



Research Article

Gender Equality in the Early Twentieth Century: A Historical Analysis of Peranakan Chinese Literary Works in *Doenia Baroe* (1930)

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Abstract

This study examines representations of gender equality in Peranakan Chinese literary works published in the newspaper *Doenia Baroe* in 1930. As a medium that provided a relatively broad space for expression and social imagination, *Doenia Baroe* became an essential platform for Peranakan Chinese women in the Dutch East Indies, who stood at the crossroads between conservative Chinese traditions and the expanding influence of Western modernity. Through formal education—both in Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (THHK) schools and Western-style schools—a group of educated women emerged who began to recognize and question the inequality of gender roles. Employing historical research methods, including heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, and integrating a gender theory approach, this study analyzes how literary works functioned as a medium for critique, proposed solutions, and reflections on women's struggles against cultural constraints. The findings indicate that female characters in these works display a growing awareness of the importance of education, freedom in choosing life partners, personal independence, and the courage to enter the public sphere. In addition, the authors frequently portray tragic consequences as moral warnings that highlight tensions between tradition and modernity. Overall, the representation of gender equality in Peranakan Chinese literature reflects broader social dynamics and underscores the role of literature as a significant arena for women's ideological struggles against gender injustice in the Dutch East Indies during the early twentieth century.

INTRODUCTION

From the nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the image of women in the Dutch East Indies was closely associated with concubinage, particularly with the figure of the *nyai*. These local women lived with European men outside of formal marriage. According to Van Marle (Hellwig, 2007), the term "*nyai*" originally referred to a young woman or younger sister. Over time, however, it came to denote a concubine whose social and economic existence was entirely dependent on her European master. Such women could be easily abandoned or transferred to another man at the master's discretion. Hellwig further notes that "the Company bought women to be married as wives, on the condition that the women allowed to marry shared the same Christian religion as the European men." In this arrangement, women had virtually no space to negotiate their position or claim personal rights. More broadly, the status of women—particularly Peranakan Chinese women—was regulated by conservative traditions and rigid cultural norms. Women were socially expected to become wives and mothers and were

therefore primarily trained in domestic management. Although they carried out numerous responsibilities, they were largely excluded from claiming rights for themselves (Hellwig, [2007](#), pp. 36–38).

The lives of Peranakan Chinese women were further shaped by family values rooted in Confucian teachings. Within this moral framework, women were expected to adhere to three fundamental principles: obedience to their husbands, loyalty to their rulers, and filial piety toward their parents. Gender relations in Chinese society were also structured by a patrilineal system, which was upheld within Confucian ideology. The positions of fathers and sons were central, as the eldest son was expected to assume the father's role after his death. Inheritance within Chinese families was typically passed down exclusively to sons (Mulyana, [2006](#), p. 44). This system constituted a significant barrier to women's participation in public life, both formally and informally. Nevertheless, this situation began to shift gradually as women gained access to formal education.

In the early twentieth century, Peranakan Chinese children had access to two primary forms of formal education: Chinese education through Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (THHK) schools and Western education through Hollandsch-Chineesche Schools (HCS). These institutions, established under colonial governance, became the primary educational choices for Peranakan Chinese families. Each educational pathway produced distinct orientations and worldviews. Graduates of THHK schools tended to look toward China, as Confucian values and Chinese cultural traditions were strongly emphasized in the curriculum. In contrast, those educated in Western schools were inclined—though to varying degrees—to orient themselves toward the Netherlands. Some sought to maintain a neutral position by preserving their Chinese identity while selectively adopting Western ideas as markers of progress. Others adopted a more critical stance, aligning themselves with anti-colonial movements and expressing support for indigenous Indonesian nationalism (Suryadinata, [1998](#), p. 14).

