



Subalternity and Racial Patriarchy in Colonial Chinese-Indonesian Fiction: A Postcolonial Feminist Reading

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54392/ajir26316>

Received: 08-09-2025; Revised: 02-07-2026; Accepted: 24-08-2026; Published: 04-09-2026



Abstract: This study interrogates the representation of indigenous concubinage within the works of Chinese Indonesian male authors, focusing on the portrayal of indigenous women in their relationships with ethnic Chinese men. While previous scholarship has focused on the legal and social precarity of indigenous women under colonial rule, this research shifts the focus toward the intersection of racial patriarchy and hybrid power relations associated with the position of the Chinese Indonesian patriarch. The research utilizes feminist narratology to examine the structural silencing of the concubine and the narrative insulation of Chinese women from the foreign gaze. The study argues that these narrative choices systematically produce subalternity, rendering the indigenous woman a "speechless" subject whose internal consciousness is inaccessible to the reader. This erasure is further analyzed through the framework of racial patriarchy, which reveals how male authors mirrored colonial expansionist logic to assert ethnic supremacy over indigenous bodies. Furthermore, by employing the concept of postcolonial hybridity, this research demonstrates that these authors constructed a hybrid power dynamic: one where indigenous women were transformed into extensions of colonial-style domination to consolidate the status of the patriarch. Ultimately, the findings suggest that the indigenous woman is positioned as the ultimate subaltern, a subject whose mind and body are occupied to the point of social and ontological invisibility.

Keywords: Concubinage, Feminist Narratology, Racial Patriarchy, Subalternity, Postcolonial Hybridity

1. Introduction

The practice of Nyai, or concubinage by European or foreign males against indigenous women, prevailed during the Dutch colonial era yet has resulted in a number of problems in Indonesia. These issues range from the recognition of children of mixed Asian and European ancestry in colonial law to marriage recognition, the position of indigenous women in colonial discourse, and race relations and sentiments (Niekerk, 2023). Boudewijn (2016) identified that children of Euroasian (Asian and European) descent experience cultural complexity in race relations, especially being in an inferior area while becoming a poorly defined image of the superiority of the European race, as seen in the novel *Ups & Downs of Life in the Indies* (1890) by P.A. Daum and *Fernand* (1874) by Melati van Java (Marie Slood). Meanwhile, Van der Veur (1968) raised the issue of racial descent in the context of assimilation law recognition based on the father's (European) blood and religion. These two issues reflect how the concubinage implications become an issue in racial relations and the complexity of subjects in colonial discourse, such as the colonized and colonizers. Recent indexed scholarship further shows that women's status in colonial Southeast Asia was shaped through overlapping regimes of sexuality, family, law, labor, and racial hierarchy, rather than through gender alone (Andaya *et al.*, 2024; Ravensbergen, 2023; Hägerdal, 2020; Manse, 2022).

Meanwhile, concubinage posed challenges to women's existence. As agents of modernity over colonial discourse for their people, Nyai or concubines are part of the problems of race and gender relations raised by the character Nyai Ontosoroh in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel *Bumi Manusia* (Niekerk, 2011). Women, race, and colonial discourse were all ideas put forward in literary texts written by both natives and Europeans at the time, as evidenced by the representation of race relations in concubinage in Indonesian literary works. Meanwhile, interracial issues are equally complex, particularly when Asians (Chinese) and natives (local, Indonesian) are engaged. Men of



Chinese descent in Indonesia have racial attitudes and sentiments toward natives, particularly women. Indigenous women were rarely recognized as legal wives and were usually used for *Nyai* or concubine (Izzah *et al.*, 2023). This is explained in Tan Kim Tjan (1922), literary work *Peniti Dasi Barlian* which tells the story of an indigenous woman compelled to relinquish her position when the Chinese man enters a legally recognized marriage with a Chinese woman. Differences in nationality (race), religion, and culture are sensitive issues in the marriage or concubinage of Chinese men and indigenous women.

Maier (1993) gives a perfect illustration in the case of Thio Tjin Boen's *Tjerita Njai Soemirah I & II* (1917), which explores issues of race and ethnicity by using language of the nationalist figure. The author-subject is Thio Tjin Boen. Based on the text, indigenous women face an inferiority complex because of not only patriarchy and tradition, but also the force of race and colonial discourse. In such contexts, women face dual colonialism, especially patriarchy and tradition, as well as masculine colonial discourse, shown in *Tjerita Njai Soemirah I & II* (Spivak, 2003). Both construct a narrative in which women are portrayed as victims of men's attitudes and colonial discourses.

Another study indicated a deviant "sex act" as concubinage emerged to be legalized for native women in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), but not for white women. The Dutch colonial government took into account facts about racial superiority and the issue of Christianity (Rose & Heijmans, 2021). The Dutch colonial government explicitly perpetuated the discourse on concubinage since indigenous women were assumed to be uncultured, barbaric, wild, and of low racial status. This has become the norm, especially when foreign (Dutch) men indulge their lust on uneducated and unequal people. In other words, indigenous women were slaves deserving to be treated as such as a manifestation of colonial racial superiority politics (Bose & Gandhi, 2000). Indigenous women were the lowest legal object in the colonial legal order, serving as a third class of ordinary people distinguishable from the nobility. Many novelists in Indonesia have written about it. They generally depict the ambiguity of women while also revealing the efforts of indigenous women to continue to voice their presence, as in the case of *Nyai Anah* (White, 2004).

