

Chapter II

KARTINI: A Woman of Cosmopolitan Outlook in Late Nineteenth-Century Java

TOMINAGA Yasuyo

Introduction

Raden Adjeng Kartini is discussed in the context of Indonesian nationalism and the Ethical Policy at the beginning of the twentieth century. John S. Furnivall, George Kahin, and Willem F. Wertheim have referred to Kartini in this context.¹ By 1964, she had become one of the *pahlawan nasional* (national heroes). Today, she is especially acknowledged as a forerunner of the women's emancipation in Indonesia. Her image as an emancipator of women, which was emphasized in the context of the Ethical Policy, was just one of the roles she played; however, does not lie within the scope of this paper. Although it is true that Kartini has mainly been considered in relation to the Ethical Policy, she was born and acquired a Dutch education before the policy was implemented. Apart from the achievements mentioned above, she deserves credit as a writer, educator, and promoter of traditional handicrafts. As she could read Dutch, she received formal schooling and could directly approach new European thought of the late nineteenth century. Her values, beliefs, and sense of independence underwent a profound change as a result of her exposure to European culture through the Dutch language and extensive readings of Western books. At the same time, her readings inspired her to think about her identity and what she wanted to do. In this paper, Kartini's life and thought is considered within the context of late nineteenth-century Java, in which the subject was in the process of new perspective. In addition, the paper attempts to establish ideas on an analysis of the cultural encounter between her and the West through an analysis of her correspondence and reading in Dutch.

Kartini became famous after the posthumous publication of a selection of her

¹ John S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 242; George Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), 64; Willem F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1964), 208.

letters to 10 persons. This correspondence was exchanged between 1899–1904; the compilation was published by Henri Abendanon under the title *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (Through darkness to light) in 1911, seven years after Kartini's death. Abendanon was the Director of Education, Religion, and Industry and a promoter of the Ethical Policy. During his stay in the Dutch East Indies, he came into contact with young members of the Indonesian elite, such as Kartini. In the preface to the collection, Abendanon wrote that the publication was aimed at the establishment of Kartini Schools in Java. All of the letters written by Kartini were not printed by Henri Abendanon who selected only some of her letters in order to ensure that the compilation was read in both societies. In other words, he aimed to create a readership for *Door Duisternis tot Licht* both in the Netherlands and in Java. The second and third editions were printed in March and November, 1912. The book was a great success. After its publication, the Kartini Fund and Kartini Committee were established in the Netherlands to assist in the establishment of Kartini Schools. Theses were built in Java in 1913.

In 1987, *Brieven: aan mevrouw R. M. Abendanon-Mandri en haar echtgenoot* (Letters to Mrs. R. M. Abendanon-Mandri and her husband) (hereafter cited as *Brieven*) was edited by Frits Jaquet in the Netherlands. That book contains the complete correspondence between Kartini and Mr. and Mrs. Abendanon. Ninety-nine letters written by Kartini to Rosa Abendanon and nine letters to Henri Abendanon are printed in full. On the other hand, in *Door Duisternis tot Licht*, only fifty-three letters written by Kartini to Mr. and Mrs. Abendanon were published by the latter; moreover, for the most part, only extracts from these letters were included. Although it is important to compare both the editions, such comparison does not lie within the scope of this paper. *Brieven* is the principal source in this paper; however, quotations are mainly from the English version of the book: Kartini, *Letters from Kartini: An Indonesian Feminist, 1900–1904*, trans. by Joost Coté (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University, 1992).

Her Life

This chapter discusses how Kartini developed a new perspective, through the influence of the Dutch language and her schooling.

Kartini was born in Jepara, which is located on the northern coast of Central Java, on April 21, 1879. When she was six years old, she was admitted to the European Elementary School. Her father, Raden Mas Ario Adipati Sosroningrat, sent all his children and not just his sons to the European Elementary School. He understood the importance of a Dutch education, because Kartini's paternal grandfather, Pangeran Ario Tjondronegoro IV also sent his children to the European Elementary School. Moreover, he employed a Dutch tutor named C. S.

Kesteren, who became a famous editor. In other words, Kartini's grandfather gave his children an excellent Dutch education. Sosroningrat became one of only four *Bupatis* (Regent, the highest native administrative official) who could speak Dutch fluently and who had access to Western thought through the Dutch language.² It has been pointed out that even prior to 1870, some parents and young Indonesians, especially those from a number of prominent families responsible for native administration, started to realize that a sound primary-school training was certainly an indispensable minimum requirement for holding a position of any importance.³

Originally, the European Elementary School was for Dutch children who lived in the Dutch East Indies. As Kartini mentions in her letter, it was "the temple of Wisdom."⁴ At the school, all the instruction was probably in Dutch and Kartini studied about the European civilization, history and thought, and such things as democracy, equality, freedom, and individualism. At the same time, it was a school for the small Dutch community. Hence, it provided Kartini with the opportunity to learn how to communicate with "different" persons. In other words, she gained access to Western thought through her school friends. For example, she had a chance to interact with Letsy Detmar, who hoped to study further in the Netherlands in order to become a teacher. Kartini realized that Letsy's situation was very different from that of hers in Java, because Javanese tradition prevented her from deciding her own future. While Dutch was the lingua franca at school, Kartini spoke her native tongue Javanese in her private life. Kartini, who was immersed in Javanese culture, would naturally have found it difficult to adjust to the Dutch cultural milieu. In this milieu, she had to converse with foreign students and think in Dutch. Such a situation would naturally have required her to constantly switch between the Dutch language and Javanese depending on the setting she was in.

The following sentences, in which Kartini describes her school days, show that she had the ability to look at herself objectively. She refers to herself in the third person.

