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The Relationship between Native Americans and the Chinese: Representation of the Formation of National Identity in the Short Story Sin Po of the 1940s

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the formation of Chinese national identity in short stories published in the Sin Po newspaper during the 1930s and 1940s, arguing that this identity emerges most clearly in the relationship depicted between the Chinese and the indigenous Indonesian population. Using a qualitative sociology-of-literature approach with content analysis, it reads the stories as social documents and interprets them through Castells's typology of identity construction—legitimizing, resistance, and project identity—alongside theories of imagined and diasporic national identity. The analysis identifies three modes of identification: a legitimizing identity imposed by colonial racial classification ("Nji Patmah"); a resistance identity forged through communal solidarity amid institutional neglect ("Bahaja Api"); and a project identity built on a shared destiny with the indigenous population ("Kemaleman di Desa," "Balesan," "Ampir Sadja," "Bapa Koempoel"). Arranged chronologically, these forms compose a trajectory from an identity received from the colonizer toward one projected in fellowship with indigenous Indonesians. Although the characters remain articulated as Chinese, empathy and a sense of shared destiny already constituted the seeds of Indonesian nationality before independence, revealing national identity as a layered, ambivalent, and medium-borne process.

keywords: Chinese national identity; Sin Po; Sino-Malay literature; sociology of literature; Castells; Peranakan.

INTRODUCTION

Sin Po is one of the historical pieces of evidence of the ideological movement of the Chinese population that came to Indonesia. According to Kosasih (2013), their emergence stemmed from their love for their ancestral motherland, China. The Indonesian movement was also supported by Sin Po. The Sin Po newspaper sought to serve as a forum for the ambitions of the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies and as a unifier of the peranakan and totok Chinese (Adam, 2003). The Sin Po journal argued that the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies should remain foreigners but have Chinese citizenship. The pro-China publication Sin Po, a voice for the Chinese people, also paid attention to the problems faced by Indonesians. The Chinese gang who managed the Sin Po newspaper likewise refused Dutch citizenship, for that matter. Thus, they maintained close contacts with persons in the Indonesian national movement. Sin Po had several Bumiputera journalists and wrote many stories about Indonesian movement groups across many periods (Kosasih, 2013: 56).

A section of the Sin Po movement was fueled by resentment of the colonial authorities. The economic success of the Chinese at the time prompted the Dutch government to take over and introduce new laws that disadvantaged the Chinese. The laws consisted of the formation of zones (Wijkensysteem) and the travel permit system (Passenstelsel), which required Chinese people to live in specified areas and not to move outside the region without a travel pass (Asmadi, 2015). top of that, the Dutch colonial authority intentionally promoted the Chinese diaspora to be superior to the indigenous Indonesian population to diminish the indigenous population's capability to unite. In the social force, unity would be a majority bloc resisting colonial rule. This political divide-and-rule strategy shaped indigenous Indonesians' perception of the Chinese diaspora and led to friction in relations between the diaspora and indigenous Indonesians. Therefore, the Chinese diaspora faced a difficult situation when Indonesia launched its national movement in the 1940s and 1950s (Suryadinata, 2010).

According to Suryadinata (2010), in the colonial era, there are 3 main streams in the political sphere of Chinese Peranakan who worked side by side. The three Chinese political streams were the Sin Po group, Chung Hwa Hui (CHH), and the Indonesian Chinese Party (PTI) group, which was founded on September 25, 1932, by Liem Koen Hian, Ong Liang Kok, and other Peranakans in Surabaya, with the support of the Indonesian Nation Association and other moderate Indonesian nationalists, especially Dr. Soetomo and Soeroso. There are three strands of Chinese politics: First is the Sin Po Stream, symbolized by Sin Po himself. He refused the Law on Dutch State Subjects and sought to ensure that the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies retain their Chinese citizenship. He attempted to draw the Peranakan group closer to China by making them more like the totok group.