Based on those studies, indigenous women were always undervalued in colonial Indonesian society and silenced when faced with colonial and patriarchal discourse (Spivak, 1988). However, another critical question is how the authors of Asian descent who were also colonized conducted the practice of concubinage in Indonesia, in this context, were Chinese men or Chinese descendants in Indonesia during the colonial period. Concubinage was not only practiced by European men, but also by Asian men against native Indonesian women. Men of Chinese descent or Indonesian Chinese society were the colonial second-class racial group after the Japanese (Hewett, 2017). Wealthy Indonesian Chinese men engaged in concubinage with native women, and in some cases, married to Chinese women while keeping or distributing native concubines to the point of trafficking (Hull, 2017). This fact shows that in colonial society at the time, indigenous women were a socially unprotected and severely marginalized group. Then, how were indigenous women's voices addressed in response to the practice of concubinage with Chinese or Chinese- descent men?

The novels *Peniti Dasi Barlian* (1922) by Tan King Tjian (Tan Tjin Kang, 1922) and *Tek Hoay* (Hoay, 1927) serve as significant representations of the concubinage practices situated within the Chinese Indonesian community. Written by hybrid Chinese authors, these texts document and interpret the historical interactions between Chinese Indonesian men and indigenous women, providing a critical case study of the power dynamics inherent in these encounters. In these narratives, issues of racial, religious, and cultural superiority form the essential background of the text. Recent studies of Chinese diasporic and Chinese-Indonesian cultural production likewise emphasize that identity is negotiated through language, memory, family history, national belonging, and continuing racial tension (Stenberg, 2022; Stenberg, 2023; Show, 2023; Adj, 2023; Thio & Sidarto, 2024; Yotes & Croucher, 2024).

The Chinese hybrid authors' voices describe concubinage in several diverse ways. Some believe that concubinage is a form of civilization for indigenous women, while others believe that concubinage is an experiment and a game played on the sexuality of Chinese Indonesian men before officially marrying Chinese women or those of Chinese descent or even as part of the prostitution world (Hesslink, 1992). Despite the author's male voice, the representations of indigenous women by Chinese men become part of the expression of the Chinese Indonesian community, who were assumed to be patriarchal, and their perspective on colonial discourse concerning indigenous women. This perspective is shaped by the fact that they, too, were marginalized and enslaved by Dutch or European colonialism at that time.



To explore these dynamics, the research is developed into three stages: first, identifying narrative structures in *Peniti Dasi Barlian*; (Tan Tjin Kang, 1922) second, evaluating the cultural perspective of the Chinese dari Tjikembang; (Hoay, 1927) and finally, conducting a comparative study to investigate how both texts produce the subalternity of the indigenous woman. By analyzing these works through the lens of racial patriarchy, this research reveals how an authoritative and controlling narratorial voice and restricted focalization rewrite the indigenous female subject as a silent signifier of male authority. Thus, this approach demonstrates how the indigenous woman is rendered the ultimate subaltern, structurally precluded from possessing her own voice or interior consciousness and subjective psychological experience.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study employs feminist narratology to interrogate the representation of indigenous concubinage in Chinese Indonesian Fictions Tan King Tjian's Novel *Peniti Dasi Barlian* (1922) (Tan Tjin Kang, 1922) and Kwee Tek Hoay's Novel *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* (1927) (Hoay, 1927), expose androcentric biases within these narratives. Feminist narratology challenges the "universal" status traditionally granted to masculine narrative patterns, arguing that narrative forms are never neutral but are structures that reinforce patriarchal ideologies and exclude female agency (Diengott, 1988). It moves beyond thematic analysis to examine how narrative technique, such as voice, focalization, and plot structure, becomes a mechanism of power. A core premise is that the authority to tell a story and control its perspective has historically been a male prerogative, making what is considered a "legitimate" narrative form culturally determined by those who have "held the pen".

To understand the subalternity of the indigenous concubine, one must first deconstruct the "universal" male subject and the patriarchal gaze that defines the text's "angle of vision." By re-evaluating focalization, the lens through which the story is perceived, this research identifies how male Chinese Indonesian authors utilize a male narratorial gaze to fix indigenous women as objects of evaluation based strictly on the body's surface. This gaze functions as a mechanism of control, where the male narrator uses his authority to speak over the female character, reducing her to a "despicable subject" without a voice.

Such structural silencing is not merely a thematic choice but a narrative "tangle" or dissonant structure that reveals patriarchal motivations (Lanser, 1986). Authors often use an authoritative and controlling narratorial voice to ironize or silence the concubine, a technique that establishes a racial patriarchy by presenting the domination of the indigenous woman as a natural extension of the male subject's authority. Furthermore, feminist narratology serves to correct the ethnocentrism of traditional narrative norms by clarifying that "legitimate" forms of storytelling are culturally determined by those who have historically "held the pen", men whose social and educational status allow them to occupy the center of the narrative.