"Go on Letsy, tell us a story, or read us something," cajoled a brown girl—it was not only the color of her skin but also her attire which revealed her to be a Native. A large blond girl, who was leaning lazily against a tree trunk and

² Heather Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite: The Colonial Transformation of the Javanese Priyayi* (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979), 49.

³ Hendrik Kroeskamp, *Early Schoolmasters in a Developing Country: A History of Experiments in School Education in Nineteenth Century Indonesia* (Assen: Van Corcum, 1974), 476.

⁴ R. A. Kartini, *Brieven aan mevrouw R. M. Abendanon-Mandri en haar echtgenoot* [Letters to Mrs. R. M. Abendanon-Mandri and her husband], ed. Frits Jaquet (Dordrecht: Foris Publications Holland, 1987), 9.

was avidly reading a book, looked up and said.⁵

Here, we notice that Kartini describes herself as “a brown girl,” and as “a Native.” Further, she uses the third person when referring to her attire. The third person is generally used to refer to an object that is observed. Kartini consciously uses these expressions, employing the words “brown” and “native” as against “a large blond girl.” It can be said that she observed herself as an object, using the third-person whenever she refers to herself. At the same time, she also observed the Dutch as objects. In short, she could look objectively at both the Dutch and the Javanese.

After Kartini reached the age of twelve and at a time when her school friends were going to graduate into the world with many options, her father did not permit her to continue her education. Kartini had to abide by the Javanese customary law called *pingitan*, according to which girls were not allowed to enter society until they were married to a man whom their parents had selected. Although *pingitan* was accepted by the majority of Javanese women of nobility, her intellect and capacity for serious thought, Kartini could not submit to this conservative view of women.⁶ She made only one decision—not to give up the freedom she possessed in her inner world. Thus, Kartini, who was “imprisoned” by Javanese customs, attained independence in belief and thought. The following sentences are a good example of Kartini’s self-observation:

The differences in the characters and life views of the two were too great for that. The older sister was quiet, solitary, calm and composed and the younger one, in contrast, was by nature full of life and energy. The opinions to which the latter was attracted were faults in the eyes of the first who was strongly attached to the old traditions and customs.⁷

In her family, Javanese conventions estranged Kartini from her oldest sister Soelastri, who accepted *pingitan*. Judging from the Javanese traditions, which imposed many restrictions related to age differences, it is true that Kartini often made mistakes. The quotation shows that she observed herself as an object and that she could objectively express her recognition of her own mistakes. Generally speaking, the first person is used in letters in which we describe our family to others. However, Kartini consciously wrote about herself in the third-person instead of using the pronoun “I,” in relation to her sister Soelastri. Consequently, Kartini

⁵ R. A. Kartini, *Letters from Kartini: An Indonesian Feminist, 1900–1904*, trans. J. Coté (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University, 1992), 28.

⁶ Tominaga Yasuyo, “Karutini no ‘sekai ninshiki’ no keisei katei: Karutini no dokusho taiken nitsuite no ichi kōsatsu [Kartini as a modern individual: Through her reading],” *Nanpō bunka* 18 (1991): 33.

⁷ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 32.

speaks about both herself and Soelastri in the third person. In other words, there are two points of view: that to the eldest sister Soelastri and that of Ni, the younger one. The following quotation can also be considered in this context:

The oldest sister did not like the younger sisters to have much to do with Ni, who had such strange ideas. And her sister was very firm, the little ones were terrified of her. Ni found this hard... Why was she so unusual, so strange, so different from others? She had tried often to be different, to think like other people and each time when she almost succeeded, something happened to awaken the slumbering thoughts which knowledge of the Dutch language had sown in her heart, and mourning the fact that she had been unfaithful to them, she attached herself even more firmly to the re-awakened ideas.⁸

We should notice that Kartini recognized the difference between herself and others who submitted to Javanese traditions, and that she understood the cause of her “strange idea.” In other words, from Soelastri’s view-point, how could Kartini consider herself a Javanese lady? Kartini was thus forced to ask herself who she was. In other words, her only problem was how she could accept herself. Contemporary European thought began to awaken Kartini to what she knew about herself and she began to see herself in a “new” light. It is obvious that this attitude of self-observation was greatly influenced by European literature.⁹ In fact, Kartini spent much of her time reading. Her love of literature is discussed in the next chapter.

In 1895, Kartini had a chance to break Javanese conventions. Let us consider the following quotation:

Ni was now 16—the oldest sister married and with this marriage changes began in her life. Ni came to know her sisters who, up to now, had lived like strangers alongside her.—The oldest sister no longer stood between them—she was now the oldest sister. Freedom, equality, she had demanded for herself, should she not begin by granting it to others? Relation between herself and her sisters should be free and unforced, therefore away with everything which could impede this. Ni shared her sister’s room. And here the three lives which to this point had been estranged from each other, now came together, flowed into each other to become one whole!¹⁰

The above quotation clearly shows that Kartini struggled to overcome the age

⁸ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 32.

⁹ Tominaga, “Kartini no ‘sekai ninshiki’ no keisei katei,” 37.

¹⁰ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 38–39.

differences between herself and her sisters. This is an important fact that needs to be emphasized.

