingly seen as rulers or superior and the lower classes as inferior [12]. The superior Dutch colonial government dominated and regulated aspects of life in its territory. The colonials applied Western ideologies, customs, manners, behaviors, and cultures that they brought to Indonesian society. This colonial rule caused impacts in the form of hedonism, secularism, individualism, racism, materialism, and so on [13].

The presence of various foreign ethnicities in Indonesia brings a variety of cultures of origin that meet each other. The meeting of multiple cultures causes 'confusion' about their identity,

especially for the Chinese community. The meeting between cultures gave birth to cultural mixing, called hybridity. Hybridity is a term that refers to the interaction between different cultures that can create new cultures and identities [4]. However, the Chinese people considered inferior only partially imitated and applied the European culture or fully applied their original traditions and culture. This makes the Chinese community ambivalent. Imitation, also known as mimicry, is an activity of reproduction of European subjectivity that occurs in a colonial environment that is no longer pure and displaced from its origin [4].

This can be seen in Peranakan Chinese literary works. Peranakan Chinese literary works generally take the story's theme based on factual things that happened at that time. Peranakan Chinese literature existed from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, so the background of his work describes colonial life at that time. At first, the themes were limited to the scope of life of the Peranakan Chinese community. However, after Indonesia's national awakening in the 1920s, the pieces expanded to the lives of the native people. This made peranakan Chinese literature considered more courageous and agile in addressing the turbulent events of the time [10]. One of them is *Korbannja Kong Ek* (1926) by Kwee Tek Hoay. The play *Korbannja Kong Ek* was written by Kwee Tek Hoay. It was first published by Drukk Map Sing Kongsie, Semarang, in January 1926. The play's text contains characters of Chinese, Dutch, and Javanese ethnicity. The play tells the story of a Chinese organization full of the cunning and greed of its administrators and members. Sim Tek Bang, as an honest secretary, falls victim to the *lid-lid bestuur* who prioritizes personal interests over the public interest. The *lid-lid bestuur* were portrayed as sycophantic, thinking only of money and gambling. They legalize all means to achieve their profits and interests. Thus, the play attempts to depict the reality of Chinese organizational life, which is full of ugliness and deceit. In these dynamics, various mimicry attitudes cause hybridity, such as in terms of language and culture. Based on the explanation above, postcolonial issues in Peranakan Chinese literary works are interesting to discuss further. This paper wants to examine language and culture from a postcolonial perspective.

Previous research that examined Chinese Peranakan literature was "Mimicry and Ambivalence in the short story "Ruma Sekola jang Saya Impiken" by Kwee Tek Hoay, written by Sitti Hardianti in 2022. This research discussed traces of colonialism resulting from Dutch and Chinese cultural meetings. Using Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory, this research finds that traces of colonialism appear as forms of diaspora, mimicry and ambivalence. These traces of colonization represent the existence of different cultures, namely the colonial and colonized cultures, which met and produced a new culture for the Chinese community. Mimicry and ambivalence appear through my character, his friend, and others. That was a form of resistance from the colonized, in this case, the Chinese community) against the discourse of Western orientalist identity [9].

Other research that also examines postcolonial discourses is the journal "Hybridity, Mimicry, and Ambivalence in the Novel Kirti Njungjung Drajat by R. Tg. Jasawidagda: Postcolonial Studies". This research was written in 2020 by Gina Novtarianggi et al. This research found that the colonialists who came to Indonesia brought many changes in the form of hybridity, such as social, cultural, linguistic and political. The author brings out hybridity through various relationships, such as cigarettes, bread, machinists, newspapers, etc. The main character imitates or imitates through a lifestyle and mindset that is at odds with his family [11].

Meanwhile, ambivalence arises regarding knowing colonial remains. This novel's hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence are on the side of the colonized. That is related to the author's interest

in bringing back postcolonial discourse through colonized people who tend to imitate Western cultural habits, thought patterns and lifestyles.

Research cannot be separated from research methods, which will go through two stages in this study. The first stage is the data collection stage. According to Faruk [8] data collection is a technique that is an extension of the human senses because it aims to collect empirical facts related to research problems. The data source used in this research is the primary data source, namely the drama text *Korbannja Kong Ek* by Kwee Tek Hoaij. In addition, in terms of formal objects, data sources come from books, journals, and articles related to identity. After collecting and classifying data by reading the drama script *Korbannja Kong Ek*, the next stage is analysis. This research uses an analytical descriptive method. The data that has been classified is then analyzed using Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory to explore hybridity.