This political nature of narrative form connects directly to women's issues in the context of colonial discourse, which became a central part of postcolonial feminist studies. According to Lewis and Mills, colonized women have different experiences than Western women, and thus Western feminist theory can be viewed as an extension or affair with colonialism or capitalism (Spivak, 1988). One of the central issues in postcolonial feminist studies is the questioning of the construction of gender or women's subjectivity in colonial discourse, which encompasses racist politics and redefines the subject of colonized women. Mohanty, for instance, raised Western world or Western feminist views on the world of colonized women or the Third World as objects of Eastern male and female victims or colonized as objects of Western feminist study. This intersectional reading is also consistent with recent scholarship that treats slavery, dependency, and colonial intimacy as historically variable institutions produced through both local hierarchies and imperial structures (Chakraborty & van Rossum, 2020; Hägerdal, 2020).

Meanwhile, Spivak sees colonized women's or subaltern classes' voices in the context of colonial discourse in literary texts as a continuation of dominant European narratives. Spivak uses a deconstructive reading to relate the content of the text or the language of the text with the author-subject, viewing both as elements of writing. She observes the characters' identity construction and the narrative rewriting of tragic colonial subjects, carrying out this reading as an "individual feminist" who views the issue through the lens of cultural backgrounds and traditions as colonial objects (Spivak, 2003).



Spivak interprets this deconstruction model through postcolonial texts, challenging and multiplying dominant colonial authority narratives by searching for the repetition and reappearance of colonial subjects (Morton, 2007). By using an allegorical model, she seeks to rewrite how colonialism is represented, noting that reading as an individual feminist involves risking the presence of two registers: the dominance of sexuality in society and the imperial project's "civilizing mission." Through these combined lenses, the female subject's psychobiography is emphasized, focusing on women subjectivity as presented by the author as both a social and individual category. By weaving feminist narratology with the insights of Spivak and Mohanty, this analysis reveals how the indigenous woman is rewritten as a signifier of postcolonial hybridity, where the male author mimics colonial logic to ensure the indigenous woman remains "disguised" and devoid of the capacity to articulate and recognize her own identity and agency.

The integration of feminist narratology with the concepts of subalternity and deconstruction is necessitated by the requirement to bridge the gap between narrative form and political ideology. While feminist narratology provides the technical apparatus to identify how the text is structurally organized to silence the female subject, specifically through the deployment of an authoritative and controlling narratorial voice, deconstruction facilitates the dismantling of the universal authority claimed by the male author-subject. By exposing the internal contradictions and colonial repetitions within the text, deconstruction reveals that the subalternity of the concubine is a deliberate structural product rather than a mere historical reflection. This combined theoretical framework is essential for examining the works of male authors because it demonstrates that the indigenous woman is rendered subaltern precisely because the narrative mechanics, such as restricted focalization, preclude her internal consciousness. Consequently, the application of these specific theories is justified as they enable a transition from the technical analysis of structural silencing to a comprehensive critique of the racial patriarchy and colonial mimicry that govern the author's creative project.

3. Research Method

This research employs a qualitative methodology that prioritizes data quality over data quantity (Moleong, 2007). The material objects of this study are the novels (Tan Tjin Kang, 1922) (Hoay, 1927). The formal object consists of the representation of indigenous women, colonial discourse, and racial politics. Primary data encompass the story content, the construction of native women subjects, and the thematic ideas regarding colonial discourse. Secondary data consist of the author- subject's relationship to colonial discourse, the structure of colonial society, and relevant scholarly literature. Data collection was performed through the systematic reading and recording of these sources.

The analysis is conducted by employing feminist narratology to deconstruct the male gaze of the author in the representation of women. By evaluating the structural mechanics of the text, specifically focalization and narrative perspective, this study identifies how the authorial "angle of vision" reinforces gendered and racial power dynamics. This analytical approach serves to expose how the male narratorial gaze reduces the indigenous woman to an object judged primarily through her physical appearance and prescribed social function, while simultaneously shielding the Chinese woman from the foreign gaze. Consequently, the use of feminist narratology allows the researchers to deconstruct the "universal" authority traditionally granted to masculine narrative patterns, revealing that the silencing of the indigenous woman is a deliberate structural choice.

The study further interrogates these narrative structures to reveal the production of subalternity. By examining how the male author uses his narratorial authority to speak over the female character, the research identifies the erasure of the indigenous woman's interior consciousness and subjective psychological experience. This process is essential to comprehend the operations of racial patriarchy within the structure of Indonesian colonial society, where the author-subject occupies a position that functions as a colonial extension.

Through the deconstruction of the narrative's masterly voice, the research demonstrates that the indigenous woman is rendered the ultimate subaltern subject. Her identity is rewritten as a signifier of the patriarch's power, leaving her mind and body occupied by a discourse that denies her the agency to acknowledge herself. This methodological framework ultimately clarifies how the intersection of gendered narrative forms and racial politics ensures that the indigenous woman remains a silent subject within the colonial hierarchy.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Case Analysis 1: *Peniti Dasi Barlian* (1922): Indigenous Women, Patriarchal Discourse, and Racial Politics.

