

Njoo Cheong Seng: An Artist in the Fight between Liberalism and Eastern Traditions

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ABSTRACT

As an artist, Njoo Cheong Seng (writer, playwright, film producer, and director) made efforts to respond to colonial discourse through his works and activities from the mid-1920s to the 1940s. His responses manifested in the forms of resistance and counter discourse. This paper seeks to explore the ideas and forms expressed in the counter discourse by Njoo Cheong Seng, an artist of Chinese Indonesian ethnicity. The perspective applied in this research is the postcolonial approach, particularly with regard to the concepts of hybridity and resistance. The deconstructive reading framework interpretation method was applied to determine the opposing relationship between the colonised and the coloniser discourses. The results show that Njoo Cheong Seng supported the movement to restore Chinese characteristics as a form of cultural resistance to the idea of Dutch colonial liberalism. The strategy that he used seemed to support the colonial discourse while simultaneously masking the hybridity that he promoted through ideas such as cultural nationalism. In addition, Njoo Cheong Seng and other similar collective artists developed a strategy that seemed to be of a puritan nature; however, it was, in fact, a simultaneous hybridity that consistently responded to modernity values. Njoo Cheong Seng actually opposed modernity born of liberalism. Essentially, he opposed the concept of the human as the centre of everything, or anthropocentrism.

Keywords: Chinese Indonesian, colonial discourse, ethnicity

INTRODUCTION

Njoo Cheong Seng's contribution to the field of Indonesian literature, plays, stage art, and film is admirable. He wrote dozens of literary works, such as *Swami jang Boeta Satoe Tjerita jang Kedjadian di Soerabaja* (1923), *Wali jang Tjoerang* (1923), *Menikah dalem Koeboeran, Satoe Kedjadian Benar Berachir Ampat Taoen Berselang* (1925), *Tikoengan ka Naraka* (1929), *Bidadari Djalan* (1931), *Battalion Setan* (1938), and others. Njoo Cheong Seng was also active in Indonesian stage plays and was among the pioneer activists of early Indonesian film (Salmon 1981: 262; Sidharta 2004: 24–36). His role and contributions to various creative fields made him an influential artist and intellectual figure in the arts during his era.

Studies on Njoo Cheong Seng have been widely conducted by numerous experts, including Kwee (1977: 170–172), Salmon (1981: 262–268) and Sidharta (1995). These studies discussed Njoo Cheong Seng's role, career achievements, and life, or history. Lombard (1998) also discussed Njoo Cheong's creativity in his writings about his travel experiences (travel writing) by analysing *Taufan Gila*, which was originally published in *Tjilik Roman* magazine. Meanwhile, Chandra (2006) presented Njoo Cheong Seng's idea of nationalism and his cultural practices in facing or resisting Dutch colonialism. The same issue was also discussed in another research study that took cases from Njoo Cheong Seng's story *Gagak Lodra* as the subjects (Chandra 2011). Additionally, Susanto (2017) explored the nationalism notion developed in the literary works of Njoo Cheong Seng. The idea of nationalism was based on a concept of cultural equality; thus, terms related to nationalism emerged as the imagination of a nation found in this work was the imagination of Indonesia.

The studies mentioned earlier provide evidence of Njoo Cheong Seng's role and position, through which he was quite influential in the arena of Indonesian culture during the colonial era. However, those studies are mainly presented in a "romantic" sense, focusing on Njoo Cheong Seng's career and achievements. This study of romanticism focuses on the presence of the subject, namely the achievement, the creative process, and the intention/purpose of Njoo Cheong Seng in writing his art words. Chandra's studies (2006; 2011) provide a new perspective. Njoo Cheong Seng's resistance to, and encounters with Western traditions under European colonialism. Chandra's study portrays the figure of Njoo Cheong Seng who adapts to local customs and opposes colonial policies by undermining security and order as a means of resistance to colonialism. This was undertaken by Njoo Cheong in *Gagak Lodra*, who was once a thief who had wrought trouble in colonial society. Departing from Chandra's (2011) notion, particularly in her review of the *Gagak Lodra* series, which she considers to be an attempt to "affirm identity," the ideas of encounter and struggle between two traditions faced by the Chinese Indonesian subject, represented by Njoo Cheong Seng, become an interesting topic to be studied further. It is interesting because Njoo Cheong Seng was a diaspora subject. He was bound to various traditions and layers of identity, such as his Chinese identity, local traditions, and his encounters with Western tradition. The three traditions came into contact and were negotiated in the context of Njoo Cheong Seng's struggle to hold onto his identity.

From the discussions above, the main topic to be discussed in this study is Njoo Cheong Seng's cultural activities as a representative of his group in responding to the colonial discourse. Related to this, the main problems to be addressed in this paper are as follows: (1) What are the forms of Njoo Cheong Seng's counter discourse, as a collective subject, in responding to the colonial discourse? (2) What strategies are developed by the colonised subjects to survive in the intermediate space?

