



# KOLONIALE TENTOONSTELLING SEMARANG AS AN INDUSTRIAL TOURISM DESTINATION

Koloniale Tontoonstelling Semarang sebagai Destinasi Wisata Industri

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## Abstract

The idea behind the world exhibitions event was to promote international trade by exhibiting goods, colonial achievements, and the identities of the colonies. However, Georg Simmel's notes in "The Berlin Trade Exhibition" showed that the exhibitions developed during the nineteenth century specifically responded to the competitive demands of the industrial mode and money economy. Thus, the purpose of the world exhibition is not merely as an annual fair; rather, it has socioeconomic and cultural aspects represented by the colony on a smaller scale. A similar pattern was also found in the Colonial Exhibition of Semarang. As one of the biggest exhibitions held in Southeast Asia in the early 20th century, the exhibition displayed the Dutch Colonial's highest achievement in the Dutch East Indies. It represents modern life's industrial and technological advancement and temporarily serves as the center of world civilization. Yet there is a distinct contrast between the natives and European visitors, which causes a contradiction between modernism and traditionalism exhibited in the exhibition. This paper examines Koloniale Tontoonstelling Semarang as the representation of an industrial city and an attraction for a touristic destination. It aims to investigate how world exhibitions served not only as platforms for promoting international trade but also as reflections of the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of the time.

*Keywords:* exhibition; colonial; Semarang; Sentiling; Tontoonstelling

## Abstrak

Gagasan di balik kegiatan *world exhibitions* adalah untuk mempromosikan perdagangan internasional dengan memamerkan barang, pencapaian kolonial, dan identitas koloni. Namun, catatan Georg Simmel dalam "The Berlin Trade Exhibition" menunjukkan bahwa pameran yang dikembangkan di abad kesembilan belas secara khusus menanggapi tuntutan kompetitif industri dan ekonomi. Oleh karena itu, tujuan pameran dunia bukan hanya sebagai pameran tahunan; namun juga memiliki aspek sosial, ekonomi, dan budaya yang diwakili oleh koloni dalam skala yang lebih kecil. Pola serupa juga ditemukan dalam Pameran Kolonial Semarang. Sebagai salah satu eksibisi terbesar yang diselenggarakan di Asia Tenggara di awal abad ke-20, pameran ini menampilkan pencapaian tertinggi Kolonial Belanda di Hindia Belanda. Hal ini mencerminkan kemajuan industri dan teknologi kehidupan modern yang ditampilkan untuk sementara waktu sebagai pusat peradaban dunia. Namun terdapat kondisi yang mencolok antara penduduk asli dan pengunjung dari Eropa, sehingga menimbulkan kontradiksi antara modernisme dan tradisionalisme yang dipamerkan dalam pameran ini. Tulisan ini akan mengkaji Koloniale Tontoonstelling Semarang sebagai representasi kota industri dan daya tarik destinasi wisata. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki bagaimana pameran dunia tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai wadah untuk mempromosikan perdagangan internasional tetapi juga sebagai cerminan dinamika sosial ekonomi dan budaya pada saat itu.

*Kata kunci:* pameran; kolonial; Semarang; Sentiling; Tontoonstelling

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## Introduction

Koloniale Tentoonstelling or Colonial Exhibition of Semarang, known as Sentiling by the natives, was the largest trade and cultural expo ever held in the Dutch East Indies and even Southeast Asia at that time. It was held from August 20 until November 22, 1914 (Van Heel, 1916, p. 8). The exhibition provides documentation of the European companies' achievements in the colonized countries, alongside the development of modern technologies and industries applied in colonial cities.



**Figure 1.** Main Entrance Illustration of The Semarang Colonial Exhibition

Source: KITLV

This exhibition was held to celebrate one hundred years of Dutch independence from France, which fell in 1914, and was celebrated in a large-scale exhibition. Some of the Dutch colonial seized land throughout the Indonesian archipelago was sold to investors to increase trade. The venues were dismantled soon after the exhibition ended. Leaving no physical record, the memory of the Semarang Colonial Exhibition now only lies in photographs, books, newspapers, and articles. The Semarang Colonial Exhibition signified the city as the most prestigious central business and industrial district in Java.