Women who were exposed to either Chinese or Western education played a significant role in initiating a wave of emancipation. They began asserting themselves economically by establishing various home-based enterprises and increasingly entered public life as writers and intellectuals. Women actively voiced their perspectives in the press, contributing articles, essays, short stories, and poetry to newspapers and magazines. Some also translated literary works from Chinese or Western sources, while others held editorial positions in prominent publications. One notable figure was Tjoa Hin Hoeij, born in Bogor in 1907, who became a significant advocate for women's emancipation through her involvement in the press. She served as editor-in-chief of the magazine *Istri* (1930), which articulated women's aspirations, and worked as a copy editor for the newspaper *Keng Po*. At a time when women's participation in journalism was still considered socially taboo, many female writers adopted pseudonyms—often flower names such as "Angrek," "Dahlia," or "Rose"—to conceal their identities (Chan, [1995](#), p. 48). The tension between adhering to Chinese cultural traditions and pursuing a modern lifestyle placed women in a precarious position, limiting their direct participation in public spaces. Consequently, many articulated their aspirations for equality through writing, particularly in literary form.

Despite this significance, Peranakan Chinese literature produced during the Dutch East Indies period has not been widely utilized as a source for analyzing gender issues and women's struggles. Literary genres such as poetry, short stories, and serialized narratives offer valuable insights into authors' perspectives and responses to their social environments (Wellek & Warren, [1970](#), p. 15). Through literary representation, historical realities can be traced, including relationships between individuals or social groups and the broader cultural, political, governmental, or religious contexts in which they lived (Shipley, [1962](#), p. 87). This study,

therefore, explores the aspirations and struggles of Peranakan Chinese women for gender equality through literary works published in *Doenia Baroe*.

The literary works featured in *Doenia Baroe* portray the lives of modern women in the early twentieth century. Approximately sixteen works were published, most of which position women as central characters. These writings primarily address issues of women's education, behavior, and lifestyle, reflecting shifting mindsets and efforts to break free from restrictive traditional customs that impeded women's advancement. Against this background, this study addresses two central questions: how was the struggle for gender equality articulated in these literary works, and what roles did these texts play in shaping the consciousness of Peranakan Chinese women as they confronted the tensions between ancestral traditions and modernity in the Dutch East Indies?

METHOD

A clearly defined research method and analytical approach are essential for addressing the objectives of this study. This research employs the historical method as its primary methodological framework. According to Gottschalk, historical research consists of four main stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Gottschalk, [1986](#), p. 37).

The first stage, heuristics, involves the systematic collection of sources. This study utilizes both primary and secondary sources of information. The primary source consists of the newspaper *Doenia Baroe*. In contrast, secondary sources are obtained through library research and include books, academic journals, and theses related to gender equality in the Dutch East Indies, particularly those examining Peranakan Chinese literary works. Following source collection, source criticism is conducted to assess the credibility, reliability, and relevance of the data. Materials drawn from *Doenia Baroe* are examined and compared with existing scholarly research to contextualize and validate interpretations of gender equality during the Dutch East Indies period.

The subsequent stage, interpretation, focuses on analyzing and synthesizing the data derived from *Doenia Baroe*. At this stage, information is critically examined, contextualized, and organized into a coherent analytical narrative. The interpreted data are then presented in written form during the final stage, historiography. At this stage, the researcher reconstructs and presents a historical account of gender equality in the Dutch East Indies during the early twentieth century, based on a systematic analysis of Peranakan Chinese literary works published in *De Nederlandse Oost-Indische Tijdschrift (Doenia Baroe)*.

In addition to the historical method, this study employs a theoretical approach to reconstruct the social realities under examination. Conceptually, the analysis is grounded in gender theory. Gender is understood as a cultural construct that differentiates roles, behaviors, mentalities, and social expectations between men and women (Women's Studies Encyclopedia, [1999](#), p. 153). Within the social sciences, gender refers to socially constructed roles and positions that shape relationships between men and women and often generate inequality and the marginalization of women. However, these conditions are not static and may shift as women develop greater awareness and actively seek gender equality (Rahardjo, [1996](#), p. 260).

