

**THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANIZATION:
EDUCATION AS THE FIRST STEP OF SPREADING THE RELIGION
IN BATAVIA IN THE 17TH CENTURY**

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's history cannot be separated from the role of the Dutch who came to the Archipelago since the 17th century along with their missionaries. Since the Dutch's arrival in Batavia, Dutch missionaries contributed a great deal of Christianization in Asia. The year 1620 was the first step of establishing ecclesiastical in Batavia. In conjunction with the development of Christianity, the Dutch also provided education for local people in the process of Christianization in Asia. This paper discusses, first, the early development of church; second, the interaction between the pastors and the locals; third, provision education by Dutch missionaries as an effort to Christenize to the locals; and fourth, the outcome of Christianization in Batavia.

Keywords: *Batavia, Dutch missionaries, education, and Christianity.*

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Early Development of Christianization in Batavia

The Dutch's arrival journey to the Asia Pacific region started when Spain's King Phillip the Second banned trading at the Iberia cape, hence in the early 17th century four Dutch ships sailed toward Asia. One of the places they were headed was Batavia, since their purpose was to obtain spices from the Dutch East India regions. In this journey, the missionaries came along with the purpose of spreading Christianity. In 1602, VOC (*de Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie*/The Dutch East India Company) established a company in Batavia with Jan Pieterszoon Coen as the Governor General of Dutch East Indies. Religion was an important part in VOC's expansion towards the region and they were encouraged by their motto Christian Nation by the Dutch because there was a strong relation between the Dutch government and the Church (Neil, 170).

They formed a spiritual assembly initiated by Hulsebos. He was the pioneer of Christianization in the Dutch East Indies. Basically, Dutch are Protestants (Gereformeerde Kerken). Hulsebos, who was the first missionary in Batavia, with financial support from the Company, formed the Church Council with Commandant van Raay, Captain Jan Jansz, Van Gorcum, Adriwn Jacobsz, and merchant Evert Hermanszoon as members. (Prakash, 1995: 157, Algra, 1946: 49).

With this Church Council in Batavia, Hulsebos first held a meeting in January 14th, 1620 at his home and the meeting was attended by Jakob Anthoniszoon Dubbeltrijck, Johannes Bloem, Cornelis Maes and Cornelis Lubbertsz. They discussed three major factors in ecclesiastical in Dutch East Indies, namely the establishment of Church Council, administration, and design of church regulations. Based on these factors,

they composed six sub sections, specifically Christianization in the Dutch East Indies, establishment of Religious Government, establishment of Religious Council, elaboration about the mission and mandate from the Governor General, promotion of Sunday Rest, and establishment of rules of marriage for Christians. These sub-sections were composed to structurize the Church of Batavia, to organize local communities who converted to Christianity and give them initial education as Christians (van Boetzelaer, 1947: 80). The spreading and establishment of Churches in Batavia turned the place into the center of VOC in Dutch East Indies.

Initial Interaction between the Pastors and the Locals in Batavia

Batavia, as the center of Western civilization in Dutch East Indies had a multicultural society as seen from many ethnics, such as Javanese, that lived in the city. VOC described Javanese as one of the local communities that gave a new perspective in how to practice Christianity in the community. They described Javanese as uncivilized people and Java were considered as a primitive area Neil: 170).

Francois Valentijn in his second book, *Onlange Bedienaar des Goddelyken Woords* in Amboina, Banda, enz, described Javanese in the Dutch East Indies by examining the structure and behavior of the society. After the Dutch arrived at Banten on June 22nd, 1596, he wrote that Javanese people were friendly and entrepreneurial (Valentijn, 1724: 80). He explained that Javanese can be categorized into three groups based on the social structure, namely commoners, slaves, and freed slaves (*mardijkers* or free people). Valentijn also saw that Javanese were followers of Islam and Hindu, and Moslems dominated the number. However, as the Dutch entered the Javanese

society, some Javanese women became Christians. For the Dutch, local Christians, especially Javanese were former slaves and was called *Mardijkers* (Valentijn, 1858: 341).

The word *mardijkers* has a strong relation with the word *Merdieka* which means being free. Most of the slaves were women who were brought by Dutch soldiers and taken as wives. This occurs because VOC workers were not allowed to bring Dutch women to Dutch East Indies, so Javanese women were taken in their place. Since there were many Javanese women who became wives of Dutch soldiers, the Company became unstable. This was because Dutch soldiers who had a relationship with Javanese women had to marry them and changed their faith into Christianity. However, in reality many VOC workers and soldiers lived with Javanese women and they were not married. As a result, the Company declared that the marital status of these couples had to be blessed by the church and this was also valid for their descendants.

