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## Fashion Style of Japanese Immigrants in Colonial Indonesia: A Preliminary Research Based on Visual Sources Observation

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is an initial study of the Dutch East Indies Japanese immigrants fashion style. The research was conducted by observing primary sources in the form of photographs of Japanese people appearing in various Japanese memoirs and newspapers published in colonial Java. From these observations, it can be seen that the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies very often appeared in Western clothing, although on certain occasions, they still wore traditional Japanese clothing. This style of dress is rooted in the modernization that occurred in Japan after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and was influenced by the recognition of the status of the Japanese as first-class citizens equal to Europeans by the Dutch East Indies government in 1899. The results of this study indicate that through the style of dress they choose, the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies wanted to assert their identity as part of the modern West as well as part of Japan's noble culture.

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### INTRODUCTION

In a social context, clothing is not just a cloth that covers the skin but also an expression of the wearer's identity. This is because when a person is choosing clothes, he is also defining and describing himself, choosing what he wants to be seen by other people and society (Davis, 1992, p. 53). In other words, clothing is the social and cultural skin of humans, an extension of the body that can connect and separate the wearer from the social world (Wilson, 1985, p. 3).

Henk Schulte Nordholt (1997) proves that outward appearances are an important aspect of history, including Indonesia. The study shows that effectively shaped and produced various groups of people at various historical periods. The ties that exist in these groups become more visible, so they are sometimes difficult to cross because of certain rules in the dress practiced by their members, either intentionally or unintentionally. However, these dress codes are not static. The style of dress of individuals or groups is very likely to change because certain factors, such as encounters with other cultures influence it. Every change in the style of dress almost always brings new ideas related to the wearer's identity (Nordholt, 1997, p. 2-3).

This phenomenon was also seen in Japanese immigrants who came and settled in the Dutch East Indies from the turn of the 19th century to the 20th century until the outbreak of the Pacific War. In their photos, the Japanese often appear in Western clothing, although on certain occasions, they also appear in traditional Japanese clothing. The choice of dress style is certainly not without reason.

The Western-influenced Japanese style of dress in the Dutch East Indies was mentioned by Saya Shiraishi and Takashi Shiraishi (1998) and Mayumi Yamamoto (2018) in their study of Japanese immigrants in Southeast Asia and the Dutch East Indies. Shiraishi and Yamamoto's studies show that the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies were very fond of imitating Europeans, including their style of dress (Shiraishi, 1998, p. 20;

Yamamoto, 2018, p. 73). However, neither of these studies has specifically discussed the Japanese style of dress in the Dutch East Indies.

This paper specifically review the Japanese dress style and interpret the statement behind it. Through this style of dress, how did the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies want to be seen, and place themselves in the structure of colonial society which was segregated based on race? What identity do they want to highlight?

## METHOD

This research uses the historical method which is conducted in four stages: source collection, source verification, interpretation, and writing (Kuntowijoyo, 1997, p. 89). In the source collection stage, I collected primary sources that were useful for writing this paper. I then verified the authenticity and credibility of the sources I had found. After that, I interpreted the information from the sources. The results of the interpretation were then put into writing.

This research uses photographs that appear in newspapers published by the Japanese community in Java, and in their memoirs as primary sources. The newspaper I used was *Java Nippo*. *Java Nippo* was a Japanese-language newspaper published in Batavia from 1920-1937. *Java Nippo* was actually not the only Japanese newspaper ever published in the Dutch East Indies (Baskoro, 2019, p. 107). However, among other Japanese newspapers, *Java Nippo* had the longest publication period, so there is more information that can be extracted from the newspaper.

*Java Nippo* was also very rich in content. The newspaper not only carried news related to the lives of Japanese people in the Dutch East Indies, but also photographs of them. From the photos, I saw how the Japanese people in the Dutch East Indies dressed. In addition, *Java Nippo* carried many advertisements, including clothing advertisements. The advertisements described what kind of clothes they wanted to wear.

