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DUTCH EAST INDIES, ITS PEOPLE, AND JAPAN AT THE 1903 OSAKA EXHIBITION

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Abstract

This article examines the participation of the Dutch East Indies in the 1903 Osaka Industrial Exhibition and analyzes how the exhibition functioned as a site of negotiation between colonial interests, imperial ambition, and representational politics in early twentieth-century Asia. The study analyzes the motivations behind the Indies' participation and the representation of "Indonesianness" amid colonial concern over Japan's rise. Using historical methods, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography, *the research finds that the motivation to participate in the exhibition was not only economic but also symbolic and diplomatic, as a Western power with a long history of friendship with Japan. At the same time, the exhibition, especially the Human Pavilion, revealed how Japan articulated its modern identity by adopting and modifying international exhibition practices previously developed in Europe. Through the Human Pavilion, Japan positioned itself differently from other Asian nations, including Java and Malay. This article argues that the Osaka Exhibition represented an early expression of a hierarchical worldview and colonial imagination that was in line with patterns later seen in Japanese imperial ideology, while also revealing the Dutch's ambiguous perception of Japan as both a modern partner and a potential threat to Western colonial domination in Asia.*

Keywords*: Dutch East Indies; Osaka Exhibition 1903; Japan; colonial concerns*

INTRODUCTION

In the 19th century, there was a trend of international exhibitions of art and industry around the world that began in Western countries. International exhibitions became popular after being held in England in 1851. In Asia, one of the countries that followed this trend was Japan, which organized a series of exhibitions called the National Industrial Exhibition (*Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai*). The background of this exhibition was closely linked to the process of industrialization during the Meiji era. The National Industrial Exhibition was held as part of policies aimed at building national prosperity and military strength. Its purpose was to introduce Western technology and promote competition and growth within domestic industries (National Diet Library 2011b).

The first exhibition was promoted by the Minister of Home Affairs, Okubo Toshimichi, who referred to the 1873 Vienna International Exhibition, in which Japan was

one of the participating countries. The first National Industrial Exhibition was held at Ueno Park, Tokyo, in 1877 during the Satsuma Rebellion, it served as a venue to introduce Western technology to the Japanese people and also became a model for exhibitions subsequently held in Japan (National Diet Library 2011a).

Of the various exhibitions that have been held in Japan, the industrial exhibition in Osaka in 1903, which was the fifth National Industrial Exhibition, was the largest exhibition ever organized (Murata 2019, 28). Unlike the previous exhibitions, which were domestic in nature, this fifth exhibition was semi-international, as it included the participation of other nations. This was intended to allow Japan, which had only recently reached parity with the West, to be seen as an equal. Among the countries that took part in the exhibition was the Dutch East Indies. As a Dutch colony, the Dutch East Indies had fairly close foreign relations with Japan compared to other European countries (Goodman 2000, 18).

There is previous research on the 1903 Osaka Exhibition. Dissertation by Hyungjo Hur (2012) examines the relationship between Qing China and the exhibition in Osaka. Hyeokhui Kwon (2017) discusses the intellectual response of Korea to the culture and peoples of Northeast Asia who are the subjects of the exhibition. Ziomek (2014) discusses the Human Pavilion, specifically the Ainu people who were colonial subject. Indonesia's participation in international exhibitions has been discussed by Lukito (2016) who discusses the Dutch East Indies pavilion at the International Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931. Sayahdikumullah & Anai (2025) discusses the Indonesian pavilion at the Osaka Expo ’70. Marieke Bloembergen (2001) in her doctoral thesis, examines the participation of the Dutch East Indies and Indonesian culture in various world exhibitions.

Regarding the relationship between Indonesia and Japan, as well as their people, several authors have discussed this topic. Zuhdi (2018) discusses the relationship between Japan and Indonesia from 1900 to 1941. A more extensive discussion was written by Padiatra (2020), who examines the dynamics between the two nations from the 1880s to 1974.