Education as the Foundation of Christianity

In early 1623, Hulsebos taught Malay language to the Javanese who lived in Batavia. The teaching was then continued by the Church Council in 1624. Three of fifteen points set by the church related to education were accepted by the locals, such as the election of village chiefs, school headmasters, and head of boarding houses. These points showed that Dutch pastors and local Christians had to go to Batavia Church. This was because the Church wanted to reduce the number of followers of Islam, Pagan, and other beliefs local beliefs (van Beotzealer, 1947: 32).

In this condition, the pastors did not only teach Christianity to VOC's workers and soldiers but also taught and spread their religion to the

Javanese, including *Mardijkers* and *Mixtisen*. *Mixtisen* is a group of people with mixed race, born from local women who married Dutch men. This group were mostly Christians since childhood and had been baptized by pastors from the Church of Batavia.

The Governor General and Church Council declared a resolution to encourage Javanese to accept Christianity as their main religion. This was also related to political interests during the Christianization in Batavia. In the resolution, it was explained that "two out of 40 stuiver (chips) of coins had to be paid to each local who agreed to be christenized by the power of the Company's church." From this statement, Church Council wanted to motivate the Javanese people who followed Pagan and Islam to become Christians and prayed to Jesus Christ.

The pastors were propagated Christianity to the Javanese people by building schools and teaching the meaning of Christianity in Dutch language. Most of the students were *Mardijkers* and *Mixtisen*. In one report written by a Dutch, David Goris, it was stated that the Dutch should live with Javanese *Mardijkers* in peace. David Goris stated that the Company had to attend the people. Yet this depended on the Company's interest at that time. The Company had built schools for locals, such as the Javanese *Mardijkers*, who converted to Christianity. However, since the old beliefs (or superstitions) still existed, Church Council issued a prohibition for activities of paganism in their region.

In reality, Javanese people did not give much attention to the teachings of Christianity which resulted in the impediment of spreading Western civilization. This was also reported by Valentijn after he visited the Church of Batavia. He saw that the locals had low interest in learning and he also got trouble with the

penalty given by the church when he came to a mass (Schutte, 2012: 138). This occurred until the penalty was canceled, and as a result the Javanese came to church by their own will. Because of their inconsistency in terms of attendance, Javanese youth did not fully understand Christianity. Another reason is an aspect related to the obligation of Christians that they must work for the Company and also work on Sundays to do catechism. From these aspects, the local Christians could not be considered as pious Christians who followed the church's rules. Another difficulty in spreading Christianity was that VOC who wanted to build more schools was having financial problems since the Company's main focus was to build more trading branches in Dutch East Indie regions.

An important development in Dutch language had also been done by the Company which was initiated by Wiltens and Danckaerts in Ambon (Gunning, 1914: 40). They taught Dutch language in Dutch-owned schools in Batavia. This was a method to teach Javanese people more easily since Javanese language have many differences in dialects. Malay language was the second language used in the schools' curricula because most Javanese had known and used Malay in trading with non-Javanese people. This resulted in a new social community and a religious language in local church schools.

In 1625, Justus Heurnius employed Chinese people who understood Latin language to write Chinese-Latin-Dutch dictionaries and to translate several prayers into Chinese (Algra, 1946: 96). In 1647, an employee of the Company reported that Church Council produced several psalms, two Bibles in Dutch with new arrangements, annotations, and one Dutch-Malay dictionary (Mooij, 1929: 55). With the effort from the pastors to translate

some of the Bibles, the Governor General announced in a meeting that every member of the Dewan Gereja should learn Malay language. This process was led by Mr. Cornelis Senen. Another development was carried out by Melchior ab Hambach who was initially a headmaster of a Latin school and came to Batavia in 1650. Hambach was appointed by the Church Council to see the Governor General regarding the construction of new Latin schools in Batavia; and another purpose was to civilize the Javanese living in the city. In the same year, Cornelis Senen commented that under the leadership of future pastors and catechists, they wanted him to be a pastor and would be appointed in the next Church Meeting (Mooij, 1929: 163).

In 1628, Dankaerts and Justus Heurnius appealed to the Church of Amsterdam and Heeren XVII to hire locals into the *Collegium Indicum* in Batavia. This decision was the foundation to educate local teachers who would spread Christianity to the Javanese people. On May 14th, 1634, the Governor General accepted a proposal from the Church Council that would be announced to the public (Al Agra, 1946: 127). The Governor General also announced that Sunday sermon must use Malay because the language was very influential for the locals. He also meant to expand the spreading of Christianity to the people of Batavia.