The memoirs I used as main sources were *Perdjalanan Menoedjoe Djawa* written by Yoshichika Tokugawa and *Jagatara Kanwa* compiled by *Jagatara Tomo no Kai*. *Perdjalanan Menoedjoe Djawa* is a translation of Tokugawa's travelogues from his visits to Java in 1921 and 1929. Meanwhile, *Jagatara Kanwa* is a collection of memoirs written by Japanese people who had lived in Batavia in the colonial period. Both *Perdjalanan Menoedjoe Djawa* and *Jagatara Kanwa* contain photographs depicting the appearance of Japanese people in the Dutch East Indies.

I realize that the use of photographic sources in historical research has some methodological problems. We cannot view early 20th-century photographs in the same way as modern-day photographs, because in those days photographs were a luxury. People in the early 20th century appeared in photographs with careful preparation. They planned what they wanted to appear in the photograph. That made the reality in the photo may not be exactly the same as the everyday reality. (Taylor, 1997, p. 121) However, this tendency makes photographs important as historical sources, because it implies a desire to show a certain identity.

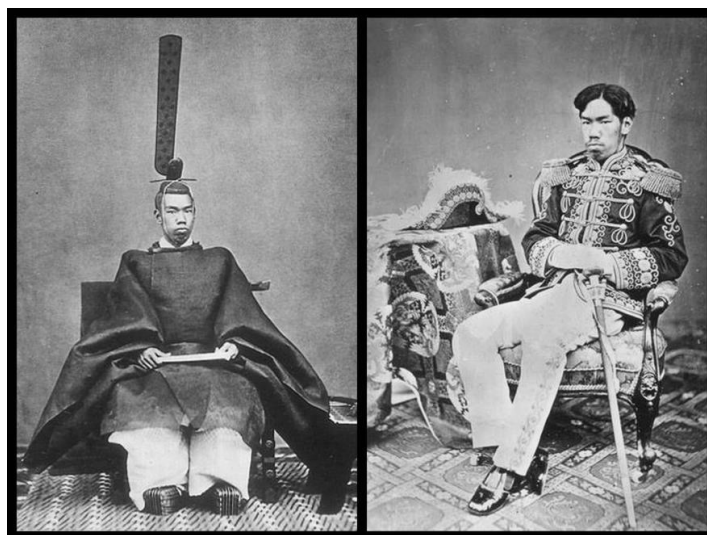
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Meiji Restoration and Fashion Transformation in Japan

Western influence in how Japanese people dress can be traced back to at least the Meiji period which lasted from 1868 to 1912. The period that changed Japan from a traditional agrarian country to a modern industrialist country was marked by the massive influx of Western culture. The Meiji period began with the takeover of power by revolutionaries in the feudal government in response to the political crisis following

the forced opening of the country by Commodore Matthew J. Perry from the United States in 1853. The coup led to the Tokugawa shogunate's dissolution and government power's return to the emperor, which came to be known as the Meiji Restoration (Beasley, 1972, p. 2-3).

The modernization took place in the Meiji period also touched the realm of everyday life, including dressing style. During this period, Japanese people began to recognize *yōfuku* or Western clothing, as opposed to *wafuku* or Japanese clothing (Osakabe, 2018, p. 18). Japanese society viewed *wafuku* as a symbol of backwardness, on the contrary *yōfuku* as a symbol of progress. They also became very fond of wearing Western clothes (Slade, 2009:173). In the 1870s, Emperor Meiji, for example, began to appear in public in Western suits. In a photo taken in 1872, the emperor is seen wearing a dark top with a dark cloak paired with light trousers and shiny loafers. The outfit contrasted with the robe he was used to before (Figure 1). The emperor's style was immediately followed by government officials, moreover at almost the same time the emperor also issued a mandate ordering them to wear Western clothes on various official occasions. According to the emperor, modernization is mandatory to maintain the dignity of Japan. The emperor thought that by westernizing himself, Japan would no longer be seen as an Eastern country that was lower than the West. In this context, Japan tried to use Western clothing as an instrument to demand international recognition for the modernization they have achieved, as well as to show that its modernization has been running on the right track (Molony, 2007, p. 81).



