

## MODERNIZING OF JAVANESE WOMEN DRESSING STYLE CULTURE IN 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY: THE EDUCATION IMPACT

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### ABSTRACT

*The Dutch colonialism not only leaves stories about exploitation, the breakdown of social strata, and other inhumane stories. On the other hand, the presence of Dutch colonialism in Nusantara gives the influence of modern culture to several aspects of bumiputra people's lives. After the colonization runs for centuries in Nusantara, the colonial government seems to have the awareness for "return the favor" to the bumiputra people by implement the Ethical Policy that are aimed at improving the welfare of bumiputra people. After the enactment of Ethical Policy, Javanese people get into the modernization, one of them in the education aspect. After receiving the western education models, Javanese women began more often wearing the western dressing style. This article try to explain the women history in the appearance style aspects as the one of implementation education impacts by the colonial government for the bumiputra people.*

**Keywords:** Ethical policy; education; bumiputra; dressing style

### ABSTRAK

Kolonialisme Belanda tidak hanya meninggalkan cerita tentang eksploitasi, pemecahan strata sosial, dan cerita tidak manusiawi lainnya. Di sisi lain, kehadiran kolonialisme Belanda di Nusantara memberikan pengaruh budaya modern terhadap beberapa aspek kehidupan masyarakat bumiputra. Setelah praktik kolonisasi berjalan sekian abad di wilayah Nusantara, pemerintah kolonial tampak memiliki kesadaran untuk "membalas budi" kepada masyarakat bumiputra dengan menerapkan Politik Etis yang bertujuan untuk memperbaiki kesejahteraan masyarakat bumiputra. Setelah diberlakukannya Politik Etis, orang Jawa mulai memasuki era modernisasi, salah satunya dalam aspek pendidikan. Setelah menerima model pendidikan barat, wanita Jawa mulai lebih sering mengenakan gaya berpakaian barat. Artikel ini mencoba menjelaskan sejarah perempuan dalam aspek gaya penampilan sebagai salah satu implementasi edukasi dampak pemerintah kolonial bagi masyarakat Bumiputra.

**Kata kunci:** Poltik Etis; pendidikan; gaya berpakaian

## INTRODUCTION

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a glory period for the Dutch, but the condition was inversely related with the situation of Javanese society. The Javanese people condition early 20<sup>th</sup> century is quite concerning. The population of Java are growing rapidly, but the welfare of the population is still relatively deficient. This is caused by hunger, natural disasters such as drought, cases of crop failure, mountain eruptions to cause famine in Java (Vlekke, 2008). Seeing these conditions, van Deventer wrote an article entitled "*Een Eereschuld*" was published in *De Gids* journal as a criticism for the Dutch government which had benefited greatly from the "Cultuurstelsel" policy without balanced the improvement of Dutch East Indies welfare people (Kartodirdjo, 1991). The criticism of van Deventer then expressed the humanity of the Dutch government by making a policy known as "Ethical Politics". This policy was implemented as a form of reciprocation of the Dutch government to improve the *bumiputra* welfare. Some of the core aspects of ethical politics policy include: (a) irrigation, building and repairing irrigation means for agricultural purposes; (b) immigration invites the population to move, from an infertile place to a exuberate place; (c) education, expanding the aspect of teaching and education (Ricklefs, 2007; Wiharyanto, 2006).

Ethical policy in education aspects is influential in the development and expansion of education and teaching in the Dutch East Indies. Since 1900, there have been schools for *priyayi* and ordinary people that are evenly distributed in every regions. Furthermore, the society is also a kind of mental exchange between the Dutch and *bumiputra*. Ethical politics supporters are concerned about the *bumiputra* getting socio-cultural discrimination. To achieve this goal, they tried to educate the *bumiputra* in order to have an awareness live independently without relying on the colonial government (Sajed, 2017). The presence of western model education is a trigger towards modernization progress, one of them is the people's dress style.

The Netherlands bring out Indonesia into a new type of education that was in contrast to the pattern of *bumiputra* education in general. During the VOC era, regents were assigned to establish schools of a religious nature because the emergence of the paradigm spread of Christianity among the community was no less important than trade affairs. The Dutch East Indies government separated religion-based education from education in general. The Dutch education system as follows; (a) dutch-funded education in schools is religiously neutral; (b) education does not oriented too much about how to live harmoniously in the world, but emphasizes how to obtain life; (c) education is organized based on the social strata in the society; (d) education is organized to maintain class differences in Indonesian society, especially among Javanese people; (e) education is largely directed towards the formation of elite groups society (Kat Angelino, 1931; Soemardjan, 2009).