The novel *Peniti Dasi Barlian* (1922) by Tan King Tjian (*Tan Tjin Kang*, 1922), the pseudonym of Tan Tjin Kang, provides a narrative of the interracial relationship between Liang Djin, a full-blooded Chinese man, and Soematri, an indigenous woman. The plot centers on the couple's initial life together as husband and wife, a status that is abruptly destabilized by the arrival of Hiang Nio, a woman of Liang Djin's own race whom he is compelled to marry. Despite this shift in legal and social standing, Soematri remains in the household as a Nyai, or concubine, serving Liang Djin while he transitions into his new marriage. Employing feminist narratology, it reveals that the author uses a distinct male narratorial gaze to differentiate the representation of these two female subjects. Hiang Nio is focalized as a beautiful, feminine, and gentle woman who nevertheless possesses the agency to make decisions and the courage to escape a debt-marriage. In contrast, the authorial gaze stabilizes Soematri as a subject defined by weakness, obedience, and an inability to resist.

Interrogating this narrative perspective demonstrates that Soematri is not a self-determined character but a structural signifier of the colonized subject, reified as a legitimate object of misfortune and excluded from the narrative's internal consciousness. The relationship between Soematri and Liang Djin is fundamentally hierarchical, stratified by the intersection of race, gender, tradition, social class, religion, and the nature of the relationship. These variables function as the foundational pillars upon which the authorial gaze constructs Soematri's inferiority. Through this framework, Liang Djin perceives himself as superior in economic, legal, and cultural standing. By deconstructing the narrative's restricted focalization, the author deliberately omits the religious and cultural frameworks of the indigenous subject (Hull, 2017), which would otherwise categorize concubinage as a moral sin, to frame Liang Djin instead as her "savior." By employing this omission, the author utilizes an authoritative and controlling narratorial voice to normalize this domination. This structural manipulation ensures that her subalternity is manufactured by the text's refusal to acknowledge her as a subject with an independent cultural identity.

The presence of phallocentrism in this discourse is essentially situated not only in the relationships between characters but also in the discourse relations of the text's narrative structure, encompassing the indigenous experience of colonialism and the tensions between colonial forces and the Chinese race (Andaya *et al.*, 2024). In this context, gender relationships develop within a framework of dual colonialism, where European colonial discourse and Chinese colonial discourse converge upon the indigenous woman. Consequently, indigenous women inhabit a layered and double patriarchal world; they are confronted by European colonial structures, patriarchal traditions, and Chinese discourses of body control and cultural dominance.

The narrative progression further reinforces this hierarchy through the authorial construction of Liang Djin as a phallocentric hero. As the plot unfolds, Liang Djin is focalized as a "superhuman" conqueror of his environment, an archetype that grants him total authority over the women in his life. This phallocentrism is embedded in the narrative's restricted focalization, where the male subject is granted the power of language and culture while the indigenous woman is relegated to a state of domestic service. A pivotal moment in the plot occurs when Soematri assisted Liang Djin in dressing for his wedding to Hiang Nio, fastening his tie while pleading with him not to forget her. Deconstructing Soematri's dialogue reveals how the male narratorial gaze operates through her own voice to normalize her erasure. When she states,

"Aku punya suwami, "kata Soematri", "tentu kau suda tau ia punya kaadaan, maka juga aku brani bicara terus terang pada kau. Betul aku suda jadi istinya, tapi baba Liang Djin musti menikah, musti mempunyai satu istri kawin. Lambat alun hal itu musti terjadi, jika ia dapet istri yang baek, niscaya aku sendiri bisa tinggal senang, tapi jika ia dapet istri yang dengki hati, niscaya aku jadi terlantar. Sekarang aku dapet satu pikiran, tida tau kau mufakat atawa tida"11(Tan Tjin Kang, 1922).

The text utilizes her as a mouthpiece to validate the racial patriarchy that excludes her. Her "frankness" is a structural mechanism that presents her displacement as an inevitable necessity, ensuring her interior consciousness and subjective psychological experience remains inaccessible.

Itu waktu Soematri bantu Liang Djin berpakaian, dan lebih dulu ia suda sisirke rambutnya Liang Djin sampe licin betul, sebagaimana lajiknya orang jadi penganten. Tapi tempo ia memasang dasi di lehernya Liang Djin, Soematri jadi terharu juga, dan sambil memeluk Liang Djin punya leher, dengan suwara perlahan ia berkata:

This evidence can be interpreted as a form of racial politics involving the indigenous race versus the Asian race, where indigenous women are literally pitted against Chinese-descent women to reinforce the latter's superiority. Indigenous women in this situation are constructed to be worthy of colonization and are unable to express themselves, having no ideological or social awareness of their own exploitation. This stratified race politics, reflected in the colonial legal system (Suryadinata, 1988), renders the indigenous woman a conduit of colonial discourse who exists solely to satisfy male sexuality.

