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Proeoeoeoeng! Bladaaaaaaas!: *Gendered Pseudonyms and the Fiction of Familiarity in Tjamboek Berdoeri's Writings*

Nik Setiadarma

Introduction

The republication of the memoir of a Tionghoa writer Kwee Thiam Tjing (1900–74), *Indonesia Dalam Api dan Bara* ([1947] 2004), and his collected columns, *Menjadi Tjamboek Berdoeri* (2010), has revealed the man behind the pseudonym Tjamboek Berdoeri (Thorny Whip) who actively wrote columns in newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s.[1] Coming from a peranakan family from Eastern Java, Kwee worked for and around several Tionghoa-owned newspapers across the region. He was critical of the Dutch colonial government and paid close attention to the rise of nationalist movements in Indonesia and China. Then in 1932, he was part of the establishment of Partai Tionghoa Indonesia with his colleague Liem Koen Hian (1897–952). Thanks to Benedict Anderson and Arief W. Djati's works, Kwee's writings, networks, and politics have become more visible for Indonesian readers. They have introduced Kwee's biography and his colonial and cosmopolitan

[1] Tjamboek Berdoeri, *Indonesia Dalam Api Dan Bara*, ed. Stanley and Arief W. Djati (Elkasa, 2004); Kwee Thiam Tjing, Menjadi Tjamboek Berdoeri: Memoar Kwee Thiam Tjing, ed. Benedict R. O'G. Anderson and Arief W. Djati (Komunitas Bambu, 2010).

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world and shared their detective work in investigating Tjamboek Berdoeri (TB) and tracing his life history. Their works invite us to revisit Anderson's long iteration about language, intellectual biography, and "colonial cosmopolitanism."[2]

For readers in the 1920s and 1930s, however, TB was an obscure and mysterious figure. Perhaps not all writers in his social networks even knew if Kwee was *the* Thorny Whip. His consistent use of pseudonyms continued a common practice of sealing one's identity in Sino-Malay print culture. In the period and region where censorship functioned to legitimate authorities, anonymity and pseudonymity were not unusual, especially in publications that criticized and insulted powerful people and institutions.[3] At the same time, anonymity and pseudonymity were a creative tool for Tionghoa writers such as Kwee to cultivate a mode of playing with names and expose the troubles and problems of their society. "Tjamboek Berdoeri," in other words, was a persona and character allowing Kwee the journalist to be vocal in his opacity to articulate social and political opinions. Playing roles as a husband and son-in-law, TB shared stories about his wife, Hoedjin TB, and his nameless mother-in-law. He also circulated stories about a mid-age woman, Auntie (*entjim*) Kiem Khoen, whose conversation and bickering with her husband were a source to satirize the Tionghoa family. He regularly shared his correspondence with a young educated woman named Mathilde to discuss matters of Tionghoa women's education and empowerment. He used names such as Sinjo Fredy and Non Elly to criticize the westernization of Tionghoa youth. In his Saturday columns, anonymous and pseudonymous names were as crucial as the content and form of his narratives. Creating "Tjamboek Berdoeri" was Kwee's work of fashioning a male figure who became a critical voice of Tionghoa consciousness.

This article is about the literary play of opacity/transparency of names embedded in TB's corpus and how it contributed to a process of gendering voices in Sino-Malay discourse. TB's pseudonymity, including the made-up names of Tionghoa characters in his writings, is a literary practice that intellectual historians can use to analyze the process of constructing and authorizing social and political ideas. The historiography of Chinese-Indonesian political movements in the twentieth century has offered understandings on the contribution of intellectuals and their debates during the recalibration of Tionghoa's social, political, and cultural positions in a colonial society.[4] What did TB add to such

[2] Anderson had shared fragments about Kwee Thiam Tjing in some of his writings since 2003. The latest one was in his memoir: he said that he wanted to write a literary biography of Kwee Thiam Tjing. He passed away in 2015 before finishing his will. Arief W. Djati is currently continuing Anderson's unfinished project of Kwee's biography in which Kwee embodied the concept of colonial cosmopolitanism. Benedict Anderson, "Responses," in *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson*, ed. Jonathan Culler and Pheng Cheah (Routledge, 2003), 235–38; Cynthia Foo, "Interview with Benedict Anderson," *InVisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*, no. 13 (Spring 2009); Benedict Anderson, introduction to *No Concessions: The Life of Yap Thiam Hien, Indonesian Human Rights Lawyer*, by Daniel S. Lev (University of Washington Press, 2011), 18–19; Benedict Anderson, *A Life Beyond Boundaries: A Memoir* (Verso, 2016), 176–77; "Uncovering a Colonial Cosmopolitanism: A Biography of Kwee Thiam Tjing," *Visitor's Voice*, Kyoto Center for Southeast Asian Studies, accessed March, 20, 2024, https://kyoto.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/staff/arief-widodo-djati/?more=34260.

[3] Nobuto Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia*, 1901–1942 (Brill, 2019); Tom Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned: Indonesia's Chinese Print Entrepreneurs*, 1911–1949 (Cornell University Press, 2021), 7–10, 93.

[4] The historiography of Chinese-Indonesian political movements in the twentieth century is vast. Among others, see the classics Lea E. Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism: The Genesis of the Pan-Chinese Movement in Indonesia*, 1900–1916 (The Free Press, 1960); Mary Somers, "Peranakan Chinese Politics in Indonesia" (PhD

conversations? How did the pseudonyms in his pieces present the Tionghoa question during the period? What did those names do and produce?

I answer these questions by performing a reading that moves beyond the biographical method of searching "proper" names, i.e., treating pseudonymity as a subject of historical inquiry of itself. As Stephanie Newell shows on her study of West African print culture during European colonialism, "anonymity (the voluntary condition of nonbeing) and pseudonymity (the voluntary condition of being other)" was an opportunity for Nigerian, Ghanaian, and Congolese writers to "air grievances, express rage, and make demands without naming, shaming, or physically exposing themselves."[5] By approaching pseudonymity as a practice of exercising the "power to name," one can regard practices of naming and renaming as a strategy and tactic to deliver political messages and create both a descriptive and prescriptive notion of "public." As TB himself announced in one of his columns, "Auntie Kiem Khoen is nobody (*niemand*) and everybody (*iedereen,* sic), that is to say, she is the public (*publiek*)."[6] I take TB's own words as a clue to step back from the revelation of Kwee's proper name and embrace the obscurity of his pseudonym to make sense of the political weight of names in his corpus. As Kwee's idiosyncratic choice and jesting tricks to (mis)lead his readers, pseudonyms also served a purpose to argue about Tionghoa people as a social and political category.

Figurative women in domestic settings, i.e., women characters who move around and talk about household matters, marriage, and/or courtship, I argue, were central in shaping this process of making Tionghoa public through print culture. As scholars of Sino-Malay literature have shown, across different years since the late nineteenth century, Tionghoa women writers in the region often hid their real name to protect their reputation and Chinese male writers often used feminine pen names to gain readers.[7] Additionally, Sino-Malay language and print culture also mediates the formation of masculinities and the construction of Tionghoa racialized nationalism from which the systematic misogynist representation of female purity is exercised.[8] In this gender configuration, the traits of "masculine" and "feminine" voices were not always a ready

diss., Cornell University, 1965); Leo Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java, 1917–1942* (Singapore University Press, 1981); Suryadinata, *Political Thinking of the Indonesian Chinese, 1900–1995: A Sourcebook* (Singapore University Press, 1997); Kwee Tek Hoay, *The Origins of the Modern Chinese Movement in Indonesia* (Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1969); Didi Kwartanada, "Dari 'Timur Asing' Ke 'Orang Indonesia': Pemuda Tionghoa Dan Arab Dalam Pergerakan Nasional (1900–1942)," Prisma 30, no. 2 (2011): 41–54; Didi Kwartanada, "The Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan School: A Transborder Project of Modernity in Batavia, c. 1900s," in *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed: History, Religion and Belonging*, ed. Siew-Min Sai and Chang-Yau Hoon (Routledge, 2013).

[5] Stephanie Newell, *The Power to Name: A History of Anonymity in Colonial West Africa* (Ohio University Press, 2013), 5–14.