In 1898, Kartini and her sisters attended a reception in Semarang; they were accompanied by their father. This means that Sosroningrat broke *pingitan*. After this, Kartini stopped following the customary Javanese laws. For example, in the following year, she began to correspond with Estella Zeehandelaar, who lived in Amsterdam.¹¹ Further, an article she wrote was published in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (Journal of the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology). The article was also published in book-form in The Hague.¹² In 1900, her articles were serialized in *De Echo* (The echo) and Mr. and Mrs. Abendanon visited Jepara in order to discuss her education with her; following this visit, they also began to correspond with her on a regular basis.¹³

Kartini was especially interested in the question of the “position of woman” because Javanese girls of nobility became *Raden Ajoe* (official wife of a Regent) as per *pingitan*. However, Kartini did not accept this notion and opposed polygamy and arbitrary divorce by a man. Nevertheless, her sister Kardinah felt compelled to marry a man who already had a wife and children. Kartini thought that woman should have the right to live an independent life. She wished to contribute to the society to which she belonged. She dreamt of opening a girls’ school in Java in order to raise the educational level of women. In order to acquire the information and knowledge necessary for opening a school, Kartini hoped to study in the Netherlands. At that time, her decision was a very radical. Kartini was intolerant of the absolute obedience that Javanese society required of her. It was an onerous form of oppression. In 1903, Kartini succeeded in opening a small girls’ school in Jepara.¹⁴

In July of 1903, Kartini wrote that she was engaged to the *Bupati* of Rembang, a widow with six children and three wives. She could not break Javanese conventions. I quote the letter in which she notes this.

We have been defeated. I have fought, wrestled, suffered—and I can not be the cause of my father’s fate and thereby bring grief to everyone whom I love. Better that I deal the mortal blow to my own heart than to be the cause of the suffering of all those who are dear to me. I do not have to tell you what it has

¹¹ R. A. Kartini, *Door Duisternis tot Licht* [Through darkness to light], ed. Henri Abendanon (The Hague, Semarang, and Surabaya: Van Dorp, 1911), 1.

¹² This book-form of her article titled *Het Huwelijk bij de Kodja’s* [Marriage amongst the Kojas] is seen in *Antiquariaats-Catalogus: G. Kolff & Co.*, printed in 1905, page 4.

¹³ Kartini, *Door Duisternis tot Licht*, 69.

¹⁴ Kartini taught reading, writing, sewing, cooking and so on four days a week; according to her letters dated July 4 and July 7, 1903, the school had nine students. Kartini, *Brieven*, 303–306.

cost me to act against my deepest feelings, my most sacred principles.¹⁵

Kartini left for Rembang in November 1903 in order to be married. She died in September 1904, several days after her son's birth. She was only twenty-five years old.

In the Search of Ideals and Ideas

This chapter deals with the manner in which Kartini developed her new ideas through an analysis of her reading and writing in Dutch. To begin with, we should pay attention to Kartini's books written in Dutch. In one of her letters, she states that the books provided sustenance to her starving soul, which the Dutch language had awakened.¹⁶ She also mentions her views on literature in her writing, as can be seen the following quotation:

There were so many fine books from which she gained such indescribable pleasure, allowing her to forget all the unpleasantness of life.—how wonderfully happy she was when she realized later that literature not only provided her with pleasure but also taught her an infinite amount.¹⁷

In her correspondence, Kartini also describes the way in which she read books.

She read everything she laid her eyes on—she devoured hungrily, good and bad... What was incomprehensible on a first reading, was on a second reading far less puzzling and with the third or fourth reading fairly comprehensible. Each unknown word which she read she noted down in order to later ask its meaning of her dear brother when he returned home.¹⁸

What kind of reading material could she obtain in Jepara? First of all, what did Kartini read everyday? —She read *De Locomotief* (The locomotive), a newspaper that was printed in Semarang and circulated among all the European communities in Java in the second half of the nineteenth century. This newspaper was also read by the Indonesian elite. As Kartini's father subscribed to the newspaper, reading informed her both internal affairs and the international situation.

¹⁵ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 428. The phrase “those who are dear to me” specially refers to her father.

¹⁶ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 36–37.

¹⁷ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 36.

¹⁸ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 36.

Whose works did Kartini read? In her letters, Kartini lists the authors and titles that interested her. The names of the writers are as follows (Kartini often mentions only titles, for example, *Quo Vadis*; in such a case I mention the author's name—here, Henryk Sienkiewicz).¹⁹

“Writers in her letters”

- (1) Dutch writers: Nicolas Adriani, Henri Borel, J. Brandes, Louis Coupers, Jacobus Jan Cremer, P. A. de Genestet, Cécile de Jong van Beek en Donk, Anna de Savornin-Lohman, Augusta de Wit, Cornélie Huygens, J. Groneman, Aletta Jacobs, Hendrik Kern, Marie Max-Koning, Hélèn Mercier, Multatuli, Lodewijk Mulder, Jeanette Nijhuis, Felix Ort, Charlotte Ovink-Soer, E. J. Potgieter, Snouck Hurgronje, Elise Soer, M. ter Horst, Martine Tonnet, Frederik van Eeden, Nellie van Kol, Jeanette van Riemsdijk, S.van Wermeskerken-Junius, Bas Veth, Carel Vosmaer, J. Wertheim, Estella Hartshalt-Zeehandelaar, and so on.
- (2) Non-Dutch writers: Günter K. Anton (Germany), Harold Fielding (UK), Selma Lagerlöf (Sweden), Edna Lyall (UK), Marcel Prévost (France), Fritz Reuter (Germany), Carmen Sylva (Rumania), Henryk Sienkiewicz (Poland), Bertha von Suttner (Austria), Lew Wallace (USA), Humphry Ward (UK), Israel Zangwill (UK), and so on,

Kartini would naturally have read many more works that are not mentioned in her letters. It will be useful, to begin with, to make a distinction between two groups of writers, as illustrated above. Judging from (2), it was easy for her to approach translations so long as she could understand them in Dutch. As she notes, “knowledge of the Dutch language is the key which can unlock the treasure houses of oneself to appropriate some of that treasure for oneself.”²⁰ In order to follow her views, it is necessary to extract an “Accompanying booklist.” In her letter dated November 3, 1903, she says, “I am sending you a list of works I should like to read. They are all books which I have longed to read and have for so long.” A list of her choice of books and information that she could obtain from her milieu is provided below.

