

## Racial and Cultural Identity in Chinese Peranakan Literature: *Cerita Satu Ibu Tiri yang Pinter Ajar Anak*

Cahyaningrum Dewojati\*, Lidwina Putu Gratia Ekaristi  
Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
\*cahyaningrum@ugm.ac.id

### Abstract

The diversity of Indonesia's identity and culture as a heterogeneous country cannot be separated from the character of the Indonesian nation, which has been inclusive from the start. The Chinese, Arab, Indian, and European diaspora during the colonial period made Indonesia's big cities a melting pot where various ethnicities, races, and cultures met. Authors, including Peranakan Chinese, were generally educated people. Their writing reflects the dialectics and dynamics between cultures, both from the Peranakan Chinese community and the native people, Europeans, Arabs, or other ethnic groups that form the background of the stories. This is also represented in one of the Chinese Peranakan literary works, *Cerita Satu Ibu Tiri yang Pinter Ajar Anak* (1913), which will be used as a material object in this research. The drama text describes the dynamics of community life, cultural friction, social conflict, and issues of ethnicity/race during the Dutch colonial period. This research aims to narrate the dynamics of multiethnic cultures that coexisted in Indonesia during the colonial period in literary works. Qualitative descriptive methods are used to explain the data found. They will describe the identity of multiethnic communities who maintained their respective identities, traditions, and cultures during the Dutch colonial period.

**Keywords:** Identity; Race; Culture; *Cerita Satu Ibu Tiri Yang Pinter Ajar Anak*

### Introduction

Indonesia is one of the countries that has diverse races, ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religions. Foreign immigrants from various parts of the world also influence this diversity. Europeans and Easterners, which include Arabs, Indians, and Chinese, are ethnicities that live in Indonesia. The arrival of the East Asian nation was not with the intention of colonization, unlike the Europeans who came as migrants who wanted to expand their colonies. The Bumiputera community has an attitude of accepting any nation that comes, without suspicion and hostility, if the foreign country comes with friendly intentions.

Conversely, when Europeans came to dominate, the Bumiputera tried to resist by fighting and expelling them (Mahayana, 2017). This brief history is one of Indonesia's long roads that form diversity. The arrival of foreigners was also the beginning of the acceptance of the Bumiputera community towards religious beliefs. The religion brought by the foreigners was packaged in the form of rituals and cultural expressions.

The arrival of foreign nations to Indonesia certainly brought their respective identities and cultures. Identity is a unique characteristic or condition of a person (KBBI). Identity can be divided into two types: natural and constructed. Natural identity can be gender (male or female), ethnicity, race, nationality, and others. These identities are naturally present and cannot be denied. These natural identities can also be referred to as natural or inherent from birth. Meanwhile, constructed identities, or the result of a person's efforts, are not fixed and can change, such as social status, education, and repeated actions. These repeated actions are called nicknames or labels certain groups give (Mutmainnah et al, 2022). Identity refers to the meanings that are reflectively

attached to a person's various roles in organizations and society (Brown, 2021). Identity gives a person both similarities and differences with others. That explains that identity provides a double space for a person, namely a personal area to relate to oneself and a social space associated with the existence of other humans (Dewojati, 2023).

Gallagher, Marcussen, and Serpe working in the field of race, agreed to describe identity as a sense of group or collective togetherness based on one's perspective that they share the same racial heritage with a particular racial group and make multiple identities (Gallagher et al, 2022). Every human being has characteristics that are different from one another. In expressing these characteristics, a person gives a specific marker to himself in the form of identity. The environment is one aspect that greatly influences the identity of a person or group. Through social interactions that occur in the background, people can construct and be constructed by their identity. Identity can be in the form of a subjective recognition given by the group to others, or it can also be an insider statement given to the group itself. When a person belongs to a group that feels part of him or her, it will affect the person's idea of themselves, what they are like, and the way the person views others, either with people from the same group (*ingroup*) or with people from other groups (*outgroup*) (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). This leads to the formation of *outgroups* and *ingroups* that can lead to discrimination between dominant groups against minority groups (Klein, et al. 2007). These dominant groups are usually the ones who label other groups. This illustrates that the definition of a person is composed mainly of self-descriptions of characteristics that determine which social group a person belongs to (Hogg & Abrams, 1998) and this can lead to violence when the group identity feels insulted, harassed, or denigrated (Na & Paternoster, 2019).

Grouping into specific categories can be found in society. The social classes in society show a hierarchy of power and social that appears through several types with higher capacity, strength, or status (Dewojati, 2023). The grouping of people into social categories is generally found through categories such as nationality status, race, ethnicity, class status, gender, profession, religion, and so (Hogg & Abrams, 1998).

