

A REVIEW OF THE EMERGENCE OF INDONESIAN MODERN INTERIOR DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Indonesian modern interior design begun by the opening of Liberalism in the Dutch East Indies. The establishment of new private enterprises and immigration of European were the connected factors in entering the modern concepts in interior design.

Many schools that had been established since applying of Ethic Politic -especially technical schools - arose Indonesian modern designer pioneers and also arose a specific style of Indonesian modern design: Indo-European Style. The progress of communication technology in the late nineteenth century accelerated the influences of international movements in enriching the development of Indonesian modern interior design.

Key words : emerge, modern, interior design.

INTRODUCTION

The late of nineteenth century was the key of change of Indonesian modern interior design, whereas it couldn't be separated from political change in the Dutch East Indies. *Cultuurstelsel* (the System of Plantation) that had been applied since 1830 until 1870 gave prosperity for the Netherlands and settled all the debt caused by both the wars against Napoleon and the bankruptcy of VOC (The East Indies Enterprises Organization).

The results of *Cultuurstelsel* for the Netherlands were real: the advantage and continuity. Since 1831 the Dutch East Indies budget had been balanced, and after that all the debt of VOC was settled. So much money was sent to the Netherlands; from 1831 until 1877 the Netherlands treasury had taken 832 million golden. By 1850 that shipment was about 19 percent from the Netherlands national income and in 1851 until 1860 it was about 32 percent (Ricklefs, 1981).

That condition introduced the Netherlands to the advanced. Many enterprises established and new middle class was emerged. Industrialization grew and modernization emerged. By them, exploitation of resources in Java got critics. In 1860 Eduard Douwes

Dekker published a novel titled *Max Havelaar* that described the condition of the Dutch East Indies government which oppressing and corrupting in Java. Inspired by this novel, the opposition in the Dutch Parliament was united. They forced the government to eliminate the *Cultuurstelsel* and give larger opportunity for private enterprises to take a part on the development of the Dutch East Indies. In 1870 their striving was accepted, *Cultuurstelsel* was wiped out and replaced by two acts in which were known as the Sugar and Land Acts.

The Sugar Act signified the definitive abolition of the *Cultuurstelsel*, the colonial system of forced farming, in which farmers were obliged to give a percentage of their crops for the tax. The Land Act meant the opening-up of the Dutch East Indies to free enterprises and private capital. It put an end to the monopoly position enjoyed by the Dutch State as the only entrepreneur in the Dutch East Indies. Colonial products were mainly transported through the large port of Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya, just as they had always been. A railway network was developed from these three cities to provide links with the hinterland and allow export goods to be transported to the harbors. Existing harbors were improved and enlarged and new harbors were constructed (Akihary, 1996).

All these advance had changed the opinion of the Dutch toward the Dutch East Indies. It wasn't viewed as a burden anymore but as potency and a hope for better future for both the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies, especially Java. The big population of Java was potency for market and human resources. Since enterprises had grown in the Netherlands, starting from the revolution of industry, it needed new market for their products. The Dutch East Indies was a challenge for the enterprises to expand their business. This fact also gave impact to migration of the Dutch and other Europeans to the Dutch East Indies.

THE FIRST INFLUENCE: LIBERALISM

The Agrarian Law (Land Act) of 1870, which replaced the oppressive, government-run Plantation System with free enterprise and private ownership, encouraged a massive influx of immigrants from Europe who were eager to take advantage of the new economic opportunities in the profitable colony (Gill, 1998). A number of mercantile houses, banks and other enterprises were established in three cities: Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya, or

opened branches there. Many Europeans followed in their wake. In 1855, there were only 28.000 Europeans in the Dutch East Indies. By 1905 this number had tripled to 84.000 and by 1920 it had grown to 240.000. The explosive growth caused fundamental problems. There was little infrastructure and a serious shortage of housing (Akihary, 1996).