The exhibition was situated in a 26-hectare area with seven sections based on the activities. The exhibition did not only include machinery products, industrial handicrafts, colonial administrative government, demonstrative plantation, agriculture products, native traditional pavilion, and foreign countries' pavilion, but it used local people (natives as an object in this exhibition as well). The Dutch colonial achievement helped improve building infrastructure, shown as a documentation of photographs in the exhibition. The improvement of infrastructure includes 600 meters of roadway, 1067 meters of railway, 105 notable buildings covering 39,260 square meters, electric and gas lighting, and power generation, which employed hundreds of local 'helpers' and 'coolies' (Cote, 2006, p. 3).

This exhibition's contemporary design, cutting-edge construction, and venue management were all very progressive. Maclaine Pont, assisted by Thomas Karsten, was the architect who led the design of the venue and pavilion (Cote, 2006, p. 14). They used advanced new materials such as asbestos sheets, galvanized iron roofing, and steel frames for the pavilion (Figure 1). There were automobile and tram services to move around within the venue. Electricity and gas were used to provide new energy sources for artificial light. A free

entertainment center, Luna Park, was also open to the public to complete the entire modern industrial representation of the colonial achievement.

The exhibition was initially planned in 1912 and expected to open in 1913 as a centenary celebration of Dutch independence from France. However, it was postponed until 1914 due to the Great War in Europe. It was also linked to a symbolic meaning to mark the completion of conquering and incorporating the archipelago into the Dutch colonial state (van Goor, 1985, as cited in Cote, 2006). It also can be seen as a symbol of Dutch colonial achievement in Asia (van Heel, 1916, p.110). The exhibition was supported by a private entrepreneur, Oei Tiong Ham, who owned the largest sugar company in Java. He provided the land for the exhibition and became a significant financial guarantor (van Heel, 1916, p.21). However, soon after the exhibition ended, all the buildings and pavilions were dismantled without any trace. The boulevard Pieter Sijthof Laan, now Gajahmada Street, where this exhibition took place, has become one of the busiest streets filled with offices and hotels. One of the reasons for choosing Pieter Sijthof Laan as the venue was that it was a strategy for the government to develop the southern part of the city.

### **Literature Review**

From the late nineteenth century until the early twentieth, world fairs and international exhibitions attracted the interest of both the public and the government. Exhibitions arranged the world into a neatly symbolic depiction of modern culture and technological advancement. During the late 19th century, there was a shift in the exhibition as part of “exhibition culture” that gave birth to new cultural attitudes by making a visual representation as a medium for transmitting knowledge (Munro, 2010). The displayed material culture in the venue was often carried out by powerful institutions such as governments and elite economic interests, which in this context was carried by the colonial power. The purpose of the colonial exhibitions was not only to make money and promote consumerism but also to draw a clear distinction between the ruling class and the colonized (Lukito, 2018, p. 19). It provides a venue for visitors to engage in various cultural and social interactions and display their conceptions of modernity. Furthermore, colonial exhibitions held in the colony contributed to the creation of localized modernity and space of encounter between the colonizer and the colonized (Lukito, 2018, p. 5).

According to George Simmel, space is discussed in the realm of ideology, representation, structuring, and the mental dimensions of phenomenology. Space is something in and through which social existence is created, sustained, and experienced. In the colonial exhibition, the fairs aim to create a platform of economic exchange where the foreign country participants (China, Japan, Taiwan, etc) learn how to give shape to their own national identities (Leerrssen & Storm, 2022). Meanwhile, as the fair's organizer, the Dutch colonial government construed the colonial identity as progressive and modern. Some countries such as Taiwan, Japan, and China showed their identities through particular styles while displaying progressiveness through displayed objects such as factories. The Dutch colonial showcased their modernity through technological advancement by using electricity, using trams as a means of transport and display inside the fair, and showcasing the sugar factory. Some cultural and historical interests are shown in each pavilion, as well as how particular

styles and materials were chosen. The exhibition shows the attempt to develop aesthetic opportunities through displayed products and pavilions that can contribute to their attractiveness.

The natives or *pribumi* were also involved in the exhibition, though they served a different purpose. The inclusion of local objects and the traditional pavilion was part of a larger discourse about natives' culture. Traditional architectures were a standard component of the international expositions that were frequently conducted in colonial metropolises; they served as an evolutionary proof of the colonial story of the rise to civilization' and as a pre-modern spectacle for the superior, civilized colonial observer (Corbey, 1993, p. 61).