“Accompanying booklist”²¹: The nationalities of the writers have been added within parentheses by an author of this paper.

¹⁹ Tominaga, “Kartini no ‘sekai ninshiki’ no keisei katei,” 40–43.

²⁰ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 535.

²¹ Kartini, *Brieven*, 343.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Ritter (The Netherlands) | <i>Paedagogische Fragmenten</i> (Pedagogical fragment), <i>Ethische Fragmenten</i> |
| 2. Vosmaer (The Netherlands) | <i>Amazonen</i> (Amazon), <i>Inwijding</i> (Introduction) |
| 3. Jonathan (The Netherlands) | <i>Waarheid en Droomen</i> (Truth and dreams) |
| 4. Limburg Brouwer (The Netherlands) | <i>Akbar</i> |
| 5. Jacques Perk (The Netherlands) | <i>Gedichten</i> (Poems) |
| 6. Hamerling (Germany) | <i>Aspasia</i> |
| 7. Maeterlinck (Belgium) | <i>Wijsheid en Levenslot</i> (Wisdom and destiny) |
| 8. Tolstoy (Russia) | <i>Opstanding</i> (Resurrection) |
| 9. Tegnér (Sweden) | <i>Frithjof Sage</i> |
| 10. Smiles (UK) | <i>Plicht</i> (Duty) |
| 11. Egerton (UK) | <i>Grondtonen</i> (Keynotes) |
| 12. Browning (UK) | <i>Aurora Leigh</i> |
| 13. Ward (UK) | <i>Robert Elsmere</i> |
| 14. Eliot (UK) | <i>Adam Bede</i> |
| 15. Tennyson (UK) | <i>Idyllen van den koning</i> (Idylls of the king) |
| 16. Kipling (UK) | <i>Het licht dat verging</i> (The light that failed) |
| 17. Harraden (UK) | <i>Voorbijgaande schepen in een donkere nacht</i> (Ships that pass in the night) |

Judging from the “Accompanying booklist,” Kartini was interested in the works of English female writers (No. 11–No. 14 & No. 17); further, more than half the works in this booklist are translations. The list under “Writers in her letters,” suggests that she had not only read Dutch works but also the Dutch translations of English, French, German, Polish, Rumanian, and Swedish works that attracted worldwide attention. On the other hand, she was familiar with Burma and its people as a neighboring Buddhist country through translations of *The Soul of People* (1901), which were written by Harold Fielding. Apart from Buddhism, she also studied Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—both in Dutch works and in translations. Hence, it is important to note that Kartini, who lived in a small town, could obtain plenty of information about the West by the end of the century.²²

What “Writers in her letters” immediately makes clear is that Kartini had already read works on the Dutch East Indies written by Dutch authors who had been living in the Dutch East Indies for some time. For example, she owned

²² Tominaga, “Kartini no ‘sekai ninshiki’ no keisei katei,” 43–44.

Max Havelaar (1860) and loved Multatuli; she also greatly appreciated *Orpheus in de Dessa* (Orpheus in the Desa) (1903) written by Augusta de Wit, the famous female writer of Dutch colonial literature. Further, she was interested in “Wayang Orang” (1899), an article written by Martine Tonnet in the magazine *De Gids* (The guide). She also made an acquaintance of Dr. Groneman, who sent her his articles. Her brother Kartono, who studied in Leiden, sent her *Album Kern* (1903), which contained an article by Dr. Adriani. We not only find the name of her pen pal, but also personages that are referred to in her letters—for example, Dr. Kern, Dr. Brandes, and Dr. Snouck Hurgronje. Articles by these authors might have been read by Kartini; thus, she could access the most in-depth academic works on the Dutch East Indies that were available then. It must be noted that Kartini studied about the Dutch East Indies by reading the works of Dutch authors.

In particular, she was interested in works written by woman writers. This explains why Kartini mentioned a number of women writers in her letters. Although it is true that only a few acclaimed authors and Nobel Prize winners (such as Selma Lagerlöf and Bertha von Suttner) are mentioned in the list, a large number of the novels were written by European women at the end of the century. There are two obvious reasons for this. First, it was a time when there was a whole generation of women who had enjoyed the benefits of higher education. Second, the question of the “position of woman” was approached from a new and searching perspective, and the entire notion of social relations between women and men became the subject of scrutiny.²³ In fact, novels were not merely written by women, they were also written about women. The publications of that period deal with the central issue that Kartini was considering.²⁴ And women writers blazed the trail that their successors now follow with ease and they prepared the minds a large public for novels full of ideas.²⁵

Kartini greatly appreciated articles in *De Hollandsche Lelie* (The Holland lily), which she received in Java a month late as a subscriber. Moreover, some of Kartini’s friends—for example, Estella Zeehandelaar, Charlotte Ovink-Soer, and her sister Elise Soer—were contributors to the magazine. This weekly magazine was being published in Amsterdam since 1886. At that time, Cornelia van Wermeskerken-Junius was the editor of the magazine. She was a female journalist and a pioneer of women’s emancipation in the Netherlands in the second half of the nineteenth

²³ George Sampson, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 800.

²⁴ She was interested in works written about such woman as *Hilda van Suylenburg* (1897) by Cécile Goekoop-de Jong van Beek en Donk, which sounded a note of revolt at that time. Although it is seldom read now, it was very popular among women in those days, along with other works written by women writers such as Marie Marx-Koning.