On perspective of interior design, the political change had influences important. **Firstly**, the coming of entrepreneurs from Europe brought a new concept in the application of design. Colonial interior design in which was typified by neo-classical building style was replaced by new interior design in which tent to be modern: new technology, industrial materials and functional shape. Nineteenth-century colonial design was typified by neo-classical building style. These were usually white-plastered structures with porticos or colonnades and large overhanging hipped roofs with ventilation and coolness as the main objectives. The Indonesian classicism lost its purity of style in the course of the nineteenth century. In the second half of that century, corrugates iron awnings, supported by wrought iron corbels, began to appear and stone pillars were replaced by supports made of wood or iron (Akihary, 1996).

Secondly, establish of enterprises emerged new experts in the Dutch East Indies: architect and designer. The development of the Dutch East Indies was dominated by government which automatically the building design became the tasks of military engineers. The erecting of the new more specific buildings needed expert of this field, which could be fulfilled by architect and designer. Consequently, many private bureau established and design pioneers were arose.

The low standard of architecture in the Dutch East Indies was due to a shortage of highly trained architects. Until the end of the nineteenth century there was not a single architectural engineer working there, either for the government or in the private building sector. Designing and building were the tasks of military engineers, or "hydraulic engineers", who work referred from books and models.

The first private architects' bureau was founded towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1909, the important commission for the new head office of the Java Bank, to be built in the lower of Batavia, resulted in the establishment of the architect's bureau of M.J. Hulswit, A.A. Fermon and Eduard Cuypers. Cuypers, who

already had an office in Amsterdam, came to the Dutch East Indies. Many other commissions followed (Akihary, 1996).

THE SECOND INFLUENCE: ETHIC POLITIC

The Ethic Politic turned up as a concern over exploitation of resources in the Dutch East Indies during both *Cultuurstelsel* and Liberal era. By an article in *de Gids* magazine in the Netherlands in 1899, van Deventer, a lawyer that had ever lived in the Dutch East Indies during 1880-1897, wrote that the Netherlands was deeply indebted to the Dutch East Indies for all resources that had been taken. The debt should be settled back by giving priority to the indigence (especially Java) in development policy. After the observation on Javanese prosperity in 1901, Ethic Politic started to be applied. There were three principles of the policy: education, immigration and irrigation. Later one the first policy would give influence for the development of modern interior design in the Dutch East Indies. Since that time many schools, training and workshop were opened. Among them, technical schools played a dominant role in arising skillful personnel to support the development of modern interior design in the Dutch East Indies.

During the time when van Heutsz occupied as governor general (1904-1909) in the Dutch East Indies and Dirk Fock occupied as minister for colony territory (1905-1908) in the Netherlands, the idea about masses education got more supports. Fock gave priority to engineering and vocational schools. Various schools had been established by Christian missions since 1881 in Minahasa, Batak territories of Sumatra and Java. The first vocational state schools established in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya in 1909. Finally, those schools took care of courses for blacksmiths, carpenters, electricians, mechanics, etc. (Ricklefs, 1981).

The undergraduate education of engineering was established in the Dutch East Indies in 1920 by opening the Technische Hoogeschool in Bandung (the Bandung Institute of Technology), a new modern city that had been planned to replace Batavia as the capital of the Dutch East Indies government.

Bandung lies 700 meters above the sea level and its supportive climate was one of the main reasons that around 1915, there was a strong advises of moving all the government services, and the civil servants who ran them, to Bandung. In anticipation of

a large-scale migration, Bandung prepared itself for an invasion of new inhabitants and institutions. In pursuance of their aim to make Bandung the new capital of the Dutch East Indies, a number of civil government services had already been moved to this city from Batavia. A number of new institutions were also welcomed before 1920. One of the most important was the Technical High School Bandung (Akihary, 1996).

The existence of this institution played a role in development a new concept of Indonesian modern interior design. It was Indo-European Style, a design movement which had a goal to develop Indonesian modern design by entering modern technology to be adapted into local climate and style.

Although modernism advocated a rationalist and functional approach to architectural design, the earliest attempts in employing these principles in the Indies were not altogether successful. The rigorous application of architectural features such as flat roofs and sheer facades, which had previously only been seen in Europe, resulted in buildings which were totally unsuited to the tropical climate with its torrential monsoon rains, high humidity and intense solar radiation. In the end, the young revolutionaries had to accept that many of the design principles endorsed by the Modern masters were quite inappropriate in the tropics. This led them to explore indigenous architectural form as a source of possible solutions to deal with the local climate.