Second, the sect of the Chung Hwa Hui. The group wished the Dutch Chinese to retain their ethnic identity in the Dutch East Indies. They fought so that Chinese culture would still exist. So they adopted the Dutch Subject Law and worked together with the Dutch colonial authorities. Indonesian Chinese Party is the third. It was a left-wing and anti-colonial group. They wanted the Dutch Chinese to keep their ethnic identity but be politically absorbed in indigenous Indonesian society.

Among the Chinese themselves, the notion of Chinese identity is undergoing a transformation. This movement was from a conventional Chinese identity to a national and local orientation, in this case, Indonesia (Lan, 1998). This change also seems to be tied to efforts to move beyond past traumas, during which Chinese identity, directed at the culture of their ancestral country, often became entangled in political difficulties, such as when relations between Indonesia and the People's Republic of China soured.

Among these difficulties was the social adaptation of the Chinese minority in Indonesia, as reflected in the short stories in the journal Sin Po. The majority of short stories that appeared in the 1930s were translations.

In the 1940s, a series of short stories revealed the nascent Chinese national consciousness as relations between the Chinese community and indigenous peoples grew increasingly amicable. This study contends that these stories demonstrate how such partnerships create Chinese national identity. National identity is closely related to the cultural values embedded in literary works and their contexts. These values can be viewed as living recommendations in the form of instructions, precepts, prohibitions, or taboos (Darmawati, 2013: 134). Moreover, cultural values should be constantly examined so that they are not only a hereditary inheritance but become a shared property transmitted from generation to generation (Mustafa, 2016).

METHODS

The study uses a qualitative research design with a descriptive-interpretive orientation in the scope of the sociology of literature (sosiologi sastra) which views a literary work not as an autonomous aesthetic object, but as a social document that reflects and responds to the historical conditions of the community that produced it (Laurenson & Swingewood, 1972; Ratna, 2004; Wellek & Warren, 1978). The data are qualitative narrative units, i.e., words, dialogue, characterization, plot situations, and thematic statements, taken from short stories (cerpen) published in the Sin Po newspaper in the 1930s and 1940s. This period was selected because it reflects the shift from predominantly translated output to stories that increasingly depict harmonious relations between the Chinese community and the indigenous population.

The data were collected using documentary and library methods. These techniques consisted of compiling an inventory of the relevant issues in Sin Po, reading them repeatedly and carefully, and taking notes (teknik catat) on the parts relevant to ethnic relations, cultural values, and markers of Chinese and Indonesian identity. The secondary sources on Sino-Malay literature and the history of Indonesian Chinese provided the interpretive context (Nio, 1962; Salmon, 1981).

The data were evaluated with qualitative content analysis, which systematically infers latent, context-dependent meaning from manifest textual material (Krippendorff, 2019) based on the interactive paradigm of data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Coded segments were first categorized (e.g., orientation toward the ancestral homeland versus local society, depictions of Chinese-indigenous interaction, and expressions of cultural value as teaching, prohibition, or taboo), then interpreted against the colonial and early national context, and finally read through theories of nation and diasporic identity—which understand national identity as an imagined, historically produced construction rather than a primordial given (Anderson, 2006; Hall, 1990; Smith, 1991)—in order to trace the shift from a China-oriented "traditional Chineseness" toward an emergent Indonesian national identity across the corpus. The credibility of the findings was enhanced by triangulating sources and theories and by continuously re-reading the primary texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

DISCUSSION

The identification issues presented in Sin Po's short stories have often been approached through the lens of the intersection of class and Chinese culture. Specifically, this study contends that these stories dramatize the slow construction of a Chinese national identity, and that this formation becomes legible particularly in the portrayal of the connection between the Chinese and the indigenous population. Reading the corpus as a social document, in the manner of the sociology of literature, for whom the literary work reflects, refracts, and intervenes in the historical conditions of its production (Faruk, 2010; Laurenson & Swingewood, 1972; Ratna, 2004; Wellek & Warren, 1978) enables the analyst to treat fiction not as an ornament upon history but as one of the sites within which a community rehearses, contests and revises its sense of who it is.