Research on education during the Dutch East Indies has been written in both in the form of books, and scientific journals. Such as Suwignyo (2012) who wrote about colonial education explained that education in colonial era for the *bumiputra* is aligned with the socio-cultural conditions of Europeans without regard the social conditions of local communities. This matter then gives influence to the *bumiputra* in terms of culture imitate the Europeans style. Then, we can read Fakhriansyah & Patoni (2019) that ethical policy brings hope for the *bumiputra* to achieve critical and intelligent modernity. Although in its implementation, education for *bumiputra* is uneven for all social classes, at least the presence of education in the *bumiputra* life's can help the realization of a society that has an awareness of identity and independence as a nation.

The logical consequences of the implementation of education for *bumiputra*, especially for the middle class is modernization in various aspects of life. Nordholt (2011) noted that the middle class is allowed into the realm of western culture in lifestyle terms, at the same time entering into the citizens system of the colony culture to deal with the racial boundaries. If on earlier times Western culture was exclusive for the Dutch people only, then after the

*bumiputra* received education, the exclusivity slowly began to open up for the *bumiputra*.

Education facilities for the Java people at that time was only spread in big cities, so the *bumiputra* students had to move and stay in the city. School placement in urban areas is not without reason, urban areas as a concentration of economic, social, and political activities are the most promising places for young people to get jobs and the dynamic potential channel they have after studying in western school models. The implementation of western model education policies by the colonial government had any impact to the Javanese people, one of them is modernization of Javanese women dressing styles.

Javanese women before the modernization era had a distinctive style of dress by wearing traditional Javanese clothing that is identical with *batik*, *kebaya*, and *kemben*. For the *santri* (someone who studies religion) women, they usually wear Javanese clothing coupled with a *kerudung* (veil) for Muslims, *mantilla* for Catholic and Christianity sisters. In this article we will see the modernization of Javanese women who previously always wore traditional clothes, then begin to recognize of dressing style like Europeans.

Research on women's history was written by Nurullita & Afiyanto (2021) which describes the lifestyle of Yogyakarta women who began to imitate the habits of European women. Yogyakarta as one of the big cities becomes the meeting point between local culture and European culture, giving rise to a new social condition among its people. The lifestyle of the *bumiputra* community has begun to be mixed with European habits. In that article, the author describes a narrative complemented by several pictures to explain to the reader that the life of the people of Yogyakarta post-independence has begun to lead to a modernity. The existence of colonialism left many traces, one of which was a new habit or lifestyle that influenced many circles of the *bumiputra* community. The article focuses on many aspects in general that explain the lifestyle of the *bumiputra* women.

Based on similar research that has been described in the previous paragraph, in this article the author tries to explain more specifically modernity as the impact of providing education for the Bumiputra community.

## THEORY AND METHOD

The theory that can be used for main discussion in this article is; (1) the theory of education in general and; (2) specifically the education during the Dutch colonial period. Education is essentially an attempt to negate people. According to Freire (1998) education is organized to liberate the human from ignorance and raise the awareness of oppression. Ideally, organized education can advance a nation and improve the quality of civilization. However, this ideal goals has not been achieved optimally in the context of education during the Dutch East Indies period. This is due to the purpose of organizing education for the *bumiputra*, only oriented for the colonial government interest (check out the following photo)

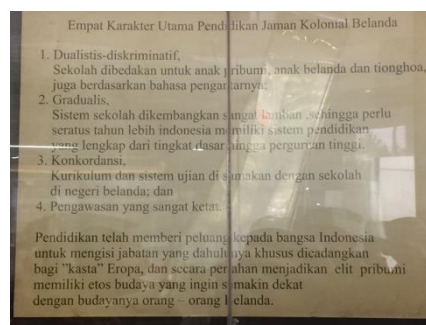


Photo 1. Several Education Character's During Dutch Colonial Era  
Source: Researcher's Documentation from UPI Education Museum, 2018

The photo shows some of the general characteristics of education during the Dutch colonial period, *first*, schools are differentiated for *bumiputra*, Dutch, and Chinese children based on the language of instruction used. *Second*, school systems were developed very slowly, so it took more than a hundred years for Indonesia to have a complete education system from elementary to college levels. *Third*, the curriculum and examination system are equalized with schools in the Netherlands. *Fourth*, supervision is carried out quite strictly.