In contrast, the relationship between Liang Djin and Hiang Nio is focalized through a lens of ethnic parity and legitimacy. While Soematri is fixed in a state of domestic service, Hiang Nio is granted a degree of narratorial respect and shielded from the objectifying gaze. This distinction illustrates that within the framework of racial patriarchy, agency is a privilege distributed according to race. The relationship with Hiang Nio is presented as the "civilized" union, while the relationship with Soematri is relegated to a utilitarian arrangement.

Ultimately, the analysis of these narrative strategies illustrates that Soematri is rendered a subaltern subject, structurally precluded from the text's consciousness to ensure the consolidation of male ethnic supremacy (Morton, 2007). In this stratified system, the indigenous woman is reduced to a conduit for male sexuality and a "leftover" of the social structure. Her voice is barely audible because it is filtered through an androcentric lens that demands her silence, leaving her identity completely occupied by a discourse that denies her the power to acknowledge her own suffering and forces her to submit to the social system as an "honest" woman accepting her fate.

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4.2 Case Analysis 2: Boenga Roes dari Tjikembang (1927): The Decay of Colonial Identity and Civilization

Kwee Tek Hoay (1880-1951), a well-known writer and intellectual from the Indonesian Chinese Indonesian community, wrote (Hoay, 1927) This text describes concubinage practice and romance in the Chinese-Indonesian and Sundanese ethnic or tribal communities on western coast of Java Island. This novel begins with Ay Tjeng, a Mount Salak plantation worker who lives with a Nyai named Marsiti. Suddenly Ay Tjeng was called by his family to marry Gwat Nio, a Chinese woman who was the daughter of a wealthy employer. When Marsiti left, Marsiti was already pregnant. Some time later, Gwat Nio's father told him that Marsiti was the child of his own Nyai who was abandoned. Gwat Nio's marriage to Ay Tjeng gave birth to Lily who finally died when she was about to marry Bian Koen, a doctor graduated from the United States.

Kwee Tek Hoay (1880-1951), a well-known writer and intellectual from the Indonesian Chinese Indonesian community, wrote Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang (1927) (Hoay, 1927) to describe concubinage practices and romance within the Chinese-Indonesian and Sundanese communities on the western coast of Java. The novel begins with Ay Tjeng, a 2 That was when Soematri helped Liang Djin get dressed, and beforehand she had already combed Liang Djin's hair until it was perfectly smooth, as it is when people marry. But when he put a tie around Liang Djin's neck, Soematri was also touched, and while hugging Liang Djin by the neck, in a low voice he said: "Now you are a bride, now you are married to Miss Hiang, don't forget about Soematri." plantation worker who lives with a Nyai named Marsiti, but is eventually compelled by his family to marry Gwat Nio, the daughter of a wealthy Chinese



employer. Unknown to Ay Tjeng, Marsiti is pregnant when she is sent away. The narrative later reveals a complex web of abandonment: Marsiti herself was the child of a Nyai belonging to Gwat Nio's father. While Ay Tjeng's marriage to Gwat Nio produces a daughter, Lily, who dies before her marriage to the Western-educated Bian Koen—the story shifts focus when Bian Koen discovers Roosminah, the daughter of Marsiti and Ay Tjeng. Following Marsiti's death in childbirth, Roosminah is raised by a native named Usman until Ay Tjeng and Gwat Nio adopt her, "civilizing" her through education so she may eventually marry Bian Koen (Hoay, 1927).

Interrogating this narrative structure through a deconstructionist lens reveals how the text produces the indigenous woman as a liminal subject whose value is dictated by the male narratorial gaze. Unlike the full-blooded Chinese characters, Marsiti and Roosminah are initially placed in an inferior position where their "native blood" excludes them from the clan. By deconstructing the patriarchal value system (Meij, 2009), we see that while men are easily grouped into the Chinese race to maintain lineage, women born of indigenous mothers are relegated to a "subaltern" class. This confirms that the culture of Chinese descent in the text functions as an essentialist strategy, where women are treated as biological vessels rather than subjects with autonomous identities.

The narrative "mission of incarnation" regarding Roosminah functions as a form of epistemic violence. Although she has Chinese ancestry, she is not treated as an equal to Lily or Bian Koen until she undergoes an initiation that requires the decay of her original identity. Roosminah must shed the indigenous culture taught by Usman to become an "intelligent" Chinese woman through a process of mimicry (Seng, 1925). From a feminist narratology perspective, this education concept is not an act of empowerment but a tool of phallogocentric control, where the woman is used to affirm Chinese tradition (Susanto & Ardianto, 2021). The text suggests that for an indigenous-descended woman to possess an "identity," she must be psychologically and culturally "re-written" to satisfy the male version of Chineseness.