This writing seeks to complement the historiography of Indonesia’s participation and Indonesian identity in world exhibitions during the colonial period. The participation of the Dutch East Indies in the 1903 Osaka Industrial Exhibition raises several important issues to discuss, namely how the relationship between the Dutch East Indies and Japan was reflected through this participation, especially in the context of diplomacy, economics, and colonial representation, and how the Dutch East Indies presented forms of “Indonesianness” at the exhibition, as well as Japan's perception of Asian nations, including Indonesia. This article aims to examine the relationship between the Dutch East Indies and Japan through the Dutch East Indies’ participation in the industrial exhibition held in Osaka in 1903, and to analyze the representation of Indonesianness brought forth by the Dutch East Indies.

METHOD

This writing uses the historical method, which consists of topic selection, heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kuntowijoyo 2013). The source used in this writing is the catalog from the Dutch East Indies pavilion, *Netherlands-India at the Fifth National Industrial Exhibition of Japan: Held in the City of Osaka in the Year 1903* (1903), tourist guide *The Osaka Exhibition Guide Book for Tourists in Japan 1903* (1903), text from the Dutch East Indies representative for the exhibition, H. Rud du. Mosch, namely *Verslag eener reis naar Japan* (1903), *Eigen Haard* magazines (1903a), as well as newspapers from the Dutch East Indies and the Netherlands such as *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, *De Sumatra Post*, and *Het Vaderland*.

In analyzing the participation of the Dutch East Indies in the 1903 Osaka Industrial Exhibition, the postcolonialism approach provides a theoretical framework for examining how the image of "Indonesianness" was represented by the colonial government. This approach is also used to study how Japan engaged in "mimicry", which according to Bhabha (Bhabha 1994, 122) "is the desire for a reformed and recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not entirely", towards the West by portraying and presenting itself as a modern power, while simultaneously reproducing the European colonial hierarchy by creating categories that considered certain nations to be lower or inferior. In postcolonial studies, mimicry becomes a means for the inferior to imitate and become superior. Meanwhile, in postcolonial discourse, mimicry is defined as the attitude adopted when the people of a colonized country begin to imitate the actions, attitudes, language, and culture of the colonizers (Farnida 2020, 128–29).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The relationship between the Dutch East Indies and Japan and Their people

The Dutch East Indies, which was a Dutch colony, had a fairly friendly relationship with Japan compared to other European countries. This relationship had existed even before the Dutch trading company *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) arrived in Japan in the early 17th century. Tokugawa Ieyasu, who seized power in Japan, adopted an anti-Christian policy. This led to the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1639, making the Dutch the only Westerners allowed to trade with the country (Elisonas 1991, 300).

In the end, after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 which subsequently opened Japan up, Dutch became the bridge to other Europeans. In the early years of diplomatic relations between Japan and other countries, Dutch was the common medium of communication, both written and spoken. Correspondence with the Japanese government was conducted in Dutch, as it was the only language understood by Europeans. At that time, almost the only aids for learning Japanese were written by Dutch students (Vandenbosch 1959, 220)

For the Japanese, their encounters with Dutch traders offered a new experience of visiting the Indonesian Archipelago. Since 1612, there have been Japanese people working

for the VOC. In 1623, there was also a large colony of non-military Japanese, as in that year they were able to gather 130 armed individuals. Some were tax farmers, and others were involved in trade. Some held the highest positions under the East India Company and in the Church. Jan Pieterszoon Coen, as the leader of the VOC, said that they were a very tough people, like sheep in their own homeland but almost like devils abroad (Vandenbosch 1941, 391). The Japanese people who worked under the VOC also took part in the massacre in Banda in 1621 (Dhont 2023). According to Vandenbosch (1941, 391), the Japanese colony in Batavia would most likely have become significant if Japan had not implemented the Sakoku policy, which prohibited people from leaving Japan.

At the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in the mid-19th century, there was a wave of Japanese immigration to Southeast Asia. These immigrants were quite visible in several urban centers such as Batavia, Surabaya, and Manila. Most of them were born in Japan, but in the 1920s and 1930s, a second generation of locally born Japanese began to appear. Initially, many Japanese immigrants worked as prostitutes in city centers in British Malaya and Java. However, after the 1910s until the 1930s, the majority of jobs held by these Japanese people began to diversify, such as white-collar workers (in British Malaya, especially in Singapore), independent shop owners and clerks (in the Dutch East Indies, especially in Java), as well as plantation owners and farm laborers (in the Philippines, especially in Davao) becoming the majority (Shiraishi and Shiraishi 1993, 7).