²⁵ Sampson, 800.

century. Concerned with the question of the “position of woman,” she wrote articles and novels using the pen name of Johanna van Woude. Van Wermeskerken-Junius set new standards of freedom. In 1900, she wrote that

Women had long been knocking at the door of professions hitherto closed to them as the sacred preserves of men and that Dutch women gradually set free conventional thought and were proud of being themselves.²⁶

This realization helped Kartini to understand the importance of woman’s gaining equal rights, freedom, and independence as issues that were related to larger social problems. Kartini describes the situation as following:

The longing for freedom, independence and emancipation was not born of recent days, but already, in her earliest youth, when “emancipation” was still unknown word and books and other printed matter which discussed such issues were far beyond her reach, that desire was born in one of the sisters; conditions in the immediate and more distant horizons called it into life.²⁷

At first, although Kartini had experienced racial and gender inequality, which was considered to be “common” in Java, she did not know how to improve the situation. She suffered because she did not know what concrete action she could take, although she knew that she had to do something. After encountering articles in *De Hollandsche Lelie* and learning about the situation of women in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, she realized that getting to know herself and the condition of the world would empower her. In order to change the situation, she would have to examine the world in which she lived. For example, she was preoccupied with *Raden Ajoe*, one of whom she would later become. Generally speaking, “being *Raden Ajoe*” means becoming an official wife of a *Bupati*, a term that has been explained in the preceding chapter. However, Kartini interprets this expression as follows; “That means girls must marry, must belong to a man without asking what-who-and how. That is a centuries-old, strictly maintained rule.”²⁸ It is obvious that there was a marked difference between the Javanese traditions and Kartini’s thought. She did not accept the traditions and was able to make a decision on this matter, by pursuing her reading of Dutch literature.²⁹

Kartini had a chance to have her articles published in *De Echo*, a Dutch ladies’ weekly magazine printed in Yogyakarta. The editor of the magazine was

²⁶ S. M. C. van Wermeskerken-Junius, “De Moderne Vrouwen [The modern ladies],” *De Hollandsche Lelie* 32 (1900): 499.

²⁷ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 27.

²⁸ Kartini, *Brieven*, 8.

²⁹ Tominaga, “Kartini no ‘sekai ninshiki’ no keisei katei,” 51.

Ter Horst, whom Kartini had once met there. Thus, Kartini was both a subscriber of and contributor to the magazine. “Een oorlogsschip op de Ree (A warship at anchor)” (April 5–June 10, 1900) and “Een Gouverneur Generaalsdag (A day of general governor)” (September 2–November 18, 1900), two works by Kartini, were serialized in *De Echo*. In the works, she describes the reception in Semarang to which her father took her and her sisters. Kartini was effusive in her gratitude, “Thank you! Father, thank you! You have broken the century-old tradition, which commanded young girls to stay home.”³⁰ This means that Kartini declared her freedom from *pingitan* and justified her behavior in public.³¹ In other words, she could express her thoughts, which were influenced by the European movement for women’s emancipation and her readings. In *Eigen Haard*, which was published in Amsterdam, she mentions the high art of wood-crafts and wood carving in Jepara, which filled her with Javanese pride. Her purpose in writing this article was the elimination of racial prejudice and revival of Javanese crafts and arts.³² She could understand the reality and importance of her own culture and made active efforts to promote the arts and crafts.³³ Through such efforts, she aimed to raise the standard of living of the craftsmen, in collaboration with the European communities in Batavia.

It should be noted that the notions Kartini encountered emancipated her from the forces of long-established customs and enabled her to create her new vision. That is to say, she was proud of being her own self, not only a woman but also a woman of Javanese origin.³⁴ Further, when Kartini succeeded in establishing her own views and began to contribute to society, she found herself trapped between the ideal—her new vision—and conventional social reality. Thus, she suffered considerably under the oppressive Javanese social conventions of the late nineteenth century.

Her Mission as a Messenger between the East and West

Indonesians of noble birth such as Kartini were always aware of the currents in new European thoughts. We should notice that it did not take much time to obtain works published in the Netherlands because of the development of communication and transportation technology.³⁵ For example, *Hilda van Suylenburg* was published

³⁰ R. A. Kartini, “Een Gouverneur Generaalsdag [A day of general governor],” *De Echo* 2 (1900): 34.

³¹ Tominaga Yasuyo, “Karutini no chosaku to tsuitō kiji nituite [Concerning Kartini’s writings and her obituary],” *Shirin* 76, no. 4 (1993): 134.

³² R. A. Kartini, “Van een Vergeten Uithokje [From a forgotten corner],” *Eigen Haard* 1 (1900): 11–16.

³³ Tominaga, “Karutini no chosaku to tsuitō kiji nitsuite,” 129.

³⁴ Tominaga, “Karutini no ‘sekai ninshiki’ no keisei katei,” 52.

³⁵ Tominaga, “Karutini no ‘sekai ninshiki’ no keisei katei,” 42.

in the Netherlands in 1897 and Kartini had already read the book three times by 1899.³⁶ Similarly, *Het Jongetje* (The boy), written by Henri Borel, was published in 1899 and Kartini mentions it in her letter dated August 23, 1900.³⁷ An original edition of *Die Waffen Nieder* (Lay down your arms), written by Bertha von Suttner, was published in 1899. Kartini expresses considerable appreciation for the novel in her letter dated December 21, 1900.³⁸ In particular, through magazines that she received in Java one month after they were published, Kartini could understand contemporary issues.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 boosted communication and transportation. Further, after the land law paved the way for private enterprises in 1870, many Dutch people settled in the Dutch East Indies with their families; these families brought a pure European life-style to the region and built houses for themselves in Dutch colonial cities. In *De Locomotief*, we often find advertisements for bookstores and names of periodicals such as *De Nieuw Gids*, *De Hollandsche Lelie*, and *De Hollandsche Revue* (The Holland review) that Kartini also enjoyed reading. When the Ethical Policy was implemented in 1901, the more colonial bureaucracy was systematized, the greater was the intensification of Dutch language education.