The identity and ethnicity of a person or group cannot be measured only through objective criteria. Still, they must also be measured by their sense of belonging to their ethnic group. The formation of ethnic identity requires the presence of other ethnicities as a comparison and affirmation of the ethnic identity concerned. The fact of different nationalities proves that identity formation is influenced by social interaction. Certain groups that do not interact with others may not realize they have something in common. Only social interactions between groups can build and develop their ethnic identity (Danardana, 2021).

In literary works, the depiction of majority and minority groups is present through the characters and their roles. A character is always described through physical, moral, and social characteristics (Schmitt & Viala, 1982). A character is an entity featured in a narrative work interpreted as having certain morals and tendencies and expressed through speech and action (Nurgiyantoro, 2013). Peranakan Chinese literature displays the characters' dynamics, who generally take the story material through events that occur in the community when the work is written. This good tradition makes peranakan Chinese literature realistic and not separated from the reality of people's lives. Initially, the themes were limited to the lives of Peranakan Chinese people. However, after Indonesia's national awakening in the 1920s, the pieces expanded to the lives of the native people. This made peranakan Chinese literature more daring and agile in addressing the turbulent events of the time (Liang, 1987).

The development of Peranakan Chinese literature was in the trading cities. These cities are a meeting place for various cultures, ethnicities, and nations. These areas are the

major cities of Indonesia, namely Bandung, Surabaya, Bogor, and Batavia (Dewojati, 2018). In 1900, the ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia amounted to around 563,000 people, half of whom were Hokkien, while the rest were Cantonese and Hakka (Sumardjo, 2004). Thus, the Hokkien people have the most contact with the local culture where they live. This indicates that the writers of Peranakan Chinese literature are mostly Hokkien people from Fujian province.

The number of Peranakan Chinese writers at that time totaled 123. Were 29 writers born in Batavia, 13 in Bogor and Sukabumi, 10 in Surabaya, 6 in Bandung, 5 in Semarang, and 4 in Surakarta. The rest were born in Malang, Gresik, Tegal, Medan, Padang, Ambon, Bengkulu, and Banjarmasin. In addition, several authors are descendants of Hakka. The discussion of Chinese Peranakan authors cannot be separated from the construction of identity, social status, citizenship, and the position of those living under Dutch colonial rule (Dewojati, 2018). Some of the Peranakan Chinese literary works are *Zonder Lentera*, *Allah Jang Palsoe* by Kwee Tek Hoaij, *Karina Adinda* an adapted drama by Liaw Giok Lan, *Pembalesan Siti Akbari* by Lie Kim Hok, *Akal Bosoek dalem Pendjoedian* by Tan Siok Gwan, *Ang Tiauw Soen's Story* by anonymous, *Stories of One Stepmother who is Smart to Teach Children* by unknown, and others.

*Cerita Satu Ibu Tiri yang Pinter Ajar Anak* is a Chinese Malay drama whose author's name is unknown (anonymous). It was published by F. B. Smits in 1917 in Weltevreden, Batavia. The play features inter-ethnic dynamics, namely Dutch, Arab, Chinese, and Javanese. It tells the story of a Chinese woman who successfully educates her two children without differentiating her biological children from her stepchildren. A Chinese Peranakan character named Ko Liang Sim owns a rice milling business. This character is described as a kind and helpful character. Ko Liang Sim has a wife, Ho Koan Nio, and two sons. One son is from Ho Koan Nio, and the other is from his late first wife. Ko Liang Sim is said to have suffered from an illness that a native shaman and a Chinese sense treated. However, in the end, Ko Liang Sim passed away and left behind his wife and two children. After Ko Liang Sim's death, Ho Koan Nio took over the rice collection business. She had to manage her family business while raising her two children. Conflict occurs when her two children are not serious about their education and engage in gambling. Ho Koan Nio, as a mother, acts firmly towards her children. At the end of the story, the two children apologize to Ho Koan Nio and end happily. Anonymous authors are listed in the drama text. So, it cannot be known for sure who the writer is. However, it can be ascertained that the author is a Peranakan Chinese by looking at the language used, namely Chinese Malay. Drama *Cerita Satu Ibu Tiri yang Pinter Ajar Anak* is the material object used in this research. By the description described above, this research further examines the identities raised by the author on the characters of these various ethnicities.