Through the three spaces of tradition, namely, the encounter with Western tradition (colonial discourse), the local tradition, and his Chinese tradition, Njoo Cheong became an intermediate subject or someone who lived at the intersection of spaces. In the postcolonial context, living in the intermediate space had political consequences and involved identity play in positioning one's roots (root of tradition/root of identity) towards the "routes" of identity. Those living in the intermediate space, like Njoo Cheong Seng, were faced with traditional hybridity contacts. Hybridity is defined as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by the colonisation" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2013: 20). As a subject representing his group, Njoo Cheong Seng developed various strategies for proclaiming and retaining his identity. As seen in his activities and work expressions, Njoo Cheong Seng was a figure who sought to survive on foreign land while affirming his identity. In this context, there were various strategies that he could adopt to survive in the intermediate space, which, in this case, included hybridity or being in a different space in the context of a cultural encounter. This strategy surely required the subject to constantly make a stand and develop a negotiation strategy.

Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), particularly in "The Commitment Theory" section, introduced the term cultural diversification as something that binds and is confusing. Bhabha (1994: 3334) then introduced the term "cultural differences," a term that essentially refers to culture as a liquid and hybridised form. According to Bhabha, cultural interaction raises important cultural territorial boundaries through which the meaning and values are (mis)interpreted or signs are (mis)used. In such a context, the subject Njoo Cheong Seng, who was within the boundaries or the spaces of cultural encounters, surely made various compromises or might have avoided contact with hybridisation or mixing through mimicry; he may even have chosen the hybrid strategy itself as his approach. Such complexity demanded that Njoo Cheong Seng make certain choices.

Njoo Cheong Seng's plays and literary works show various signs of disagreement with Western traditions, especially with regard to the idea of liberalism. This fact can be seen in works such as *Raden Adjeng Moerhia* (1934) and *Nona Olanda S'bagi Istri Tionghoa* (1925). Both texts demonstrate Njoo Cheong Seng's idea of resisting Western liberalism. For him, liberalism, or what is often termed "Westernisation," was seen as a destroyer of Chinese customs and Eastern or Chinese traditions. Using two analogies, namely, *perempuan priyayi* (noble/aristocratic woman) or *bangsawan Jawa* (Javanese nobles/aristocrats), Njoo Cheong Seng presented the superiority of the Javanese race and the negative impact of European (Dutch) education and lifestyle. In *Nona Olanda S'bagi Istri Tionghoa* (1925), Njoo Cheong Seng also demonstrated the regression or transfer of identity that happened to a Dutch woman who married a Chinese man.

Such attitudes were also present in Njoo Cheong Seng's activities in the world of stage and drama. Through his theatre trips to various regions in Indonesia, such as Medan, Aceh, and Manado, Njoo Cheong Seng always found time to write works that originated from local history or traditions. Using this "ethnographic" model during his several months-long stays in each area, Njoo Cheong Seng produced literary works and dramatic performances. His love for local traditions and his adherence to Chinese traditions shows that Njoo

Cheong Seng was trying to affirm the idea of establishing an Eastern identity. The notion of the East was presented as a national narrative, namely, the idea of nationalism based on culture or a cultural nationalism.

In postcolonial studies, matters regarding diasporas are often regarded as “other matters.” Members of a diaspora are also seen as “others.” The experience of space and cultural migration is a complex experience for diasporas and their descendants, and this relates to the concepts of history, politics, economics, literature, and ideology. Diaspora, in postcolonial study terminology, is often referred to as “those who are driven away” or “those who flee,” as well as those who “colonise” or “are colonised” (Gandhi 1998). For example, Hall (1993) pointed out that a diasporic community often uses marking and homogenising representation models in responding to various experiences. According to Hall, the main problem with this is the endless production of identity. This is interpreted as cultural identity (Hall 1993: 2), as stated by Homi K. Bhabha in “Bordes Lives.”

Diasporic space is an intersection of cultural boundaries. In this case, the subject and his identity are aligned, contested, and proclaimed. In fact, this does not rule out the possibility that an identity can be faked or denied (McLeod 2020). This fact provides an interpretation that the locality, tradition, and historical background of the figure of Njoo Cheong Seng is very important for the interpretation of his position and work in the context of the diaspora. Njoo Cheong Seng can be assumed to be carrying out a series of strategies in dealing with traditional encounters in the context of him being a diasporic descendant. Cultural interaction increases the limitations of main cultural areas, resulting in their meanings and values being (mis)interpreted or their signs being (mis)used (Bhabha, 1994: 34).

Another issue concerning diasporas is related to life or living “between” two spaces, namely, the “roots” to the “routes.” The cultural migration model establishes an existence and contends that the shadow of the past is realised between travel and space. In addition, the exploration of diasporas and their descendants leads to new placements, fragmentations, and tendencies. A “home” has become a problematic concept from the past to present. To accommodate life in the intermediate space, narrative ownership and identity become liquid and difficult to identify. These various aspects eventually lead to a new contingent challenge regarding the roots to routes issues (McLeod 2020).

In life between, the interpretation of the subject’s presence through his work considers the local socio-political context of colonial society. The presence of Njoo Cheong Seng’s own work is essentially inseparable from the context of Dutch colonial politics in Indonesia. An example is the traditionalisation of the movement carried out by the colonial government in the 1930s to maintain its position. Apart from that, the wave of liberalism and the idea of nationalism also influenced the writer’s works at that time. Thus, the understanding or interpretation of the Njoo Cheong Seng phenomenon in the context of colonial discourse is inseparable from the historical birth of the work.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopted a qualitative method. The material object studied was the subject Njoo Cheong Seng, who conducted cultural actions on the colonial discourse, which can be seen in his artworks and activities. The formal objects of this study were the relationships between the colonised and the coloniser in the context of Indonesian colonialism, Njoo Cheong Seng’s strategy, and his counter discourse against colonialism. The data used were ideas developed by the subject, the topics of the subject’s works, the subject’s position in the colonial context, the history of colonialism in Indonesia, and Chinese Indonesian ethnicity in the colonial discourse.