In such situation, a European elementary school-teacher named Annie Glaser was sent to Jepara and made the acquaintance of Kartini. In her letters (1901–1902), Kartini writes that they shared the same culture and that Annie Glaser, who understood Kartini's difficulties, sympathized and encouraged her. Kartini could borrow whichever Dutch books she liked from Glaser. According to her letters, although Annie Glaser was two years older than Kartini, unlike the case of her elder sister, the two shared a horizontal relationship; in other words, she felt that there was no age difference between the two of them. Thus, the relationship allowed her to enjoy an intercultural experience that was rather different from the actual social situation in Java. In spite of the fact that it was a foreign language, Kartini could use the Dutch language as a means of communication and could make herself understood in Dutch. Although it is true that she was proficient in Dutch, it might not have been a mere question of linguistic ability. The experience during her school days enabled Kartini to understand what the Dutch people regarded as common sense, and this enable her to evaluate the social reality in Java. Therefore, her opinions and writings must have reflected the Dutch way of thinking.

Kartini could exchange letters with her pen pals both in Europe and the Dutch East Indies. However, to a great extent, her exchanges depended on the development of communication and transportation technology in the late nineteenth century.

³⁶ Kartini, *Door Duisternis tot Licht*, 9.

³⁷ Kartini, *Door Duisternis tot Licht*, 74.

³⁸ Kartini, *Brieven*, 39.

For example, Rosa Abendanon, one of the pen pals with whom she exchanged letters published in *Door Duïstermis tot Licht*, sent her books from Batavia and sometimes Kartini requested books, such as those listed under the “Accompanying booklist” in the preceding chapter. Charlotte Ovink-Soer, a wife of the Assistant Resident, taught Kartini a handicraft in her *pingitan* days; Ovink-Soer was later transferred to East Java, and she exchanged ideas with Kartini and sent her copies of articles. Nicolas Adriani, who carried out research as a philologist in Sulawesi, sent Kartini books and his articles. Further, Günter K. Anton, who taught at the University of Jena in Germany, once met her in Jepara and sent her his articles and German literary works by sea mail. Estella Zeehandelaar sent copies of articles to Kartini from Amsterdam and exchanged ideas with her. Nellie van Kol sent her books and magazines in which her articles had been published by sea mail. Thanks to Eduard C. Abendanon, Kartini also had the opportunity to read *Gösta Berling* (original edition published in 1891). Thus, it can be said that Kartini’s pen pals were providers of books, articles and other printed material; such exchanges were made possible by the development of communication and transportation technology in the late nineteenth century.

Kartini’s opinions and her writings show the influence of her correspondents, who had thoughts on women’s emancipation. Charlotte Ovink-Soer was a contributor to *De Hollandsche Lelie*, as was Estella Zeehandelaar.³⁹ Kartini was a subscriber to the magazine; she called the former her “mother” and regarded the latter as a soul mate. Kartini writes the following about Estella Zeehandelaar:

a friend and confidante of mine whom I have come to know and love through correspondence as a loving, refined and extremely well-educated woman, with a kind heart, practical and with a good common sense. She expresses great interest in our striving and declares she is ready at any time to gladly undertake the most difficult of tasks for us. That this is sincerely meant I am convinced. I have experienced many tokens of her friendship and affection.⁴⁰

Estella Zeehandelaar was five years older than Kartini, and three years older than Soelastri. However, Kartini herself felt that there was no age difference between Estella and herself. As she states in the above quotation, Estella was a “friend” to her and, their relationship was horizontal. The two women shared a strong sense of sisterhood. On the other hand, as described by Kartini herself in her writing,

³⁹ Esttela Zeehandlaar, “‘Hidla van Suylenburg’ van Goedkoop-de Jong van Beek en Donk,” *De Hollandshe Lelie* 11 (1898): 519–520, 534–537, 550–552, 567–569, 583–584, 596–599, 615–616, 630–632, 651–654, 664–665, 680–682, 696–698, 713–717. This is her main article (a book review), which made a great impression on Kartini. Zeehandelaar wrote other articles in this magazine, as Kartini mentions in her letters.

⁴⁰ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 235.

in Javanese society, the notion of “sisterhood” was vertical. Kartini had to obey her elder sister according to the Javanese tradition. She realized that the Western concept of sisterhood was rather different from the Oriental one. In her letter dated November 20, 1901, she states, “I have learned three things from Europeans—love, sympathetic pity and concern for sufferings, and the concept of justice—and I want to live according to these.”⁴¹ Kartini could decide on her view on this issue through, her discussions with correspondents, which involved the free and continuous exchange of ideas and knowledge. Further, this exchange enabled her to understand the importance of equal rights for women, freedom, and independence as issues that were related to larger social problems.

She encountered women such as Nellie van Kol, an editor friend of her, Annie Glaser, and Estella Zehandelaar. However, the social milieu in which these women lived was rather different from Kartini’s. She insisted on the importance of education, especially vocational training for Javanese women, as a vehicle for self-independence, social progress, and better standards of living through freedom. In her letters, Kartini informed her pen pals about the conditions and struggles of Javanese women and discussed ways in which the situation could be improved. When she refused to obey Javanese traditions, she did not do so out of scorn for Javanese society; rather she felt it was her duty to work for the upliftment of society, as Javanese convention indicated a bleak future for women.