Drawing on gender theory, this study examines how Peranakan Chinese literary works contributed to and reflected the dynamics of women's struggles for equality. The sixteen literary works published in *Doenia Baroe* depict women's lives during a period marked by tensions between entrenched traditions and the pressures of Western modernity. Consequently, gender theory offers a suitable and effective analytical framework for interpreting these texts.

Through this approach, the study elucidates women's efforts to negotiate equality with men, as reflected in their mentalities, aspirations, and social roles within Peranakan Chinese society in the early twentieth century.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Portrait of the Role and Status of Peranakan Chinese Women

From the nineteenth to the early twentieth century, women frequently appeared as central thematic subjects in literary works, particularly in Peranakan Chinese literature. Peranakan Chinese literary works were produced by Chinese authors residing in the Dutch East Indies. According to Salmon (2010), Chinese literary production in the Indies began to develop around 1870. This body of literature encompassed a wide range of narratives, including fantasy, martial arts stories, and realist accounts that reflected contemporary social issues. The narrative structures of Peranakan Chinese literary works closely mirrored the authors' perspectives and cultural orientations.

First, writers who maintained strong emotional and cultural ties to their ancestral homeland often foregrounded Chinese culture in their works. They produced numerous adaptations and translations of classical Chinese literature, many of which circulated widely in the Indies. During this period, historical narratives such as *Sam Kok* were frequently translated and published either as standalone books or serialized in newspapers, reinforcing cultural continuity with China.

Second, authors who identified more closely with their birthplace in the Indies often incorporated indigenous characters and local social contexts into their narratives. These works commonly explored themes of interracial relationships, particularly stories involving a *nyai* who married or lived with a European man. One example is *Tjerita Controleur Malheure* (1912) by Th. H. Poa, which tells the story of a dancer named Sarinten who becomes the *nyai* of a European man, Malheure. In this narrative, Sarinten willingly accepts her role as a *nyai*. When Malheure proposes marriage, she initially feels inferior due to her poverty and is ashamed to stand beside him. Malheure, however, disregards her social status and family background. The story concludes with Sarinten living happily with Malheure and bearing a child whom he legally recognizes. While the narrative offers a relatively positive portrayal of a *nyai* and depicts a male character who challenges social hierarchies, it simultaneously reveals an internalized sense of female inferiority that remains deeply embedded in women's self-perception. Similarly, *Tjerita Oey Se* by Thio Tjin Boen portrays a woman named Kim Nio who marries a Javanese officer but faces severe opposition from her parents, ultimately being disowned for crossing ethnic boundaries.

Third, writers oriented toward Western culture generally focused on portraying the ideals and social conditions associated with Western modernity. Literary works from this orientation frequently addressed themes of women's emancipation, including access to education, employment, economic independence, and gender equality. Many short stories and novels from this period depicted young female protagonists shaped by Western education and modern lifestyles who openly rejected traditional norms. As a consequence, these characters often met tragic fates—being disowned by their families, abandoned by lovers, or ostracized by their communities. Notably, many of these narratives were written by male authors. They functioned as cautionary tales aimed at young women educated in European-style schools, who were perceived as vulnerable to transgressing established gender norms in their pursuit of autonomy (Chandra, 2015).

Beyond reflecting individual authorial perspectives, Peranakan Chinese literary works were profoundly shaped by the broader cultural environment of the Dutch East Indies. Lan (1961) observes that the Peranakan Chinese community simultaneously navigated three overlapping cultural spheres. The first was Chinese culture, which embodied ancestral identity; the second was indigenous culture, representing the social environment in which Peranakan Chinese were born and raised; and the third was Western culture, which was widely regarded as a marker of progress and modernity. These intersecting influences significantly shaped the literary imagination of Peranakan Chinese writers. Consequently, while engaging with diverse cultural elements, most scholarly works continued to position Chinese identity at the core of their narratives.