In Semarang, displays of native agriculture and craftwork were also intended to be seen by native audiences. Thus, it promoted the political celebration of the success of the Dutch East Indies as dependent upon the paternal direction of the colony. The Colonial Exhibition of Semarang resembled Foucault's model of "partitioning and verticality" by deliberately enforcing rigid boundaries between settler and native's cultural and economic life according to the hierarchical discourse of "progress" to visibly enforce the power hierarchies between them (Nicolaas, 2018).

## Method

The essay will discuss the Colonial Exhibition of Semarang through Georg Simmel's lens in his review of the 'Berlin Trade Exhibition.' There is a resemblance between both exhibitions, which show colonial achievement. Simmel's proposition is chosen to contextualize the exhibition review into the broader context and to provide a historically located cultural commentary in Industrial City Semarang. Although the exhibition was in a colonial country of origin, the Berlin Trade Exhibition showed recreations of villages from colonized countries (East Africa, Togo, Camerouns, and New Guinea), complete with more than 100 natives brought to Berlin for an accurate, authentic impression. Thus, George Simmel's lens is chosen as a guide to dissect the Semarang Colonial Exhibition.

The study uses qualitative methods, with a historical perspective and historical analysis methods. This approach rooted itself in tracing the past relating to urban sociology. The data will be collected using the photography and photo analysis method from primary sources such as original documents, articles from delpher.nl, and photos from KITLV. Secondary sources such as journals, magazines, and articles will also be used. In the study, the author will describe a phenomenon and an event that occurred in the research object of the past.

## Result and Discussion

### a. The City

Semarang was selected as the venue for such a significant event due to its pivotal role as a business hub. Semarang was crucial as a linking point for the sugar industry, as it had an active port that developed into the center of the railway network. In 1678, Sultan Amangkurat II, the leader of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom, ceded Semarang as a debt payment to the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC). Since then, Semarang has become the center for exporting agricultural products from Central Java's rural area and

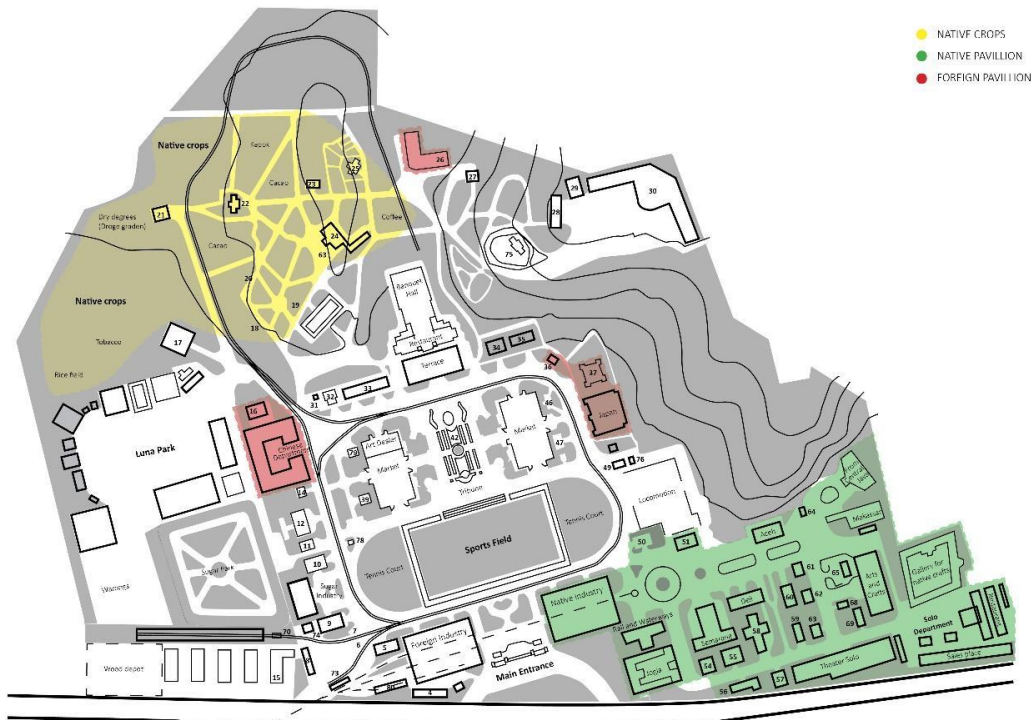
importing manufactured goods from abroad. This makes a reliable transportation infrastructure essential. De Groote Postweg, or Great Post Road, was built through Semarang. Later on, an extensive railway network also served the city, including the first railway line in the Dutch East Indies between Semarang and the Vorstenlanden.