In the social structure of the Dutch East Indies, the Japanese were grouped together with the Chinese and Arabs as the "Foreign Oriental" class, below the Europeans and above the natives. However, when Japan began to display its nationalist and imperialist spirit, there was a change in status for the Japanese. Japan's modernization under the Meiji regime transformed the country's relationship with its neighbors. Seeing itself as a modern nation, Japan did not want to be placed in the Foreign Oriental group. Fujita Toshiro, the Japanese Consul in Singapore who visited Java in 1897, proposed that their status be made equal to that of Europeans. This was intended to allow Japan to leave Asia behind and identify with Europe and the United States. However, at first, this proposal was rejected by the Governor-General (Goto 2003, 8–9).

The spirit of Japanese expansion eventually prompted the colonial government to reconsider its foreign policy. Dutch concerns about Japan emerged, starting from the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894-1895 (Vandenbosch 1941, 395). Aside from their concerns about being outcompeted in trade and economics by larger colonial powers, there were also worries about Japan's possible plans to colonize New Guinea at the far eastern corner of the Dutch colony, where their de facto presence was very weak. The Dutch realized that Japan's influence had grown and that this needed to be reflected in the formal status of Japanese people. Therefore, in 1899 the Japanese were granted European legal status (Houben 2013, 229). Against this backdrop of anxiety over Japan’s ambitions, the Dutch East Indies was invited to participate in the Osaka Industrial Exhibition in 1903.

The Fifth National Industrial Exhibition in Osaka, 1903

The Japanese Industrial Exhibition cannot be separated from the mission of modernization brought about by the Meiji Restoration. This goal aligns with the ideology of world exhibitions, which were first held on a grand scale in England in 1851 through The Great Exhibition, interpreted as a celebration of advances in science, technology, and industry (Cantor 2012). Japan's participation in a world exposition first took place at the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris, during the final years of the Tokugawa Shogunate, one year before the Meiji Restoration, at a time when the United States had previously forced Japan to open trade relations with the West (Daykin 2021, 84).

After the Meiji Restoration, Japan participated in the Vienna Exhibition in 1873. This was followed by their participation in the exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, and a series of exhibitions in Paris in 1878, 1889, and 1900, each time showcasing a stronger and more confident modernity. Participation in these exhibitions was considered successful (Demeulenaere-Douyère 2020, 132). Figures such as Sano Tsunetami, the Meiji government representative in Vienna and also a delegate in Paris in 1867, believed that these exhibitions were vital components for the strength of Western industry, trade, and education. Japan's participation in world exhibitions and their organization domestically were considered important for national development (Daykin 2021, 86).

After its first participation in a previous world exposition, Japan began to hold its own exhibitions at the domestic level. Okubo Toshimichi, who had served as a delegate in Vienna and later became the Minister of Home Affairs, decided to organize the National Industrial Exhibition to promote industry on August 21, 1877, at Ueno Park, Tokyo (Mamiko 2020, 63). This exhibition was held during the ongoing Satsuma Rebellion, a samurai uprising dissatisfied with the Meiji Government. The financial cost of quelling this rebellion was enormous. Direct expenses reached 42 million yen, equivalent to 80 percent of the annual budget (Vlastos 1989, 398). This proves just how important holding exhibitions was in helping to achieve the goals of *shokusan kōgyō*, namely increasing production and advancing industry (Noriko Aso as cited in Daykin 2021, 87).

After that exhibition, the National Industrial Exhibition was held again in 1881, and then for the third time in 1890. Both of these exhibitions took place in Tokyo. The fourth exhibition was held in 1895 in Kyoto and the fifth in 1903 in Osaka (Mamiko 2020, 63). The National Industrial Exhibition held in Osaka was different from the previous four exhibitions, as this exhibition featured representation from abroad. The Japanese government sent invitations through their consulates overseas. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the exhibition organizers did not anticipate the high level of interest in the exhibition. They had only planned for 300 *tsubo*, or about 10,600 square feet and 685 square meters, as exhibition space for foreign displays. When the items from abroad arrived, it turned out that more than 2,000 *tsubo* were needed (Daykin 2015, 335).