[6] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, March 6, 1926.

[7] Claudine Salmon, "Chinese Women Writers in Indonesia and their Views of Female Emancipation," *Archipel* 28, no. 1 (1984): 149–71; Elizabeth Chandra, "Blossoming Dahlia: Chinese Women Novelists in Colonial Indonesia," *Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 3 (2015): 533–64.

[8] Tom Hoogervorst, "Manliness in Sino-Malay Publications in the Netherlands Indies," *South East Asia Research* 24, no. 2 (2016): 283–307; Grace V. S. Chin and Tom Hoogervorst, "From Soetji to Soendel: Negotiating Race, Class and Gender in a Netherlands Indies Newspaper," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 41 (December 2017); Grace V. S. Chin, "Engendering Tionghoa Nationalism: Female Purity in Male-Authored Sino-Malay Novels of Colonial Java," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 52, no. 1 (March 2021): 110–32, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463421000138.

category: they were in perpetual contraction, sometimes rigid and oftentimes fluid, depending on the conveyed questions and messages. As I will show in this article, women characters in TB's writings, such as Auntie Kiem Khoen and Hoedjin TB, and their voices were recognizable to serve the writer's purpose.

This configuration of gender and (hetero)sexuality in Tionghoa society in Java through pseudonyms, I suggest further, required writers to perform ways of writing that established what I call the "fiction of familiarity": the representations of everyday familial and household life that persuade readers less through the reliability of the contents than the relatability and familiarity of the scenes from which the discourse is delivered. In TB's case, this literary practice includes the use of vernacular languages and ordinary scenery, language switching, irony and satirical humor, onomatopoeia, and syntaxes that mimic oral conversations among Tionghoa people living in the urban areas of East Java.[9] Moreover, TB optimized the function of a regular column by making his characters reappear over and over again, conveying that these fictive figures had their own continuing lives, making them presentable for readers as their ordinary neighbors. Using these various literary tools, TB constructed a discursive environment where, first, his readers could sense the social and affective relatability of TB's fiction with their own life; and second, TB himself delivered a promise that such relatability could form self-criticism and political solidarity as fellow *bangsa Tionghoa.*

This fiction of familiarity—identified through the works of a Sino-Malay writer of the early twentieth century—relates to what gender literary scholar Nancy Armstrong has argued more than three decades ago about "domestic fiction." As Armstrong shows, this genre of fiction, written by women writers during the rise of the English middle class in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, reveals how language, "which once represented the history of the individual as well as the history of the state in terms of kinship relations, was dismantled to form the masculine and feminine spheres that characterize modern culture."[10] This binary and individuation of sexual spheres separated from political economy was where white modern subjectivity emerged. Likewise, historian Afsaneh Najmbadi, in studying "beyond the Americas and the modern," makes critical inquiries on how to "approach the problem of gender's historical and narrative effect for its own production as binary."[11] Here, Najmabadi considers gender binary categories—of masculinity and femininity, of men and women—as a fractured concept and modern imperative within which race, ethnicity, and age shaped its production and delineation.

Adding to this history of gender as a problem of the modern production of categories is a history of gender from which such binary categories were simultaneously created and collapsed through the fiction of familiarity. On the one hand, content wise, TB reproduced men/women categories and set them in domestic spheres to articulate their

[9] Due to this specific use of language, Anderson claims that TB's memoir is "almost impossible to translate," which inspires me to use onomatopoeia as a title for this article. Benedict Anderson, "Benedict Anderson in Search of Tjamboek Berdoeri," *Asian American Writers' Workshop*, April 29, 2016, https://aaww.org/benedict-anderson-tjamboek-berdoeri/.

[10] Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 14.

[11] Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Analysis?," *Journal of Women's History* 18, no. 1 (2006): 11–21.

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different roles and characteristics. On the other hand, his literary practice of mimicking and appropriating women's voices shattered the presumption of the authenticity of Sino-Malay writers. Put in another words, the separation of man/woman spheres in TB's works was never fully completed and more ambiguous, although not less misogynist. By reading TB's columns in *Pewarta Soerabaia* (1924–25), *Soeara/Swara Publiek* (1925–29), and *Sin Tit Po* (1938–39), I show how the fiction of familiarity became a device to practice the bending and sticking of voices to a gendered figure and how it shaped the process of articulating and authorizing voices in the discourse of Tionghoa society. I begin with how TB the persona and the narrator crafted ordinary people's names in marital relationships and friendships to create dialogical scenes surrounding the Tionghoa question. Here, I demonstrate how TB's fiction of familiarity was formed through this craft of names and dialogues. In the second part, I discuss the continuing practice of making "female" voices in TB's columns and the puzzle around ways of reading the figurative presence of Hoedjin TB. This section shows further the gendering process in pseudonyms and their discursive effects. The third part discusses the shifting of TB's narrative voices and the disappearance of his "autobiographical" stories in the late 1930s. In this part, TB's fiction remained familiar through his pseudonyms, yet it turned more observatory. Exploring and describing TB's pseudonyms, this article presents a history of an intellectual practice of articulating ideas in which naming voices did matter less to signify one's biography than to unfold his political consciousness.

Names In Public

From the turn of the twentieth century to the early 1920s, the practice of using of pen names and pseudonyms had been widely performed by Sino-Malay writers. When TB first appeared in *Pewarta Soerabaia* on July 12, 1924, as part of the weekly column "Tjorat-Tjaret Hari Saptoe" (Saturday's scribbles), his name was only one among many that contributed to the same column. Across the year, readers would find playful and humorous names, e.g., Si Togok (wood logs), Alutol (soap brand), Tangan Mait (corpse's hand), Gareng (a Javanese *wayang* character), and Atilla de Geseel (sic, Atilla the scourge), as the contributors of the column. The humorous element of these names was intended to create a comic persona of the writer, which was part of the business model of periodicals to gain readership and sustain their publishing lifetime.[12] Meanwhile, for articles outside the "Scribbles," some writers in the same newspaper occasionally used English language, such as Bachelor, Interested Reader, and Invisible to mark their authorial names. Their names suggest their levels of literacy, within which vernacular Malay language, Hokkien speech, or Dutch words were also entangled with the gradual exposition of English language among educated Tionghoa from an upper middle-class background.

TB was aware of these "westernized" names. In one of his columns, he queried why Tionghoa men wanted to exchange the deep purpose and meaning of their names with Western names like Piet, Jan, Klaas and Karel? And why did they use English too?!

[12] In 1928, *Soeara/Swara Publiek* promoted TB's column "Pridatoe Hari Saptoe" (Saturday's speech) as one main feature of the newspaper. The advertisement mentioned him as the "original entertainer [who] makes your head lighter and eases your big or small problems."

"This *meneer de Hollander-Chinees-Engelschman* is worried that the name Karel Njoo is not sufficient to be introduced for Tionghoa people. So, this monsieur of three nations thinks he must explain his own true Tionghoa name between brackets (Njoo Swie Gwan). . . . Readers, this is the international orientation!"[13] For TB, the problem with Tionghoa men was their infatuation with Dutch or English names and languages so they could be seen as westernized and modern. Names carried valuable meanings. Changing names meant changing one's identity.