The second theory, we can read Kamphuis (2018) that the dimension of colonial education is dominated by racial nature, prioritizing European women and women of certain groups, and loaded with religious interests. Ethical policy in the education aspect is only normative, the education for *bumiputra* stops at the pragmatic value of colonial government. The colonial government realized that to maintain economic stability required many experts, while the budget for the establishment of schools still limited. Therefore, education organized majority is intended for the upper middle class of *bumiputra* who are considered able to contribute for the colonial government practically (Ridho'i, 2018).

In the cultural aspect, education for the *bumiputra* presents the new habits, especially in women's dressing styles aspect. In the discussion section we can see that the *bumiputra* womens began to recognize modernization in the dressing style after getting western model education.

Study of women history began to be written by historian and historical academics as either efforts to provide alternative themes in the development of Indonesian historiography. The study of women's history can lift up the image of women role in the narrative of Indonesian history which relatively has deficient in generally. This article try to explain the women history in the appearance style aspects as the one of implementation education impacts by the colonial government for the *bumiputra* people. This style of dress then became a new habit for the *bumiputra* people, for woman especially.

The method used for writing this article is the historical research method (Gottschalk, 1969; Kuntowijoyo, 2003): (a) determination the topic; (b) heuristic; (c) critics and verification the sources; (d) interpretation; and (e) historiography. In the first stage, the author determines the article topics, which main discussion about the education impacts on the dressing style of Javanese women in 20th century. Furthermore, the author collects the sources that are relevant with the main discussion, the collected sources is a secondary source in the form of books and scientific articles published in the journals. The sources has own a validity of information because it has passed through several

selection and editing processes before published. The next stage is interpretation, the author examines critically the various information presented in the source and then construe it. After passing through several stages, the results of study and interpretation are realized in the form of articles adapted with this journal systematics.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### The Education

The education provided in general schools is very close with the Dutch culture elements. Dutch is an important requirement to be granted the exam as a requirements to get a job. The lessons be taught in Dutch language, excepting in the rural schools still using the local language. At the high school level, somebody is allowed to continue the Dutch education if he belongs the *bumiputra* elite. The education system for the *bumiputra* is not defined to educate the people, but only oriented to fulfill the needs of the Dutch government. Slowly, when the Dutch applied ethical politics in the education aspects, *bumiputra* people began having the opportunity to be able of the experience western model education. For the gospel message, the services of health care and education is equally important, because of the society condition surely need this. In general, schools teach reading, writing, and numeracy skills. There are two types of schools, the first school for children who have high social status, and the second school for children of lowly social status. At first, European children will attend a special school for Europeans at the elementary school level, then in the secondary school level they can study with Javanese students (Rottier, 1943; Zainu'ddin, 1970).

There is no similarity of the school curriculum for *bumiputra*, so the Dutch opened a system of ratifying primary schools, there are first grade schools and second grade schools. First-grade schools provide a broader education, with the compentents teachers and the schools get more funding from the government. Villages are required to give a donations amount 5% of the village's income for

the second-grade schools maintenance. The first-grade school was transformed into an *bumiputra's* Dutch school, namely Hollandsch-Inlandsche School (HIS) with a seven-year curriculum (Vickers, 2005). This school is only intended for children while the parents have an honorable status in society-employment, genealogy, property or education. Therefore, the qualified these requirement are mostly town people, and almost all of *hollandsch-inlandsche school* (HIS) was established in the town. For the *bumiputra*, HIS is the main stage to increase social degrees, because this school was originally intended for elite people only. Under government provisions (Stbld. 1914 No. 359) there are four basic requirements that allow the parents send their children to HIS, genealogy, honorable, wealth, or education (Prayudi & Salindri, 2015). Likewise people have positions in the government, such as *wedana*, *demang*, and other status prestige. With the average income of f.100.00 per-month, the parents can funding the undergoing their children education in HIS (Poesponegoro & Notosusanto, 2010).

