




# Hybridity Lifestyle and Fashion in *Allah Jang Palsoe*

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**Abstract.** In a colonized country, a cultural encounter is inevitable. The natives, with their authentic culture and the colonizers carrying their colonial values, get into contact for an extended period. Dutch East Indies, Indonesia's former official name under the Dutch occupation, had a long colonial history and caused various cultures to intersect. Mimicry and cultural hybridity are two products of the intersection of cultures. The people of the Dutch East Indies, including the Chinese and other diaspora who had their own culture, tended to imitate the culture of their colonizers. Such impersonation can become a hybrid identity. The imitation of lifestyle and dress style represents the hybridity of the Dutch East Indies community during the colonial period. Kwee Tek Hoaij's drama, *Allah Jang Palsoe*, displays the mimicry of European culture performed by the Chinese-breed community. That eventually gave birth to hybridity. This play's depiction of mimicry and hybridity aligns with Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory. This study aims to bring to the surface the forms of hybridity resulting from different cultural intersections, mainly in lifestyle and fashion. The descriptive-qualitative method is used to interpret the mimicry and hybridity data gathered to describe the forms of hybridity in the people's way of life and clothing styles.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial, mimicry, hybridity, *Allah Jang Palsoe*

## 1 Introduction

Diaspora communities from China have been coming to Southeast Asia for centuries. Large-scale migration to Indonesia occurred during the reign of the Ming Dynasty. Their departure from their homeland was based on the turbulent economic conditions of China [8]. Domestic financial pressure welcomes the British government in Indonesia, which requires workers in the mining and plantation sector [4].

When the Dutch colonial government came to power in Indonesia, it imposed a social class political system based on race for all people living in the territory of Indonesia. The white race or European nation occupies the top class in that social class system. Then the second class is filled by East Asia, which includes the Chinese community.

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Bumiputera people occupy the lowest class. The enactment of social class aims to emphasize clear boundaries between races and between colonizers and colonized. The colonizing group will become superior and consider those under it or colonized as inferior [9]. This instilled mindset causes people who are in the second and third class to bow and see European society as first class in the system as patrons. The arrival of Chinese ethnic to Indonesia brought their original culture, which led to encounters with local and foreign cultures in Indonesia. In the end, the meeting between European, Chinese, and local cultures gave birth to a mixture of cultures or hybridity. The Chinese community more or less began to imitate the Western culture that they encountered in their lives. However, the Chinese still need to fully replicate and apply the European culture and their original traditions and culture. That makes Chinese society ambivalent.

The cultural contact in colonial society gave rise to interactions between the colonizers and the colonized, causing hybridity. Hybridity is a term that refers to interactions between different cultures that can create new cultures and identities with history and embodiment, and textuality. According to Homi K. Bhabha, imitation or mimicry reproduces European subjectivity in an impure colonial environment that has been shifted from its origins and reconfigured in the sensibility and anxiety of colonialism[2]. The colonized, in this case, the Chinese and native peoples, have never wholly imitated the colonialists' culture. That can be a mockery or mockery of the West [5]. Bhabha also said that mimicry is a cultural process where there is an opportunity for the agency from the colonial subject to enter the dominant power in a non-serious manner by showing subjectivity similar to that of the colonizer, although not entirely the same [1]. This cultural imitation can be in imitation of lifestyles and clothing styles so that they can look the same as the colonialists and elevate their social status. Homi K. Bhabha adopted the term ambivalence into colonial discourse as a complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. This ambivalence occurs because the colonized do not entirely oppose the colonizers [12].

In literary works, Peranakan Chinese authors exist well in producing outcomes. Their works are set in the colonial period according to the time they wrote them. One is the play Allah Jang Palseo, from now on referred to as AJP, by Kwee Tek Hoaij, written in 1919. This drama talks about the dynamics of a poor Chinese family living in Cicurug. Two centuries before the script of this play was written, the colonial government in 1742 issued a regulation that one must wear distinctive clothing according to each ethnicity. That aims to facilitate the distinction between them [10].

Previous research discussing postcolonial issues in Chinese Peranakan literature is used as a reference in this paper. The journal entitled "Ambivalence and Power of Colonized Women in Karina Adinda: Lelakon Indies Comedy Timoer in Three Parts" was written by Cahyaningrum Dewojati in 2017 [3]. This paper discusses hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and resistance arising from the interaction between colonizers and colonized in the drama Karina Adinda. The mimicry shown is a way of thinking and acting influenced by European idealism. Then, the ambivalence shown by the character is an ambivalence that shows a fluctuating attitude between rejecting and accepting colonial culture. In addition, the resistance carried out by the character is in the form of

rejecting European culture, refusing to worship, and squatting in front of a guest because it is considered demeaning[3].

This article wants to examine more about the style of dress and lifestyle of the hybrid Chinese community due to the influence of colonialism. That shows the confusion of the Chinese community with their identity in the dynamics of colonial life in the Dutch East Indies. Furthermore, this paper will use a qualitative method which will go through two stages. The first stage is the data collection stage. According to Faruk, data collection is a technique that is an extension of the human senses because it aims to collect empirical facts related to research problems [6]. After collecting data by reading AJP's drama script, the next stage is analysis. This data analysis uses Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory.