For this interpretation, the analytical scaffolding is provided by Manuel Castells's (2004) explanation of the social formation of identity. Castells contends that identities are always constructed, and that the materials used in their construction, as well as the purposes to which they are put, vary across three ideal types. The prevailing institutions of a society

confer a legitimizing identity to prolong and legitimize their rule, and those subjected to it experience it as the natural order of social existence. Players in positions that are devalued or stigmatized by the logic of domination construct resistance identities. Therefore, players construct "trenches of resistance and survival " on principles opposed to those of the dominant order. Project identity is the construction of a new identity by social actors using whatever cultural elements are at their disposal, which redefines their position in society and, in so doing, aims to alter the social system as a whole.

Two characteristics of Castells's scheme are vital for the following: First, the typology emphasizes not just the identity a text claims for itself but also the manner in which that identity is constructed and by whom, whether by top-down imposition, by way of reaction, or toward a future. Second, Castells does not see the three forms as watertight containers; he allows for the possibility that a resistance identity may, under specific historical conditions, evolve into a project. This diachronic potential is the hinge of the developmental reading presented later in the discussion. The typology, together with the theory of national identity—Anderson's (2006) account of the nation as an imagined community enabled by vernacular print, Smith's (1991) focus on the ethnic substratum of national feeling, and Hall's (1990) insistence that diasporic identity is positional, hybrid, and always in process—reveals the corpus as the record of a community negotiating, in print, the terms of its belonging.

Historical and Discursive Context: Sin Po and the Sino-Malay World of Print

Any sociological reading of these stories must start with the medium that gave rise to them. Sin Po was not just a vehicle for fiction; it was a vernacular newspaper, printed in Malay and read by Peranakans across the Netherlands Indies. This has consequences for the analysis. Anderson (2006) contends that the rise of print-capitalism in vernacular languages set the stage for national consciousness. The newspaper is read simultaneously by strangers who are dispersed and will never meet, creating an experience of a bounded, horizontal community moving together through homogeneous time. Sin Po's Malay columns did more than report or entertain; they built a public and educated it to imagine itself. In this sense, the short stories published in the newspaper of that public are among the instruments through which an imagined community was regularly created and recomposed.

The content of that composition evolved, and the evolution is a datum per se. Peranakan literary creation consisted of translation, particularly from Chinese, as well as original writing based on local society, as is evident from the bibliography of Malay literature by the Chinese of Indonesia (Salmon, 1981) and the history of Sino-Malay letters (Nio Joe Lan, 1962). This dual heritage is reflected in a chronological pattern in the corpus under study: the short stories of the 1930s were mostly translations, a point supported in the present study

by the informant J. Anto, while those of the 1940s increasingly dealt with the social life of the indigenous population and the texture of everyday Chinese–indigenous contact. At the level of the medium, the shift from translated fiction oriented toward the cultural world of the ancestral homeland to original fiction oriented toward the immediate Indonesian milieu constitutes a reorientation of the imagined community itself — from one centered on China to one increasingly centered on Indonesia.

This reorientation is inseparable from the colonial mechanisms that formed Chinese life. The Netherlands Indies governed its peoples under a racial tripartite categorization that put the Chinese as "Foreign Orientals" between the European and the indigenous Inlander. This juridical ranking was buttressed by spatial and mobility controls—the Wijkenstelsel, which confined the Chinese to specified quarters, and the Passenstelsel, which required movement permits—that imprinted Chinese difference upon the map and upon the body (Suryadinata, 2010). The same colonial calculation that elevated the Chinese above the indigenous majority also distinguished them from it, a divide-and-rule arrangement meant to discourage the very cross-ethnic collaboration that might have posed a threat to colonial dominance. In this context – and in opposition to it – three currents of Peranakan politics emerged: the Sin Po stream which called on the Chinese to maintain their Chinese nationality; Chung Hwa Hui which reconciled Dutch subjecthood with a continuing Chinese cultural presence; and the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia which aimed at the political assimilation of the Chinese into indigenous Indonesian society. These three dimensions of belonging establish the political antithesis to the three identity categories detailed below.