When TB moved his Saturday column from *Pewarta Soerabaia* newspaper to *Soeara Publiek*, he started to craft Tionghoa names and honorifics more playfully to expose the habit and behavior of Tionghoa ordinary people. On May 2, 1925, for instance, TB reported a long argument between the couple 'Ntjim (auntie) and 'Ntjik (uncle) Kiem Khoen. Their argument started when Auntie Kiem Khoen complaining about her husband as they planned to move to a new house:

> "You haven't told the landlord in advance, but I've taken care of our things. And then you come back saying that the house isn't ready. . . . My work is all finished: brazier, griddle, kitchen utensils, I've packed them and tidied up. It's done! But men only act like pigeons. They came *proeoeoeoeng!* And then leave, *bladaaaaaaas!* Leaving the women busy by themselves!"
>
> "You're so skillful at whining about other people! If I wanted to help you, you'd make a fuss; if I did not help, you'd be mouthy!"[14]

Their quarrel then spilled over beyond the matter of moving to the new house. They started fighting over why they even married in the first place, bickering about Auntie Kiem Khoen's inferiority when she hung out with other Dutch-educated Tionghoa women. At the end of the story, Uncle Kiem Khoen went away with his coffee, "tired of making sense (*tjinglie*) of Auntie Kiem Khoen's nonsense (*botjinglie*)." In such a crafty manner of verbalizing colloquial speeches of Eastern Javanese through layers of words, interjections, cursing idioms, and punctuation, TB was able to make Auntie and Uncle Kiem Khoen's voices heard. And they were loud and fast.[15]

The audibility and visibility of Auntie and Uncle Kiem Khoen carried satirical messages that also demand readers to use their skill of making sense of the familiarity of the scenes as both fiction and an idea. In the same column, TB told his readers that many people asked him why he used names such as "Kiem Khoen," alongside other names such as "Siang" and "oewa Djantoeng" (lit. grandpa heart). Some readers apparently objected to TB's use of those names because there were people in real life who coincidentally were really named that. TB mocked them for being narrow-minded (*tjoepet*) as if there's a monopoly on making and using names. "Today I use name Auntie and Uncle Kiem Khoen, and I give the name Siang to their son. Tomorrow, I can also change it to whatever I want, such as Goat Tjiang, Tik Hien, or whoever."[16] He then asked

[13] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Tjorat-Tjaret Hari Saptoe," *Pewarta Soerabaia*, January 31, 1925.

[14] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, May 2, 1925.

[15] Anderson mentioned about the untranslatability of TB/Kwee's writings that are very much grounded in vernacular speech specific to some areas in East Java. I want to add that the difficulty in translating TB's writings is not so much because of the quick switch-code of multiple languages but because of the pressure, tonality, and flow of his words and syntax. This is one piece of evidence that proves Anderson's concern.

[16] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, May 2, 1925.

readers to not think about the names too much because "it doesn't bring any benefits; instead, it only brings harm by evoking useless anger." This passage was a disclaimer. To read TB's columns, dear readers, your discretion is advised. Names and places are coincidental. Pay attention to what happens and what they say, not about *who* they are. TB's guidance on how to read his own writing was his means to not only avoid false accusations against his observations and criticism but also to demand a careful reading from his audience.

Auntie Kiem Khoen, however, appeared more regularly so that she could not be ignored as a mere coincidence. Yes, readers would find other names such as Djanoko, Sembodro, Hong San, Jane, and Oewa Bin, even the more anonymous X. But Auntie Kiem Khoen's presence, alongside Hoedjin TB and a young girl named Mathilde, was more pronounced than others. Almost every week across October 1925, TB would mention Auntie Kiem Khoen. She embodied what Tionghoa men considered a problem: a woman who enjoyed betel nut and was easily jealous.[17] She liked to talk and was mouthy so that TB called her "*djagoe poeter lidah*" (lit. a master of tongue twists).[18] She was ignorant about social issues but cared too much about household matters and clothes. Auntie Kiem Khoen in TB's stories was an icon of the ordinariness of Tionghoa society.

TB pushed further this abstraction of Auntie Kiem Khoen when he tried to explain the problem of journalism in colonial Indonesia. Accused of being *toekang maki* (master of cursing), journalists walked a thin line. At any time, someone from the colonial authority or anyone offended by criticism might report them for committing press offence. TB then mentioned once again about the role of names such as "entjim Kiem Khoen." I have briefly discussed in the introduction that TB described her as "no one" (*niemand*) and "everyone" (*iedereen*), which means she was, therefore, the "*publiek*." In that case, representation—whether Auntie Kiem Khoen was a real person or not in reality—did not matter as much. "If the *publiek* has patience (*kesabaran hati*)," TB wrote, "they must understand the intention behind the ways I tell entjim Kiem Khoen's weaknesses (*zwakheden*), which also represents our hoedjin's zwakheden."[19]

The anonymity and pseudonymity of names such as Auntie Kiem Khoen created what I call a fiction of familiarity, which intended for Tionghoa readers to receive critical messages from their sense of relatability to the characters' personalities and stories. For TB, doing this mode of writing was not at all easy. "This job [of pointing out Tionghoa household problems] is not only annoying (*vervelend*) for readers who *read* (*batja*), but mainly for me who *write* (*toelies*). And for those who are too dull to understand my true intention in Pridatoe Hari Saptoe, och, the best way was to pass along this column. I'm not a writer who wants their pieces to be read."[20] In telling Auntie Kiem Khoen's stories, TB also fought with his readers and their ways of reading.

TB, however, did not identify this problem with his correspondence with the young Mathilde. The first appearance of the name occurred on December 12, 1925. Using an epistolary style of writing, TB said that he had received a letter from "Nona Mathilde" and was honored to know that a young Tionghoa woman (*siotjia*) like her still cared

[17] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, October 3, 1925.

[18] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, October 9, 1925.

[19] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, March 6, 1926.

[20] Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," italics in the original.

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about matters of piety (*hauw*).[21] From 1925 to 1928, Mathilde's letter regularly "arrived" at TB's desk and demanded his response. She always asked something about matters of everyday life and politics and requested that TB give her answers, explanations, or advice. The newspaper did not give a chance for readers to see Mathilde's letters verbatim. Her questions were always paraphrased and narrated via TB's replies. This stage of correspondence was more a vessel to deliver TB's opinions and arguments and less an imposition *to* than a conversation *with* young Tionghoa women.

The question is why did he use the letter form for Mathilde instead of the usual plot line like Auntie Kiem Khoen? In her study of Western epistolary literature, Janet Gurkin Altman identifies a genre in which writers "use [the] letter's formal properties to create meaning."[22] One of the important elements in this genre's structure is the "weight of the reader" within which "the reader (narratee) [is] almost as important an agent in the narrative as the writer (narrator)."[23] TB's correspondence with Mathild not only delivered TB's opinions about matters of Tionghoa society but also displayed the manners of making kin part of his satire. In a column that discusses the "true" job of newspaper editors, TB criticized their cowardice and closed his argument with a message for Mathilde:

> O, yes, I almost forgot. Please send my greetings to your mother. Her package of twenty kitchen fans and half pound of "true" shrimp paste for my mom has arrived. [She] received them with "all the pleasure."
>
> For such affection (*ketjintaan*), I obviously have to thank you very much on behalf of my mother.
>
> Likewise, I wish you and your family well.
>
> I still can't deliver you the puppy I promised you, because their eyes are still weak. Which one do you want, Miss? The one with a crooked tail, or the one with droopy ears? They only have short hair. This means these dogs are not greedy and able to guard your house well, like a "true" dog.[24]

These passages, using Altmen's words, blur the distinction between internal readers (in TB's case, the young Mathilde) and the external eavesdropper (the newspapers' readers). "The path from internal private reader to internal public to external public appears a continuous unbroken one. We pass almost imperceptibly from the fictional to real, historical world in a narrative that portrays the story of its own publication."[25] TB's letters for Mathilde were *the* letters for his readers that were delivered through a sense of familiarity in which readers might also find themselves meeting and having conversations with young Tionghoa girls about the state and future of their own community.

The ways TB configured Auntie Kiem Khoen and his words to Mathilde created a series of conversations, both regarding the domestic everyday life of Tionghoa

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[21] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, December 12, 1925.

[22] Janet Gurkin Altmen, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (The Ohio State University Press, 1982), 4.

[23] Altmen, *Epistolarity*, 88.

[24] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, December 19, 1925.

[25] Altmen, *Epistolarity*, 111.

society and the problems of journalism and politics. The voices of these women from two generations were subsumed into TB's opinionated narratives, asking readers as close observers and participants. TB's satirical writings demanded active engagement with the trouble of representation. Names might be coincidental but they were not without purpose. The intention was to create familiarity in which Auntie Kiem Khoen and Mathilde were not total strangers. They were neighbors, family members and relatives, friends and colleagues, acquaintances, and pen pals encountered in the street, working places, or through newspapers. In knowing their names, strangers could offer familiarity.