**Figure 1** Meiji Emperor in Japanese and Western Outfit [Molony, B. (2007). *Gender, Citizenship, and Dress in Modernizing Japan*. In M. Roces & L. Edwards (Eds), *The Politics of Dress in Asia and the Americas*. London, UK: Sussex Academic Press.]

The trend of Western dress in Japan did not stop at the elites but also ordinary people. In responding to the cultural transformation initiated by the state, Japanese society did not become a passive object, but took a part in the westernization process (Slade, 2009, p. 173). Since the 1870s Japanese people started wearing Western clothing or at least adding Western accents to their Japanese ones. For example, they combined an umbrella with *geta* sandals made of wood, a hat with *hakama* pants, or a *kimono* overcoat with a flannel shirt (Eichler, 1995, p. 97). A photograph taken by Kazuma Ōgawa during the late Meiji period, for example, shows people in Western clothes or Japanese ones combined with Western accents walking around in Tokyo's Ginza economic district (Figure 2). At that time, the Japanese had a habit of wearing Western clothes to work and changing into a casual *kimono* after returning home. In this context, the Japanese people have placed Western clothing as clothing in the public sphere and Japanese clothing as clothing in the domestic

sphere. However, the transformation of this dress style was initially only dominated by men. Women commonly wore Western clothes into the 1920s (Molony, 2007, p. 91).



**Figure 2** Ginza Economic District in Tokyo at the Late of Meiji Period [Ōgawa Kazuma. (1911). *Tokyo Fūkei*. Tokyo: Ōgawa Kazuma Shuppan-bu]

The westernization process in Japan during the Meiji period did not always run linearly. Amid the modernization that was rushing, Japanese scholars were trying to find a middle point between Japan and the West. They considered that westernization that occurs without control has obscured Japan's national identity, so the revitalization of traditional culture was needed to reshape that identity (Pyle, 1988, p. 31). In this process, the notion that Western clothing always symbolizes progress, while Japanese clothing always symbolizes backwardness slowly began to get a correction. The notion that modernism itself was more important than its representation in Western dress began to emerge in the last few decades of the Meiji period. Japan also began to reinvent traditionalism as something that not only can be side by side, but also fill modernism (Slade, 2009, p. 173). In this stage, Western clothing got a new, more moderate interpretation.

### **Western Fashion Style among Dutch East Indies Japanese Immigrants**

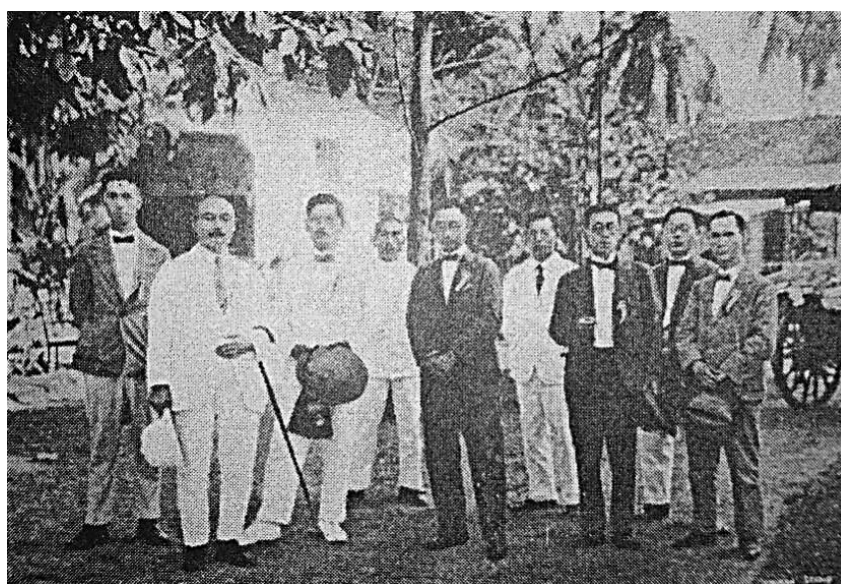
The Western style of dress that was developing in Japan since the Meiji period also flourished in the midst of the Dutch East Indies Japanese immigrant community. After the 1910s Japanese community in Dutch East Indies transformed into a community that is economically and socially stable. At this stage, the Japanese began to appear to express their pride as part of modern Japan, as well as first-class citizens in the Dutch East Indies, through their style of dress. Shiraishi (1998, p. 12) describes that Japanese peddlers express this pride by dressing like Europeans, with mustaches, white helmets, and tight-fitting five-button coats. When traveling to the countryside by bus, they also sat in the front row with Europeans and Eurasians while their belongings were carried by native servants. Meanwhile, wealthy Japanese live in Western-style houses. The photo of a Japanese merchant named Shintaro Otomo posing in Tegal square in 1912 seems to represent the description of the Shiraishi (Figure 3).