Legitimizing Identity: Colonial Classification, Passing Logic and Nji Patmah

The exact colonial classification just outlined is the stuff of legitimating identity. In the words of Castells (2004), a legitimizing identity is "one that is fabricated and disseminated by the dominant institutions of a society in order to naturalize its rule, so that those subjected to it come to experience an externally imposed ranking as the settled order of things." In the Netherlands Indies this precise function was performed by the tripartite racial hierarchy, and 'Nji Patmah' makes its workings obvious by staging what happens when a person tries to move inside it. The device of the story is transience: Tanoemihardja, an indigenous guy supposedly drowned, emerges having taken a Chinese identity.

> "Shut up, akoe maoe tjerita and kaoe don't be surprised," remarked the man, none other than Tanoemihardja, who had been assumed drowned. "Now my name is Lie Pong Tong, not Tanoe any longer!"

It is interesting to consider the economy of this change. In renouncing the name "Tanoe" and taking on "Lie Pong Tong", the character does not simply change his perception, but rather places himself inside a legal and spatial order in which the Chinese, as Suryadinata (2010) notes, stood one rung above the indigenous population. To 'become Chinese' in the colonial Indies was therefore not a private masquerade, but a repositioning with material stakes – a claim upon the relative security, mobility and standing that the classification reserved for Foreign Orientals, and that the Passenstelsel and Wijkenstelsel otherwise regulated so tightly. The fact that a local man passes for Chinese to stay safe is a modest critique of the colonial order even as it affirms the system's grasp. The story shows the hierarchy as arbitrary and performable, while acknowledging that the repercussions were very real.

The passing mechanism exposes the manufactured and situational nature of ethnic identity. Read through Hall (1990), Identity, if it were an essence, could not be traded like clothing. That Tanoemihardja can take up Chineseness and put down his indigenous name shows that identity is a production, something pieced together from accessible indicators and legible only within a certain social grammar. But the plot does not go far enough to embrace this mobility. The mobility it describes is a defensive one, one born of fear and dispossession, not chosen in freedom, and it leaves the hierarchy itself intact. The paradox of legitimizing identity is that even its escape pays homage to its authority. The name a man must assume to be safe tells us, namely, who the colonial authority has determined may be safe. The story thus operates in the double manner typical of the sociology of the text: it reproduces the prevailing classification while making that classification visible, and so debatable, to its readers.

Resistance Identity: Neglect, Solidarity, and Memory in "Bahaja Api"

If "Nji Patmah" breaks down the identity imposed from above, "Bahaja Api" captures the identity a community constructs from below when the dominant institutions withdraw their protection. It is here that Castells (2004) finds resistance identity, among actors in devalued positions who, excluded from the benefits of the dominant system, develop "trenches" of solidarity and survival. The story tells of a fire in the Chinatown of Bandung, and its initial scene of disturbance already sets up the abandonment of the community:

> "People were running around screaming, saying they were saving goods from the flames, but just making things worse. Most wanted to observe, just, and cursed the officials, who were expected to organize the rescue but choked the streets instead.

‘The pump? Where's the pump? ‘Has it come yet?’ screamed from every side, the sound of their voices rising louder and louder.

The story has two features that shape the resistance. Institutional neglect. The dienst pumps, the municipal fire pumps, had been removed from both the Chinese and Bumiputra quarters. When calamity struck, the colonial state was conspicuous by its absence. The second is the spontaneous communal self-organization that fills the void, personified by the Chinese headman Khouw Sian To, who works hardest to save the district and whose name is later attached to the alley Kompa Sian To. Without protection from the dominant order, the community becomes its own resource; identity forms around the common experience of being left to your own devices and around the personalities that lead that devising. This is resistance identity in its purest form – a ‘we’ built by exclusion, banding together against the very order that cast it aside.