Crafting "Her" Voice

By the early 1920s, newspapers had become a site for Tionghoa people in the Netherlands East Indies to create a series of conversations about living under the racial orders of the colonial government and about the state and future of their communities. Printing mediums in the Malay language allowed for multiple processes to unfold: the development of participatory politics, the formation of "imagined community," the configuration of enlightenment and modernity, and the mass production of entertaining and innovative literary works for urban middle-class audience.[26] Various often opposing answers to the question of Chineseness and articulations of being and becoming Tionghoa competed with each other and struggled to find a middle ground. As Tom Hoogervorst identifies, they were "willing to adjust their views, strike middle grounds and admonish their own ranks, yet never completely outgrew their ideological differences."[27]

These ideological differences indeed focused on matters of geopolitical belonging, i.e., whether they were Indies- or China-oriented and how they configured matters of nation or *bangsa* under Dutch colonial rule. Simultaneously, as these debates were staged in and for the public, they also involved the question of femaleness and womanhood and the positions of Tionghoa women in the pursuit of modern Tionghoa society. One of the earliest and continuous ideas was about women's nobility, which was raised by educated Tionghoa women who had seized newspapers since their birth to bring forward their agenda of emancipation and empowerment.[28] Matters of adopted traditions, such as chewing betel nut, for instance, were increasingly problematized and seen as one of the daily habits requiring correction and change to form ideal figures of modern Tionghoa women.

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[26] Ahmat Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness* (*1855–1913*) (SEAP Publications Cornell University Press, 1995); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (Verso, 2006); Siew-Min Sai, "Mandarin Lessons: Modernity, Colonialism and Chinese Cultural Nationalism in the Dutch East Indies, c.1900s," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 17, no. 3 (2016): 375–94; Hoogervorst, *Language Ungoverned*; Ravando, "A 'New Newspaper': Sin Po and the Voices of Progressive Chinese Indonesian Nationalists, 1910–1949" (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2023).

[27] Tom Hoogervorst, "Chineseness in Sino-Malay Printing: A Triptych of Self-Criticism," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 24, no. 4 (2023): 678–93.

[28] Myra Sidharta, "The Making of the Indonesian Chinese Women," in *Indonesian Women in Focus: Past and Present Notions*, ed. Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Anke Niehof (KITLV Press, 1992), 67–68; Didi Kwartanada, "Bangsawan Prampoewan: Enlightened Peranakan Chinese Women from Early Twentieth Century Java," *Wacana* 18, no. 2 (2017): 422–54.

By the 1920s, this figuration of modern women scaled up and took its cosmopolitan face. This time, the daily fashions of living, including questions of marriage and family, moved both in domestic and global orientations. In late 1924, for instance, a writer named Hoedjin Koo Lio Ing wrote a series of articles under the title "What Tionghoa Women Must Know" that talked about the condition and future of Tionghoa women in Java, including the importance of motherhood and the future of their nation. In delivering her messages, Hoedjin Koo oriented her readers toward a global connection with famous historical figures:

> Bing Tjoe [Meng Zi/Mencius] can be a prophet because his brilliant mother educates him. . . . Lincoln, a great statesman of America, was also privileged with having a smart mother. . . . Garibaldi, Bismarck, Darwin, Edison, Goethe, and other famous people also acknowledge their mothers who guide them to be smart. . . . Are you readers not envious of the mothers of these great and famous people?[29]

For Hoedjin Koo, Tionghoa mothers must be smart enough to educate their children to be successful. Hoedjin Koo's emphasis on all-male names was not accidental. Men's successes were the result of the great struggles of their mothers.

Tionghoa women such as Hoedjin Koo were aware of the global connected world they lived in and often used some aspects of this connection to push her agenda of encouraging their fellow women. For Hoedjin Koo, the historical accuracy of these world figures was not relevant. What these figures did was help to articulate problems and offer solutions. As Hoedjin Koo clarified in her article: "I just want Tionghoa wives to be like those women, to help their husbands' works, whatever the works are (as long as it is not a crime). I mentioned their names as an example for Tionghoa wives because it is impossible to give an example by using an unknown figure, unrecognized by the public."[30] Hoedjin Koo used her knowledge of world events and figures as part of her attention to the readership and to aid the comprehensibility of her writing. The larger aim was to identify family and "women problems" in her local contexts and encourage readers to overcome these problems. In her second article of the "What Tionghoa Women Must Know" series, she wrote about how Tionghoa people only think about their own conjugal and extended family but not about their bigger community.[31] For her, the use of specific honorifics for family members, such as *koh tio* for the husband of a paternal aunt (the younger sister) or *twa koe* for the maternal eldest uncle, suggested a strong familial bond among Tionghoa people compared to other communities such as the Dutch, who only used *oom* and *tante* for all their uncles and aunts. This bond caused Tionghoa women to think only about their family's interests and not the public good or common social interests.

This identification of everyday family problems circled back to a global orientation. Hoedjin Koo called for Tionghoa women to move and make a change. She asked whether Tionghoa women in Malang now have the strong will and gracefulness of

[29] Hoedjin Koo Lio Ing, "Apa Jang Prampoean Tionghoa Haroes Taoe," *Pewarta Soerabaia*, October 18, 1924.

[30] Hoedjin Koo Lio Ing, "Fatsal Nikahan," *Pewarta Soerabaia*, November 29, 1924.

[31] Hoedjin Koo Lio Ing, "Apa Jang Prampoean Tionghoa Haroes Taoe," *Pewarta Soerabaia*, October 25, 1924.

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Hua Mu Lan (China's woman warrior), Qiu Jin (China's revolutionary and feminist), or Joan d'Arc (a French heroine). These female figures were willing to sacrifice themselves for the common good of their community. "It is wrong to wait. The era does not make Tionghoa women achieve progress. It is the Tionghoa women themselves who change an era and make it progressive."[32] For Hoedjin Koo, Tionghoa women in Java, alongside other heroic women around the world, must change and elevate themselves for the sake of their communities. Moreover, she put together the words of Confucius, Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr, Diogenes, Socrates, Kang Youwei, Chen Huanzhang, Rabindranath Tagore, Guy de Maupassant, and Auguste Forel. Sometimes she mentioned the books she referred to, but most of the time, these intellectuals' words just flowed into Hoedjin Koo's passages, serving her aims and purpose to write extensively about the problems and future of Tionghoa women. References to these intellectuals authorized Hoedjin Koo's cause: the problems of Tionghoa girls and women in Java are general problems of society across historical times and places, from the period of antiquity to the contemporary age, from ancient Greece to modern China.

Hoedjin Koo's sense of living and thinking in a cosmopolitan world was then challenged by her readers. A pseudonymous reader named Bachelor criticized Hoedjin Koo for emphasizing the importance of Tionghoa women's intellectualism but not their personality and character. He asked her about the necessity of women's personality in marriage, which is more important for Tionghoa families and society, rather than her strong references. "As someone who is not yet married, I can only assume that the foundation of a strong and long-lasting marriage is the man's and woman's personal characters," said Bachelor. He asserted that when the marriage between an educated man and an uneducated woman failed, it was not because the woman was uneducated but because she had a bad personality. "Hoedjin Koo has been married for years. Perhaps she can confirm whether uneducated women could still make a marriage work as long they had satisfactory characters."[33]

The point of Bachelor's critique was less about Hoedjin Koo's writings than about her global orientation as a woman. His comment was an aggressive remark that as a married woman, Hoedjin Koo should know better how marriage operated compared to him as a single man—a bachelor. Bachelor (mis)recognized Hoedjin Koo's sense of a global world as a performance of intellectual superiority and, simultaneously, a gesture of ignorance. She, as a wife, ought to understand that personality was far more important to maintain marriage than the so-called intellectual endeavor. For readers like Bachelor, Hoedjin Koo's wide references and citational practices proved her elitism and intellectualism. Her "global" knowledge was less important than her "local" experiences as a wife. The consequence of Hoedjin Koo's view as a highly educated wife was male disappointment because she was supposed to talk about Tionghoa women's character at home and their relationship dynamics with their husbands.

This detailed case was an important sequence to my inquiry about the appearance of Hoedjin Tjamboek Berdoeri (Mrs. Thorny Whip) in the Surabaya-based newspaper *Soeara Publiek* via a column on April 29, 1925 titled "Soeara Prampoean" (The voice of

[32] Hoedjin Koo Lio Ing, "Apa Jang Prampoean Tionghoa Haroes Taoe," *Pewarta Soerabaia*, October 25, 1924.