2 Findings and Discussion

The most recognizable history of Indonesian education is Budi Oetomo. Budi Oetomo is a youth organization operating in education, social, and culture. This organization has a vision of improving the education and knowledge of the Indonesian people. Wahidin Soedirohoesodo, one of Budi Oetomo's essential figures, traveled to several regions on the island of Java to open the minds of the gentry so that they could work together to find ways to improve the status of the nation through education [3]. However, before Budi Oetomo was established, Tionghoa Hwee Koan (THHK) had already preceded it. THHK was formed in 1900, and a year later, they established the THHK school in Batavia. At the same time, Budi Utomo was only established in 1908. Chinese schools are often referred to as Pahoa or Patekoan Tionghoa Hwee Koan. Starting in Batavia, THHK schools expanded throughout Java, Kalimantan, Sumatra, and other parts of Indonesia a few years later. The THHK community established schools because they did not have access to education. That was due to the Chinese community occupying the second class in the social class system imposed by the Dutch colonial government at that time. The second and third classes, which the native and local people filled, had the same fate. Thus, the establishment of the THHK school inspired other ethnic communities to establish schools. Some examples are Budi Utomo and the Arab community Jam'iyat Khair. The development of THHK schools throughout Indonesia made the Dutch nervous. That made the Dutch government establish Holland Chinese Scholl (HCS) school to compete with THHK schools [1].

The play *Korbannja Kong Ek* (1926), which tells the story of the THHK school dynamics, shows the attachment between Peranakan Chinese and the ancestral land (China). At that time, THHK was actually based on the return to China movement. This movement aims to restore or revive Chinese nationalism and Confucian religious philosophy. In the beginning of the *Korbannja Kong Ek* text, the author has shown this in the first nebensatz.

The view: ... in the corner near the door to enter the house, there is a hat hanger. On the wall hangs a large picture of Prophet Khong Hoe Tju.'" (13) [2].

In the nebensatz excerpt above, the author mentions 'Prophet Khong Hoe Tju,' which explicitly displays attachment to the ancestral country (China). The mention articulates diasporic hybridity, which illustrates that, in reality, Chinese Peranakans in Indonesia are not entirely

separated from their ancestral land, in this case, the Confucian religion, which is the religion of the Chinese ancestors. The Chinese diaspora community in Indonesia is a society with diversity in building its identity in Indonesia. That is influenced by the meeting of various cultures brought by other foreign diasporas with Chinese culture and local Indonesian culture. The intersection of these multiple cultures produces a Chinese society with different characteristics. This diversity shows that the author's attachment to *his homeland* is no longer pure but has been reduced by various interests.

In *Korbannja Kong Ek*, the author presents Chinese nationalism as a THHK school focusing on regenerating Chinese culture and identity. In addition, it aims to represent Chinese people who are close to their ancestral culture. However, the indirect practice of mimicry is still present in the text.

(Tek Beng puts on his hat, then heads out. Kong Pah also put on his *pet* hat, took a puff of a cigarette, then went out the door but passed Tjia Wan Touw, Tong Beng Tiauw, and Soen Hong Kie, who had entered the *vergadering* room.) (15) [2]

Tek Beng: "That reason is not true. I know for sure that on the night of the first *vergadering*, some *lid-bestuur* gathered at Kaptoa Beng Soe Sek's house playing *baccarat* with professional players from Batavia and Bandung. On the second night, about ten *lid-bestuur* gathered and danced at Ma Inot's house in Kebon Klapa, who was holding a circumcision party for her grandson." (18) [2]

The imitation or mimicry of the colonized towards the colonizer's culture is never complete. This incompleteness can become a *mockery* [7]. Mimicry is one of the ways that the colonized can feel the superiority of the colonizer. The imitation makes them think they have a higher position and more power over other colonized people [6]. Imitation can be in clothing styles, lifestyles, language use, and others. In the quote above, there are imitations made of Chinese characters. Western superiority in this text is seen in several things or items mentioned above, which are imitated by the inferior, in this case, the Chinese and Bumiputera communities. When superiority reaches the highest level, it can cause what they have to become standard benchmarks for inferiors to emulate to appear to be at a level approaching that of superiors. The first quote is a *nebensatz* that explains the character Kong Pah wearing a pet hat and smoking a cigarette. The pet hat is one of the accessories in European dress culture that European men widely used at that time. In this case, Kong Pah's character imitates a clothing culture synonymous with European ethnicity. In addition, the Kong Pah character is also depicted smoking. Smoking was a habit brought by Europeans at the beginning of the colonization period. Previously, non-European people did not recognize cigarettes. The second quote is a dialog with Tek Beng, who says that the *lid-bestuur* or members of the Chinese Hwee Koan board are gathering Beng Soe Sek to play *baccarat*. The game of *baccarat* is one of the games originating from Europe that is played for gambling. Smoking and playing *baccarat* are mimicry carried out by the Chinese community towards European culture. These characters are members of the Chinese Hwee Koan board, which aims to revive Chinese nationalism, focusing on regenerating Chinese culture and identity. However, these board members imitate various European cultures that they encounter daily. The above mentioned limitations are one of the ways that the colonized people feel equal to their colonizers. Although these imitations were never complete, the colonizers were still different from the colonizers.