Talking about identity in literary works, of course, this research is not the first time. One of the previous studies on identity in literary works is "Analysis of the Construction of Character Identity in *Au Bonheur Des Ogres* by Daniel Pennac" (2022), written by Mutmainnah, Ade Yolanda Latjuba, and Hasbullah from Hassanuddin University. This research uses a French-language novel by Daniel Pennac, published in 1985. This research describes Benjamin's family life and work in *Au Bonheur Des Ogres*. The description leads the authors to find two factors that influence and shape Benjamin's identity as the novel's main character. The two factors are family (*ingroup*) factors that view Benjamin as a responsible, kind, and understanding person. The second factor is the work environment (*outgroup*), which views Benjamin as a scapegoat and the accused bomber (Mutmainnah et al. 2022).

Another research was written by Sugiarti (2013) titled "Representation of Minang Identity and Ethnicity in Wisran Hadi's Novel *Persiden*". Sugiarti's study examines identity and ethnicity that are always solid in cultural construction to provide cultural characteristics owned by the community. Sugiarti found that the identity that stands out is the Bagonjong house, which strengthens the existence of the Minang community with its accompanying attributes and the ridicule it expresses. The Bagonjong house faces various problems, but to no avail due to differences of opinion in resolving them. Wisran Hadi, as the author, presents the Minang side with all the social symptoms that arise. The discussion of custom in Wisran's perspective is essential because it cannot be separated from society's identity. His perspective in understanding Minang customs is presented as an effort to communicate the typical problems of the people from the author's perspective (Sugiarti, 2013).

## Method

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, 2012) 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 *Cerita Satu Ibu Tiri yang Pinter Ajar Anak* by anonymous. 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 *Cerita Satu Ibu Tiri yang Pinter Ajar Anak*, the next stage is analysis. This research uses an analytical descriptive method. The data that has been classified is then analyzed using Hogg and Abrams' identity theory to explore the diversity of identities of the characters present in the inter-ethnic dynamics.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Racial Diversity and Identity

Peranakan Chinese are one of the ethnic groups living in Indonesia. They are descendants of mixed ethnicity between the Chinese totok and the Bumiputera ethnicity. As a community living in the Dutch colonial area, of course, the Peranakan Chinese community met various ethnicities, both foreign and native ethnicities. This makes them live and dynamize with diversity that has their own identity. As a mixed ethnic group identity, it is unsurprising that Peranakan Chinese communities have different cultural forms.

The drama text *Cerita Satu Ibu Tiri yang Pinter Ajar Anak*, referred to hereafter as *CSITyPAA*, as an embodiment of the depiction of Indonesian society at that time, was also identified as displaying various identities of various races and ethnicities. The text features characters from Chinese, European, Arab, and native nationalities. One identification of their identity can be seen in the naming. The characters have distinctive names according to their ethnicity. At the story's beginning, several Chinese characters appear Ko Liang Sim, Ho Koan Nio, and Ko Lim Sim. In addition, there is also a native character named Mian who acts as a maid in Ko Liang Sim's house. This also shows that Mian, as a native, is a working class. In addition to the identity of the character's name, the author also presents several social categories that are depicted through the narratives of the drama text and dialog between characters. The dynamics between several ethnicities illustrate each character's social and economic status. Since the story's beginning, the author has emphasized social and economic status. There is an imbalance of social and economic situations that can be seen in the characters. Ko Liang Sim and Ho Koan Nio are described as a couple from the upper middle class with a rice mill

business and a landowner. As a foreign easterner who occupies the second social class in the social class system imposed by the Dutch in their territory, Chinese people generally have a relatively good economic situation compared to the native people. The social class status also gave the Peranakan Chinese community some privileges to develop businesses by trading, farming, and others. Meanwhile, Mian is portrayed as a poor, lower-income Bumiputera. As a Bumiputera, Mian, who occupies the lowest social class in the Dutch system, has no privileges or opportunities. Bumiputera, like Mian, had to borrow rice from their landlords to survive. In this case, the depiction of inter-ethnic social status identity is visible. Peranakan Chinese who have a middle social status with a good economy, and Bumiputera who have the lowest social group with a poor economy. This can be seen in the following quote.

'KO LIANG SIM: "My wife, now i am going out to work on the land and in the rice mill because I haven't seen they for a long time. I hope my wife will stay home to care for our children and do all the necessary work".'

'MIAN: "I am a resident of Baba Ko Liang Sim's land; every year when I am short of paddy, I go to Baba the landlord's house to borrow paddy from him. So now I go to his house whenever he is available".'