Although Kartini was not accepted in Javanese society because of her modern behavior that breached Javanese conventions of age and gender differences, her pen pals understood and encouraged her. For example, in her letter dated July 15, 1902, Kartini notes, “Mrs. van Kol gave us more than moral support, she gave us something of herself, something very intimate, that lives in her heart and soul.”⁴² Human relations and the notions that Kartini encountered made an impact on her world that needs to be understood. It might be said that her correspondence was a form of cultural exchange.

After developing a new perspective as a modern individual through her correspondence and the Dutch books she read, Kartini was able to elaborate upon her view in her letters. She was recommended as a contributor by Estella Zehandelaar, Nellie van Kol, and Hilda de Booy-Boissevain, a wife of adjutant of governor general. These recommendations indicate that these women appreciated Kartini’s talent and also encouraged her to undertake the challenge of working for society. Not only her pen pals, but several editors of magazines also asked her to contribute to their publications; however, Kartini was denied permission by her father:

⁴¹ Kartini, *Brieven*, 98.

⁴² Kartini, *Brieven*, 182.

The great difficulty is that Father will not allow me to publish such a book. That I have a command of the Dutch language is very nice, Father says, but I cannot make use of it to express my opinions. We girls can not have opinions—we have just to accept everything and say yes and amen to everything others consider is good.⁴³

In the above quotation, we notice that Kartni had the ability to depict the reality of the Javanese social milieu in her writings.⁴⁴ Moreover, she expressed her desire to study further in the Netherlands in order to contribute to the society to which she belonged. Although Henri van Kol, who was a member of Parliament, and Estella Zeehandelaar made serious efforts to help Kartini realize her dream, she could not go abroad to study because her father disapproved of her plan.⁴⁵ Kartini acknowledged the fact that a new era and a new world where racial and gender inequality do not exist were a distant reality for women. She describes the situation as follows:

I know the path I wish to follow is difficult, full of thorns, thistles, potholes, it is rocky, bumpy, slippery—it has not been surveyed. And even if I should not be so fortunate as to achieve my end goal, if I should succumb halfway, I should die happy because then the way would have been opened and I would have helped carve out the Native woman. It would already be a great pleasure for me if parents of other girls who also want to be independent, would no longer be able to say: there is no one amongst us who has done that.⁴⁶

Estella Zeehandelaar refers to Kartini's suffering and struggle in "Obituary," *Eigen Haard* dated November 12, 1904⁴⁷:

In a limited space it was impossible to describe her struggle for realizing her ideals vision and to express the mental suffering it caused her, and that her efforts were not well rewarded because of prejudices by other high born Javanese.⁴⁸

An obituary was typically used to commemorate well-known persons soon after

⁴³ Kartini, *Letter from Kartini*, 168.

⁴⁴ Tominaga, "Kartini no chosaku to tsuitō kiji nitsuite," 134.

⁴⁵ See the quotation and note 13. Kartini always considered the impact her action would have on her father and ended up obeying him against her will.

⁴⁶ Kartini, *Letters from Kartini*, 47.

⁴⁷ Tominaga, "Kartini no chosaku to tsuitō kiji nitsuite," 136.

⁴⁸ Estella Hartshalt-Zeehandelaar, "Raden Ajoe Djojo Adiningrat Kartini," *Eigen Haard* (1904): 724–275.

they had passed away. Although it is said that Kartini became famous after her correspondence was published and the Kartini School was opened, she was already well known before her death.⁴⁹ The obituary suggests that her ideas were not accepted by Javanese high society and that it caused her tremendous sorrows and sufferings during her life-time. We can understand that Kartini conveyed modern European thought to the Javanese; at the same time, she informed the Dutch people about the Javanese situation, especially the condition and struggles of Javanese women. This was an important role of the Indonesian elite in those days.

The Decision to Move

In the northern coastal town of Java, Kartini witnessed transition that accompanied the exposure to European culture and the flooding of Western elements into the East. Kartini, who had direct access to new Western notions, could easily adopt those that she wished to. It was necessary for her to discover images, a kind of dream, vision, and hope. Although Kartini could approach Western culture, she experienced certain difficulties in doing so, because the cultural patterns were very different from her own. It is true that she stood between Java and the Netherlands—“Western thoughts in her mind and her feet on Java.”⁵⁰ From this starting point, she could recognize herself, the cultures, and the worlds she belonged to for what they were. Further, the notion of “emancipation, freedom and independence” that she encountered became her new vision for changing her conventional Javanese life. It might be said that she was the first person in the Dutch East Indies to become involved in the woman’s movement for equal rights, freedom, and independence, and that her statements concerned with issues faced by Javanese women constituted fragments in the history of the first international wave of feminism. Therefore, she may well be regarded not only as a forerunner of this women’s movement but also as a woman of cosmopolitan outlook. Further, Kartini’s letters are a humanist account of a cultural encounter related to the dignity and worth of a human being.

Bibliography

Archival Material

Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde, Leiden
Collectie Kartini.

⁴⁹ Tominaga, “Kartini no chosaku to tsuitō kiji nitsuite,” 139.

⁵⁰ Interview with Pramoedya A. Toer in 1987.

Periodicals and Newspapers

De Echo-Weekblad voor Dames in Indie. Yogyakarta, 1899–1900.

De Hollandsche Lelie. Amsterdam, 1886–1901.

De Locomotief. Semarang, 1902–1904.

Eigen Haard. Amsterdam, 1903–1904.

Books and Articles

Anten, Jaap. “De Ontrekende Brief van Kartini.” *Indische Letteren* 20 (2005): 25–33.

Bouman, Hendrik. *Meer Licht over Kartini*. Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1954.