Peranakan Chinese literary works were also characterized by distinctive thematic patterns that contributed to their popularity among readers. According to Tjan, several recurring themes can be identified. First, realism: many stories claimed to be based on real-life experiences. Authors often emphasized the authenticity of their narratives, frequently beginning with phrases such as “*Satoe tjerita jang soenggoe-soenggoe soeda terdjadi...*” (“A story that truly happened...”), a convention commonly found in Peranakan Chinese literature (Liji, 1987). Second, didacticism: nearly all works contained educational elements intended to instruct and warn younger generations against repeating the mistakes of their predecessors. Third, issues of race, interethnic marriage, and religious belief were prominent, with narratives often placing characters from different ethnic or religious backgrounds in situations of moral conflict that demanded sacrifice and frequently resulted in tragedy. These conflicts typically stage a confrontation between traditional and modern worldviews, with the older generation embodying conservative values and the younger, Western-educated generation representing new ideas. Finally, themes of patriotism also emerged, expressing ideals of justice and the defense of moral truth.

Peranakan Chinese Malay literary works were disseminated not only in book form but also extensively through newspapers and magazines. In the early twentieth century, as the economic conditions of the Peranakan Chinese community improved, increasing numbers of Chinese individuals became involved in new economic sectors, including publishing and journalism. Journalists and entrepreneurs established printing houses and newspapers, which significantly contributed to the growth of literary production. One such publication was *Doenia Baroe*, founded in 1930. Rich in scholarly content, *Doenia Baroe* offered valuable insights into the lives of women in the early twentieth century—a period marked by the emergence of modernity in the Dutch East Indies. Modernity, widely associated with notions of progress, became a central reference point for writers in imagining the social realities and challenges faced by young people, particularly women, during this transformative era.

Representation of Gender Equality in Literary Works

The newspaper *Doenia Baroe* was published in Padang in 1930. It featured a diverse range of content, including advertisements, news, and literary works such as poetry, *pantun*, short stories, and serialized fiction. From its inception, *Doenia Baroe* positioned itself as an inclusive publication, welcoming readers from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. This orientation is explicitly stated in its first issue:

“Haloean dan toedjoeannja ‘DOENIA BAROE’ ada bersifat LIBERAAL, dengan halamannja terboeka goena segala golongan, partij dan bangsa; teroetama boeat goenanja bangsa Asia rata-rata” (*Doenia Baroe*, 1930, p. 1).

This statement indicates that *Doenia Baroe* was not intended solely for the Chinese community in the Dutch East Indies but sought a broader readership across social, political,

and ethnic groups. It also reflects the editorial vision of expanding circulation by addressing the interests and concerns of a broad audience.

Doenia Baroe was published monthly from early January to 30 November 1930, producing approximately eleven issues. It was printed by Boek- & Drukkerij “Djiet Sien” under the leadership of editor-in-chief Lie Soeij Ho, assisted by editors Charles Chen and L. Nan Chiang. The newspaper primarily featured literary works written in Malay by Peranakan Chinese authors from various regions of the Dutch East Indies, including Tangerang, Batavia, Cirebon, Surabaya, and Semarang (Sari et al., [2020](#)).

Among the contributors to *Doenia Baroe* was Thio Tjin Boen (1885–1940), a journalist, translator, and prolific novelist. He served as editor for several newspapers, including *Perniagaan* (1926–1929), *Taman Sari*, and *Mustika* (1929), and authored numerous novels such as *Oey Se* (1903), *Njai Sumirah* (1917), and *Sie Tjaij Kim* (1917). Thio Tjin Boen also contributed opinion pieces and short stories to *Doenia Baroe*. Another notable contributor was Ong Kim Tiat (1893–1964), who was well known for his martial arts fiction, including *Siaw in Jang Gaib*, *Kang Ouw Soe Hoe atawa Djago Silat jang Mengoembara* (1930), and *Resianja Saorang Boeangan* (1930).