The Industrial Revolution in Europe between the 18th and mid-19th centuries created a new phenomenon of an industrial city. The transition from manual labor to new manufacturing processes resulted in a type of city where economy and urban development are concentrated around industrial production and characterized by many factories. Semarang served as the central industrial development through trading where only a small number of factories and offices were located inside the city: Hygiea mineral water factory (1901), Cultuurmaatschappij der Vorstenlanden or Plantation Company of the Royal (1888), De Nederlandsche Handelmaatschappij or The Netherland Trading Company (1907) (Yuliati and Susilowati, 2023). The city's center in Oude Stadt of Semarang is filled with government and trade offices for industrial product exchange near the north port.

Semarang became the largest commercial city in Java in the mid-19th century (Yoshihara, 1989, as cited in Mary and Rahardjo, 2010). Between 1905 and 1920, it proliferated as an industrial city. The population in Semarang increased from 96,000 to 158,000, and by 1930 it reached 218,000. In 1905, the population comprised 78% natives, 15% local Chinese, 5% European, and 2% other Asian (Wijono, 2014). As an industrial city, business culture is thus reflected in the Semarang Colonial Exhibition. Business ethos, civic pride, middle-class culture, working-class culture, leisure, and entertainment became prominent aspects of the exhibition. Through its industrial production, the city can represent itself as a copy and an example of the manufacturing forces of world culture that was happening during that era.

### **b. The Space**

The exhibition ground was located along the main road of Bojdong and Randoesari, where hotels Du Pavillion and Jansen were located (Algemeene Koloniale Tentoonstelling te Semarang, 1914). The 26 hectares of the exhibition ground were owned by Oie Tiong Ham, the king of the sugar factory, and were used free of charge for the exhibition. The terrain is bounded on the south and west by picturesque ranges of hills belonging to the foothills of the Ungaran Mountains, which are partly used for a pictorial presentation of the mountain cultures. In contrast, the eastern flat part is used to demonstrate the natives' culture. Some significant agricultural products were planted months before the exhibition in the northern part of the area. Cacao, tobacco, coffee, tea, cinchona, and paddy were chosen to represent the most productive agricultural produce.