Here, it is worth noting a dialectical irony. The Wijkenstelsel that subalternized the Chinese by relegating them to segregated quarters also spatialized them. And it was this imposed density that made possible the social togetherness the fire summons forth. The weapon of colonial rule thus provided, quite unwittingly, the basis of collective resistance. Calhoun (1994) refers to this as reverse identity politics, in which a stigmatized attribution serves as the basis for communal self-assertion. That its Chinese protagonist, to be read, I think, as a representative of the community, is aware of being a member of a minority stereotyped by the surrounding society is explicit. The story translates that awareness of stigma into a claim for communal competence and worth. This is precisely the operation by which a resistance identity is consolidated.

The name of the alley does some extra, mnemonic work. By naming a lane Kompa Sian To, the community writes its own memory into the colonial city, so the headman’s service – and by extension, the community’s potential to preserve itself – endures in common speech long after the flames have died out. It is essentially such shared memories, Anderson (2006) tells us, that sustain imagined communities, the narratives and names through which a collectivity defines itself over time. A memorial toponym is a little monument to an identity of resistance: a form of remembering that the community did not fail when the state failed. The naming recovers, in solidarity, the fire-ravaged property.

Project Title: Common Destiny and the Seeds of Indonesian Nationality

The third and most futuristic type is found in the cluster of stories comprising “Balesan”, “Kemaleman di Desa”, “Ampir Sadja”, and “Bapa Koempoel”. If resistance identity is

defensive, project identity is generative: in Castells's (2004) perspective, social actors draw upon existing cultural elements to construct a new identity that redefines their place in society and moves toward a reformed social order. These pieces, however, with their shared subject, coalesce into a unified aspiration: to present the Chinese not as a separate group but as a people joined to the native population by a common destiny, and to show the newspaper's readers the harmony that such a connection may bring.

"Kemaleman di Desa" stages this project in special clarity. During the fasting month, generally feared as the "thieves' season", a young Chinese collector, Gin Siang, and an indigenous coolie, Parta, are trapped in a village for the night and offered shelter by Mang Djoenaedi, himself a former prisoner. Everything about the scenario is designed to provoke prejudice: the exposed Chinese tourist, the strange village, the season of distrust, the host with a criminal record. At first Gin Siang can't sleep for fear of being robbed. But the story systematically disarms each phobia until the true hospitality of the villages melts away his trepidation, and the natives prove to be on his side against his fears. It is a two-way street, even as far as Gin Siang's own sympathy for his worn-out coolie goes:

The task was so arduous that sometimes Gin Siang felt sorry for his coolie. When the guy was tired out, Gin Siang would take over the peddling himself, and let the coolie ride in the cart. This little inversion of the master-coolie dynamic is doing a lot of ideological work. Not only is the Chinese collector divided from the indigenous laborer by ethnicity, but also by class; that Gin Siang should relieve his coolie of the peddling establishes a solidarity that overcomes both divisions at once. Thus, the shared destiny – senasib – between the Chinese and indigenous characters is not just asserted, but realized in a tangible gesture. It is this enacted solidarity that the study identifies as the "seeds" of an Indonesian national identity that germinated far before independence. In the language of the sociology of literature, the cultural values the story conveys – empathy, hospitality, and mutual regard across the lines of ethnicity and class – function as guidelines offered to a readership in the form of teaching and example (Ratna, 2004), values meant to be carried out of the fiction and into social life.

The rest of the cluster's stories follow the same ethic. The three stories, "Balesan," "Ampir Sadja," and "Bapa Koempoel," though different in content, all seek to create a new identity for the Chinese as a group with a common destiny with the native population, and to portray Chinese-native ties as essentially peaceful. Together, they constitute a project in Castells's precise sense: they not only reflect an already existing solidarity but also project and elaborate one, addressing an audience and encouraging it to embrace a reconfigured identity. This literary effort was in keeping with the assimilationist perspective of Peranakan politics represented by the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia, which aimed at the political absorption

of the Chinese into Indonesian society. What Anderson (2006) terms the "deep, horizontal comradeship" of the nation is thus being imaginatively extended across ethnic lines, a rehearsal, in the columns of a Chinese-Malay daily, of an Indonesian nation that did not yet exist as a state.