[33] Bachelor, "Fatsal Nikahan," *Pewarta Soerabaia*, November 22, 1924.

women) with the tagline "The life of a Tionghoa Woman as a Wife. Written only for my fellows!" In this column, Hoedjin TB delivered a message from a nameless married woman who lived with a "shitty husband" (*soeami jang keparat*). Using the first-person confessional style, this woman told her story. During their first months of marriage, she and her husband used to be in love. But one night, before their first wedding anniversary, she waited the whole night for her husband to come home. Alone and pregnant, she felt deeply sad and resentful, then crying: "Oh, men! Men! When will you wake up realizing that your responsibility and obligation to your wife was a noble and sacred duty? When??" At the end of the story, Hoedjin TB said that she could not mend the broken heart of a fellow wife. The least she could do was to expose her sorrow as a reminder for male readers about their role and duty.[34]

The appearance of Hoedjin TB was inseparable from the presence of TB. By the year of her first appearance, her "husband" was already known among readers in Surabaya and Malang since his debut in mid-1924. Famous for his satire and sardonic wit, TB had made a name for himself among readers in Malang and Surabaya as a cruel punisher whose whip does not differentiate between men and women, nor between "the real cock and the cock that hides its crow behind the hen."[35] Not only did he criticize the Dutch government or his fellow Tionghoa journalists and westernized men but he also made commentaries about women and their behavior: hair, clothes, chewing betel nut. Hoedjin TB came to the surface after the popularity of "her" husband; and in the newspaper, they were seen as a couple who talked to, acknowledged, and debated with each other.

At this point, readers might wonder whether the writer behind Hoedjin TB is the same as TB was or not. One reason for this curiosity was another piece of the puzzle appeared in the form of an article dated May 9, 1925, in the same *Soeara Publiek*. There, TB launched an attack, criticizing his wife's idea about women's empowerment. From the surviving collection of newspapers, I cannot find Hoedjin's piece that her husband referred to.[36] But reading his response, she seemingly wrote a piece about Tionghoa women's freedom, demanding Tionghoa women to be in an equal place with men. Her husband's response was undeniably hostile:

> *Ai*, hoedjin! Hoedjin! All of the lessons that I have given you since we married have been lost. I have always wanted you to understand that what is true for white women is not always true for Tionghoa women! . . .
>
> Educated Tionghoa girls in this age have a dream in their heart to seize freedom, like that of their white sisters. That dream is dangerous for not only their own honor but also the honor of their people, the honor of their nation!
>
> Hoedjin Tjamboek Berdoeri forgets that the question "are we, Tionghoa women, not human too?" has led many girls astray. Moved by their desire and feeling to be human, they choose their own husband. They are blind, and it is not surprising that their love is temporary, easily blown away by the wind.

[34] Hoedjin Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pengidoepan Prampoean Tionghoa Sebagi Istri," *Soeara Publiek*, April 29, 1925.

[35] Atilla de Geseel and Si Togok, "Tjorat-Tjaret Hari Saptoe," *Pewarta Soerabaia*, September 13, 1924.

[36] I used the microfilm collection from the John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Kroch Library Asia Collections, Cornell University.

> [They want] a chance to interact in a civil manner with men? *Poeh!* There is no highest knowledge nor greatest civilization that can tame the animal desire in humans' hearts! Once that wretched fire burns, it will destroy anything in the world, to say nothing of their honor. Although their body is burned alive in boiling oils, they do not want to back down even for a single step until that animal desire disappears, and then they regret their actions. It cannot be corrected even when they cry tears of blood! This, hoedjin Tjamboek Berdoeri, is the fruit of freedom!"[37]

The rants, exclamation marks, and sounds of disdain in TB's response to his wife was direct and harsh. It displayed male suspicion and anxiety against Tionghoa women's dream of searching for freedom like "white women." Readers at that time might wonder what Hoedjin TB would do as she read her husband's rage. But after this column, she no longer appeared as a single author.[38] They only met her again in her husband's voice.

The voices of Hoedjin TB, as the "female" version of TB, were too fragmented and somehow baffling. I once speculated whether Hoedjin TB was written by Kwee's wife, Nie Hiang Nio, or another female writer who appropriated the name and used it to raise questions about men's failure as breadwinners. This speculation was drawn by the fact that, first, in this period, educated Tionghoa women had actively written for newspapers; and second, the name "Njonja Kwee Thiam Tjing" regularly contributed to a column "Halaman Istri" (Wife's page) in Kwee's newspaper, *Pembrita*, when they lived in Jember in the early 1930s. I had doubted whether my speculation was true. But when I was informed that Kwee and Nie married in 1928, including the possibility that Hoedjin TB was written by Kwee himself, I started to ask further what I'd been missing in insisting on revealing Hoedjin TB's proper name when the context and perhaps the author's intention demanded it remain pseudonymous.[39]

This puzzle of voice craft makes it rather difficult, if not completely problematic, to conclude about the authorial authenticity of female figures' representation in Sino-Malay writings. Sino-Malay literary scholars such as Claudine Salmon and Elizabeth Chandra have touched on this matter during their attempts to identify Tionghoa women's authorship.[40] They first use the Hokkien word "Nio" (girl, lady) and the honorific use of "Nona," "Njonja," or "Miss" as their clues to search for women's names across the surviving texts and manuscripts. Here, they listed pen names such as Nona Boedjang (Maiden Girl), Nona Botoh (Beautiful Girl), and Nona Manis (Charming Girl); and in later years, the name of flowers and plants such as Kembang Sembodja (Frangipani Flower) and Dahlia were also used. Then, especially for Chandra, the furthering issue is about the extent of authors' gender identity represented by their gendered voices because many Tionghoa male writers during the period also used feminine names as "a first step in the authorial attempt to speak in the feminine voice and appeal to potential women readers."[41] At the end of her examination, Chandra concluded that some male writers

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[37] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, May 9, 1925.

[38] After the date May 9, 1925, I do not find a single column written under the name Hoedjin TB.

[39] I thank Arief W. Djati for giving me the information and calling my claim out about the writer behind Hoedjin Tjamboek Berdoeri.

[40] Salmon, "Chinese Women Writers in Indonesia"; Chandra, "Blossoming Dahlia."

[41] Chandra, "Blossoming Dahlia," 543.

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who wrote in the feminine voice created heroines with compelling female agency and "female authorship did not guarantee an autonomous female protagonist, or a woman-centered narrative" although they "could be expected to be more candid with respect to gender inequality and the position of women in Chinese society."[42] The identification of "female" names and "feminine" voices in Sino-Malay literature, Chandra concluded, was not necessarily "feminist" in the sense that the characters or the plots brought issues of women's empowerment and equality.

Such a conclusion about the dis/association between "female/feminine" voices with "feminist" argument is convincing yet it also relies on a persisting compulsion to search for authentic femininity through the identification of female figures. Hoedjin TB, both as a pseudonymous author and a domesticated character, troubles this way of reading. Her/his presence demands a way of reading discursive figures not in a ready category of gender binary but always as a discourse in the making. In other words, the puzzle of Hoedjin TB requires historians to move away from gender identification, i.e., whether the real writer was a man or a woman, and get closer to the possibility of authorial "crossdressing" without undermining writers' compulsion to repeat misogynist and anti-feminist sentiments. To locate Hoedjin TB in the middle of debates between female-represented names, e.g., Hoedjin Koo, and male-represented pseudonyms, e.g., Bachelor, is to understand the practice of performing gender differences and ideologies at the front of political discussion vis-à-vis Tionghoa society without necessarily using differences as the authenticator of proper names.