During its publication period, *Doenia Baroe* featured serialized fiction, short stories, adaptations, and poetry. The serialized narratives (*feuilletons*) were written by three authors: *Achirnja Toch Beroentoeng* by S. L. Foe Sen Lee, *Tjinta Jang Tida Terbalas* by Thio Tjin Boen, and *Kaloe Tida Djodo atawa Menjesal Kamoedian Tida Goenanja* by Ong Kim Tiat and Jo Boen Ek. Short stories included *Oh Nasib* by Tan Po Chuan, *The Beauty of Padang* or *Pengaroehnja Tjinta* by Lee, *Gadis Cordelia Dengem Itoe Bangsat* by T. L. Huang, and *Siapa Lebih Tjerdik* by Thio Tjin Boen. In addition, several *syair*—poetic compositions expressing emotion, reflection, and moral commentary—were published, including *Djangan Poetoes Harapan* by Lie Ken Ho, *Petasan* by Su Jeun Chien, and *Pergaoelan dan Kedjoedjoeran* by Lie Khong Ho.

The literary works published in *Doenia Baroe* articulate diverse representations of gender equality between men and women. At the time of the newspaper’s publication, the Dutch East Indies was undergoing social transformation, particularly in education and lifestyle. Peranakan Chinese communities increasingly gained access to Dutch education, which parents viewed as a pathway to better employment opportunities within the colonial administration. Exposure to Western education significantly shaped the worldview of young people, introducing them to ideas of freedom, equality, and individual autonomy that were prevalent in Europe.

This transformation created a generational divide within the Peranakan Chinese community. The older generation largely resisted Western lifestyles, viewing them as incompatible with ancestral traditions. In contrast, the younger generation—especially women—embraced modernity and adopted lifestyles similar to those of Europeans. Modern women aspired to freedom without rigid gender distinctions, whether in mentality, social status, or personal ambition. These tensions are vividly reflected in the literary works published in *Doenia Baroe*.

One prominent example is “*Achirnja Toch Beroentoeng*” by S. L. Foe Sen Lee, a serialized story that appeared in the first issue of *Doenia Baroe*. The story centers on Pauline, an educated young woman with progressive views on gender relations. Pauline believes that women must possess courage and intellectual independence and should not remain under male domination. The narrative highlights the importance of education in empowering women to

preserve their dignity and shape their own futures, particularly in a social context where women were often subject to familial and patriarchal authority.

Pauline is portrayed as a modern woman who challenges traditional expectations by actively participating in public life. She enjoys dancing, attending parties, and socializing freely with both men and women. Her lifestyle reflects a form of gender equality in social behavior, mirroring the freedoms enjoyed by European women in the early twentieth century. At the same time, the narrative reaches a tragic climax, as Pauline ultimately regrets her inability to reconcile Western modernity with her cultural background. The author presents her fate as a moral warning, suggesting that abandoning traditional values in pursuit of Western-style freedom may lead to personal ruin. Thus, the story simultaneously celebrates women's emancipation through education while cautioning against the uncritical adoption of Western modernity.

A contrasting representation appears in *Kaloe Tida Djodo atawa Menjesal Kamoedian Tida Goenanja* by Ong Kim Tiat and Jo Boen Ek. This story depicts Hian-nio, a young woman educated at a Hollandsch-Chineesche School, whose education is abruptly halted when she reaches marriageable age. While her male counterpart, Kian Ho, is permitted to continue his education in Batavia, Hian-nio is withdrawn from school and required to assist in the family business. This unequal treatment highlights persistent gender disparities in educational opportunities. Nevertheless, the story also grants Hian-nio a degree of agency: she is allowed to choose her own marriage partner and exercises this right by rejecting unsuitable proposals. The narrative thus reflects a negotiated form of gender equality—one that acknowledges women's autonomy while remaining constrained by traditional family authority.

Other works further complicate the representation of women. In *Pengaroehnja Tjinta*, a young woman named Souw Eng Nio is supported by her parents in prioritizing education over marriage, illustrating a progressive attitude toward women's autonomy. Conversely, stories such as *Oh... Nasib* and *Itoe Tjinta Jang Membawa Kematian atawa Hatinja Orang Prempoean* depict tragic outcomes for women whose lives are controlled by patriarchal authority, underscoring women's vulnerability within traditional family structures.