A person's social status is only obtained automatically with specific actions to emphasize it. The status is present through recognizing other people or groups' positions. However, the characters in *CSITYPAA* gain social status through the Dutch colonial government's enforcement of the social class system. The social class system classifies each ethnicity that the Dutch themselves have determined. In addition, the effort to show wealth implicitly emphasized the position of social status. Society at that time had a positive view of people with a strong economy. So that these people have a lot of easy access to various things and get the power to direct people's attention. Economic dominance also affects a person's degree and the way society treats these people (Dewojati, 2023).

The positive view of a person with a strong economy appears in the *CSITYPAA* story. Ko Liang Sim, a character with a strong economy who owns land occupied by the community, gets an excellent assessment from the people who inhabit his land. This can be seen in the following quote.

'Mandor Kardim: "As long as I have been a foreman on Baba Ko Liang Sim's land, I have always had enough, nothing less. Baba Ko Liang Sim was a kind-hearted landlord who would scavenge for people in trouble and give medicine to people who were sick."'

Ko Liang Sim's economic dominance does not make him a person of consumerism and hedonism. With his wealth, Ko Liang Sim also helped residents by giving them land to live on for free. This can be seen in the quote above, a positive view of a worker, Ko Liang Sim. This positive view also emphasizes Ko Liang Sim's social status as his identity. On the other hand, the symbolization of status through wealth further clarifies the social class boundaries between the Chinese and Bumiputera communities. Apart from the characters of Mian and Mandir Kardim, Ko Liang Sim's employees, the author presents an unusual character. The presence of a shaman character named Pa Gaet is a form of labeling by the author. The shaman character is present when the story makes Ko Liang Sim sick. At that time, his family asked Mian to call a shaman.

'Pa Gaet: "I have no other day job than to be a witch doctor and look at people's fortunes, and I can also treat all kinds of diseases. Many people already know that I have a skill. Now, I should wait for the arrival of people who want to ask me for help".'

(MIAN arrived).



'Mian: "Salam malaikum Pa Dukun".'

'Pa Gaet: "Malaikum salam. What's the news that you've come here?"'

A shaman's work tends to be closely related to the supernatural, mystical, and clichéd. These things have permanently been attached to the Bumiputera community. This aligns with the West's view of the East as traditional, underdeveloped, mystical, and clichéd. It seems to have become a label always encouraged by groups that feel more modern, advanced, and powerful than those considered inferior. This confirms that Pa Gaet's character is a Bumiputera. In addition, the greeting that Mian said to Pa Gaet when he was about to take him to Ko Liang Sim's house further indicated that Pa Gaet was identified as a Bumiputera with a low social status. In addition to the Bumiputera characters described above, the author still presents another Bumiputera character named Sainem. Sainem is a babu in Ko Liang Sim's house with Mian. In Peranakan Chinese literature, Bumiputera characters are often present as lower-class workers. Similarly, in the *CSITYPAA* text, Bumiputera characters are primarily present as lower-class workers, namely as babu, field workers, and shamans. This time, the babu character Sainem is tasked with calling a Chinese doctor when Ko Liang Sim is sick. This coincides with Mian calling Pa Gaet. This can be seen in the following quote.

'Babu Sainem: "Kiaie was called by little baba, told to come right now."'

'Loei Goa Bwe: "Maid, what do you want to call little baba? I've already paid the rent, what else do you want to contact me about? Maid, leaves from here. I don't like women coming here."'

In the quote above, when Sainem called a Chinese doctor named Loei Goa Bwe to treat Ko Liang Sim, Sainem received unpleasant treatment. Her position as a babu and a woman became a problem for Loei Goa Bwe. The Chinese doctor looked down on Sainem and sent her away. However, the doctor's attitude changed when Sainem expressed her intention to ask the doctor to help treat Ko Liang Sim. Knowing that a fellow Chinese gave Sainem orders, Loei Goa Bwe immediately changed his mind. This shows that the position of the Bumiputera is inferior, and the Chinese are superior. In this case, the doctor Loei Goa Bwe is an ethnic Chinese with a lower-middle economic status. However, as someone with a higher social class status than the Bumiputera, Loei Goa Bwe, who feels his status is more elevated, looks down on Sainem, a Bumiputera. This shows the author wants to convey that not all Chinese Peranakan society has a good and polite identity. Still, some also have a terrible behavioral identity, which considers people in the lower social class lower than themselves.

In addition to Bumiputera and Peranakan Chinese characters, the author of *CSITYPAA* also presents several characters from other ethnicities. One of them is an Arabic character named Sech Salim Bin Dulusala. Sech Salim is a textile trader. This character is present when the story enters conflict.

In the *straat kampong*.

'SECH SALIM BIN DULUSALA: "I have a daily business of going out of town, making debts to people, with payments every day. But the worst thing was at the hotel; there was a woman named Hatija who wanted a debt and didn't want to pay; I thought that if I came this time, she wouldn't pay either, I would just take her home, to be my young wife, so that I wouldn't suffer a significant loss."