This "closed" nature of Chinese culture functions as an essentialist strategy designed to preserve a specific iteration of "Chineseness" against the perceived encroachment of outside forces. By deconstructing the marriage politics within the text, we uncover a profound gendered double standard: while Chinese women are "hidden" and protected from foreign or non-Chinese men to prevent the "destruction" of the female subject—as seen in contemporary works like *Kesoepanan Timoer* (1932) and *Gwi Hian Nio* (1925), indigenous women are treated as "civilizing" mission performed on Roosminah is, in fact, an act of cultural annexation. The authorial voice suggests that the non-Chinese woman is an uncultured being who must be emptied of her "native" self to be worthy of the Chinese domestic sphere.

The narrative structure thus reinforces a hierarchy where indigenous women are produced as inferior, low-class beings and mere objects of sexual satisfaction until they can be "re-written" by the patriarchal order. This creates a layered subalternity; even when an indigenous woman like Roosminah is "elevated" through education, the text implies that her original identity was a state of deficiency. By interrogating the narratorial gaze, Roosminah's marriage to Bian Koen is only possible once she has been rendered a "mimic" of Chinese tradition, effectively erasing her indigenous lineage to serve as a developer and guardian of a culture that viewed her mother, Marsiti, as a "disposable object."

The representation of the indigenous woman in *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* serves as a tool for male power to construct and maintain cultural boundaries. Under the lens of deconstruction, the text's "happy ending" is exposed as the ultimate triumph of racial patriarchy. It confirms that within the discourse of the Chinese Indonesian community, the indigenous woman is a silent signifier who can only attain identity by surrendering it, leaving her as a perpetual subaltern whose true voice is buried under the weight of a "civilizing" mission that demands her total assimilation.

4.3 Comparative Discussion: Indigenous Women as Objects of Patriarchal Misfortune

Tjikembang (Hoay, 1927) are deeply rooted in the sociological backgrounds (Tan Tjin Kang, 1922) and Boenga Roos dari (1880–1951). Both intellectuals operated during a period of colonial transition marked by the rise of the liberalism movement (Jones, 2007), which was often perceived as a threat to traditional Chinese customs (Susanto & Ardianto, 2021).



Tan Tjin Kang, a socially conservative intellectual associated with newspapers like *Sin Po* and *Keng Po*, viewed liberalism, particularly women's liberalism, with suspicion. His works, such as *Radja goela jang toelen* (1923) and *Sengsara lantaran ketjinta'an* (1926), reflect a concern for maintaining gender and generational hierarchies (Tan Tjin Kang, 1923, 1926). He also contributed to the literary movement by publishing in literary magazines such as *Goedang Tjerita* and *Boelan Poernama* (Salmon, 1981). Tan Tjin Kang is a socially conservative intellectual who represents the Chinese Indonesian community in their perception of the liberalism movement in colonial discourse.

In contrast, Kwee Tek Hoay adopted a more moderate stance, appearing to embrace liberal discourse for the advancement of women and the adaptation of Chinese-Indonesian society to modern times (Hoay, 1927). This is apparent in the various topics of his works, such as *Drama Di Boven Digoel* (1929-1932) and *Nonton Tjapgome* (1930). Kwee Tek Hoay seems to embrace colonial discourse's liberalism for the advancement of women, as evidenced by his efforts to establish magazines or newspapers that promote women's thoughts and roles in adapting to the times (Chan, 1995). In fact, this liberalism movement is seen not only in women's issues in his other works, but the schools founded by THHK (Tiong Hua Hwee Kuan) have received criticism for not adapting to the times. This is evident in his work titled *Roema sekola jang saja impiken* (Hoay, 1927). This fact provides evidence that Kwee Tek Hoay saw the problem of liberalism in the Chinese Indonesian community in a different light than Tan Tjin Kang. However, when these perspectives are applied to the indigenous woman, both authors utilize their distinct social strategies to reinforce the supremacy of the Chinese race within the colonial structure.

Based on this sociological framework, the two authors developed distinct strategies for navigating colonial society. Tan Tjin Kang focalizes indigenous women as victims of double oppression who lack a voice. By comparing them to non-indigenous women, he employs racial stereotypes to construct Chinese women as "more dignified and valuable." This mirrors the colonial segmentation of citizens into Europeans, Foreign Orientals (Chinese), and Indigenous peoples (Hewett, 2017). Such races are still polarised into Indo-native aristocrats or elite and common indigenous people. Tan Tjin Kang's worldview on Chinese or Chinese women of Chinese descent deserve to marry Chinese men. Chinese women cannot be compelled to become concubines or Nyai, whereas natives must accept their fate as Nyai and are not eligible to marry Chinese men.

Kwee Tek Hoay, conversely, views women's advancement through the lens of cultural inheritance. In his work, the descendant of a Nyai can be accepted into the Chinese family through an initiation of education. While this suggests a path toward equality, it is actually a "civilizing" process that demands the woman be separated from her indigenous tradition. Whether conservative or moderate, both authors remain inextricably linked to phallogocentric views. Women in their texts serve as secondary characters or vehicles for male power, burdened with preserving traditions while being denied a truly autonomous voice.