In addition to cultural and lifestyle hybridity, the *Korbannja Kong Ek* text also presents hybridity in language. As a Chinese Hwee Koan school located in Indonesian territory, language

education is one of the most important areas to be taught. The author briefly presents the importance of language education in the following quote.

Kioe Gie: " ... it is better just to make the Chinese Hwee Koan school a poor school, which provides simple educations, teaching Malay and Tjeng Im without teaching English, and the teachers use only former Chinese Hwee Koan students with the most expensive salary of fifty. When it's organized like that, it certainly can't be a loss even if it costs two rupiah a month." (64) [2].

Tek Beng: "This is not possible because most *lid-bestuurs* want lessons in our school to be managed well and invite teachers who are credible and have diplomas" (64) [2].

The above excerpts are a conversation between Kioe Gie and Tek Beng, who discuss the economic problems of the THHK school. In the story, the THHK school was financially strapped. It has students who mostly come from low-income families, coupled with board members who do not want to work. As a result, in the first quote, Kioe Gie says it is better to give simple lessons such as Malay and Tjeng Im (Mandarin) language lessons without teaching English. However, in the second quote, Tek Beng disagrees with this because most board members want THHK schools to teach good lessons by credible teachers. Kioe Gie's dialogue to eliminate English indirectly states that the THHK school had previously taught it. Tek Beng's disagreement that the school should give suitable lessons is that it should still teach English. In this case, it can be seen that the Chinese community considers English as something important. Given that the British colonized Indonesia before the Dutch, teaching English is a manifestation of the colonized wanting to look like their colonizers. Even with a school vision that emphasizes Chinese nationalism, this Chinese school still teaches English, which is the language of one of its colonizers. That was done so that the Chinese people would not be left behind by other nations, especially European.

The Dutch colonial government at that time was the first class in the social class system. That made them a superior group that had authority over the entire government in Indonesia. In addition, they also held important positions in Indonesia. The following excerpt shows a Dutch character who held an important position.

'Ong Sam Kiok: "Yes, Kanjeng Tuan! My servant can get the six hundred if only Kanjeng Tuan will help." (75) [2]

'Van Eerlijk: "in what way should i help?" (75) [2]

In the quote above, we can also see the form of Western superiority. That means that Western nations have power in government in Indonesia. A Chinese character named Ong Sam Kiok calls 'Kanjeng Tuan' to refer to a Dutch figure. The reference aligns with the social class at the time, which placed Chinese society in a lower class than Europeans. The nickname Kanjeng Tuan, mentioned by Ong Sam Kiok, can be a tribute to someone of a higher class, but it can also be a mockery of Dutch society. A mockery is a form of imperfect imitation. The mention of Kanjeng Tuan consists of the words *kanjeng* and Tuan. The word *tuan* is very familiar to Westerners as it is a term for a respected man. In the colonial context, people other than

European groups imitated by referring to or addressing European men as Tuan. Meanwhile, *kanjeng* itself is an honourable title given to Indonesian nobles. So, this imitation is not perfect because it combines two terms from different languages and cultures. That can be a mockery for Europe, considering that Europeans look down on other nations besides their own.

'Van Eerlijk: "I feel sorry for the one hundred and fifty students of this school, but I feel even more sorry for the thousand or so Chinese who live in this *afdeeling*, because if hazard gambling is held for a month, there will be a lot of harm (With a loud voice) No! I will refuse the request to open gambling! I won't allow people to gamble on hazards for so long while I'm still in have power in this *afdeling*!" (76) [2]

Apart from being the first class in the social class system, Dutch society also has various authorities and privileges. As seen in the quote above, the character Van Eerlijk is described as a figure with complete jurisdiction over the entire *afdeelling* area, including having authority over all levels of society below his class. In this case, it relates to the Chinese community, namely gambling business licenses and schools.

3 Conclusion

Korbannja Kong Ek's play text, which tells the story of the dynamics of the Hwee Koan Chinese school, has a vision of promoting and reviving nationalism towards China. That is slightly evident at the story's beginning by presenting 'Prophet Khong Hu Tju' in the nebenscene. However, this text has several forms of hybridity when Chinese characters carry out several practices of European or colonial culture mimicry. These are mimicry in the fields of European culture and language. In addition, in *Korbannja Kong Ek's* text, the author clearly shows the differences and boundaries between the colonizers as superior and the colonized people in the lower class as inferior.

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