The exhibition covered 100,000 *tsubo* of land, three times larger than the exhibition in Tokyo in 1877 and twice as large as the exhibition in Kyoto in 1895 (*The Osaka Exhibition Guide Book for Tourists in Japan 1903* 1903, 54). The exhibition was considered a success with a total of 4,350,693 visitors, including 12,443 visitors from Europe and America as well as 8,677 visitors from China and Korea (Daykin 2015).

The Participation of the Dutch East Indies in the Fifth National Industrial Exhibition of Japan in Osaka

For the Dutch East Indies, industrial exhibitions were nothing new, especially for colonial scholars who came from Europe. Previously, the Dutch East Indies itself had already held domestic industrial exhibitions, the largest of which was organized in 1853 in Batavia under the name *Bataviasche Tentoonstelling van Produkten der Natuur en der Industrie* (Exhibition of Natural and Industrial Products of the Dutch East Indies), which became the major annual event that year (Goss 2011; Rizkinta 2022).

In the Dutch East Indies, news that Japan would be holding an industrial exhibition had already spread in early 1902, a year before the event took place. It was reported that the purpose of the exhibition was to provide Japanese industries with the opportunity to study the latest products from Western discoveries with the aim of advancing their own local industries. In addition, the exhibition also offered foreign industries the chance to expand their connections in the rapidly growing markets throughout East Asia (*Deli Courant* 1902).

In March, the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce of the Japanese Empire, through its consulate in Amsterdam, invited the Dutch to participate in the industrial exhibition. In addition to matters of trade, the Japanese representatives also stated that Dutch participation could strengthen the relationship between the Netherlands and Japan (*De Nieuwe Courant; Dagblad van Nederland* 1902). One month later, the Batavia Chamber of Commerce and Industry received a circular letter from the Dutch consul to Japan, inviting merchants in the Dutch East Indies to participate in the exhibition. Although the purpose of the exhibition was to promote Japanese industry, for the Dutch East Indies, this event served as an opportunity to introduce their agricultural and industrial products to the world. The Dutch consul to Japan himself stated that their colonial products were not unfamiliar in Japan. This was evidenced by the increase in imports from the colonies to Japan. However, trade potential could still be improved, as these commodities were only produced in limited quantities in Japan (*Het Nieuws van Den Dag* 1902).

The Dutch East Indies exhibition committee for Osaka was successfully formed on July 2, 1902, by the government. Chaired by E. G. Taylor of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Batavia, the committee included J. A. van Delden and E. W. J. Schoften (also members of the Chamber), J. Dinger (director of the Nederlandsch-Indische Escompto Maatschappij), H. R. du Mosch (head of the firm Maintz & Co.), and G. C. F. W. Mundt (president of the Sukabumi Agricultural Association). B. Vlielander Hein, a Batavia broker,

served as secretary, while du Mosch represented the committee in Japan (*De Nieuwe Courant: Dagblad van Nederland* 1902). From the professional backgrounds of these representatives, it is clear that economic interests were central to their participation, although the committee also accepted cultural works for display.

Figure 1. The Dutch East Indies section at the 1903 Osaka Exhibition (Source: *Eigen Haard Geïllustreerd Volkstijdschrift,* No 28, 1903)

In the catalogs, it is stated that the participation of the Dutch East Indies in the exhibition was based not only on commercial interests but also on the long-standing friendship between the two countries, which has lasted for three centuries. The Osaka Exhibition was expected to lead to significant developments in trade between the two nations. It should also be mentioned that the newly established "Java-China-Japan Steamship Company" of the Netherlands will begin its service to the East around September of this year (Netherlands-India Commission for the Osaka Exhibition 1903, i).

In the section discussing the products, the catalog explains the natural wealth of the Dutch East Indies, namely its agriculture and minerals. It states that this region has fertile soil and extensive mines. The agricultural products considered important include coffee, sugar, quinine *(cinchona calisaya*), indigo, tobacco, tea, copra, cocoa, nutmeg and mace, pepper, gambier, cotton and kapok, areca nuts, sago, and tapioca flour. The forest products highlighted in this exhibition are teak wood, damar trees, rattan, tree bark and the hat-making industry, and vegetable oils. Other featured products in this exhibition include minerals such as coal, petroleum, diamonds, gold, silver, tin, copper, and iron. In addition, there are also

shells and pearls, hides and furs, as well as salt (Netherlands-India Commission for the Osaka Exhibition 1903, x–xlvi).