The analysis of both texts reveals that the hybrid Chinese author-subject does not represent the indigenous woman's voice; instead, the authors occupy a contradictory position within the framework of dual colonialism. While these authors used their work to resist European colonial liberalism and forge a distinct Chinese identity, they simultaneously extended colonial hierarchies by portraying indigenous women as objects to be dominated. In this context, the indigenous woman is not merely a domestic figure but a objectified figure defined by imposed social misfortune, whose subjectivity is "killed" to make room for the author's patriarchal preferences. Consequently, she faces a triple oppression of race, tradition, and economic status (Lewis & Mills, 2003). This represents a "secondary colonization" where the Chinese male, himself a second-class citizen under Dutch law, reasserts his own supremacy by placing the indigenous woman in a pariah class that no one protects.

The novels *Peniti Dasi Barlian* (1922) (Tan Tjin Kang, 1922) and *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* (1927) (Hoay, 1927) collectively demonstrate how the hybrid Chinese author-subject utilizes an authoritative and controlling narratorial voice to reinforce the subalternity of the indigenous woman. While both texts engage in a struggle for Chinese cultural identity against European colonial liberalism, they remain trapped in a stratified race politics that subordinates the indigenous subject. In *Peniti Dasi Barlian*, (Tan Tjin Kang, 1922) the indigenous woman is rendered a "leftover" of the social system, while in *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang*, she is a material object to be "civilized" and annexed.

The following table 1 outlines the structural and ideological mechanisms used by both authors to maintain this hierarchy:



Table 1. Structural Comparison of Subalternity in Chinese-Indonesian Prose

Feature	Peniti Dasi Barlian (1922)	Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang (1927)
Narrative Trajectory	Exclusion/Abandonment: The indigenous woman is displaced and relegated to service.	Assimilation/Annexation: The indigenous identity is erased to permit cultural entry.
The "Masterly" Gaze	Views the woman as a utilitarian object and a domestic signifier of male power.	Views the woman as a liminal subject or a biological vessel for male lineage.
Mechanism of Subalternity	Physical Silence: Soematri is forced to validate her own erasure through a male voice.	Epistemic Violence: Roosminah must undergo the "decay" of her original identity.
Initiation Strategy	Absent; her status is fixed by race and a lack of recognized social class	Central; used as a tool of mimicry to transform the "native" into a "Chinese" subject.
Outcome for the Woman	Fixed in the pariah class; a silent complement to the domestic order.	Becomes a "Chinese Woman"; her indigenous self is effectively and culturally killed.
Authorial Position	Extends colonial discourse by treating the woman as material "garbage."	Deconstructs blood-based race only to enforce cultural superiority.

Based on the comparative evidence, neither author-subject represents the indigenous woman's voice. Instead, the texts serve as evidence of the dual oppression faced by the concubine (Lewis & Mills, 2003). While Chinese men were marginalized by Dutch colonialism, they reasserted their own supremacy by treating indigenous women as objects to be shaped in line with patriarchal preferences. In *Peniti Dasi Barlian*, the subalternity is achieved through abandonment; in *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang*, it is achieved through a civilizing mission that demands the total surrender of indigenous tradition and the shedding of the original identity.

Through the lens of feminist narratology, the subalternity of characters like Soematri and Marsiti is a structural product of restricted focalization (Rimmon-Kenan, 2003). The authors utilize an authoritative and controlling narratorial voice that denies the indigenous subject an independent interior consciousness and subjective psychological perspective. Unlike the representation of the Nyai in local indigenous literature, where characters like Nyai Ontosoroh emerge as subjects able to speak, these texts written by Chinese Indonesian authors ensure that the indigenous woman remains psychologically and racially silenced. She is a conduit for male sexuality and a guardian of a tradition that is not her own. Her presence in these texts is not as a human subject with an independent interior consciousness and subjective psychological perspective, but as a silent signifier of the racial and sexual superiority of the male author-subject. Her presence is confined to that of a "silent complement," confirming her status as the ultimate subaltern (Morton, 2007).

Besides, indigenous women were both colonial objects and evidence of the supremacy of the Chinese race. This not only shows the dual oppression of women. The fact that indigenous women are perceived as socially and racially inferior to Chinese women, let alone European women, is another issue. This fact gave credence to the idea that concubinage by indigenous women is something normal and acceptable as Nyai are the lowest race and group (Hewett, 2017). Indigenous women were not just colonial objects, but also ideological objects of the ideology of racial and sexual superiority. Additionally, this shows that indigenous women have earned the right to accept their fate as the lowest social class or as those with no social class in the structure of a patriarchal colonial society. This indicates that indigenous women's subjectivity is being killed, so that they are unable to speak and their presence is confined to complements and objects of suffering.

In both narratives, bodily control over indigenous women is inextricably linked to racial and sexual superiority. The indigenous woman is rendered a conduit and disposable object within colonial discourse, existing



solely to satisfy male sexuality and validate the Chinese race's supremacy (Hewett, 2017). This stands in stark contrast to the representation of Chinese women in these same texts, who are focalized as protectors of cultural tradition and symbolic guardians of racial honor. To preserve this identity, the male author "hides" Chinese women from the foreign gaze while treating indigenous women as "material objects" to be consumed or "civilized." This binary highlights the phallogocentric nature of the texts: the indigenous body is sacrificed to define the boundaries of Chinese Indonesian identity, ensuring her presence remains confined to a "subordinated narrative presence" to male authority.