The Ambivalence of a Transitional Identity

And yet the project is, in our interpretation, unclear and unfinished — and its very incompleteness is historically significant. In these stories the Chinese characters are still expressly articulated as Chinese, but the narratives do not so much eliminate ethnic difference as put it alongside a nascent sense of Indonesian belonging. Their depiction of Chinese-Indonesian existence is double in this sense, Chinese in self-designation, Indonesian in compassion and destiny. To regard this doubleness as ordinary contradiction would be to miss its point.

The interpretive key is Hall's (1990) notion of diasporic identity. For Hall, the identity of a diasporic group is never unique but always doubly positioned—oriented at once toward an ancestral "homeland" and toward the society of settlement—and is best understood as an ongoing process of being rather than as a fixed state of being. The ambiguity of the Sin Po stories is not confusion; it is the structural condition of diaspora made evident in narrative. Smith's (1991) account converges from another direction: national identity does not so much abolish prior ethnic attachment as reframe it, so that the persistence of an explicit Chineseness alongside an Indonesian orientation is exactly what a nascent national identity, growing within an ethnie, should be expected to look like.

We can define the incompleteness with Castells (2004). A project identity is an ambition towards a reformed social order, not an achieved fact; immanent in the form is unfinishedness. The historical timing adds an extra edge to the point. These are pre-independence stories, and the solidarity they generate is a seed, not a harvest – rooted in soil that remained vulnerable for the Chinese community. As Suryadinata points out (2010), throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the diaspora was in a difficult and exposed position, sensitive to the changes in a politics it did not control and to the recurring intertwining of Chinese identity with the troubled relations between Indonesia and China. The corpus's caution—it continues to call itself Chinese even as it moves toward an Indonesian fellowship—is understandable as a mode of self-protection, the carefulness of a community moving toward belonging without the safety to claim it is fully there.

The Crossing of Class and Ethnicity

This is not to suggest that the interpretation put up here replaces the categories of class and culture with which analysis of these stories has typically begun. Rather, it demonstrates the extent to which ethnicity and class were inextricably entwined in the colonial context the stories portray. The tripartite racial classification was also an economic hierarchy: the elevation of the Chinese above the indigenous population was evident in commerce, credit, and debt collection—roles that positioned Chinese characters as relatively economically advantaged over indigenous laborers. Identity in Sin Po's literature, then, is never merely a question of ethnic self-designation but always entails a position within a structure of economic ties that colonial rule has racialized. To read the stories for identification only, and not pay attention to the class ties that run through them, would be to separate the ethnic drama from the material ground on which it was played out.

This is the class signature of each of the three identity types. In "Nji Patmah," the security that Tanoemihardja buys by pretending to be Chinese cannot be disentangled from the economic status that the classification afforded; to be Chinese was in part to enter a more favorable economic category, so that the passing narrative is as much about class mobility as it is about ethnic disguise.

In "Bahaja Api," the fire burns Chinese-owned homes and shops, and the story's overt focus on the class inequalities between Chinese and indigenous viewers identifies the resistance identity it represents as the solidarity of a propertied minority as much as a stigmatized one. And in "Kemaleman di Desa," the project identification is played out directly across a class divide: Gin Siang, a collector, Parta, a coolie, and the fellowship the narrative cultivates must extend over the very economic asymmetry that the colonial system had established. The motion by which Gin Siang takes over the peddling from his coolie is precisely what is affecting, because it momentarily suspends that asymmetry.

This convergence gives the project's identity both promise and fragility.