The data interpretation techniques were based on the postcolonial approach. The main techniques applied were deconstructive reading to create binary opposition; this technique was then reversed to determine the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser. Reading this text in fact sees the various discourses that appear in the text without neglecting the context as its method of reading. Further, through the reversal, the breaking down of power hegemony was conducted through circular readings to identify the subject’s relation to and strategy for facing the colonial discourse. However, the reading of the work and the involvement of the artist Njoo Cheong Seng should consider various issues, such as the social background of the birth of the text, the language and traditions that surround it. Furthermore, circular readings were carried out on the subject’s colonial discourse, literary works using the hybridity point of view, and ideas regarding identity negotiation to determine the subject’s position and role in responding to cultural encounters with the colonial discourse.

DISCUSSION

Chinese Indonesian and the Idea of Restoring Chinese Characteristics

The existence of the Chinese Indonesian community in the context of colonialism in Indonesia provided a different space when compared to the colonial context from the indigenous subject's point of view. Scholars have provided an explanation of the existence of Chinese Indonesian society in a colonial context, a society set in an ambiguous position before the law and of people conditioned as intermediary traders. Scholars have also offered explanations of the issue of the coloniser's efforts to divert Chinese Indonesians from their root culture towards the European culture through the establishment of Western-style schools. However, such conditions were countered by the growing movement to restore Chinese characteristics, which involves reverting to Chinese traditions and spreading the teachings of their ancestor (Khong Hucu) among Chinese Indonesians through the *Tiong Hua Hwee Kuan* (THHK) (Suryadinata 1988; Salmon 2005). This early Chinese restoration movement, which took place in the 1900s, was a cultural, political, and religious movement. It was not related to the political context of supporting nationalism in China.

The movement to restore Chinese characteristics among the Chinese Indonesians continued to develop until 1942 and the arrival of Japanese colonialism. Some examples of this movement can be seen in the literature, art, and dramatic works that promote the topic of going back to ancestral traditions or to Eastern traditions, accompanied by a "curse" on Western traditions or the idea of European liberalism. In fact, the movement to restore Chinese characteristics in the 1920s led to the idea of cultural nationalism or "Indonesian nationalism" based on Eastern culture. This fact provides evidence that the movement to restore Chinese characteristics was not the same as the political and nationalist movement in China.

Nevertheless, an undeniable fact was the emergence of political organisations that centred on various political interests of Chinese Indonesians from the 1920s to 1942. First, there was an organisation that was politically aligned with the colonial government and that referenced the colonial culture and ideals, or European culture. This group was often referred to as the *Chung Hua Hwui* (CHH) group. Second, there was a group that was politically oriented towards China, known as the *Sin Po* group, that developed cultural ideas and political views that referred to China. The third was an organisation that provided political and ideological support for the struggle for the independence of the Indonesian people. This group was known as *Partai Tionghoa Indonesia* (PTI) (Suryadinata 1986). Although those groups had different ideas politically, in general, these communities of Chinese Indonesians each developed a similar idea, namely, to revive ancestral traditions among Chinese Indonesians. This is as expressed by Kwee Tek Hoay in the article "Itu Tiga Aliran" published in the *Djawa Tengah* newspaper, 1–4 October 1932 and also the writing of Kwee Hing Tjiat in the daily *Mata Hari*, 1 August 1934, entitled "Baba Dewasa." These two writings prove that there are three streams of politics and state nationalism, but they are united in their cultural identity as Chinese (Suryadinata 1988).

The emergence of the movement to restore Chinese characteristics or the idea of returning to the roots of Chinese tradition was essentially related to the cultural-political constellation developed by the moderate revolutionary group of the Chinese Empire, Kang You Wei. For Kang You Wei, Chinese descendant communities were to advance and modernise themselves without abandoning their ancestral traditions and were to utilise the progress and strength of the Western world as a means to achieve Eastern goals (Wong 2008). Thus, the movement to restore Chinese characteristics seemed to reject the idea of liberalism, but in fact, it was not necessarily opposed to the progress or modernisation of the Western world. They make liberalism a way of building a Chinese identity. In a sense, liberalism is not a target to be achieved in such a way that it is nevertheless seen as resisting the spirit and ideals of liberalism. In this context, what happens is strategic ambiguity. The struggle of the movement to restore Chinese characteristics was essentially a struggle of affirmation or unification of identity based on the teachings of the ancestor Khong Hucu. Consequently, this movement rejected inclusion of Western values to Chinese characteristic identity. The movement to restore Chinese characteristics can thus be viewed as a strategy for resisting European colonialism.

Within the idea of the restoration of Chinese characteristics, Chinese Indonesian subjects were, of course, faced with various encounters with traditions, namely, locality, contact with the Western world, and the affirmation of their own Chinese roots. They would inevitably encounter different traditions simultaneously and react to them. As expressed by scholars, hybridity or an encounter involving intermediate spaces is highly possible. For example, Brandon (1967: 12, 27, 34) and Lombard (2007: 3) found that the Nanyang (South Sea, Southeast Asia) is a place of great cultural encounters, resulting in an identity of such layers of cultures

that its origins are difficult to determine. As the descendants of diasporas, individuals would of course nourish a collective memory, preserve cultural communication, retain identity, and adapt or “assimilate” to the local tradition (Cohen 1997: 85–87).