In the excerpt, Sech Salim tells of a woman who owes him money but has not been paid. Then, he intends to make her his wife if he still does not pay the debt. In this case, Sech Salim, as a person of Arab ethnicity, has a second social class status in the Dutch social class policy. The Arab ethnicity is equivalent to the Chinese ethnicity. The author also portrays Sech Salim as a person with an upper- middle-class economy, so he feels he has power. By wanting to make the woman in debt his wife, Sech Salim uses his

social class and wealth to do as he pleases. This is the identity given by the author. Being a member of the middle social class and having wealth helps Sech Salim dare act as he pleases to reap benefits and degrade women. In addition to Sech Salim, the Arab ethnic character comes with a female character named Hatija, who works as a seductress. In addition to Hatija, there is also a woman named Mariati, a native who also works as a seductress. Hatija and Mariati, although from different ethnicities, have other social class statuses, but both work as lower-class workers. This proves that a high social class status, if not followed by an increased economy, will not guarantee its members a decent and good life.

Set in the Dutch colonial period, the author also presents a Dutch character. The character is named Smeerikwil, who acts as the chief of police. As a ruling class member, Dutch people usually occupy essential positions in Indonesia. Having a high social status and being a member of the ruling group, Smeerikwil behaves like a police officer who can be bribed.

'Smeerikwil: "How many years have I been a schout in this city, with a lot of pleasure, even if people's business matters, even if the business in my house has a number of all safe, if someone often gets what matters too, if he likes to give a little sugar, all matters I then make just fine with his savings from I have a clerk, this is the cleverest and most able to make me have pleasure."

In the quote above, the Dutch police character says that the criminal problem he handles can be resolved with peace if the suspect's family provides more goods. This is the practice of bribery presented by the author through the Dutch character. By having the highest social status and being a ruling class member, Smeerikwil can act arbitrarily by offering peace in return for gifts. The practice of bribery committed by Smeerikwil can be considered the author's attempt to convey the bad behavior of Indonesian government officials at that time. Without realizing it, the practice of bribery that we still find in everyday life today is a legacy of Dutch colonialism.

## 2. Chinese and Bumiputera Cultural Identities

The inter-ethnic dynamics in the *CSITyPAA* text are not only the behavior of the characters but also their ethnic identity. However, it also brings cultural diversity that touches each other. The author only displays a few inter-ethnic cultures. This is present in the following quote.

'PA GAET: "Okay, try to get me a censer, a betel leaf holder, and a glass of cold water."

(PA GAET reads the prayer on the censer and recite a mantra the glass filled with cold water, then.)

'PA GAET: "Big baba has a disease from being exposed, but the big lady is not worried, because big baba's disease is not serious, the lady can bathe in the crock, one day three times, and this water for big baba drink and also his eyes must be given at the time of each fingertip with aer ginger and onion so that that big baba can sleep happily."

Pak Gaet, a Bumiputera shaman, shows the supernatural culture very close to the Bumiputera community. He tries to cure Ko Liang Sim by reciting mantras and incense. He also ordered some ritual activities believed to cure Ko Liang Sim. This also illustrates that the clichéd culture is an identity given by the author to the Bumiputera community. On the other hand, the author directly compares with Chinese culture through the healer Loei Goa Bwe, who is also present to treat Ko Liang Sim. This can be seen in the following quote.

‘LOEI GOA BWE: “An evil wind hit Madam's husband, and it got into his bones, so he had a fever, but what you need to pay attention to, number one, Madam must not give him random food and cold water, don't bathe, he must be fed rice with salt.”’

‘LOEI GOA BWE: (while writing a receipt) “twenty bowls of water for this medicine, twenty-five bowls of boiled water.”’

In the quotation above, Loei Goa Bwe's healer treats more reasonably by giving medicine and some routine treatment advice. Without spells, rituals, and other clichés. This makes it clear that the author depicts a noticeable cultural difference between shamans and healers who make it their identity.

## Conclusion

The dynamics of inter-ethnic life in the *CSITYPAA* text are depicted with the struggle of identity, class, social status, and economy that meet each other. The type and socio-economic status of each character influence the depiction of the identity of the symbols representing their ethnicity. High social status but not followed by the economy will make the character's identity change and not by other members of his class. Thus, differences in social and economic status show diverse identities. Some of the identities present are still found in today's life, such as the practice of bribery and shamanism. The diversity of identities found shows that, at that time, people could still live side by side with each other.

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