Coté Joost, trans. and ed. *Realizing the Dream of R. A. Kartini: Her Sister's Letters from Coloneal Java*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008.

Elderhorst-van Hofwegen, Hanneke. “Het Kartini-beeld van J. H. Abendanon: de Heldin en de Mens.” *Indische Letteren* 5 (1990): 114–130.

Furnivall, John, S. *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939.

Jaquet, Frits. “Kartini: een Reactie.” *Indische Letteren* 3 (1988): 75–83.

———. “Vier Zusters.” *Indische Letteren* 10 (1995): 125–141.

Kahin, George M. *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952.

Kardinah. *The Three Sisters*, trans. A. King. Salatiga: Satya Wacana Christian University, 1958.

———. “Kartini: de Feiten.” *Bijdragen tot Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 122 (1966): 283–287.

Karels, Rene B. “Het Heerlijk Product eener Kruising van Javaansche en Nederlandsche Cultuur.” *Indische Letteren* 19 (2004): 176–192.

Kartini, R. A. *Door Duisternis tot Licht*, ed. J. H. Abendanon. The Hague, Semarang, and Surabaya: Van Dorp, 1911.

———. *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* [Through darkness to light], trans. A. Pane. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1938.

———. *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, trans. A. L. Symmers, ed. H. Geertz. New York: WW Norton, 1964.

———. *Surat-Surat Kartini: Renungan Tentang dan Untuk Bangsanya* [Letters Kartini: Thinking about and for people], trans. S. Sutrisno. Jakarta: Djambatan, 1979.

———. *Brieven aan mevrouw R. M. Abendanon-Mandri en Haar Echtgenoot*, ed. F. G. P. Jaquet. Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1987.

———. *Letters from Kartini: An Indonesian Feminist 1900–1904*, trans. J. Coté. Clayton, Vic.: Monash University, 1992.

———. *On Feminism and Nationalism: Kartini's Letter to Stella Zeehandelaar 1899–1903*, trans. J. Coté. Clayton, Vic.: Monash University, 2005.

Kraemer, Hendrik. *Dr. N. Adriani*, ed. Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap. Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1930.

Kroeskamp, Hendrik. *Early Schoolmasters in a Developing Country: A History of*

- Experiments in School Education in Nineteenth Century Indonesia*. Assen: Van Corcum, 1974.
- Nagazumi Akira. *Indoneshia minzoku ishiki no keisei* [The formation of the concept of all-Indonesian nationalism]. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1980.
- Nieuwenhuys, Rob. *Oost-Indische Spiegel*. Amsterdam: EM. Querido's Uitgeverij B.V., 1978.
- . *Met Vreemde Ogen: Tempo Doeloe-een verzonken wereld*. Amsterdam: EM. Querido's Uitgeverij B.V., 1988.
- Poezo, Harry A. *Indonesiërs in Nederland, 1600–1950 (in het Land van Overheersers I)*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1986.
- Sampson, George. *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953.
- Sears, Laurie J., ed. *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996.
- Soeroto, Sitisoeemandari. *Kartini, Sebuah Biografi*. Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1984.
- Steinberg, David J., ed. *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Sutherland, Heather. *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite: The Colonial Transformation of the Javanese Priyayi*. Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979.
- Taylor, Jean. *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia*. Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.
- . "Kartini in her Historical Context." *Bijdragen tot Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 145, no. 2/3 (1989): 295–307.
- . "A New Edition of Kartini's Letters." *Asian Studies Association of Australia Review* 13, no. 2 (1989): 156–160.
- Termoshuizen, Gerald. "Daar Heb Je Waarachtig Weer een Indische Roman!: Indische Literatuur en Literaire Kritiek Tussen 1885 en 1898." *Indische Letteren* 13 (1998): 139–148.
- . "Was Kartini wel de Schrijfster van Haar Brieven?: een Polemieek uit 1921." *Indische Letteren* 19 (2004): 167–175.
- Toer, Pramoedya A. *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja* [Call me Kartini only]. Jakarta: Nusantara, 1962.
- Tominaga Yasuyo. "Karutini no 'sekai ninshiki' no keisei katei: Karutini no dokusho taiken nitsuite no ichi kōsatsu [Kartini as a modern individual: Through her readings]." *Nanpō bunka* 18 (1991): 33–55.
- . "Tsuchiya Kenji, *Karutini no fūkei*, Tokyo, 1991 [Review of *Kartini's image of Java's landscape*]." *Shigaku zasshi* 101, no. 10 (1992): 93–101.
- . "Karutini no chosaku to tsuitōkiji nitsuite [Concerning Kartini's writings and her obituary]." *Shirin* 76, no. 4 (1993): 124–142.
- Tsuchiya Kenji. "Karutini no shinshō fūkei [Kartini's image of Java's landscape]." *Tōnan Ajia kenkyū* 22, no.1 (1984): 53–74.
- . "Karutini sairon [Revisiting Kartini]." In *Oranda to Indoneshia* [The Netherlands and Indonesia], ed. Nichiran Gakkai, 217–212. Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1986.
- . *Karutini no fūkei* [Kartini's image of Java's landscape]. Tokyo: Mekon, 1991.
- van den Berg, Joop. "100 Jaar Feiten en Fatasien over Java." *Indische Letteren* 13 (1998): 149–157.

Vreede-de Steurs, Cora. "Kartini: Feiten en Ficties." *Bijdragen tot Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 121, no. 2 (1965): 233–244.

———. "Een Nationale Heldin: R. A. Kartini." *Bijdragen tot Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 124, no. 3 (1968): 386–391.

Wertheim, Willem, F. *Indonesian Society in Transition*. The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1964.