The movement to restore Chinese characteristics was not only a cultural and purification (or modernisation) of Khong Hucu teachings but also a practice of diversity and a philosophical system (Yao 2000). The movement to restore Chinese characteristics became a social, ideological, and spiritual movement for the Chinese Indonesian community. It was a social movement because it sought to achieve social and cultural change for Chinese Indonesian society. As an ideological movement, it was connected to cultural idealism as a unified Chinese Indonesian society. Consequently, the movement was, of course, confronted with colonial policy, which attempted to penetrate and direct the idea of cultural nationalism towards European cultural ideas, such as the establishment of schools for Chinese Indonesians (Hollandsch Chinesesch School) as a counter measure to THHK schools (Onghokham 2009: 74–77). The main purpose was to obscure the Chinese identity and turn it towards the golden European world. In fact, Chinese Indonesians were directed to forget China, reject local cultures and traditions, and turn to European culture and history.

The politics of identity segregation also became a part of the development of the movement to restore Chinese characteristics. Some examples included the travel letter policy, residential systems, and the *capitan* system. In fact, people were divided into different categories according to their races, such as first class for Europeans, followed by Indo-Europeans and then foreigners, with indigenous peoples in the lowest class, who were further divided into free indigenous and slaves. As expressed by some experts, colonialism and such policies led to cultural resistance (Ricklefs 2011: 227–273). For example, there was an indigenous effort against Dutch revitalisation politics by anti-Western and anti-feudalist movements such as Djawa Dipa and Sinar Jawa in 1881 (Siraishi 1997: 143). Such ideas had essentially been incorporated into the movement to restore Chinese characteristics as a strategy for cultural resistance to European colonialism, namely, the internalisation and construction of cultural identity.

The effect or impact of this layered interaction makes Indonesian Chinese ethnic to build a stereotype that Indonesian Chinese only secure its position in the context of colonial and local discourse. They are relegated to a choice to be able to give “pleasure” to the locality and the West. As a result, the relationship between the races, both colonial and local, there are two negotiations that can save his position. The first is negotiations with localities that seem to melt into the context of their traditions. The second is negotiation with colonial cultural discourse using liberalism strategies to achieve Chineseness. Apart from that, the political position was very dependent on the colonial discourse so that economic opportunity was used as a force in facing the two traditions. As a result, hybridity between traditions can be created in the spaces that are played, so as to create an ethics of “mutual understanding” of locality and colonial conditions.

The Chinese Indonesian community was also established as a problematic minority, placing it in an ambivalent position. The concept of race was applied as a political concept (Lev 2000: 4–6). As a consequence, race became the justification for controlling other communities, including the economies of those communities (Loomba 2003: 7–8). Furnivall (1967), a colonial historian, found a society that was evident only in the economy; there was no unity among its members even though the community was labelled as the plural colonial society. As a consequence, these rules led to suspicion and ignited “embers of fire” on the basis of racial stereotypes. The presence of the movement to restore Chinese characteristics in this context served as a counter to colonialist ideas.

Njoo Cheong Seng and Cultural Resistance

Njoo Cheong Seng was known as an intellectual who opposed the internalisation of liberalism and its ideas. However, he was not against the progress of the Western world. Njoo Cheong Seng presented his ideas of resistance to liberalism through his works and activities in the world of stage performances. Some of the slogans presented in his works included “ultra-Western,” “Westernisation,” “liberalism,” and “Western customs.” The slogans were designed to counter slogans such as “the Eastern world,” “the Eastern people,” “we are the nation,” “the Eastern custom,” and so on. These slogans are simply expressions or attitudes that seem to be discourses and campaigns of anti-liberalism or anti-colonial movements. These slogans were made in binary opposition, creating a single unit, East versus West, colonised versus colonialist. Through his opposition, Njoo Cheong Seng basically contested the thought development and identity construction directed at the Chinese Indonesian community. This resistance could be connected to the colonial government’s efforts to standardise the image

of the Chinese Indonesian to be in accordance with the European image. This caused Njoo Cheong Seng to be caught between the two worlds because he could not run away from world development and liberalism in the colonised land.

An example of Njoo Cheong Seng's ambiguity was presented in his literary work entitled *Nona Olanda S'bagi Istri Tionghoa* (1925). Although this text was a political and cultural answer to European liberalism, it also contradicted the reality faced by Njoo Cheong Seng and his social group. Even though the ideas to return to the locality or to ancestral tradition were promoted in works of art and literature, many Chinese Indonesian schools or the THHK were, in fact, straying from the initial purpose of the movement to restore Chinese characteristics. The schools tended to lean on and approach liberalism as a way to advance the Chinese Indonesian community. At this point, Njoo Cheong Seng was caught between two choices: resist liberalism or boldly hold on to local traditions as a way to build his Chinese identity. This statement, however, offers a start for reviewing Njoo Cheong Seng's real opposition when faced with the colonial discourse.