Figure 2. On the left side, the screen from Jepara was part of the Governor General's collection (Source: *Eigen Haard Geïllustreerd Volkstijdschrift,* No 29, 1903)

There was a rather interesting category because it was not directly related to natural resources, namely the "Native Industry" category. Some items considered highly valuable include batik, silk and thread weaving, lace, copper and tin crafts, silver filigree crafts, as well as wood carvings. After ten days of exhibition, products from the Dutch East Indies had become a major historical attraction on the very first day, even earning praise from the Japanese press (*Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* 1903; *De Avondpost* 1903).

This exhibition marked an important moment in the trade and political relations between the Dutch East Indies and Japan because, according to du Mosch (1903, 4), until a few years ago, the Dutch East Indies was not attractive to Japanese trade. It was only in 1898 that this began to change, mainly due to the opening of regular shipping routes from the Dutch East Indies to Japan. Therefore, the participation of the Dutch East Indies can be considered a moment to renew and strengthen the bonds of friendship that have existed for a long time. In a positive tone, the art magazine *Eigen Haard* (1903a, 445) states that the relationship between the two countries is now at the beginning of a new era, in which trade between the Indies and Japan will flourish.

Indonesia's Identity Representation in Exhibitions and Colonial Concerns about Japan

Although culture was not the main focus of the exhibition in Osaka, cultural products and representations were still featured in the exhibition. The "Native Industry" category in

the exhibition was closely associated with the *Vereeniging Oost en West* (East and West Association), which had long been involved in promoting the export trade of native industries. Improving societal conditions and humanitarian reasons were the main objectives of this association in supporting native industries (Netherlands-India Commission for the Osaka Exhibition 1903, xlvii).

Figure 3. Central section of the Dutch East Indies section at the Exhibition in Osaka (Japan) (Source: *Eigen Haard Geïllustreerd Volkstijdschrift,* No 28, 1903)

The catalog (1903, 9–19) provides information about the collection of cultural objects from several important figures exhibited in this exhibition. Governor General Rooseboom displayed a five-panel folding screen with wood carvings made from *sono* wood in Jepara. The Dutch-India Commission for the Osaka Exhibition showcased photographs of Borobudur temple. Vereeniging Oost en West brought a total of 780 indigenous industrial products for trade such as Solo batik, kris, shawls, *tempolong*, *bokor*, and vases.

The Japanese people showed great interest in batik sarong fabrics and shawls, as well as copper crafts from Gresik, silver filigree works from Padang, and wood carvings from Rembang and Japara (*Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* 1903). Tsuboi Shōgorō (1903, 302), an anthropologist, in the *Journal of the Tokyo Anthropological Society* (*Jinruigaku zasshi*), stated that the Indies section presented quite interesting items. According to him, those that deserved special attention were wooden statues, dancer figures, and betel containers made by the Javanese people. Soon after the exhibition opened, most of the indigenous industrial products were already labeled "sold" (Djaoeh 1903b, 458).

Although at the exhibition the Japanese people appeared interested in these cultural products, it seems that their views toward the indigenous Indonesians were different. The representation of Indonesian identity was not only carried out by the Dutch East Indies, as

the colonizing country of the owners of "Native Industry" goods, but also by the exhibition organizers through their interest in anthropology, namely the Human Pavilion (*Jinruikan*) (Akira 1903).

The human pavilion often emerged as a manifestation of colonial ambition. In this exhibition, by paying ten sen, visitors could see "exotic" people, including a Javanese person, as well as Africans, Indians, Turks, Malays, and peoples colonized by Japan such as the Okinawans and Ainu, and also Han and aboriginal people from Taiwan. They were placed as if they were living in their own traditional homes. The structure of the houses was made to resemble the original form (Akira 1903, 289). Tsuboi, who organized the pavilion, said that his goal was to showcase the various races that exist in the world. However, many observers pointed out that there were no Japanese or Western people on display. This exhibition only featured people who were considered barbaric and primitive, so Japanese and Westerners were excluded (Ziomek 2014, 493–94). The Anthropological Pavilion exhibit, justified under the guise of modern science, visually depicted ethnic groups that Japan had marginalized as "others" (Kwon 2017, 37). This suggests the spirit of *datsua nyuo*, Japan's effort to sever ties with Asia and identify itself with the West, but it also indicates their sense of inferiority complex (Goto 2003, 4).