**Figure 3** Japanese Peddler in Western Outfit [Jagatara Tomo no Kai. (1978). *Jagatara Kanwa: Ran'in Jidai Hōjin no Ashiato* (Tokyo: Jagatara Tomo no Kai.)

In the context of the fondness for Western fashion, the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies at the beginning of the 20th century were no different from the Japanese in their homeland. When Japanese people who occasionally came to the Dutch East Indies for certain purposes met Japanese immigrants who settled in the Dutch East Indies, both of them looked and behaved like Westerners (Yamamoto, 2018:72). It can be seen, for example, in a photograph taken by Yoshichika Tokugawa on his way to attend a science conference in Java in the late 1920s (Figure 4). When he stopped in Cilacap, Tokugawa was greeted by the owners of the Japanese shop there. In the photo, the Japanese people who greet Tokugawa are wearing full suits, the same style of dress as their guests.



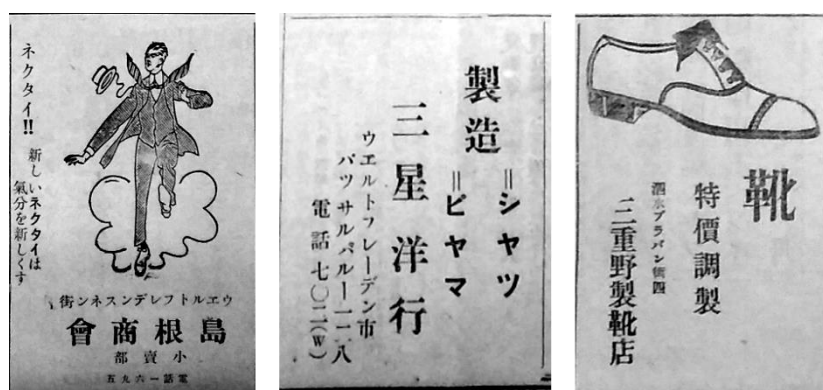
**Figure 4** Yoshichika Tokugawa and Japanese Community Members in Cilacapap [Tokugawa, Yoshichika. (2004). *Perjalanan Menoedjoe Djawa*. Bandung: ITB Press.]

The Dutch East Indies Japanese people's fondness for wearing Western clothes was also evidenced in the photographs in their newspapers. In the *Java Nippo* newspaper, images of Japanese people dressed in Western clothing often appear in the news about the activities of Japanese associations or *nihonjinkai*. On January 8th 1934, *Java Nippo*, for example, published news about the opening of the *nihonjinkai* tennis court in Batavia, which was held the day before. In the photo featured in the news, the Japanese, members of the Batavian *nihonjinkai*, were seen wearing Western clothing. Some of them wore light-colored suits, others wore all-white sports clothes. Some of them were also carrying rackets (Figure 5). The photo shows that Western clothes are commonly used by Japanese people to attend official events, including those held within the internal community.