His position when faced with cultural encounters required Njoo Cheong Seng to make certain unfinished choices. His initial choice was focused on the idea of locality or returning to tradition, which he presented in his text *Nona Olanda S'bagi Istri Tionghoa* (1925). However, his opposition to or resistance against liberalism consequently plunged him into cultural puritanism that was harmful and caused him to be overwhelmed by the development of the era. The same idea was also presented in his text *Raden Adjeng Moerhia* (1934) and his film works prior to the Japanese invasion.

The idea of cultural resistance was indeed repeated in *Raden Adjeng Moerhia* (1934). The symbolism of women, as presented in his other texts, represented the heir and the successor of an identity. However, the woman symbol was portrayed only as a subject who was an introvert and obedient to the cultural norms. The norms that reaffirm tradition and locality were burdensome to women. Meanwhile, the issue of the women's emancipation movement was recognised as an indispensable part of a well-ordered society, that is, a progressive, not conservative, and not old-fashioned society, that welcomed the new era. This was, in fact, synonymous with the success of the values of liberalism. In this position, Njoo Cheong Seng unconsciously acknowledged or admired the liberalism movement with regard to the advancement of Chinese Indonesian women. Such ambiguous positioning was repeated in another text, *Kesopanan Tiomer*, written by Dahlia (1932). This text presented women's progress through liberalism and education, progress inversely proportional to the spirit of returning to puritan Eastern traditions.

The cultural resistance of Njoo Cheong Seng had, in fact, led to ambiguity. It seems that hybridity was the chosen path, but it was disguised through an emphasis on reverting to tradition. Returning to tradition was originally a cultural resistance movement. Later, the movement came to represent a difficult choice between traditional puritanism and liberalism. A hybrid eventually became the choice as an unconscious consequence of the resistance in order to survive amidst traditional encounters.

The following is an excerpt in Raden Adjeng Moerhia's text which mentions the idea of locality nationalism and Western anti-liberalism (Njoo Cheong Seng 1934: 131):

Kau tida mengerti tentang pendirian kita sebagai bangsa Indonesier yang mengharapken perobahan dan kamajuan dalem kalangan kita. dengen dididik kita dalem rumah sekola, itu cuma buat mendapat plajaran dan pengetahuan yang luas, dan dengen plajaran itu, dapet kita berketet dan mengerti hal ka'ada'an dunia. Bukannya kita dididik dalem rumah sekola supaya kita orang menuntut kamerdika'an yang dilakukan oleh bangsa Barat, yang buat kita sanget meliwati wates, juga bukannya kita harus melupakan bangsa sendiri, kerna kita anggep bangsa laen ada sanget agung dan tinggi. Pendirian saya, benar, atawa salah, kita harus meninggikan bangsa sendiri. Saya, jangan kau kata, saya saorang muda yang kuno. Saya ada cukup Modern, tapi bukannya modern buat jeblosken diri saya ka dalem gelombnag ka-Baratan. Saya punya Modern, saya aken berdiri tetap di saya punya tempat sebagai bangsa Timur...

The idea of resisting liberalism by Njoo Cheong Seng has always been connected with the terms modernisation and Westernisation. In this context, the Dutch colonial discourse became a power that he opposed. The idea of resistance to colonial discourse faced a series of rejections in terms of social, religious, and cultural movements such as the THHK, literary works, cultural activities, Taman Siswa organisations, and Djawa Dipa (Sinar Jawa) in 1914, as well as the cultural polemic of the 1930s era.

However, the idea of resistance is essentially an idea based on the concept of nationalism as a result of cultural resistance. In such a context, cultural resistance can be seen as part of nationalism. Nationalism-puritanism of diverse localities can actually cause problems if it is not balanced by the concept of modernisation,

namely, the choice of liberalism. In this position, Njoo Cheong Seng seemed to pretend to shed the European identity and return to tradition. However, the concept of a “nation” that is seen as a force of cultural nationalism actually comes from the progressive thinking of liberalism. This means that the ambiguity was not realised by Njoo Cheong Seng when building the concept of a “national” identity for the Chinese Indonesian community by returning to the value of tradition or Khong Hucu teachings.

Colonialism operated in different ways in the context of different social groups or subjects. Through the retraditionalisation movement, for example, indigenous people were invited to support colonial rule. Meanwhile, diaspora societies, such as Chinese Indonesians, were not introduced to the retraditionalisation movement. They had to turn to European traditions and cultures instead.

In his dramatic and literary works, Njoo Cheong Seng presented a topic or an indictment against the “Westernisation” process. He was followed by a group of other authors, such as Kwee Tek Hoay, Dahlia, Tan Boen Soan, and Liem Khing Hoo. The idea of returning to ancestral traditions was essentially a counter discourse to the idea of turning to European culture. In addition, although these authors did not realise it, the call to indigenous people return to the locality tradition seemed to actually support the idea of the retraditionalisation of the colonial discourse. However, the retraditionalisation carried out by Njoo Cheong Seng was intended to be a force to hold back the “standardisation of European values.”

In addition to those two works, Njoo Cheong Seng showed the same tendency in his dramatic, film and literary works through slogans such as “ultra-Western” versus “traditional virtues,” “European custom” versus “Eastern world,” “Western” versus “Eastern,” and others. These ideas were discourses that opposed one another. However, the idea of an anti-Western world was not balanced or clarified in terms of which Western culture was the enemy or what kind of Western values were opposed to the return to tradition or locality or to the retraditionalisation movement. Meanwhile, the idea of forming a cultural identity for the Chinese Indonesian community originated from the ideas of liberalism or modernity.