In colonial era, the education system was generally regarded as a means of selection in training a person to occupy certain functional positions. Education practice in Java became one of the criteria for the employees appointment in various colonial company services, both in private companies and in government institutions. Most of the *bumiputra* who get western education model allowed for working on government services (Klaveren, 1983).

The western education system was introduced by the colonial government in Java started form primary school untill the college level. This education have an impact on increasing the knowledge of *bumiputra* youth generation to get the various scientific knowledge that they have never learn before. Nevertheless, the implemented of education system by the colonial government nonetheless aims to create *bumiputra* graduates who can work for colonial companies, both for government-owned and private companies. The secondary and high schools that using western education curriculum also using Dutch as their instruction language. While rural schools are not connected to high schools so close the



way to higher status, this splitting also makes the villagers not appreciative of formal education. Another reason people are not so interested in education is that rural communities generally do not have a habit of reading and writing (Afandi dkk., 2020; Jones, 2013).

### **The Dressing Style**

Clothes as a human primary need was originally used to protect the body from the weather influence, insect bites, and then evolved to aesthetic and ethical function. Dressing actually does not just fulfill the biological needs for protect the body, but is related with tradition, life outlook, events, position, social status and identity. Clothes is one of the most obvious physical appearances to differentiate a person from each others, or equate somebody with another group. Community groups can be clearly identified through the dress they used, clothing materials and clothing models used. The development of dress styles among the people community in the city during the colonial times had a pretty influence for the Javanese women's lives (Margana & Nursam, 2010).

During the VOC era, Dutch clothes was a culture and religion marker of European landlords. At first, the Dutch wanted to keep European clothing style for themselves and the Indonesians who were allowed to wear European-style clothing in VOC-controlled areas were Christians (Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008). The typical clothing complement for non-European Christians consists of European-style hats, socks and shoes. Hats, pants, and shoes, serve to differentiate from Indonesians, who has constantly faithful with traditional Javanese clothes. Non-Christian Indonesians are not allowed to wearing the dress like Europeans. Permanent residences and distinctive clothing made it easier for the VOC to keep an eye on the population. When a crime happened, the dressing style makes it easier to find the perpetrator by identifying his dressing style. It means that clothing also becomes a instruments for monitoring the population community (Maas & Steenbrink, 2007).

The use of European-style clothing among the general public was not allowed, except for the Javanese elite, like kings, princes, and regents has adopted a European dressing style with open-plan suits and pentalone typical like European military (Houben, 2002). The use of European clothing by the Javanese elite was only for important events involving European officials, but for the ceremonial tradition they still using Javanese dress styles. Though adopting western culture elements, the Javanese elite never abandoned Javanese culture.

Entering the 20th century when the influence of modernization was present in the life of city people, the issue of fashion became most important part of the debates about culture. Many Javanese people want to use European-style clothing, but are obstructed because of the colonial government prohibitions raised. These prohibitions are attempt by the colonial government to carrying out racial discrimination politics with the intention of affirm class differences or social status between the ruling class and the controlled class (Roskies, 1988).

Clothes could change the someone status who uses it, clothes also serves to strengthen the identity. Imitating European-style clothing in early 20th century is believed by some Javanese elite to be a modernity gateway. The transformed of traditional clothing to the use European-style clothing for some people in early 20th century indirectly changed the lifestyles. The wearing of European clothing for the *bumiputra*, until early 20th century was still prohibited by the Dutch colonial government. But, in accordance with the modernization form of liberalization ideas, nationalism people through western-style education model slowly reduce the prohibitions use of European-style clothing by *bumiputra* peoples. City people began to wear European-style clothing as a symbol of modernity (Coté, 1995; Ingelson, 2018; Kartodirdjo, Sartono, 1991).

At first European clothing became a marker of the colonial rulers culture and religion. The *bumiputra* who allowed to wearing European-style clothing

are Christians and who are given equal standing with Europeans . It is intended that control over the people in the region is maintained so that there is a difference between the rulers and the controlled. The presence of education for the *bumiputra* gradually slowly reduce it, education became the main factor in the modernization of Javanese society. Modern education for women introduced since in early 20th century contributes quite meaningfully for Javanese women, especially Javanese women from the upper middle class (Taylor, 2009).