Dressing one's up as both a man and woman in literary debate served a double purpose of criticizing irresponsible men as the primary breadwinners and pushing women back and questioning their call of empowerment and progress through the language of recognition. The signifier "Hoedjin" marked Tionghoa women's social and marital status, opening a chance for male figures—a husband or a single young man—to reject and debate her ideas and aspirations. Such pushback did not intend to remove her representative presence. Instead, she was needed so that a discussion about Tionghoa society might unfold and be reproduced. Without the presence of Tionghoa women, writers could not criticize the moral degradation of Tionghoa men, nor discuss ways of making and reproducing modern society. The question of Tionghoa society would not be meaningful without a female figure articulating her thoughts and feelings. In the pursuit of social progress, Tionghoa women were undeniably important as part of society and the nurturer of its future. This craft ensured Tionghoa women acquired a place in the newspaper, e.g., a married status and a dedicated column, so that readers could engage with, confirm, and/or challenge her cause.

This manner of recognition was one of the reasons why the discursive performance did not always appear in the form of hostile debate between husband and wife. A series of conversations between fellow women also shaped this manner of representing Tionghoa women's voices as an entry to the broader discussion of Tionghoa society. In one article published in March 1926, TB put Hoedjin TB and Auntie Kiem Khoen in a conversation about press offenses (*persdelict*) against Tionghoa journalists named "Thiam Tjing." In the column, TB and Hoedjin visited Auntie Kiem Khoen who asked them about Thiam

[42] Chandra, "Blossoming Dahlia," 560.

Tjing's *persdelict* case. Playing the role of the narrator, TB wrote down Hoedjin's response to Auntie Kiem Khoen's question:

> Auntie, I know Thiam Tjing's parents. I have to say, yes, they are devastated, but thankfully they understand: "Not all parents can be proud like me. My son is in prison, not for a crime, swindling, fraud, or murder, but for defending the public interest, including my interest." . . .
>
> I also think, Auntie, that Thiam Tjing's wife, if he had a wife, can improve herself among honorable and intelligent people without being ashamed. I'm saying it again, of course, she is devastated, but she also thinks, "That's true, my husband is imprisoned but for what? He defended the public interest. He wants to improve the current situation from its sorry state."[43]

Hoedjin TB's speech was a rhetorical strategy to explain and justify Thiam Tjing's good intentions as a journalist and the risk that he bore. Here, TB, as the unreliable narrator, blurred the details about "Thiam Tjing's wife," while at the same time he used Hoedjin's voice to make a case about the political integrity of a journalist. Thiam Tjing's criticism and political arguments about colonial society were voiced for the sake of social progress. In such a narrative, Auntie Kiem Khoen played a role as the devil's advocate. She did not care or necessarily understand how journalism worked. She preferred young people to secure their economic and political well-being by working as merchants and traders. While Hoedjin TB talked seriously about the importance of Thiam Tjing's work, Auntie Kiem Khoen treated it lightly, as if it had nothing to do with her.

This dialogue between two married women, separated by age differences, was a response to the ongoing political retaliation against the rise of social and nationalist movements. Since the late 1910s, the Dutch had enforced *persdelict* (press offense) and speech offense articles in the penal code.[44] As many Tionghoa journalists at the time also actively made alliances with Native Indigenous (*bumipoetra*) journalists, their work and critique against Dutch press monitoring could lead them to imprisonment. Kwee Thiam Tjing himself was one of the detainees accused of committing press offenses. The Dutch court detained him in Kalisosok prison Surabaya in February 1926, and a few months later, they moved him to Cipinang prison in Jakarta.[45] To put Thiam Tjing's imprisonment at the center of conversation between women was to juxtapose different attitudes among members of the Tionghoa community regarding their political activities. Hoedjin TB embodied the politically active member of the community who was able to appreciate the role of journalism for social improvement. Meanwhile, Auntie Kiem Khoen represented Tionghoa common folks who preferred fewer risks and more stability.

This dialogue reflected tensions among Tionghoa people at the time from which political activity also became a matter to reclaim their position and sense of belonging in the Indies within the rise of both Indonesian and Chinese nationalism. The ideological oppositions between different factions, as historians argued, were not always neat: they still relied on certain degrees of collaboration and fellowship even when their

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[43] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, March 6, 1926.

[44] Yamamoto, *Censorship in Colonial Indonesia*, 121–22.

[45] During this period, the TB pseudonym still appeared in the newspaper until the colonial government finally released Kwee in November 1926.

disagreement loomed large on their social and discursive interactions.[46] What the conversation between Hoedjin TB and Auntie Kiem Khoen did was to bring such a tension into the domestic sphere where a married couple visited their neighbor in a friendly manner, then ended up talking about a journalist's imprisonment. TB did not picture the debate as heated and intense, unlike the domestic brawl between Uncle and Auntie Kiem Khoen.

Up to this point, three things happened around the craft of Hoedjin TB's voices. First, Hoedjin TB as a female author was seen as an authoritative voice talking about men's irresponsibility. Second, in the same role as an author, she then could be criticized for advocating a "westernized" idea of women's freedom. Third, now that she talked to a middle-age woman about press politics, her voice was rendered important to defend journalistic freedom and the Tionghoa's press movement. The discourse regarding Tionghoa society was then gendered through this technique of making female characters by attaching the signifier "Hoedjin" and putting them in a conversation both with men and fellow women. In this manner, TB presented himself as an observant narrator of women's dynamic voices. These women could be "wrong" according to male assumptions of women's (dis)empowerment, and they could be "right" when it serves the idea of political activism. "Hoedjin" was both a sign of one's femaleness and social positions that unfolded the discourse of *bangsa Tionghoa.*

Love, Heaven, War

Crafting fictional familiar names and exercised gendered voices through Tionghoa women figures was a practice that kept TB—the pseudonymous narrator—stay on the question of Chineseness and belonging in colonial society. The iteration, however, was increasingly moderate and less sarcastic than the late 1920s when TB started writing more about love. In an article about the domestic interactions between husband and wife, he condemned a predatory and cruel husband who always made his wife scared. He also did not agree that the wife must only follow her husband's will. The interaction between husband and wife must be in balance:

> I appreciate a wife who gives thought and consideration for her husband when he turns down the wrong path away from being a good husband and father. I appreciate a wife who can be a loyal friend to her husband, besides being a perfect mother and great household caretaker. In return, a husband must take care of his wife's demands. In short, I just want to say: husband-wife must care for, respect, and love each other. [47]

TB thought that the husband must eventually be the main decision-maker after thinking and considering many things, but his wife's opinion was one of them. The husband might lead but mutual love and care between husband and wife was essential.

Affection between heterosexual men and women was important in TB's construction of the *bangsa Tionghoa*.[48] He used the word "love" (*tjinta*) but also referred to "passion"

[46] Ravando, "A 'New Newspaper,'" 57–66; Hoogervorst, "Chineseness in Sino-Malay Printing."

[47] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, December 5, 1925.

[48] For a reference on how nationalism operated within the discourse of love, see Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900–1950* (Stanford University Press, 2006).

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and "emotion"—an expansive almost sacred feeling. In one of his articles, he told a story about his friend X, who fell in love with a girl. This girl also had feelings for the friend, but both of them remained silent. They shared invisible waves, which no one could see and feel except them. But for whatever reasons, X could not confess his true feelings to the girl, and they went their own ways. For TB, this was a tragic story. "X told me everything about what he feels, and I know his heart is conflicted. On the one hand, the heart desires his *tjinta* to be manifested. On the other hand, it suppresses this feeling, trying to make it disappear." When TB saw X's broken heart, he was sad too. TB took X's story seriously and did not write about love in a comical tone. He did not care about people who were proud of their love of money and wealth; they deserved a big laugh. But he could not laugh at X, as his love was pure and genuine.[49]

Tjinta could bring sorrow and misery, however. One could love someone so eagerly that one could lose oneself. For TB, it was exactly this passion that makes one's life colorful. Happy and sad feelings poured from the heart like a river and made one feel alive. Without feelings, life would be quiet and lonely. For TB, this was the life of many Tionghoa people: "dead and colorless." Conflicts of the heart were part of life itself, "the life that was not granted to many Chinese people."[50] Rather than assuming sadness is weakness, TB saw it as proof of life. And it was important for a community to have these dynamic feelings and emotions. Social bonds among Tionghoa people were supposed to be grounded in affection and deep feelings.