Source: Map taken from KITLV

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| <p><b>LEGEND</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 General Director Office</li> <li>2 Secretariat Office</li> <li>3 Bandstands</li> <li>4 Bicycle shed</li> <li>5 Deutsch-Hollanische Export Company</li> <li>6 Waniare Factory "Java"</li> <li>7 Bars</li> <li>8 Exhibition works and customs Office</li> <li>9 Koffi v. d. Hosen &amp; Broekmen</li> <li>10 Carl Schleper</li> <li>11 Lindeteves Stokvis</li> <li>12 Lavatory</li> <li>14 L. C. Janson</li> <li>15 Auto Garage</li> <li>16 Chinese restaurant</li> <li>17 Royal Tobacco</li> <li>18 Police Station</li> <li>19 Coffee</li> <li>20 Monorail Forestry Bureau</li> <li>21 Native Agriculture</li> <li>22 Kapok-cacao</li> <li>23 Demonstration shed for mountain culture</li> <li>24 Semarang - Kedoe</li> <li>25 Fiber, kina, spices</li> <li>26 British India</li> <li>27 General Dutch Association</li> <li>28 Cabaret</li> <li>29 Dutch department</li> <li>30 Observation tower</li> <li>31 Comar &amp; Co.</li> <li>32 Parcel Shipping Company</li> <li>33 Colonial management</li> <li>34 Post, telegraph and telephone Station</li> <li>35 NI Gas Company</li> <li>36 Nestle &amp; Anglo-swiss condensed Milk Co.</li> <li>37 Formose Tea House</li> <li>38 Daily Newspaper "De Locomotief"</li> <li>39 S&amp;W Birnbaum</li> <li>40 Charls &amp; Co</li> <li>41 De Erzen and J van Nelle</li> <li>42 Banostands</li> <li>43 Fountain</li> <li>44 NIL Company</li> <li>45 Behn Meyer &amp; Co.</li> <li>46 F van der Loo</li> <li>47 F van der Loo</li> <li>48 Schnitzer &amp; Co.</li> <li>49 Pers Pavilion</li> <li>50 Carriage factory wh FJ Fuchs</li> <li>51 Semarang Automosail (Maatschappij)</li> <li>52 Geo Wahny &amp; Co</li> <li>53 Fountain</li> <li>54 Soerabaja</li> <li>55 Demonstration pavilion mail handling</li> <li>56 Warongs</li> <li>57 Western division of borneo</li> <li>58 Southern and Eastern part of borneo</li> <li>59 Palembang</li> <li>60 Praanger ingencies</li> <li>61 Bali and Lombok</li> <li>62 Amboina</li> <li>63 Kedoe</li> <li>64 Japanell</li> <li>65 West Sumatra's house</li> <li>66 Cleaning detachment</li> <li>67 Lavatory</li> <li>68 Korintji (Djambi)</li> <li>69 Moara boengo (Djambi)</li> <li>70 Depot Locomotives</li> <li>71 House transformation Anlem</li> <li>73 Unloading and loading platform</li> <li>74 Storage shed</li> <li>75 Soekaboemi tea pavillion</li> <li>76 Lavatory</li> <li>77 Ford with fountain</li> <li>78 Chocolate tent</li> <li>79 Advertising column rubber exhibition</li> <li>80 Hamise locos for power outage</li> </ul> |
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**Figure 2.** Masterplan of the Colonial Exhibition of Semarang

Source: Author, 2023

The main entrance was located in the middle of a large tribune (Figure 4), which, with its seats, faces the sports field, on which various matches and competitions took place during the exhibition. The building for Inheemsche Nijverheid (Indigenous Industry) was to the right of the main entrance. Behind it was a square around which the pavilions of the various regions and the separate pavilion for native arts and crafts were grouped. The party hall was opposite the main entrance in the background of the exhibition. A terraced garden leads up to an area used for Kermesse d'Eté (fairground amusement) close to the party hall.



**Figure 3.** Bodjong-Pieter Sijhoff Street  
Source: KITLV



**Figure 4.** Main Entrance  
Source: KITLV



**Figure 5.** Banquet Hall and Fountain  
Source: KITLV



**Figure 6.** Market/Trade Building  
Source: KITLV



**Figure 7.** Restaurant Building  
Source: KITLV

A separate hall was set up for the sugar industry, where the latest machines were housed, along with a complete laboratory where the sugar planters could fully assess the most modern installations. Behind the Sugar Palace was a spacious area where sugar cane was planted. Not far from the Sugar Palace was the Tobacco Pavilion, surrounded by an area where the planters of Java gave a full demonstration of tobacco culture.

The remaining low area, situated at the eastern border of the exhibition, was mainly intended for the native cultures. A large number of different crops of importance for domestic consumption and export were grown there. At the same time, the harvested products and the tools required for the cultivation were displayed in a pavilion, creating a unique opportunity for acquiring knowledge on the origin of many foods, herbs, and medicines, which most of us know only in finished forms

### c. The Architecture

Architecture served as a valuable source and experience for the visitor through modern technologies and local identities shown in the form of pavilions. It signified the colonial achievement by using modern design and representing the culture that the colonial had shaped. Some prominent architects, namely Abukasan Atmodirono and Maclaine Pont, were involved in designing the venue.