The pastors' efforts to describe Java and to understand Malay language were new insights on how they interact with the locals. Establishment of local schools and translations of the Bible were ways to facilitate Javanese people in understanding their new religion. The pastors' decisions resulted in a close relationship between Dutch and Javanese people, and also gave important contributions to the propagation of Christianity in Batavia.

The Outcome of Christianization in Batavia

The outcome of Christianization was influenced by the descriptions given by pastors and VOC workers, and also by the education given about the religion. In 1629, the Gospel of Mathew was translated into Malay for the first time. The Gospel was published in the Book of Genesis in 1662, which was translated by Daniel Brouwerius (Neil, 177). By translating the Gospel into Malay, some locals became teachers at churches. However, a number of youths who became Christians were still worshipping idols and their number were increasing in several areas, therefore the pastors believed that Pagan teachings were a conspiracy done by local sects. Because of this case, Church Council called a meeting to solve the problem and to ask for fund to the Company in order to reduce the number of pagans.

One of the Church's members, Ds Abrahamus Rogerius, used Portuguese language to teach Christianity at Batavia church (Mooij, 1929: 15). Mr. Cornelis Senen was the chief of the Christian Javanese community and taught the Christians that learning and reading from the Bible was a foundation of understanding Christianity. Church member Joannes Rooman, as reported by a pastor to the Governor General, should have been learning Malay because he was going to preach to the Javanese.

The propagation became more intensive when a VOC worker received a report that Jesuits could not accept superstitious activities and paganism done by *Mardijkers*. This was reported in 1646 as baptized *Mardijkers* were still doing superstitious activities after giving their oath in the church (Mooij, 1929: 15). Therefore the Church Council, supported by the Governor General's authority, tried to

narrow down the number of Pagans among the Javanese.

In 1650 until 1662, only a few of the Javanese women wanted to have their children baptized in the church, and among them were two women who had been concubines of Dutch men for quite a while. These women wanted to be Christians so that they could be married with Dutch men (Mooij, 1929: 171). Baptizing Javanese was not simple since there was a deadline set by the church. The decision of Church Council had slowed the process down. This also happened to a 14 year-old teenager whose parents were Javanese (Mooij, 1929: 460). However, the church would only baptize the teenager if the parents were also converted to Christianity.

For Javanese Christian community in Batavia, since the early times of Christianization, there were no restrictions for any ethnicities, such as Europeans, Eurasians, or locals to become Christians. The church did not only baptize Javanese, but also people in other regions of Dutch East Indies, and the people were from slaves or freed slaves (Mooij, 1929: 116, 171). Batavians who had been baptized in 1644 were 338 people consisted of 205 children and 133 adults. Among the children, 49 were European, 156 were Eurasians and locals; and among the adults, 2 were European, 26 were *Mardijkers*, and 105 were slaves. The population of *Mardijkers* increased in 1678, when 95 *Mardijkers* came from various regions of Dutch East Indies to become members of the Church of Batavia. In spite of this, local pastors could not develop well. This was because of the intricate processes in becoming a pastor and the lack of facilities given by the Company and the Church of Batavia. The *Mixtisens* who were Christians since childhood, even converted into Islam as they became adults. With Muslims as the majority, it was very easy for Christians to convert to Islam.

Conclusions

Christianization as a process of propagating Western civilization through church with the help from VOC made a new relationship with the Javanese who were the main target of Christianization. The first step made by the Company was occupying Batavia and ruling Javanese as their subjects. The effort had given a way to structuring the local people. Javanese, who had been Muslims before the Dutch came, were a great challenge for pastors in the effort in changing the people's faith. Church Council, with hard work and financial support from the Governor General, built local schools and churches to teach Christianity to Javanese. These schools and churches were the early and the most important foundations for spreading Christianity. They used several languages, namely Dutch, Malay, and Portugese, in the process of Christianization. One proof of the success was that *Mardijkers*, who are freed slaves, changed their faith. They converted because of their marriage with VOC workers. The marriage resulted in a new group, namely Mixtisen. One aspect that was challenging for the Dutch was reducing the number of Pagan believers among the Javanese people. Although many efforts were done by the Company and the Church Council, the relationship between Javanese people and Dutch pastors did not turn out as expected, because the lack of interest the Javanese had in learning Christianity. Other aspects that hindered the process of Christianization of the Javanese were the beliefs that they had beforehand, and the inadequate amount of fund received from the Company.

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