Distinct from these narratives is *Siapa Lebih Tjerdik?* by Thio Tjin Boen, which presents Annie as an intelligent and resourceful character who successfully outwits a male detective. This portrayal challenges conventional representations of women as weak or passive, asserting women's intellectual equality with men. Similarly, the translated classic *Kiang Thaij Kong Kian Tjoe Ge toeroen dari Koen Loen San* depicts Ma-sie as an economically independent woman who manages her household and guides her husband, highlighting women's leadership and practical competence.

In addition to prose narratives, poetry in *Doenia Baroe* also articulated gender equality. The *syair Varia* portrays changing social interactions among young men and women, influenced by European culture, and emphasizes equality in lifestyle and behavior. Women are no longer confined to domestic roles but participate actively in public and social life alongside men.

Overall, the literary works published in *Doenia Baroe* reflect the broader social dynamics of modernity in the Dutch East Indies. Gender awareness among women was expressed through demands for equality in education, social interaction, economic participation, and personal autonomy. While these works often retained elements of traditional morality, they nonetheless reveal an emerging consciousness that challenged patriarchal norms and redefined women's roles in early twentieth-century Peranakan Chinese society.

The Influence of Peranakan Chinese Literary Works on the Gender Struggle

In the early twentieth century, as society in the Dutch East Indies increasingly operated within a modernizing environment, some parents began to provide their daughters with greater space, particularly in the realm of education. Progressive and forward-thinking families no longer insisted that girls remain confined to the domestic sphere. Instead, they allowed daughters to pursue formal education, engage in work outside the home, and, in some instances, exercise autonomy in choosing marriage partners. During this period, educated women developed a clearer awareness of their roles, attitudes, and social positions, which in turn fostered aspirations for gender equality.

The concept of gender equality articulated in this context encompassed not merely identical roles for men and women but a balance grounded in harmony, compatibility, and reciprocity. According to Achmad, as cited in Sumiarni (2004), equality represents the realization of legal guarantees in everyday social practices shared by men and women within both family and societal relations. These relations are characterized by mutual respect, care, support, empowerment, and opportunities for individual growth, particularly in making free yet responsible choices. Within such an egalitarian framework, women possess the right to determine their own roles, social status, and lifestyle in accordance with their personal aspirations and desires.

Despite these emerging ideals, the position of Peranakan Chinese women remained deeply constrained by long-standing traditions and customs. Within Peranakan Chinese families, women were typically regarded as secondary to men. Sons were designated as heirs and were expected to assume leadership of the household following the father's death. Consequently, when women encountered new ideas of self-liberation and gender equality—particularly through education and exposure to modern thought—their social position became increasingly complex. Gender, understood as a social construct composed of learned traits, attitudes, and behaviors, is theoretically mutable; however, in practice, these patterns are complicated to transform because they are deeply embedded in individual consciousness and collective social norms (Sadli, 2000, p. 5).

Traditional gender assumptions—such as the association of masculinity with authority and femininity with weakness—reinforced the belief that men must always protect women. These ideas were instilled in me from an early age through my family upbringing and community expectations, making me resistant to change. In the Peranakan Chinese context, such norms were further reinforced by Confucian teachings that emphasized female obedience and moral restraint, particularly in matters extending beyond the domestic sphere. As a result, attempts to challenge or reinterpret these values often provoked strong resistance within the community.

Peranakan Chinese women who aspired to Western-style lifestyles frequently faced criticism and moral scrutiny from those who upheld traditional cultural values. They were cautioned against imitating Western women, who were perceived as overly free in their social interactions with men. These tensions reveal the contested nature of gender roles and status, particularly for women navigating the space between tradition and modernity.

In this context, literary works published in *Doenia Baroe* became an essential medium through which women's aspirations for personal freedom and gender equality were articulated. Through fiction, poetry, and serialized narratives, authors advocated for equality between men and women in behavior, lifestyle, and access to opportunities beyond the domestic sphere. Gender equality, as reflected in these works, implied not domination by one gender over

another but the recognition of equal rights, responsibilities, and social participation for both men and women (Sumiarni, [2004](#)).