Aboekasan Atmodirono (1860-1920) was a native architect who worked at the Dutch East Indies Public Works Department, the Department van Burgerlijke Openbare Werken (B.O.W) in Semarang. He designed the pavilions in Section VII, which covers regions in the archipelago, specifically the Yogyakarta Sultanate, Surakarta Sultanate, Minangkabau, and Bali. According to the newspaper *De Preanger Bode* (26 April 1913), Atmodirono began his work by creating the pavilion for the Municipality of Semarang, embellished with exquisite Jepara carvings. The Aceh Pavilion is one of the pavilions in Section VII. Notwithstanding Aceh, which had just been conquered by the Dutch, the pavilion was strategically located and won several awards: 4 gold, 11 silver, and three bronze medals. It was recognized as the best pavilion. The pavilion was sent back to Aceh by the governor of Aceh, who chose to turn it into a museum. The Aceh Pavilion was opened as a museum on July 31, 1915, East of Blang Padang, Banda Aceh. It is now the only surviving pavilion from Koloniale Tentoonstelling 1914 and is known as the Aceh State Museum.

Most of the buildings in the exhibition were designed by Henry Maclaine Pont, who was assisted by Thomas Karsten. He was responsible for the design and construction of

indigenous architecture. For him, the exhibition was meant to contrast modernity and local identity.



**Figure 8.** (from left) Stand inside of the Trade Building: Stand of the W. Schotte Cork Factory, Coumas & Co, Foreign industry - Sanitary  
Source: KITLV



**Figure 9.** (from left) Dutch-Indian Gas Company, Train and Ram Service, Van Nelle, The illuminated Pavilion of the Company for Tools and Machines Kahabee - Kolff, Van der Hoeven and Broekman  
Source: KITLV



**Figure 10.** (from left) Java Manure Factory, Behn Meyer and Co., Kiosk of S. and W. Birnbaum  
Source: KITLV

Several pavilions from different countries, such as Japan, China, British-India, Australia, and New South Wales, were founded as establishments for International Exhibitions. Meanwhile, some regions represent themselves as a company, such as Germany with Carl Schlieper company, Taiwan with Formose Teahouse, and Switzerland with Nestle. The highlight of the company's exhibition was the sugar factory in the Dutch East Indies with its technological advancement (van Heel, 1916, as cited in Cote, p. 19). The Japanese, Chinese, and Taiwanese pavilions signified a political statement by showcasing their identity instead of industrial products, as many others have done (Figure 5). The Japanese had an impressive pavilion that reflected Japan's importance in international politics. As the British ally at that time, Japan had an economic interest in the Dutch East Indies. Meanwhile, Australia and China were concerned about Japanese expansion. In the exhibition, the Chinese pavilion expressed their new Nationalism (Cote, 2006).





**Figure 11.** (from left) Carl Schlieper – Germany, Japan, Formosa Tea House - Taiwan  
Source: KITLV



**Figure 12.** China, (from left) Nestle – Switzerland, British - India  
Source: KITLV

The architectural representation in the colonial exhibition shows an imaginary identity of modern Dutch East Indies determined by the colonizers, imperialists, Dutch, and business interests. This exhibition was planned according to the entitled authority to demonstrate modernity and authenticity, contrasting the new technologies and the natives. Although Maclaine Pont planned to achieve a cultural fusion of imperial and colonial progress and a stylized tradition, the result was experimental buildings that the imperial and colonial represented.

From George Simmel's approach, space is something in and through which social existence is created, sustained, and experienced. In the context of the Colonial Exhibition, space was represented as a place for experience heightened by proximity, density, frequency, boundaries, and entrance fees. This was supported by the architect's intention to reflect the natives as a separate and autonomous identity from the colonial Dutch. Consequently, the Western section, facing after the entrance gate, is located in the most prominent area where the spectators would notice immediately. Meanwhile, the native 'eastern' section, located in the undulating terrain, is presented distinctively behind the Western section. Thus, the venue is set up to show the differences between the colonials in the main entrance to the west part (Figure 4 and Figure 5) and the natives in the eastern part (Figure 2).



**Figure 13.** (from left) Palembang, Ambon, Central Java and Makassar  
Source: KITLV



**Figure 14.** (from left) Deli, Tapanuli, Sukabumi  
Source: KITLV



**Figure 15.** (from left) Semarang – Kedu, Minangkabau  
Source: KITLV

The native elements provide the exotic aspect of the orient for the colonial exhibition. It became an attraction for foreign visitors to follow the Western perspective in non-organic relations between natives and foreigners. The native pavilion is only represented as a by-product of the current power. Representation is treated in its various meanings: as an ideology, as a theatrical event, and as a mode of translating the perception of reality into a specific language using certain technical devices. According to Diana Agrest, the city represents power and the scene of power. In this regard, the colonial exhibition in Semarang is a form of urban representation built by the colonial perspective to commemorate the colonial achievement in the Dutch East Indies. The exhibition also represents the ongoing complexities of the industrial city, social interaction, and the institutions that shaped city dwellers under the colonial regime.