Its promise lay in the idea that shared destiny would somehow transcend economic hierarchy—that empathy might somehow link collector to coolie, and merchant to laborer, inside a single national society. Its fragility is that the asymmetry is merely suspended, not abolished: Gin Siang pedals for a time, but the employer-employee relationship remains intact when the ride is over. The stories thus record an unresolved contradiction that outlasted the colonial period – whether an Indonesian national identity that extended to the Chinese could fit the socioeconomic positions that colonial racialization had placed them in. This unsolved dilemma, in another incarnation, is, at bottom, the ambiguity explored above, and it is a test of the corpus's honesty that it stages the aspiration without faking away the obstacle.

From legitimation to project: A developmental reading

Individually, the three types of identification define three clusters of stories, but together, and in order of the corpus itself, they constitute a trajectory. Castells's (2004) assertion that the forms are not sealed—that a resistance identity may, given the right conditions, mature into a project—permits this diachronic reading. What appears tale after story to be a taxonomy of identity kinds can be read, decade after decade, as a sequence of identity alterations.

The sequence is as follows. The hegemony of translation in the 1930s constrains the readership to an imaginary community that remains rooted in China, an inheritance handed down rather than elected. In the 1940s, the original story turns to local society, and so goes through the three types in turn.

"Nji Patmah" unpacks the legitimizing identity transmitted through colonial classification, exposing its arbitrariness while acknowledging its force. "Bahaja Api" chronicles the development of a resistance identity as that same colonial rule withdraws its protection, transforming stigma and neglect into community togetherness. The cluster around "Kemaleman di Desa" then states a project identity, offering a new self defined by common destiny with the indigenous population. In other words, the newspaper transports its readership over the decade from an identity imposed by the colonizer to one forged in reaction to colonial abandonment to one envisioned in solidarity with their indigenous neighbors.

This literary path goes parallel to the political one. The three streams of Peranakan politics—the China-oriented Sin Po stream, the accommodationist Chung Hwa Hui, and the assimilationist Partai Tionghoa Indonesia—define three perspectives of belonging, and the project identity cultivated in the 1940s stories aligns itself unmistakably with the last of these. Thus the fiction was not a passive mirror of a political debate held elsewhere; it was one of the sites at which that debate was held, an argument about where the Chinese belonged, made in the persuasive and affectively potent form of story. Thus the importance of the media is reaffirmed. As a vernacular newspaper, Sin Po's fiction did not simply reflect an identity, but produced the public that could have one. It interpellated scattered Peranakan readers as members of a community and invited them, week by week, to reimagine the boundaries of that community (Anderson, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The central finding of this discussion is that the formation of Chinese national identity in the short stories of *Sin Po* is neither a single event nor a simple substitution of Indonesian identity for Chinese identity, but rather a layered, ambivalent, and medium-borne process. Combining the sociology of literature with Castells's typology of identity and the theory of imagined and diasporic nationhood makes that process legible in a way no single framework

could. The sociology of literature authorizes the reading of fiction as social evidence; Castells's three forms distinguish the *modes* by which identity is produced—imposed, resisted, projected—and, crucially, allow those modes to be arranged as a developmental sequence; and the theories of Anderson, Smith, and Hall situate that sequence within the wider dynamics of national imagining and diasporic positioning.

A measure of caution is warranted in stating the conclusion. These are works of fiction, and the harmony they depict is an aspiration articulated in narrative rather than a documented condition of colonial society; the corpus is partial, the reading interpretive, and representation must not be mistaken for social fact. Yet it is precisely as records of aspiration that the stories possess their evidentiary value. They tell us what a section of the Peranakan community, writing in its own newspaper, wished the Chinese to become—not foreigners suspended above the indigenous population, but partners bound to it by a common fate. That such seeds of Indonesian nationality should have been sown in the columns of a Chinese-Malay newspaper, before independence and under colonial rule, is the finding that this reading most wishes to underline: the imagining of the nation was underway in places, and among communities, that later national narratives have too often overlooked.

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