In the 1920s and 1930s the progressive development of this school of thought which consciously sought to combine the traditional elements of Indonesian architecture with new technologies and Modernist architectural principles from Europe. Indigenous roofs were singled out for particular attention and there were many interesting syntheses of local and European forms and construction techniques. This exchange of ideas worked in two directions: the interest of Modernists in the dynamic interplay of geometrical elements was soon incorporated into the New Indies Style and led to bold experiments that combined these structural forms with traditional vernacular ornamentation (Sukada, 1998).

Some architects that became lecturers in the Technical High School Bandung were pioneers on developing of Indo-Europe Style. One of them was Herman Thomas Karsten (1884-1945), a foremost Dutch architect (and also interior designer) who practiced in Batavia in the 1920s and 1930s.

Herman Thomas Karsten, a son of a philosophy professor and graduate of the Delft High School of Technology, worked as a town planner and later became the professor of town planning at the Bandung Institute of Technology. Karsten's concern for the tropical climate can be seen in a number of special features, such as the high window and ventilation grills, which reach from floor to ceiling. The large, and steeply sloping, expanse of roof provides good insulation from solar radiation and efficient run-off for monsoon rains. Corridors, at the front and sides, on the ground floor and first storied, also assist thermal insulation (Somalyo, 1998). The most important building designed by Karsten were 'Volks theatre Sobokarti' at Semarang and 'Museum Sonobudoyo' at Jogjakarta. In these designs he took the traditional Javanese *pendopo* as his inspiration.

Another pioneer who had part was Henry Maclaine Pont, an architect (and also interior designer) of the Technical High School Building at Bandung. Besides designed that building, he also designed a church at Pohsarang, in Kediri-East Java, which represented another attempt in incorporating Hindu-Buddhist elements into western building for the interior design. In this church building, he put all the knowledge he had acquired in his archeological researches into design.

Henri Maclaine Pont was born in 1885 what is now known as Jatinegara and similar with his contemporary, Karsten, he was a graduate of the Technische Hogeschool de Delf. Maclaine Pont was greatly interested in the indigenous design of the region and published several works on the Hindu-Buddhist temples of Java. The influence of local design form is more apparent in his masterpiece, the Technical High School at Bandung.

The original Technische Hogeschool complex consisted of three main groups of building, which are linked by colonnaded walkways springing from a central periphery entrance. These principal buildings are set out on a north-south axis in which aligns with the volcano Tangkuban Perahu to the north. The arrangement is clearly inspired by ancient cosmological precepts.

Maclaine Pont employed highly original construction techniques for the most important buildings in the complex, such as the auditorium. The main structural elements, such as the columns, are made of layers of teak bound combined with iron hoops (Somalyo, 1998).

Others design pioneers of this movement were: C.P. Wolff Schoemaker, Ir. J. Gerber, C. Citroen and A.F. Aalbers. His design, the Preanger Hotel Bandung, Schoemaker was inspired by the East in an otherwise wholly Western interior design style. He condemned the Indo-European Style in which Hindu-Javanese ornamentation was applied without the slightest comprehension of it. In Surabaya, Gerber designed 'Stad-huis' (town hall) and in Bandung Gerber designed Public Works Office. These were modern buildings, constructed round a reinforced concrete skeleton, was given refined decoration and facade detailing. Aalbers designed Denis-Bank Building and Hotel Savoy Homann at Bandung. These were austere designs, with carefully designed and detailed facades (Akihary, 1996).

THE INFLUENCES OF INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENTS AND DESIGN PIONEERS

In every change on modern terms, interrelation from one movement to the others is logical. The progression of communication technology in the late of nineteenth century enabled, the information from one country to the others carried out smoothly. Journals and magazines were effective media to spread ideas of a movement. Ethic Politic was the gate to arise the publication in the Dutch East Indies. By publication, modern movement in the Dutch East Indies could be supported to advanced. The Dutch Indian Association of Architect (NIAK) was an example of an association in which planned to publish a journal four times in one year.