**Figure 5** Opening Ceremony of the Japanese Association of Tennis Courts in Batavia [*Java Nippo*, January 8th 1934.]

The Dutch East Indies Japanese people's fondness for Western clothing is also seen in the advertisements published by *Java Nippo*. Advertisements of Japanese shops selling various types of Western clothing often appear in the newspaper. For example, Shimane Store sells ties, Mitsuboshi Store sells shirts and pajamas, and Mieno Shop sells loafers. (Figure 6). These ads appear quite often. Based on my observations, in a week, these ads appear at least three to four times. It shows that these items have become a necessity for Japanese immigrants in the Dutch East Indies.

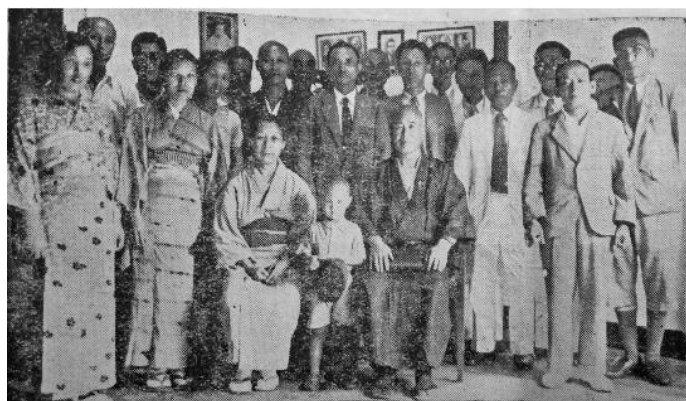


**Figure 6** Advertisement in *Java Nippo* [*Java Nippo*, January 19th 1921; *Java Nippo*, January 17th 1929; *Java Nippo*, May 15th 1936]

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Nevertheless, the kimono was not abandoned by the Japanese of the Dutch East Indies. In other photos published by *Java Nippo*, for example, it can be seen that some Japanese still wear kimonos when attending *nihonjinkai* events. An example is the photo of the members of the *nihonjinkai* in Magelang and Kedu published by *Java Nippo* on May 28, 1937 (Figure 7). In the photo, Japanese people are seen wearing suits and kimonos at the same time. It shows that in the Dutch East Indies Japanese Community, western clothes do not substitute for Japanese clothes.



**Figure 7** Members of *Nihonjinkai* in Magelang and Kedu Wear Kimono and Western Suit at the Same Time [*Java Nippo*, May 28th 1937]

The Japanese in the Dutch East Indies occasionally appeared in clothes that were very representative of their traditional culture. For example, as reported by *Java Nippo* on January 12, 1937, in celebration of the wedding of Queen Juliana and Prince Bernhard, Japanese people in various big cities in the Dutch East Indies, such as Batavia, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Makassar marched while displaying their cultural symbols. In one of the photos accompanying the news, Japanese people in Surabaya can be seen standing in front of torii or Japanese gates in miniature dressed in magnificent kimonos (Figure 8). The photo shows that Japanese people wear their traditional clothes in public events that require them to display their Japanese identity. In this case, the Japanese provided themselves as a window to introduce their culture in the midst of the pluralistic society of the Dutch East Indies.



**Figure 8** Japanese People in Surabaya Wear Traditional Outfit in the Celebration of Queen Juliana and Prince Bernhard Wedding [*Java Nippo*, January 12th 1937]



## CONCLUSION

The fondness for Western dress styles that developed in Japan also grew in the midst of the Japanese community in the Dutch East Indies. The fondness for Western clothing styles only became prominent in the 1910s, after they were transformed into an economically and socially established community. They wear Western clothing to show Japanese modernity, as well as an expression of pride as first-class citizens equal to Europeans.

Meanwhile, some photographs show that Western clothing has become common for Japanese people in the Dutch East Indies. However, the Japanese did not necessarily abandon their kimono. It shows that there are two ideas that are lived by the Japanese community: modernity and traditionality. On the one hand, Japanese people see themselves as part of Western modernity, but on the other hand, they also see themselves as part of Japanese tradition.

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