Such discourse on cultural resistance emphasises that Njoo Cheong Seng was an anti-colonial figure who prioritised tradition or the “rooting” of tradition as a force against the process of Europeanisation or colonisation while simultaneously using colonial discourse (liberalism) as a strategy or tool against the Western discourse. This shows the two sides of the coin. As an anti-colonial subject, Njoo Cheong Seng placed himself in the constellation of colonial politics, which imposed restrictions and gave privileges to his group, such as status as a second-class group in society. This also confirms that in his ambiguous position, Njoo Cheong Seng ventured to respond to colonial discourse through a “resistance” strategy to Europeanisation conducted through a European education model, the internalisation of European liberalism ideas, and other approaches. However, the resistance also used values drawn from liberalism or modernity.

The Idea of Cultural Nationalism

Similar to the idea of cultural resistance developed by Njoo Cheong Seng, another idea proposed was the development of a cultural nationalism concept. The idea of cultural nationalism was found not only in Njoo Cheong Seng’s texts but also in the works of other intellectual authors or actors such as Kwee Tek Hoay, Liem Khing Hoo, Nationalist Liang, Tan Boen Soan (Chen Wen Zwan), A. A. Achsien, Chiu, Kho Tjoen Sien, and Kwee Seng Tjoan. Similar to Njoo Cheong Seng, those intellectual actors developed the concept of “returning to the locality tradition” or “back to the ancestral traditions.” However, these movements also unwittingly adopted ideas that they opposed, namely, the concept of modernity, which seemed to support the idea of colonialism. This ambiguity was the characteristic or strategy used to maintain their position.

For example, Liem Khing Hoo suggested that the Javanese people should return to the roots of tradition and the values of “Java” in the face of globalisation or “Westernisation,” as expressed in his work *Kembang Widjaja Koesoema* (1930). The same idea was expressed by Kwee Tek Hoay, who resisted Western materialism or the construction of colonial subjects in his opposition to the Western world (materialism, socialism, and liberalism). Kwee Tek Hoay, a prominent Chinese Indonesian author, journalist, and initiator of the unity of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, and author of the *Drama Diboven Digoel*, put forward the idea of returning to the roots of Eastern spirituality as a foundation for constructing the subjects of colonised peoples. This was expressed in *Drama Diboven Digoel* (1929–1932) and *Allah jang palseo, satoe lelakon komedi dalem 6 bagian* (1919).

The themes developed by Njoo Cheong Seng in his dramatic, film, and literary works presented his attitudes and views in response to the movements and social changes in his society. The idea of cultural nationalism expressed by Njoo Cheong Seng can be seen in his “ethnographic” work, which was written based

on his travels to various regions in Indonesia. The travel writing model was based on his observations and his involvement with written objects. It showed that the developed topics had distinctive characteristics as a semi-ethnographic work. Travel writing was an idea that had many dimensions, one of which was the interpretation of colonial biases (Hulme and Youngs 2002). Njoo Cheong Seng raised the myths, stories, and life of a particular society. He introduced a common boundary and cultural space in the context of the imaginary unity of the ethnic groups in Indonesia. Such ideas were also presented by Liem Khing Hoo, who wrote locality stories by living among and observing local communities. Among his works were *Gawok* (1936), a story about a tradition in Banyumas, and *Kembang Widjaja Koesoema* (1930), a story about a tradition in Tengger and its surrounding areas, as well as *Andjarsari* (1929), *Brangti* (1934), and others.

Similar to Liem Khing Hoo, Njoo Cheong Seng also promoted the idea of cultural nationalism through travel writing, and this can be seen in writings: *Sio Sayang* (1933), written as a memoir of his travels to Makasar from 21 July 1932 to 13 August 1932, and based on his interest in the old Makasar language and its verses about high virtues and especially his interest in Makasar citizens and their excellent hospitality; *Balas Membalas* (1931), a memoir of his travels to Aceh 1929–1930; *Sirada dari Telaga Toba* (1932), written as a memoir of his travels to Lake Toba, Haranggaul, Prapat and Bahge, and then across Lake Toba to Samosir Island, where he met the Batak Toba ethnic group; *Poelau Samosir 27 September 1929*; etc. These travelogue novels provided interpretations, judgements, and responses by Njoo Cheong Seng regarding the uniqueness, myth, life, and history of a community and his assessments of the characteristics and similarities of the various ethnic groups and customs of the communities that he visited. These basically confirmed the concept of a national “imagination” or the unity of a nation. This suggests that the “imagination” of a nation emerged as part of an effort to unify the differences and similarities of the cultures and localities of the communities that he visited, such as Makasar, Aceh, and Batak.