Education and gender roles thus emerged as recurring and interconnected themes in Peranakan Chinese literary works of the early twentieth century. Educated women, in particular, began to question established norms governing morality, lifestyle, and marriage. Marriage, which had long functioned as an arrangement determined by families—often with economic considerations prioritized by male authority—was increasingly challenged by women seeking autonomy and emotional fulfillment.

Beyond education and marriage, women's behavior and lifestyle were also portrayed as central markers of gender equality. Literary works in *Doenia Baroe* consistently challenged the notion that women were inherently fragile, passive, or confined to domestic life. Instead, women were depicted as active social beings capable of participating in public life, engaging in leisure activities, and asserting their preferences. In this sense, gender is understood not merely as a biological distinction but as a social status embedded within a complex network of relationships between men and women (Lorber, [1997](#)).

Accordingly, the representation of gender in Peranakan Chinese literary works does not rest on physical or biological differences between the sexes. Instead, “gender” refers to socially constructed distinctions in roles, attitudes, behaviors, and social status. As defined in the *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*, cited in Sumiarni ([2004](#)), gender is a cultural concept that differentiates roles, mentalities, and characteristics between men and women. This understanding is clearly reflected in the literary portrayals of modern women in *Doenia Baroe*, who navigate changing social expectations while negotiating cultural continuity.

The growing gender awareness among Peranakan Chinese women also manifested in collective action. Women's associations such as Chung-Hwa Fu-Nu Hwee (Chinese Women's Association), Hoedjin Hwee (Women's Association), and Chie Mey Hwee (Sisters' Association) emerged during this period. These organizations provided spaces for women to gather, socialize, and engage in activities such as sewing, cooking demonstrations, music, drama, excursions, and charitable work. The establishment of these associations demonstrates that women were becoming increasingly conscious of their roles in public life and were actively seeking platforms to express solidarity, assert their agency, and engage in social participation.

CONCLUSION

Peranakan Chinese literary works of the early twentieth century introduced an essential discourse on the social transformations experienced by Peranakan Chinese women. These transformations were closely linked to shifts in lifestyle associated with access to education, growing independence, and emerging demands for equality in both private and public spheres. Women who had previously been positioned as passive subjects increasingly asserted their identities in public life. Nevertheless, women's calls for change were often interpreted as challenges to long-standing Chinese cultural values. Consequently, by the late 1930s, literary expressions of gender equality tended to be articulated with caution rather than overt advocacy.

The literary works published in *Doenia Baroe* offer an evident reflection of the gender equality envisioned by women during this period. Authors contributing to the newspaper expressed support for women's aspirations for equality while simultaneously maintaining allegiance to Chinese cultural identity and family values. As a result, these works reveal two interconnected perspectives on gender equality.

The first perspective supports the transformation of women's lives in the direction of progress and modernity. In these representations, modern women are portrayed as increasingly conscious of their social roles and status, capable of participating in education, work, and public life. The second perspective, however, emphasizes moral guidance and restraint, encouraging women not to abandon the cultural and ethical values embedded in Chinese tradition. Within this framework, women continue to be positioned as the moral anchors of society, expected to balance personal autonomy with cultural responsibility. Implicitly, the authors suggest that not all aspects of Western modernity labeled as "progressive" are necessarily beneficial for women's well-being.

This study contributes to the broader field of gender history by demonstrating how literary texts functioned as a medium for negotiating gender relations within a colonial and multicultural context. Although the analysis is limited to the newspaper *Doenia Baroe*, the findings provide valuable insights into the lived experiences and aspirations of women in the Dutch East Indies during the early twentieth century. Future research would benefit from expanding the scope of analysis to include other contemporary literary and journalistic publications, particularly those addressing Chinese women, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of modern womanhood and gender discourse in the colonial era.

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