Although there are no records regarding the individual Javanese who were exhibited, contemporary descriptions of the Human Pavilion indicate that they were displayed as anthropological specimens, integrated into a curated racial hierarchy that placed the Japanese and Westerners at the top. This objectification is consistent with colonial exhibition practices around the world, where colonized peoples were displayed as static examples of "primitive" cultures. The Human Pavilion, which featured a Javanese individual, became crucial in understanding Japanese perceptions of the indigenous peoples of the Nusantara because this section manifested their mentality not only in written form, but also through Western techniques, using exposition and the science of anthropology.

According to Putnam (2012), the practice of exhibiting indigenous people at colonial exhibitions played a role in shaping a radical sense of difference between the colonizer and the colonized, between Europe and non-Europe, between the familiar and the foreign. The physical proximity resulting from close interactions with exoticized natives reinforced the ideological position of superiority among European spectators, legitimizing their power and prestige through the exhibition. By removing these individuals from their “natural” environment, Europe created displays that were devoid of meaningful context. This idea was then translated and articulated by Japan, as fellow Asians, to demonstrate their superiority over other Asian nations.

Du Mosch (1903) himself did not provide any statement or comment regarding the Human Pavilion that displayed a Javanese person in Osaka in his report, despite the fact that the Javanese constituted the largest ethnic population in the Dutch East Indies. His silence is not entirely surprising, as the concept of exhibiting native Javanese people in exhibitions had

become a colonial tradition in various international exhibitions, as demonstrated by Bloembergen's study (2001)**.** However, what is unique about this particular Human Pavilion is that it was an Asian nation, Japan, that was doing the exhibiting.

With the industrial exhibition and Human Pavilion, Japan truly sought to establish its position as a modern nation and aimed to convey this message. To this end, a newspaper in the Dutch East Indies translated a poem from a competition organized by the *Osaka Asahi Shimbun* newspaper in conjunction with the Osaka exhibition. The poem, entitled Het Lied van Osaka (The Song of Osaka) (1903) describes the beauty and glory of Osaka's history. The poem openly praises industrialization, depicting clouds of smoke billowing from tall chimneys as symbols of prosperity and the grandeur of the city of Osaka. The act of translation by the colonial newspaper carries significant meaning. It not only demonstrates an awareness of promoting Japanese culture but also a willingness to disseminate the image of Japan that it seeks to shape.

The condescending view towards Southeast Asian nations had actually already formed before the Meiji era. Japanese intellectuals wrote that countries outside Japan were divided into two categories: foreign countries influenced by Chinese culture, and outside barbarians, who were the peoples of Southeast Asia except for Vietnam. The view towards Southeast Asia further deteriorated when the region submitted to colonial powers. In the modern Japanese hierarchical worldview, Southeast Asia still occupies a low position. A Japanese writer who often visited Java stated that the Javanese people were very stupid and lazy. However, it cannot be denied that for Japan, the region held significant value for the Japanese economy (Goto 2003, 4–5).

While Japanese intellectuals cultivated a perception of Southeast Asian inferiority, Japan itself became the object of a similarly skewed perception from its sole former Western partner, which grew increasingly concerned about Japan's rising power. In du Mosch's report (1903, 5), it is evident that the Dutch still felt they played a role in Japan's progress. He believed they were the ones who gave the first impetus to modern Japan and that Japanese youth needed to be "reminded" that their grandfathers once used Dutch as a global language. Du Mosch's statement reveals the waning influence of the Dutch and their concern about Japan's imperialist ambitions, which had already spread among the Dutch population. He himself realized there had been a shift in influence from the Dutch to the British, and even to the French and Germans. The participation of the Dutch East Indies in Osaka can be interpreted, apart from economic factors, as a symbolic effort to remind Japan of the great services rendered by the Dutch in the past and their relevance in Asia.