The imagination of a nation developed by Njoo Cheong Seng complemented the idea of a nation on the basis of fate equality in colonialism. Njoo Cheong Seng developed the idea to resist the nation’s conception of the liberalism tradition. On the other hand, resistance against liberalism in fact derived from the values of liberalism, especially the concept of a modern society. The notion of cultural nationalism was apparently similar to the cultural resistance developed by Njoo Cheong Seng. In this position, he stood on both sides, one side accepting liberalism as the power that drove him, while on the other side, he opposed the source of the power itself by presenting a puritan tradition of locality as an element of building nationalism as the antithesis of liberalism. This fact is also proven in the texts he wrote, for example in the debate on the choice of customs and traditions such as religion. The following is evidence from the text of *Raden Adjeng Moerhia*, which presents ideas about religion and tradition as part of its identity (Njoo Cheong Seng 1934):

Tuan Willy van Galen. Saya saharusnya pantes bertrima kasi, kerna kau, seorang Blanda, yang kau anhhjep kau punya derajat tinggi dari kita orang Indonesia, kau suda meminta saya punya anak, buat jadi kau punya nyonya. Tapi sebagi satu ayah, saya nyatakan padamu dengen ringkes, saya tida sekali menyetujui, anak saya aken menika dengen laen bangsa. Moerhia musti menika menurut kita punya igama, da bernaung dengen kita punya adat lembaga. Moerhia aken menika iapunya bangsa sendiri, kaya atawa miskin terpelajar atau tidak...

Njoo Cheong Seng campaigned with this attitude in his travel stories, which revealed the images of people in various regions in Indonesia. Njoo Cheong Seng was fully aware that his view and writings were both a reaction to and represented support for the idea of political nationalism developed against a colonial power. However, he did not realise that the idea originated from colonialism itself. This fact, as revealed by Chandra (2011), shows that Njoo Cheong Seng’s literary works, such as the *Gagak Lodra* series, were an effort to fight against colonialism by creating chaos and resistance to the *rust en order* of the colonial government. The character of *Gagak Lodra* is a hero of the “native” community and an anti-colonial Chinese Indonesian, representing a counter discourse on the idea of romanticism in colonial literature, which, at the same time, constructed the identity of colonised subjects.

It seems that the images or depictions of colonised people through their customs and traditions were not attempts to support the colonial government’s retraditionalisation movement. However, these were not mimicry of colonial actions either. Instead, they were the acts of the colonised subject in responding to the colonial discourse. The purpose of the action was to make an effort to assert and place the subject in the “intermediate space” as a diaspora ethnicity in the political constellation and national identity of the joint struggle against colonialism.

Through the idea of cultural nationalism, the colonised subjects of colonial discourse experienced a mysterious reaction to their construction as a diasporic group who at the time were a “foreign” ethnicity in the colonised land. This mysterious reaction could not be predicted and controlled by the imperial discourse in the context of the Dutch occupation of Indonesia. The Chinese Indonesian community carried out counter discourse beyond the colonialists’ conscious reasoning. In fact, it performed provocative actions while at the same time masking its actions from the attention and grip of colonialism. This act was one of cultural resistance that eventually led to cultural nationalism. This nationalism was also an attempt to have the group accepted as part of Indonesian nationalism because the group’s identity had been racially and politically segregated by the Dutch government.

Hybridity and Intermediate Space

As a diasporic community in the context of colonial discourse, the main issue was positioning the colonised subjects amidst cultural encounters or traditions. Njoo Cheong Seng and his social group needed to develop a strategy for that context. The main strategies that he utilised were hybridity and living in the intermediate space. The hybridity strategy was carried out through various methods both naturally and by developing the original culture through various methods such as mimicry and cultural diversification.

Njoo Cheong Seng was essentially a hybrid in terms of both race and culture. According to racial politics, he was of Chinese descent and indigenous ethnicity. This kind of racial politics was implemented by the Dutch colonial government. Culturally, he was a hybrid because he experienced and internalised various traditions, namely, Western (Dutch colonialism) tradition, local culture, and Chinese culture through the THHK. In the face of these encounters, he seemed to conceal the naturally existing hybridity and employed a new strategy: exerting the cultural puritanism movement as a concept of nationalism and cultural resistance. This was confusing and could at the same time be seen as his attempt to survive the wave of nationalism that existed at the time. As a result, the complexity of culture and the way he expressed new forms of identity such as mimicry, puritan-traditionalism, and resistance to liberalism were, in fact, only surface identities.

The concealment of Njoo Cheong Seng’s original and hidden hybridity was a play or strategy in cultural encounters as well as a political goal of his group. This also strengthens the image of Chinese Indonesians as a “grey” group, a group that was slick, mysterious, and cunning. This condition was finally used by the colonial government to develop the ideas of racial politics and identity that departed from stereotypes, stereotypes that continued to be communicated and preserved. However, for Njoo Cheong Seng, this was a strategy used to save himself from the political and ideological waves that developed in the colonised lands, a difficult position with a risky racial stigma.

Hybridity, in the context of intermediate space, was in fact a strategy and arena in which the subject defended and established his identity as a means to survive encounters and control the “intermediate space.” In the context of dealing with various colonial issues and encounters with various traditions, ambiguity could be observed from the nature and strategy that Njoo Cheong Seng employed. Through works such as *Tofan* (1939), *Battalion Setan* (1938), *Nona Olanda S’bagi Istri Tionghoa* (1925), and others, Njoo Cheong Seng was a voice of opposition to the construction of Western identity while essentially opposing Western liberalism using the values of Western modernity. He advocated returning to tradition and resisting liberalism, but the power of the resistance itself came from the values of modernism.