**d. Social Elements**



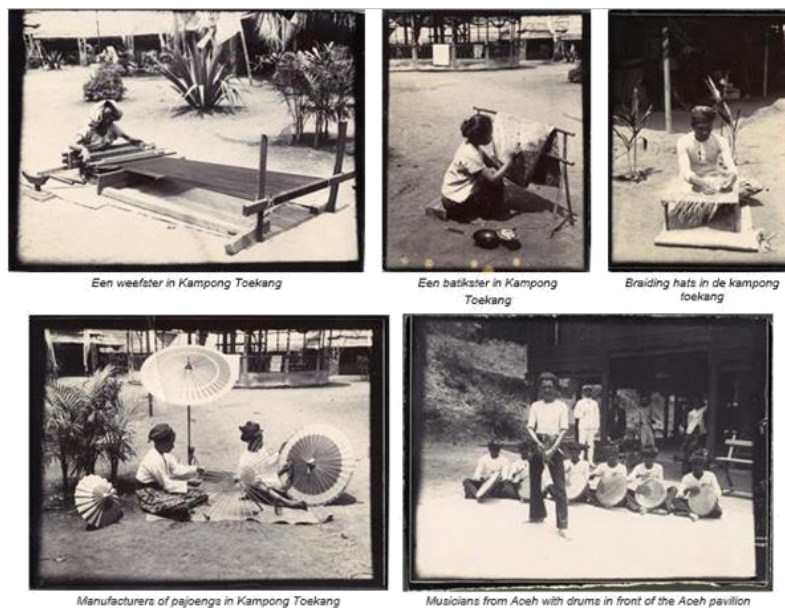
**Figure 16.** The Visitors were Scattered near the Nestle, Swiss, Pavilion  
Source: KITLV

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| <p><b>Koloniale Tentoonstelling Semarang.</b><br/><b>Verpachting</b><br/>bij inschrijving van de exploitatie van het<br/><b>hoofdrestaurant en drie bars.</b><br/>Bedeelstaats gelieven zich voor informatie, voorwaarden en tekenen gen te wenden tot het secretariaat van de <b>Koloniale Tentoonstelling te Semarang.</b> 3156</p> <p><b>Koloniale Tentoonstelling Semarang.</b><br/><b>Tijdelijk h6tel.</b><br/>Zij, die genegen zijn gedurende de maanden JULI, NOVEMBER 1914 te Semarang<br/><b>een tijdelijk h6tel te exploiteeren,</b><br/>van ruim 65 kamers, worden verzocht zich ten spoedigste te wenden tot, W. DE<br/>COCK BUNING, Raddossiri 15, Semarang. 3157</p> | <p>SEMARANG, 22 Aug. 1914.<br/><b>De Koloniale Tentoonstelling.</b><br/>Op den dag der opening van de <b>Koloniale Tentoonstelling te Semarang,</b> bedroeg het aantal betalende bezoekers 7080, van wie 3828 Europeanen.<br/>Den tweeden dag was het aantal belangstellenden veel minder.<br/>Omdat zij geen maand voorschot hebben gekregen, is er staking uitgebroken onder de zettters van enkele drukkerijten te Semarang.<br/>E6n drukkers-firma denkt aan sluiting der zaak, vooral omdat er weinig werk aan den winkel is.<br/>(Van Reuters Agentschap).</p> |
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**Figure 17.** On the Opening Day, the Number of Visitors was 7030, 3828 were Europeans.  
Source: Delpher.nl

The event successfully attracted thousands of visitors, both natives and foreigners, over a few days. The total number on the first day of the opening was 7030, where 3829 of them were Europeans, and the rest were natives (Figure 17). Given that the total population of Semarang was about 150,000, with 6.3 percent of natives, it would leave us with only 10,000 natives who lived during that era. Therefore, I assume most native visitors came from other regions. The visitors would be the most exciting yet contradictory subject in the realm of the Semarang Colonial Exhibition. Two primary groups, the foreigners (the colonial, the European) and the *pribumi* (natives, which include royal families), symbolize the unity as well as the separation of the spectators. The richness and diversity of pavilions attract various people to enjoy the amusement of the exhibition. Meanwhile, the extreme distinction in architecture, culture, and behavior marks the separation of the two.