Through education, women can giving contribute in national movements and the nation struggle. Education also provides opportunities for women to take the role important position in various fields of work. The modernization in early 20th century giving opportunities any jobs for the women such as plantation workers, the sugar industry, the cigarette industry and also available jobs with higher formal education qualifications such as teachers, nurses, jurists, clerks, newspaper and magazine journalists, telephone recipients for hotels. Modern education has given a new spirit and also raised of *bumiputra* intellectuals skills in the emancipation and modernization aspects (Nurhajarini, 2003).

Modernizing the women dress style on various scope is one of the education impacts. Javanese women began to recognize the aesthetics of dressing style. European women generally wearing the western clothing in the form of long skirts or short skirts. Long skirts called *japon* are used to attend official events, while for daily activities in generally, they used wearing skirts with short cuts. Some accessories to equip the appearance included hats, handbags, shoes and sometimes used the gloves. In the end, the dressing style of Javanese women more or less imitates the dressing style of European women in general, the clothes worn by Javanese women in early 20th century can be classified into three models; (a) long cloths, sheaths and *kebaya*; (b) Shanghai-style clothing; (c) western clothing (skirts and blouses or canals) (Soekiman, 2011).

Long cloth, *sarong* that combined with *kebaya* is a typical Javanese woman's clothing. To differentiate the use of long cloth and *kebaya*, usually equipped with certain accessories. *Kebaya* cloth comes with gold or silver jewelry and sometimes comes with diamond particles. Jewelry in generally is shaped of necklaces, bracelets, earrings, pendants, and conde, handbags and watches is complement high-end women's accessories. Javanese women who wear long clothes and *kebaya* are not only intended for adult women, women students can also wear these clothes. *Stagen* is also important accessory in dressing style that functions like a belt. While the women students going to school, they wear simple shaped conde prickers. Clothing models for Muhammadiyah and NU students coupled with veils for coverings head (Dewi, 2012).



Photo 2. Three Indonesian Young Woman in A Garden with Evening Gown, Medioen  
Or. 28.084.

Source: KITLV.nl

After receiving the western education models, Javanese women began more often wearing the western dressing style. Those who first wore the western-style clothes were the *keraton* princesses who received education in European schools, so that skirts and shoes became the primary clothes of noble

girls when going to school. The other woman besides *keraton* family who first wore western clothing were students who learn the religion. They wear these clothes for religious duties, such as wearing clothes commonly used by nuns. In other types of work, women who work as nurses also wearing the dresscode like a western nurse. Nurse's clothes are worn on the outside, while on the inside still wearing *kebaya* cloth (Pols, 2018).

From 1930's, the influence of western clothing expanded to every side of urban areas. Western style clothing is not only limited to elementary school students, however the high school students also wear almost the same clothing style. This phenomenon then created the image that western clothing or skirts in colonial period were identical with schoolgirls. The students' clothes were in the form of top and subordinate suits, equipped with shoes, socks and belts. While the must uniform for students is a cohesion uniform (scouting) in the form of top suits and subordinates. Western clothing worn by Javanese women not only used in educational institutions, it's also used in public area, such as in tourist attraction and sports venues. The western clothing model has a diverse motif following the fashion.

After the colonial period and continued to the Japanese occupation until the independence era, *kebaya* cloth began to lose the prestige as school and daily clothes for upper middle class women. But *kebaya* remains the primary needs as a daily activity cloth's for the bottom class women. In addition, *kebaya* model clothes becomes main attribute in various special events like a party or other official event. The development of western education system opens the opportunity to entered ideas for women in expressing themselves through dressing styles. If at the beginning emergence of western clothing model raises the stigma by some people as westernized Javanese women, at the end of the day this practical clothes becomes a choice of dressing style for Javanese women (Lee, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

The Dutch colonialism not only leaves stories about exploitation, the breakdown of social strata, and other inhumane stories. On the other hand, the presence of Dutch colonialism in *Nusantara* gives the influence of modern culture to several aspects of *bumiputra* people's lives. Ethical policy enacted by the colonial government in early 1900s became a big factor in the implementation of education for the *bumiputra* people on a wider scale than before. Education has been held an impact in the form of dressing style modernization for the *bumiputra* people, for Javanese women especially. This new habit does not solely scrape the noble of Javanese women culture, it's just the modernization of European dressing styles provides new choices for Javanese women in appearance.

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