Another ambiguity was noted the moment Njoo Cheong Seng hid his hybrid identity. However, he developed a dense and puritanic identity for his community as the reason for resisting colonial discourse. In this case, the real reason was to preserve his position during the political wave of modernity and the birth of the Indonesian nation. His efforts were not wrong because colonial discourse placed him in this group. This means that he fought against colonial discourse using the stereotypes taught or formed by the colonial discourse itself. The hybridity of identity became a source of confusion that at the same time eroded others’ identities and built them together.

Such ideas were also found in literary texts and dramas in the form of terms such as anti-liberalism, Westernisation, ultra-Westernism, and the deterioration of European identity. The idea that was put forward was the construction of Western identity, namely, the idea of materialism. Resistance to materialism was, in general, resistance to excessive liberalism and socialism. The more general resistance involved resistance to the root or way of looking at the concept of anthropocentrism, which is the return to the human subject as the centre of everything. Liberalism and socialism were only a means to an end, as they were not ideals. This idea

was presented by Kwee Tek Hoay in his monumental work *Drama Diboven Digoel*. Resistance to the idea of anthropocentrism was essentially resistance to the modern era or the era of rationality, in which humans were the centre of everything. In this context, Njoo Cheong Seng's ambiguity could be considered as a way to live, a natural thing that could be used as a strategy to achieve his ideals, namely, the ideals in the teachings of his ancestors or in tradition. This was shown in the purpose of writing one of the novels by Njoo Cheong Seng (1934), namely *Raden Adjeng Moerhia*, who said that:

Buku ini diatutkan dengan hormat kepada putra-putri Indonesia yang sedang sangat gumbira berketet dan berlombah-lombahan dalem gelumbang ka-Modernan, dengan pengharepan supaya marika dapet berhasil maksud idealnya yang tinggi, tapi jangalah sampe melangkain wates ka-Timuran kita yang suci, kerna katanya Ruduard Kipling: Timur tinggal Timur Barat tinggal Barat Marika tidak akan pernah bertemu

This fact demonstrates that since the beginning of his writing, Njoo Cheong Seng still prefers the local or Chinese tradition as part of his identity.

Such constructions in literature or art works conveyed romantic and gothic ideas and horror and other emotions (Russell 2007: 648–649). The modernity project was becoming Njoo Cheong Seng's "curse" so that he could return to his ancestors' ideals. This choice of attitude made him seem to be ambivalent. For him, Eastern culture was based on the concept of natural balance, namely, cosmological ideas. In such a context, the operation of colonial discourse on the colonised society was not a matter of policy and an occupation of politics, ideology, or economy. However, the thing Njoo Cheong Seng and his group most feared from colonial discourse was the construction of human identity based on the idea of anthropocentrism, which is to return of humans to the centre of everything or the idea of the "triumphal age of rationality," or as Rene Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." The idea of modernity and the return to the human perspective can be found in the romantic literary traditions, such as the *Balai Pustaka* tradition, with regard to the triumph of universal humanism in the New Order era and aesthetic dominance in the present era in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, the intermediate space was a space where the subject fought to defend himself. In this space, Njoo Cheong Seng performed a series of movements and strategies to secure his position within the politics of racial colonialism and the Indonesian nationalism movement. This was reflected in his movements towards retraditionalism, his efforts to efface or hide his hybrid reality, his return to tradition, and his ideas on cultural nationalism. As a hybrid figure who at the same time struggled in these arenas, his formed identity was not an essentialist identity, but a flexible identity. The subject was like water that could flow to a place that was safe without changing its liquid properties. This was often viewed as a "non-permanent," "unpredictable" identity that was "opportunistic" and "mysterious and cunning." However, it was his strategy for being accepted and able to survive in the "intermediate space" as well as to proclaim his Chinese identity amidst cultural encounters.

CONCLUSION

Njoo Cheong Seng's strategy in facing the colonialism discourse was to conduct a counter discourse movement. This counter discourse was manifested through the movement to restore Chinese characteristics, which seemed to support the Dutch colonial government. In addition, the cultural movement was carried out to establish a concept of resistance and an idea of nationalism based on traditional equality or spirit. The similarity among the values and power of tradition that are oriented in harmony with nature and spirituality is the counter discourse to the idea of the liberalism or materialism of the Western world. This counter discourse is referred to as cultural resistance against the colonial discourse, namely, the rejection of an ideology that prioritises human beings as its centre, or anthropocentrism.

In the context of cultural encounters, the subject Njoo Cheong Seng undertook a hybridity strategy. Njoo Cheong Seng's hybridity was in fact natural in terms of both race and culture. However, he changed his natural hybridity by exerting a strategy of cultural puritanism through cultural resistance, i.e., returning to tradition, which seemed to support colonial politics. This was seen as an intermediate space that placed the subject in a "space of ambiguity," that is, a space in which the circumstances required the subject to internalise different values but at the same time proclaim his true identity and simultaneously conceal the truth.

Meanwhile, the idea of cultural nationalism can be seen as a movement for maintaining and securing the subject's position. This is similar to the concept of hybridity or layers of identity that was used as a survival strategy in the intermediate space. Nationalism is an ideological and cultural idea. Ideologically, this

idea is similar to the reconciliation movement, which carried out cultural resistance to the colonial discourse. Culturally, this idea was intended to help the subject be accepted amidst the diversity or “cultural differences” involved in building the concept of a common people or nation.

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