"We must press forward with this, the people here must understand that there are architects and there are builders. The magazine must confine itself to architecture and, of course, with related matters such as urban planning, interiors, furniture, etc." (Akihary, 1996).

The first influence came from the Netherlands. Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856-1934), a pioneer of Modern movement, gave inspirations to the Dutch East Indies design pioneers. In the Netherlands, the effort to find an alternative to Victorian excess is represented by the work of Hendrik Petrus Berlage, an architect (and also interior designer) who was best known for the massive Amsterdam Stock Exchange (1896-1903).

The building is constructed of Dutch brick with a facades that is symmetrical except for the great clock tower in one side (Pile, 2002).

From the Berlage's characteristic of design, P.A.J. Moojen, an architect (and also interior designer) who ran a private bureau in Batavia, designed some buildings based on the inspiration of Berlage. P.A.J. Moojen's rational design was based on the demands of simplicity, sobriety and truth. This was expressed in lucidly designed ground plans and clear structural synthesis, in simple asymmetric (Berlagian) brick facades and an economical use of ornamentation.

In Nillmij's head office in Weltevreden (Bogor), in which he designed collaborated with Snuyf, Moojen was one of the first architects (and also interior designer) in the Dutch East Indies to use reinforced concrete for floors, columns and even for parapets and window mullions. The walls were built using Portland cement blocks. They were then plastered because this material was not resistant to the extreme tropical climate conditions and rain and wind left a green deposit on the bare stone. Moreover, the bricklayers of the time were incapable of producing smooth brickwork" (Akihary, 1996).

On his journey to the Dutch East Indies in 1923, Berlage expressed praise for two buildings designed by P.A.J. Moojen; the office of the Netherlands-Indian Life assurance and Annuity Company ('Nillmij') and Art Association Building.

"Modern architecture began over there, of course, with a purification in structural sense of practically the same motifs as in the motherland. The traditional classic form has been replaced by the realization of a more rational concept." (Akihary, 1996).

Berlage's journey to the Dutch East Indies also influenced on the development of the Indo-European style. His support on the movement revealed in his opinion on the lecture that he gave during his journey.

"An Indo-European style can only be created from a synthesis of the Western structural system and the eastern art form, so that by using the Javanese pendopo as the source building, a definitive structure can be developed."

In his opinion: "A true Indo-European architecture can be created when the Javanese not only is able to practice the profession of architect, but can also be fully trained in Indonesia (...) Because Europe cannot give him the art form which harmonizes with Indo-European, in this case Javanese, art. He must therefore rediscover it for himself. First a start could be made on the search for harmony between construction and art, the goal of every architectural style. Development, which presumes the Javanese as a fully-fledged architect, will then keep pace with that towards an independent Indonesia." (Akihary, 1996)

The emerge of Indonesian modern interior design in the Dutch East Indies was also influenced by an American design pioneer, Frank Lloyd Wright. While, in his own early work, Wright himself was influenced by Louis Sullivan, an American modern design pioneer who declared "form follows function". Although he had never come to Indonesia, Wright's concepts of design gave inspiration in developing Indonesian modern interior design. C.P. Wolff Schoemaker and Frans Johan Louwrens Ghijsels, two modern design pioneers of the Dutch East Indies, was inspired by him.

A visit to Chicago in 1917, where he became acquainted with the early work of Frank Lloyd Wright (the houses in Oak Park, among other things), had an unmistakable influence on his work in the Dutch East Indies in the twenties. Schoemaker was not the only one to be influenced by Wright - his influence is also clearly discernable in some of Ghijsels' projects (Akihary, 1996).

Besides influenced the Dutch East Indies, Wright also influenced the Netherlands, especially to De Stijl (The Style), a modern design movement which appeared from a magazine 'de Stijl' that published from 1917 until 1927 and supported by Dutch artists, sculptors, architects and designers.