The presence of *tjinta* became a good sign within a community that had become materialistic under the promise of Western progress. TB came to see *tjinta* as oppositional and essential to Tionghoa people who often cared more about money and their appearance than their fellows. In a rhyming poem about a girl who rejected an arranged marriage, he wrote:

> Don't force me, mother, Betsy shoved
> To marry a man, I do not love
> Even when you said, he has money and trove
> For me, it doesn't matter most
> . . .
> I want to marry
> A man I know truly
> I don't want to marry money
> But marry a person whom I love dearly."[51]

Here, TB criticized Tionghoa parents for often focusing more on the value of money than the value of love, which consequently brings disaster for their children and families. For him, it was loveless marriages, entered into only for money, that made many Chinese people miserable.

TB's attention to love and marital intimacy subtly changed his manner of satire. This change, moreover, can be identified after the prison episode of Kwee Thiam Tjing in 1926. Here, TB still criticized journalists and Tionghoa people in general, but the

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[49] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, January 30, 1926.

[50] Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe."

[51] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, April 2, 1927.

tone of his satire became less derisive. He rather gave emphasis to the readers' role as participants and interpreters: "Do [the stories] actually happen? Not really. But if you say it did not happen, it is as familiar as if it had. It is up to you, readers."[52] This invitation was followed by more anecdotal and allusive articles. In an article where he talked about the habits of *bangsa Tionghoa*, he said that chewing betel nuts might provide a lesson to those wanting to improve their economic and social situation.[53] Rather than attacking Tionghoa women for chewing betel, as he had done in previous writings, he made a moderate association between the habit and the Chinese community. The editor in chief of *Soeara Publiek*, Liem Koen Hian, noticed this change and told TB: "People say [your] writings are now lacking salt."[54] The journalist did not deny it, but replied mischievously that it was because "the [Dutch] governor controlled all of the salt factories, which made people must buy salt from him." He could not add more salt to his writings because "the price is too high." Censorship and control over publications by the Dutch government had made Kwee the journalist and TB the persona lose his freedom. Being stubborn at this time would only create more problems.

In the last story about his own domestic life with Hoedjin, TB self-ridiculed the consequences of his stubbornness. The story started when he read a piece of news about a married couple who canceled their divorce because the husband pretended to commit suicide by falling on the railway tracks. TB wondered if he could do the same thing when he was angry with Hoedjin. So, he told the readers that he went under the bed to make a statement: "I deliberately did not want to use a pillow or blanket, only a floor mat, wishing hoedjin Tjamboek Berdoeri would budge." Hour after hour, mosquitos now surrounded him, and his wife did not yield. "I expected her to pity me when she heard my wailing, with her eyes full of tears, but *astaga!* She did not hear the mosquitos because she was engrossed in her book. 'Chinese women in this age must know their price and don't easily succumb to men! We, women, have to show that we exist in this world with full rights based on humanity etc! etc!' she proclaimed." TB grumbled into the morning. When he finally awoke he was covered in mosquito bites and his back felt painful. Hoedjin felt sorry for her husband at last and made him a cup of tea: "Do you want to sulk again tonight? Do you think you can make me yield? I don't care, I [would] go to sleep!" she scolded him again. TB regretted his childishness. "From now on, readers, I will think twice before I decide to become sulky."[55] Clumsy and comical, TB's righteous indignation could hurt him too.

After Kwee resigned from *Soeara Publiek* (which was changed to *Swara Publiek*) in 1929, he focused more on providing for his household. With the wind of the economic crisis beginning to blow, he tried to find a new job and a new place to live. It was not clear where Kwee worked from late 1929 until 1933. He became the first secretary of the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia, which Liem Koen Hian established in 1932.[56] But around 1933–34, he moved to Jember, East Java, and started his own printing business, "The Eureka,"

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[52] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, May 28, 1927.

[53] Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, May 28, 1927.

[54] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Soeara Publiek*, July 14, 1928.

[55] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Swara Publiek*, March 23, 1929.

[56] Francisca Yuniarti, "Partai Tionghoa Indonesia 1932–1942," Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Indonesia, 1983. The party was arguably oriented to Indonesian nationalism and open to other ethnic groups. See Suryadinata, *Political Thinking of the Indonesian Chinese*, 51–61.

and published a newspaper, *Pembrita* (The messenger). Kwee became the chief editor and wrote the feuilleton using the pen name "Sangkoeriang," taken from a Sundanese legendary tale.[57] His wife, Nie Hiang Nio, also contributed to the newspaper, writing a column titled "Halaman Istri" (The wife's page) that shared practical information for homemakers. The pair also opened a small restaurant and atelier business named "Sangkoeriang" and contributed to poverty relief with funds from their businesses. But they did not last long in Jember and moved to Semarang in late 1934 where Kwee worked for another newspaper, *Mata Hari*. Although Kwee remained active as a journalist, he did not write under his iconic pen name.[58]

It was not until 1938 that the name Tjamboek Berdoeri reappeared in the newspaper *Sin Tit Po*. This time, TB's columns were entangled with the newspapers's multiple political orientations. With Liem Koen Hian as the editor in chief, the newspaper was actively involved not only in the discussion of Indonesian nationalism with the creole Arabic community in Java but also in the anti-Japanese campaign during the Sino-Japanese War that already created anxiety among Tionghoa in the Indies. Some people who had followed the events in the early 1930s were not shocked by Japanese aggression in Manchuria; but they were astounded with the speed of China's defeat.[59] The Battle of Nanjing (1937–38), which took many lives, startled them. They started to organize and began sending material to support the victims and campaigned against Japanese aggression. *Sin Tit Po*'s headlines regularly published news updates about the war and showed photos of the catastrophe to invoke solidarity among its readers. Liem himself published a series of articles "Sedjarah Tiongkok" (History of China); and Siauw Giok Tjhan (1914–81), another journalist from *Sin Tit Po*, translated Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China* (1937) under the title "Why China must win," which provided an account of the Chinese Communist Party and Mao Zedong's army.[60]

In contrast, TB's column remained close to the everyday lives of Tionghoa people in East Java. But now his writings were less autobiographical and more about exposing the material-based follies and vices of *bangsa Tionghoa* in a general manner. For instance, TB despised loan sharks and rich Tionghoa men who discriminated against and robbed their own Tionghoa fellows. In one story, a shop owner named Han Liong Tjiang ignored and looked down on one Bie Thay, a Tionghoa trader from a trade company who had offered him a new product for his shop. But when a Dutch trader with a position equal to Bie Thay came to Liong Tjiang, his attitude was completely different. Liong Tjiang offered the seller a bottle of beer and the Dutchman persuaded him to order products that his shop did not need. "Bie Thay's only mistake," TB wrote, "is that he was just a Tionghoa trader."[61] It was this internal discrimination that hampered the development of the Tionghoa community.

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[57] *Pembrita*, February 28, 1934; March 20, 1934; May 20 and 30, 1934; August 10 and 30, 1934.

[58] Anderson and Djati, *Menjadi Tjamboek Berdoeri*, 113–22. In several copies of *Mata Hari* in October–December 1934, there was a Saturday weekly column called *Oering-Oeringan* (Grumpy) signed by "Sentoel," which, according to Anderson, was also Kwee's pen name.

[59] Yan Qinghuang, "The Overseas Chinese and the Second Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945," in *The Ethnic Chinese in East and Southeast Asia* (Times Academic Press, 2002), 369–70.

[60] Liem's articles were published in March 26–May 21, 1938. The fragments of the Malay translation of *Red Star Over China* (*Bintang Merah di Langit di Tiongkok*) were published in May 21–July 12, 1938.

[61] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Sin Tit Po*, June 18, 1938.