Although they had witnessed Japan's progress firsthand by organizing industrial exhibitions, some Dutch people still felt superior to them. The Dutch newspaper, *De Zuidwillemsvaart* (1904), stated that concerns about Japan are merely an illusion. According to the paper, the Japanese have "natural shortcomings" that make them poor workers, incompetent administrators, and bad traders. The newspaper cited the opinion of an

industrialist in Kyoto, who said that Japanese workers are lazy, squander their money, think only of entertainment, lack discipline, have no initiative, and do not care about the results of their work. The narrative that portrays Japanese workers as lazy and undisciplined is similar to the old myth often attached to indigenous people in various colonial regions, including Indonesia, as written by Alatas (1977). The myth of the "lazy native" served as a justification for discriminatory and exploitative treatment within the colonial system, which positioned Europeans as superior and productive, while natives were seen as less capable and inefficient. The context of being "lazy" is the same, namely in terms of how the body must be adjusted to the rhythms of capitalism. Therefore, the newspaper actually contains what they want to hear and confirms their own prejudices.

By publishing criticism from the Japanese themselves, the article not only reports but actively alleviates concerns by reinforcing belief in the superiority of the European race. The newspaper presents a reassuring narrative that Japan's progress is merely superficial and ultimately limited by inherent weaknesses, thereby soothing Dutch readers who feel anxious about Japan's undeniable modernization. Thus, familiar colonial rhetorical tools are repurposed, not to reinforce, but to dispel worries about the emergence of Japan as a non-Western global competitor within the same hierarchical worldview.

However, the soothing narrative that underestimated Japan's capabilities was soon refuted by geopolitical realities. Not long after the exhibition, conflict in the Eurasian region intensified. War broke out between Japan and Russia. Once again, Japan demonstrated its ambitions. This rekindled Dutch concerns about Japan. Several days after the war broke out, the Dutch East Indies newspaper, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* (1904), believes that the consequences of the war will affect trade. Although trade between the Dutch East Indies and Japan was still relatively small, as a positive result of our participation in the exhibition in Osaka and the opening of the Java-China-Japan route, interest in Indies products and direct trade have begun to grow in Japan. As a result of the ongoing war, this progress had come to a halt. Whatever the outcome of the war, it would negatively impact trade in the Indies.

The neutral tone towards this conflict changed in the following months. De *Zuidwillemsvaart* (1904) in June writes that many Dutch people desired Japan's defeat, using the racist term het *gele gevaar* (the yellow peril). They are concerned that the world market will be flooded with Japanese products, which would create deadly competition for European products. In addition, if Japan were to win the war, according to *De Locomotief* (as cited in Van Dijk 2007), their ambitions would not be limited.

CONCLUSION

The participation of the Dutch East Indies in the 1903 Osaka Industrial Exhibition was a complex event that reflected the dynamics between the Dutch colonial government, its colonial subjects, and Japan. Their involvement in the exhibition was driven not only by the longstanding friendship between the two countries and economic interests to expand trade,

but also as a symbolic Dutch effort to reaffirm their historical influence in Japan and their relevance in Asia amidst growing concerns over the rise of Japanese imperial power. At the exhibition, the Dutch East Indies showcased a variety of products reflecting their natural resources and indigenous industries. However, beneath the interest in cultural products, the exhibition also revealed Japan's hierarchical and racial views toward other Asian nations, including the indigenous people of the Dutch East Indies, as manifested by the Human Pavilion where a Javanese individual was displayed.

The industrial exhibition in Osaka successfully demonstrated Japan's progress to the entire world after the Meiji Restoration. Not long after, Japan attacked Russia, prompting the Dutch to recall Japan's ambitions. For some Dutch, this was difficult to accept because, from their rather condescending point of view, they believed the Japanese had "natural shortcomings" and thus could never become a dominant power. For du Mosch, the Dutch East Indies representative at the exhibition, it was the Dutch who made a major contribution to Japan's progress.

Ultimately, the Osaka Exhibition was not a neutral stage for display but a contested arena where power, identity, and modernity were negotiated. This case study, therefore, transcends the event itself, offering crucial insights into the mechanisms of colonial representation and the intricate interplay of power and perception at the dawn of the twentieth century.

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