"It was Wright's frequently expressed conviction that he was the only originator of the modernism in architecture, and that European modernist, were merely (inferior) imitators of his achievements. Reality hardly supports such claims, but it is true that Wright's work was exhibited, published, and admired in Europe long before it had comparable recognition in America. The Dutch artist, sculptors, architects and designers who in 1917 began publication of the magazine De Stijl, which appeared until 1927, may well have known of Wright's work. Certainly, it is possible to notice some similarities in form between such Wright designs as the Gale House of 1909 in Oak Park and the Dutch Huis ter Heide at Utrecht (1916) by Robert van't Hoff (1887-1979)" (Pile, 2002).

Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Expressionist Styles were the other parts in influencing the emergence of Indonesian modern interior design. Although these styles tend to aesthetic than function, but it could enrich the development of Indonesian modern interior design. Especially for Art Nouveau and Art Deco, since they were historicism, it was parallel with the concept of Indo-European Style.

"Art Deco was not strongly concern with issues of functionalism and technology, it was primarily a fashion-oriented style which was expected to take its place in the

sequence of styles from past history. Styles among which designer and client could choose as their preferences might suggest". (Pile, 2002)

INTERIOR DESIGNER AS A NEW EXPERTISE

In the early emergence of interior designer, it was difficult to differentiate between architect and interior designer. Almost architects were also interior designers. Since besides designed architectural of a building, they also designed the interior. During the Ethic Politic, many new types of modern buildings were built in the Dutch East Indies. Consequently, interior designers began to work professionally.

The Architectural Division of the Department of Public Works (BOW), a public department under the government of the Dutch East Indies, was an institution that established to maintain, repair and design all government building facilities. It also had a duty to control and standardize government building designs. Designing the buildings using modern interior design, was a part of the department. Ir. Frans Johan Louwrens Ghijssels (1882-1947) was an Indonesian modern designer pioneer who joined the department.

During his time at the Bow, Ghijssels also produced various furniture designs, either for himself or commission. His archives contained sketches and detailed drawings of a small table, a writing desk, a child's cupboard, a number of chairs, a settee, various cupboards, a girl's desk and several lamps.

Besides working for the BOW, Ghijssels also a private interior designer. He often designed the interiors and furniture for his projects. Most of the drawings in archives were signature by him, but were not dated. It isn't known if all the designs were actually realized, but photographs of some furniture exist. Ghijssels used leaded glass in many of his projects. One lovely example is the staircase in the Internatio Building. The designs of a number of windows have remained. There are also drawings of wood carving in the archives.

Ghijssels was born in Tulung Agung, in Java, on September 8th, 1882, and with his parents he moved to the Netherlands. Nor it was known exactly when the family returned to the Netherlands. Perhaps it was because he spent his youth in the Dutch East Indies

that he began to study architecture relatively late-in 1903, at the Polytechnic in Delft, where his parents were living there at that time.

During his studies in Delft Ghijssels has received drawing lesson from Kees Sluyterman and Prof. H. Evers. A number of sketches still remained in his private archives. The Designs are for pieces of furniture, such as a small table, a writing desk, children's cupboard, various chairs and cupboards, and lamps. These drawings signed by him. Sluyterman indicated his approval with his initials, K.S. There are also a number of drawings of sumptuous interiors, fine details and lovely facades of Dutch buildings. These signed by Prof. Hein Evers and Ghijssels himself. (Akihary, 1996)



Picture 1. Entrance hall of The Kota Railway Station, wide space for sun setting presents a tropical taste combined into art deco style (photo by Akihary).



Picture 2. Lobby of *Hotel des Indes*, the use of local materials and big opened windows are suitable for Indonesian climate (photo by Akihary).

CONCLUSION

Starting from its emergence, the development of Indonesian modern interior design had pointed out a clear direction: enrichment of advance by synchronizing the modern technology from Europe with local climate and indigenous heritage. Others influences of international movements such as Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Expressionist and de Stijl were adapted to enrich it. Basically it can be said that in the beginning of the development of the Indonesian modern interior design, the pioneers had deeply awareness in putting modern idiom in the right place to reach an ideal Indonesian modern interior design.

Apathy to view back into the trace of the development of Indonesian modern interior design often traps us into misunderstanding on the application of modern idiom. By reviewing it, we should be able to apply modern idiom in the right place just like what our pioneers had done.

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