[114.10.30.1] Project MUSE (2026-11-05 06:59 GMT) Murdoch University

Most of TB's columns in *Sin Tit Po* looked like raw transcriptions of dialogues, and he rarely disrupted the conversations with his comments. In comparison to other articles in the same newspaper, which were highly opinionated, TB avoided straightforward opinions and arguments. Although he had previously concealed his opinions, he now worked it out through a moralist tale that sometimes involved spiritual deities. In a humorous article titled "The afterlife court," he told a story of Giam Loo Ong (Wang Yanluo), the Daoist God of Death, who talked to his fellow god, Sat Soe Tji Lian, about people who dared to separate the temple's room between the rich and the poor:

> Ha, now I know those people who swanked as if they were higher than their fellow human! . . . Hey, Sat Soe Tji Lian, you quickly take the Yellow Book and record the names that I give to you. As an initial punishment . . . I will give them rheumatism all day and toothache all night for seven days seven nights! And you tell people of Earth, so they know what kind of punishment they will have.[62]

TB framed the behavior of rich Tionghoa as both an earthly and a divine problem. The clash of social classes happened in between heaven, hell, and earth. A greedy and vile loan shark could not "bribe the gods" by donating a coffin for poor people.[63]

This kind of narrative marked a shift in the style of TB's criticism. Where before Kwee had used colloquial speeches of Tionghoa women to mount critiques, he now also used the voices of gods to expose the im/morality of Tionghoa people. TB's story about the situation in heaven and earth broke the boundary between the spiritual and material realm. He did not bother to explain who Giam Loo Ong was, perhaps assuming the name was already familiar among Tionghoa readers, either as a divine being or as a part of their archaic past. But in introducing the gods, he brought sin and punishment, matters moral and spiritual, into the mundane. Heavenly gods paid close attention to earthly matters.

This narrative of sin and punishment was woven into the family scandals of *bangsa Tionghoa* and could involve bitter-sweet revenge. In one story, a poor girl named Swan Nio was forced to marry Uncle Kim Liong, an old, rich man who tricked her parents into debt, for which she became the payment. In sorrow, Swan Nio avenged herself. She seduced Kim Liong's son, Hok Sing, and persuaded him to run away from the house with money and jewels. One day, Hok Sing found out that Swan Nio had taken all of their belongings and deserted him, leaving only a letter of vengeance.[64] Money and status could undercut the obligations of filial piety.[65] Sometimes TB used gossip as a form of punishment through social exclusion. In one article, he wrote about three aunties in the same neighborhood who bad-mouthed an arrogant rich man.[66] It was a cautionary tale involving both material and social punishment: greediness and arrogance eventually brought self-destruction. The tale was a practice of self-criticism on a communal scale, perhaps under an expectation that Tionghoa people would listen to their own gods and, later, their own fellows.

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[62] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Sin Tit Po*, July 23, 1938.

[63] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Sin Tit Po*, April 15, 1939.

[64] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Sin Tit Po*, July 22, 1939.

[65] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Sin Tit Po*, May 6, 1939.

[66] Tjamboek Berdoeri, "Pridato Hari Saptoe," *Sin Tit Po*, February 25, 1939.

Bangsa Tionghoa in decay was indeed TB's leitmotif. If Dutch colonialism exposed Tionghoa's inferiority complex, the defeat of China at the hands of Japan added to this crisis. In this sense, Tionghoa women no longer embodied the community's troubles but also a small part of the larger social troubles of which they were also the victims. One might argue for the universal feature in TB's writings—that he moved on from an ethnocentric approach and started to think about the universal problem of humanity. In my reading, that was not the ultimate case. What TB proposed instead was a more internalized articulation of *bangsa Tionghoa* grounded in the social proximity either between Tionghoa individuals or between them and the spiritual gods. As there no longer was Hoedjin TB, nor Auntie Kiem Khoen and Mathilde, in TB's iteration, his column in the late 1930s became fragments and debris of everyday lives swept away by the drum of war.

Epilogue

In the 1940s, it became harder and harder for Tionghoa people to articulate a sense of *bangsa Tionghoa*. In 1941, Kwee the writer was no longer working as a full-time journalist. He registered himself as a city guardian in Surabaya and Malang after Nazi Germany occupied the Netherlands until the Japanese invaded Java in 1942.[67] The anti-Chinese sentiment during the Japanese Occupation meant that the lives of Kwee and his family were at stake.[68] He moved with the sequence of wars without writing anything on any public platform. The name Tjamboek Berdoeri appeared again only in 1947 when the bloody Revolutionary War (1945–49) was still taking place. This time, TB was angry. The war took the lives of many of his fellow Tionghoa. He was upset with many Tionghoa associations in Malang, who did not do anything when he reported about a pit full of corpses in Mergosono, where his friend was. "My eyes at that time, readers, could not see anything because it was pinkish red [blood everywhere]," he wrote, "In the next twenty-four hours, if they ignore my request to put soil on the top of the pit, I will beat all *siahwee Tionghoa* in Malang completely. I don't care anymore [with] Ang Hien Hoo, Chung Hua Chung Hui, this Tionghoa doctor, that Tionghoa professor."[69] Violence was graphic and real, and the leaders of Tionghoa associations did not pay attention to this crisis, ignoring their duty to their own people. The painful course of war disrupted his articulation and caring narrative of *bangsa*.

Tjamboek Berdoeri eventually pulled his persona out of print culture with his latest memoir, *Indonesia Dalam Api dan Bara.* TB cried for peace, and the writer Kwee Thiam Tjing pursued one. Across the 1950s and 1960s, with Nie Hiang Nio, he built a family far from the spectacle of journalism. It was only in the early 1970s that Kwee made his last appearance as a columnist in the newspaper *Indonesia Raya*, telling memories of his past, sharing his life and journey. As Djati and Anderson resurrect Kwee, they titled the republication of the memoir *Menjadi Tjamboek Berdoeri*—Becoming Thorny Whip.

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[67] According to Anderson, in 1939-1941, Kwee still wrote for *Pewarta Soerabaia's* "Scribbles on Saturday" but using a different pen name. Anderson, "Kata Pengantar [Introduction]," 33–34.

[68] Ethan Mark, *Japan's Occupation of Java in the Second World War: A Transnational History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 31–32.

[69] Tjamboek Berdoeri, *Indonesia Dalam Api Dan Bara*, 334–35.

But what is this act of "becoming" in which names were fluid, gender-bending, never fixed, and at the same time carrying patriarchal insistences that defined woman's labor and behavior? Becoming Tjamboek Berdoeri, a figure of critical and patriarchal consciousness, was then about envisioning ordered modernity for Tionghoa society against the pressures of Dutch colonialism and the imposition of Western culture. Becoming Tjamboek Berdoeri was about navigating layers of racial, class, and lifestyle stratas by using Tionghoa women's figures and voices, without necessarily challenging patriarchal hierarchies. Becoming Tjamboek Berdoeri was about changing attitudes when lives were at stake. It was about surviving during the war, struggling with and beyond nationalist violence that alienated and eliminated Tionghoa bodies. It was about crafting a vessel where Tionghoa society in late colonial Indonesia then later became a subject of care from an Indonesianist and his Indonesian working partner. Becoming Tjamboek Berdoeri was about playing with the opacity of one's identity and past lives, while also inviting others to search, find, and tell the story.

During the New Order, many Tionghoa people were forced to make and appropriate new names.[70] I did not know the Hokkien version of my last name "Setiadarma" until my father, a Tionghoa descendant born on Madura island, told me during a dinner at home in Semarang in the early 2000s. On multiple occasions, even until now, every time he finds someone with the last name "Setiadarma," he wonders in joy whether they are relatives or not. His current first name, the name of a Christian apostle, is his pseudonym; and for him, it is impossible to go back. He has lived through and embodied the meaning of "Peter." And yet dwelling in names is such a tricky game. *Proeoeoeoeng! Bladaaaaaaas!* What is left is the sounds—the sounds of Indonesian language mixed with Eastern Javanese words, dialects, interjections, and sprinkles of Hokkien and English words. These sounds are uttered in tongue. They roll out names and honorifics, asking for a place, inviting people in. They try to make home and be familiar too.

[70] John B. Kwee, "The Many Implications of Name Change for Indonesian- Born Chinese," in The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays, edited by Wang Ling-chi and Wang Gungwu, vol. 2 (Times Academic Press, 1998), 50–54; Onghokham, "Tentang nama-nama Warga Negara Indonesia keturunan Tionghoa," in *Riwayat Peranakan Tionghoa di Jawa* (Komunitas Bambu, 2005), 135–49; Benjamin Bailey and Sunny Lie, "The Politics of Names among Chinese Indonesians in Java: The Politics of Names among Chinese Indonesians," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (2013): 21–40, https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12003