## 2 Discussion

### 2.1 Fashion and the Confusion of Chinese Society

The meeting of the culture brought by the Chinese community with the local Indonesian culture and the culture brought by the European society during the colonial era created a 'confused' identity. That causes the search for identity to continue. The story's beginning opens by telling a little about their lifestyle and habits as Chinese people who still apply the original culture, they brought with them. As in the quote below.

“View Front of a bamboo house in the village, with one half-closed door and two windows with bamboo bars. Above the door, and each window was taped to the dark yellow paper written in large Chinese letters” (AJP, 20) [7]

The quote above depicts the house of Tan Lauw Pe, a poor Chinese farmer, which the author appears at the story's beginning. In the quote, the author wants to explain clearly that this story is a story of typical dynamics in Chinese families. The author describes this drama's stage setting as a bamboo house with Chinese or *Hanzi* letters plastered on every window and door. That shows that as a Chinese family living in Indonesia at that time, they still preserved the ancestral culture of China.

Even though the writer starts with Chinese traditions and culture at the beginning of the story, but later shows a lot of mimicry or imitation. The dynamics of the Chinese community with other ethnic groups, especially Europeans, greatly influence their behavior. Superior Europeans are seen as a standard of behavior, a culture worthy of being imitated by other inferior ethnic groups, namely the Chinese and the natives. The attitude of glorifying European culture began to appear when the financial life of the ethnic Chinese community began to improve. The characters in AJP's drama show many mimicry actions. One is Kioe Lie's dress style after working in a factory.

“(Yan Nio goes inside: The door opens from the outside, and then comes Tan Kio Lie with a car and glasses, a long coat made of sortjoeantioe cloth whose buttons are open so you can see his shirt is an open jacket made of tricot, on his vest there is a gold watch chain across, with a silk tie bearing a diamond-tipped tie pin and in his mouth a large Manila cigarette).” (AJP, 69) [7]

The quote above describes Kioe Lie's dress style after becoming increasingly successful in his career and enriching himself. In 1972, the colonial government ruled that every ethnic group must wear distinctive clothes. However, at the beginning of the 20th

century, the colonials issued a policy of equalizing status (*gelijkstelling*) [10]. That caused the Chinese people who received equalization to leave their typical clothes and switch to Western-style clothes. Western-style clothing is considered a symbol of the establishment of the capitalists. That is in line with the description of Kioe Lie, whose dress style aligns with his rising social status. Through the character Lie, who is depicted as being born into a poor Chinese family, the author wishes to convey that Lie's partiality towards colonial capitalism results in a materialistic attitude, equalizing his social status. So that the style of dress also changed, no longer only with the use of typical European accessories, but all that was worn was typical European clothing. Besides clothing, smoking, a habit of European society, has become Kioe Lie's habit. European habits and lifestyles have become Kioe Lie's role models. Fashion styles resembling European styles are used to enhance image and social status. Indirectly, by practicing mimicry, Kioe Lie acknowledged that European culture is higher than Chinese culture.

In AJP, the depiction of characters with the dress style is not only on the character Kioe Lie but also on several other figures. That shows that in the dynamics of Chinese society, there are several behaviors in responding to the domination of European power. That is shown in the quote below.

"Kioe Lie (after watching for a while): Hey! I see there are two madams who dress in the Chinese way; are they Chinese mistresses?" (AJP, 96) [7]

"Kioe Lie quickly entered the side room and slipped behind the piano. Hap Nio and Yan Nio came not long after, dressed in Shanghai models, walking with their hands carrying rackets. Behind him walked Kioe Gie and Beng Sien, who were also carrying rackets, each smoking cigarettes" (AJP, 101) [7]

"Jongos: '... several Dutch and Chinese ladies and gentlemen from nearby companies, some from Sukabumi and Bogor, come here every week to play tennis and play music...'" (AJP, 98) [7]

The quotation above mentions that two Chinese madams wore typical Chinese clothing with a Shanghai style. They are Yan Nio and Hap Nio. Yan Nio is the wife of Kioe Gie, who has an Indonesian nationalist ideology and still respects and practices Chinese values and traditions. Hap Nio is a neighbor of the Tan Lauw Pe family and has been betrothed to Kioe Lie since childhood. However, the match was cancelled because Kioe Lie did not want to marry a poor woman. Hap Nio eventually married Beng Sien, a large plantation owner. The two husband and wife pairs have a wealthy financial background, but that does not make them change their dress style towards Western-style clothing and still maintain the typical Chinese clothing. However, on the other hand, it was stated that they and the ladies and gentlemen of the Netherlands regularly played tennis, a sport of Western origin. Kioe Gie's house is also a European-style house. As explained in the quote below.