A critical distinction arises in Kwee Tek Hoay's *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang*, where there appears to be a "hope" for the indigenous woman to rise through education. However, a deconstructionist critique reveals this as the ultimate form of epistemic violence. Roosminah only attains equality by "shedding" her indigenous identity, a process of cultural decay that allows her to be "re-written" as a Chinese woman. This suggests that Kwee Tek Hoay's concept of *Chineseness* had shifted from blood-based essentialism to a mastery of tradition. Yet, this "civilizing" mission still requires the total erasure of the indigenous self. This subalternity becomes even more apparent when compared to works by local indigenous authors, such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer's depiction of Nyai Ontosoroh in *This Earth of Mankind*. Unlike the silenced Soematri or the assimilated Roosminah, Ontosoroh is a subject able to speak and actively resist both colonial law and patriarchal limits. In the texts written by Chinese Indonesian authors, the *Nyai* is psychologically and racially silenced; in local resistance literature, she begins to reclaim her interior consciousness and subjective psychological experience.

By examining the ideological underpinnings of these Chinese Indonesian authors, it becomes evident that while they engaged in a project of cultural defense against European hegemony, their narratorial authority remained trapped within the stratified race politics of the colonial state (Show, 2023), illustrating a complex intersection between postcolonial hybridity and patriarchal control. The author's voice of these texts reveals that even when the narrative attempts to focalize the female experience or speak for the indigenous woman, it remains anchored in an authoritative public mode that is inextricably linked to the social and racial power of the author-subject (see Lanser, 1986; Stenberg, 2023). This narratorial stance suggests that the authors' position as Eastern Foreigner implicitly compels the text to utilize the indigenous woman as a symbolic site for demonstrating a perceived cultural and racial hierarchy over the native population. Consequently, this results in a restricted focalization where the indigenous woman is rendered the ultimate subaltern (Morton, 2007) not merely through plot events, but through a discursive strategy that denies her an interior consciousness and subjective psychological experience or an autonomous subjectivity. Even when the narrative structures grant her voice, it is implicitly designed to affirm her own subordination and submission to a domestic order that she did not construct. This reveals a masculinist postcolonial hybridity that reasserts its own hegemony by treating the indigenous woman as a "material object" to be either discarded, as in Tan Tjin Kang's conservative exclusion, or "civilized" through the epistemic violence of Kwee Tek Hoay's moderate liberalism (Susanto & Ardianto, 2021). This narratorial strategy effectively silences the subjectivity of the indigenous woman, confirming that her presence across both texts is not that of a self-determined human subject but a silent tool for the preservation of a tradition that demands either her total submission or her complete cultural disappearance.

5. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of *Peniti Dasi Barlian* and *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* reveals a profound intersection of racial patriarchy and class-based domination. The authors, positioned within a specific social class of the Chinese Indonesian community, utilize their narratives to stabilize a colonial social structure that elevates their race above the indigenous population. While Kwee Tek Hoay suggests that concubinage can lead to equality, this is only possible if the woman "sheds" her identity, an act of epistemic violence that civilizes the native only by erasing her. Conversely, Tan King Tjian maintains the indigenous woman as a controlled object, devoid of social awareness and agency. In both instances, the authors produce concubinage as a site where indigenous women are rendered among the most marginalized and systematically dehumanized subjects in colonial society.

Through the lens of feminist narratology, it is evident that the male narratorial gaze in these texts functions as an extension of colonial discourse. The indigenous woman is reduced to a "servant" of foreign male sexuality, strategically "hidden" from indigenous men and trapped within a patriarchal framework that exploits her body for



the interests of other races. This representation is a byproduct of postcolonial hybridity; while the authors may resist European liberalism to preserve their own traditions, they simultaneously adopt the racial politics of the colonizer to dominate the indigenous "Other." By focalizing the indigenous woman as a misfortune, the texts ensure she remains a subordinated narrative presence to Chinese male authority.

Ultimately, these narratives confirm the absolute subalternity of the indigenous woman. Her subjectivity is "killed" by a discourse that favors racial and sexual superiority, leaving her unable to speak or resist. In this stratified world, she is a conduit for male power, a pariah whose mind and body are occupied by a tradition that demands her total submission. These works illustrate that within the hybrid Chinese Indonesian discourse of the early 20th century, the indigenous woman exists only as a passive object, racially and psychologically silenced to maintain the precarious social standing of the hybrid male author-subject.

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Author Contributions

Both authors contributed equally have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Does this article screen for similarity?

Yes

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare. There is also no financial interest to report. The author certifies that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication.

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Cite this Article

Dwi Susanto, Yulitin Sungkowati, Subalternity and Racial Patriarchy in Colonial Chinese-Indonesian Fiction: A Postcolonial Feminist Reading, *Asian Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 9(3) (2026), 258-270. <https://doi.org/10.54392/ajir26316>