Around the 19th century, there were phenomena called human exhibitions known as "human zoos" or "ethnological expositions" that frequently highlighted the cultural distinctions between Western and non-Western civilizations, which the latter were thought to have more primitive lifestyles (Abbattista and Iannuzzi, 2016). The human exhibition usually shows how exotic and different non-Westerners are. In the World Exhibition, human zoos typically become the event's main attraction. As shown in the 1931 Paris International Colonial Exhibition, the Dutch government built traditional Javanese houses and flew the natives to show how authentic and exotic they were. In the Semarang Colonial Exhibition, the exoticism of the natives was exhibited through traditional dance and traditional industry demonstration. An open-air area without a roof was provided for the natives to demonstrate making umbrellas, batik, traditional weaving, and hat-making. Like the World Exhibition, the human zoo also became an attraction to Western visitors, even though it was placed as the secondary display and took place only 13 out of 80 pavilions. The record was found in a commemoration book of Koloniale Tentoonstelling filled with many illustrations of traditional and native shows.



**Figure 18.** Traditional Dance and Traditional Industry-making Performed by the Natives

Source: KITLV

It is clear to see a spatial contestation of the natives as the human zoo where they are displayed under the sun without any shed. By exhibiting the natives, the exhibition creates a gap among the visitors, especially the native visitors. After the big wave of native visitors at the opening, the total number of visitors quickly decreased. The probable explanation was that the native visitors did not consider the entry fee valuable, let alone watching their fellow natives exhibited there. Even so, the native visitors who attended the exhibition were seemingly the highly Dutch-educated elite (van Heel, 1916, p. 121). Figure 10 shows that the elite natives and the Europeans are dressed up similarly, which is a sign of the former's elitism. Meanwhile, the non-elite natives kept their traditional clothes. As a result, the non-elite natives are viewed as the non-modern other.



**Figure 19.** The Western and Native Visitors were Mixed in the Exhibition Area  
Source: KITLV

An influential native who opposed the event provided an alternative viewpoint. Before the colonial exhibition, Ki Hajar Dewantara or Suwardi Suryaningrat wrote an article. "If I were Dutch, I would not celebrate independence in a country where we deny the people's independence," he said. Modernity and modern societies have been shaped mainly by colonialism. Examining colonial modernities can help to unsettle intersectional injustices while contributing to political struggle in a colonized world. There are six dimensions of colonial modernity (Arora and Stirling, 2023): assumptions of comprehensive 'superiority,' appropriation of cultural privileges, assertions of military supremacy, enforcement of gendered domination, an extension of controlling imaginations, and expansion of toxic extraction. Modernity provided by the colonizers, imperialists, Dutch, and business interests had shown that the exhibition falls into colonial modernity. It is reflected through exhibiting the natives as objects, positioning colonial and participating countries as the central while maintaining natives' architecture and agriculture as the opposing state. The colonial exhibition forms the momentary center of Dutch East Indies *civilization*, assembling the products of the Dutch East Indies in a confined space as a single picture (Simmel, 1991, pp. 120).

## Conclusion

The Semarang Colonial Exhibition did not merely display the Dutch Colonials' highest achievements; rather, it represented socioeconomic and cultural aspects on a smaller scale.

The exhibition's main attraction is that it serves as a temporary hub of global civilization, bringing together goods from around the globe in a confined space for everyone to enjoy. The exhibition was about the spectacle of work and industry on the site of a park for the middle class of the Dutch East Indies. The representation of industry here became one of pleasure in production and consumption in which work became the subject of a primarily aesthetic discourse over and above a socioeconomic. Ironically, though the exhibition aimed to showcase advanced technology and modern aspects of the colonized country, Koloniale Tentoonstelling, or Colonial Exhibition of Semarang, was still trapped in traditionalism and exoticism by displaying *pribumi* or the natives as part of the exhibition object.

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