"(View): the front of a small European-style house. One door on the right leads to the house's interior, and in the middle, there is another door that leads to a side room with a piano and shelves for violins, guitars, and other musical instruments. In the middle is a rattan table covered with a silk cloth embroidered in a wonderful Chinese way; on top is a vase full of fresh flowers. On the left are a wooden fence and stairs for the people to go down to the front yard leading to the main road. several pots filled with herbs are arranged neatly in the

corners and beside the fence, while some beautiful frames hang on the walls." (AJP, 96) [7]

The quotation above describes Kioe Gie's European-style house with interior trimmings, which are not even difficult for Indigenous ethnic middle-class people living in Indonesia to own. As a figure who rejected Dutch ideology, Kioe Gie consciously imitated European lifestyles. Kioe Gie associates with European people conducts European activities and habits such as tennis and owns a house with a European style and feel. However, in the story, Kioe Gie chooses to leave his job as a journalist when the Dutch ideology begins to insert him where he works. This can be seen in the following quote by Yan Nio, Kioe Gie's wife.

Yan Nio: "it's better to be a farmer who works in the garden with a clean mind than to be a hoofdredacteur who earns f 500 a month by betraying his people." (68)

These attitudes and behaviors indirectly show that Kioe Gie is ambivalent towards European culture. On the one hand, he rejects the ideology of capitalism and Dutch colonialism. Still, on the other hand, Gie tries hard to imitate the lifestyle and fashion culture they produce.

It also shows the ambivalent attitude of Kioe Gie. Even so, the imitation or mimicry attempts by Kioe Gie and those around him are always flawed, such as playing tennis wearing Shanghai-style clothes typical of the Chinese community, and the presence of European-style components in their homes, namely embroidered silk tablecloths, pianos, and various other European musical instruments. That confirms that Kioe Gie's lifestyle is a hybrid by combining local, European, and Chinese cultures. Meanwhile, his attitude of rejecting the ideology of colonialism brought by the Dutch but trying hard to imitate their lifestyle is part of his ambivalence. According to Bhabha, ambivalence in colonial discourse is an acceptance and rejection that characterizes the relationship between colonizers and colonized. Ambivalent relations arise because of the behavior of the colonized, who oppose colonialism and, on the other hand, accept power and try to fight [11]. In this case, Kioe Gie opposed colonialism by sticking to his nationalist and Chinese ideology. On the other hand, he still accepted power by conducting typical European activities and owning a European-style house. Still, he also tried to fight by quitting his job as a journalist when the company he began to work with Dutch ideology was inserted. These things clearly show Kioe Gie's ambivalence.

## 2.2 Coachman and Fashion

As previously explained, the Dutch implemented a social class system for all people in their territory during the colonial era. The Bumiputera people occupy the lowest class, namely the third class under the East Asian class. In the AJP script, which tells about the dynamics of a Chinese family, several characters from other ethnicities appear. The author presents the Bumiputera community a bit through the figures of the coachman

and the servant at the beginning and end of the story, which play little of a role. However, the author presents the following figure of the coachman among the Chinese figures.

'Kioe Lie enters; Kioe Gie turned to the living room. He saw the coachman standing in the middle of the door, and the coachman tightly tied his sarong around his waist; his sleeves were both rolled up high as if he was preparing to fight.' (AJP, 31) [7]

Apart from the Chinese people's dress style, the author also presented a few dress styles of other ethnicities at that time. In the above quote is said that a horse-drawn carriage coachman is wearing a sarong. In this case, the sarong is considered the hallmark of the dress of the Bumiputera people. As the lowest class, this shows that this coachman needs to get equality from the Dutch because he still wears the typical clothes of the Bumiputera people. Economic conditions were also affected because dressing in the Dutch style was seen as a symbol of stability. Meanwhile, the coachman here is considered a symbol of poverty for the Bumiputera people.

### 3 Conclusion

The enactment of the social class system aims to clarify the boundaries between colonizers and colonized. That triggers the interaction of the second and third classes as the colonized, which gives rise to hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence. In AJP's drama, one of the forms of mimicry that appears several times is in the use of European clothing and lifestyle as practiced by the character Kioe Lie from the Chinese community. Furthermore, there is an ambivalence that emerges through the character Kioe Gie. As a figure who rejected Dutch ideology, Kioe Gie consciously imitated European lifestyles. Kioe Gie associates with European people carries out European activities and habits such as tennis and owns a house with a European style and feel. This attitude shows that Kioe Gie is also ambivalent towards European culture. Mimicry attempts by Kioe Gie and those around him are always flawed, such as playing tennis wearing Shanghai-style clothes typical of the Chinese community and the presence of European-style components in their homes, namely embroidered silk tablecloths, pianos, and various other European musical instruments. That confirms that Kioe Gie's lifestyle is a hybrid by combining local, European, and Chinese cultures. In addition to the Chinese people who imitate European clothing, the AJP script also presents the style of dress from the native ethnic group. That is present through the character of the coachman, who wears a sarong. The sarong represents the distinctive way of dressing for the Bumiputera people, which is considered a symbol of poverty. The attitudes and behavior of the Chinese characters in the AJP drama represent the closeness between colonizers and colonialists in an environment of colonialism. So that the use or style of dress that is presented in the AJP drama can represent the social class of the perpetrators.

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