



## Political or Religious Policy? Indigenous Christian Education in the Dutch East Indies Era

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### ABSTRACT

This study is a textual analysis discussing the existence of Christian educational institutions for indigenous students under the Dutch colonial administration in the Dutch East Indies. The primary objective of this research is to examine the underlying motives behind the Dutch colonial government's policies on Christian education for indigenous communities, specifically to determine whether these policies were politically or religiously motivated. Focusing on historical contexts, this research employs historical methods to reconstruct past events. The central question addressed is the Dutch colonial government's main focus in shaping policies for Christian education through mission institutions for indigenous communities: whether these were driven by political interests or religious considerations. Data sources were obtained from literature and historical documents archived in data storage centers and libraries. The findings, using a structuration methodology, reveal a pragmatic dualism underlying the colonial government's policies, which shifted according to the socio-political context.

**Keywords:** Policy, Colonial, Education, Mission

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### INTRODUCTION

On May 25, 1938, the Foundation for Christian Education in Surabaya inaugurated the Beatrix School in commemoration of Princess Beatrix's birth, heir to the Dutch throne. This school aimed to provide primary education for indigenous children of relatively higher social standing (*beter gesitueerde Inlanders*) than the general indigenous population (*Beatrix-school*, 1938). The school followed a seven-year primary education curriculum, similar to the *Hollandsch Inlandsche School*, which was also implemented by the colonial government for indigenous students. The foundation itself was a social organization specifically focused on addressing the educational needs of indigenous Christian children, particularly those who could not afford basic education, whether provided by public or private institutions. Established in the second half of the 20th century with its headquarters in Batavia (*Weltevreden*, 1926), the foundation opened branches in several major cities in the Dutch East Indies, including Medan in 1919 (*Christelijke Scholen*, 1919).

Despite the foundation's existence and history, this scenario highlights the challenges faced by indigenous Christian education in colonial Indonesia. The assumption that Christian children received special privileges and attention from the colonial government under the religious policies of the Ethical Policy era (*Aqib Suminto*, 1985)

conflicts with the reality that many indigenous Christian children lacked adequate facilities and opportunities for intellectual advancement. The efforts of the Christian education foundation, operating outside the colonial government's purview, demonstrate that the government was unable to fully support the educational needs of all colonial subjects, particularly indigenous Christian children, to provide them with intellectual tools for their future lives.

This paper addresses the ironic discrepancy above by examining the colonial government's policy towards indigenous Christian children's education and its subsequent development. On one side, the colonial government supported the idea of cultural assimilation through its association program (Leiden, 1911). Professor Snouck Hurgronje promoted Western cultural penetration, including Christian values taught in primary schools, to support Christian proselytization (Kerstenings, 1912). However, on the other hand, the government could not fully ensure the comfort and emotional support of indigenous children who had converted to Christianity, especially in the education sector.

To address these questions and reconstruct the historical events outlined in this article, this study employs historical research methods, encompassing four stages: heuristic, critique, interpretation, and reconstruction. Heuristics serve as the initial stage for tracing and gathering data. Critique involves assessing the data both externally (data's physical form) and internally (data content). Data that undergoes critique is analyzed to extract factual information (data meaning) and forms the basis for synthesis (connecting facts). This sequence of facts is then assembled into a historical reconstruction. As the final stage of the historical method, reconstruction produces a report containing research findings that answer the research questions.

This study contributes to the existing literature on the intersection of education, colonial policy, and religious influences in the Dutch East Indies by highlighting the socio-political dynamics influencing Christian education for indigenous children. Previous studies, such as those by Aqib Suminto (1985), focused on the Dutch Ethical Policy's impact on religious policies, particularly Islam, while this study expands the scope by exploring how similar policies affected indigenous Christian communities.

Moreover, this research addresses a gap in earlier works that primarily examine colonial education policies' role in promoting Westernization but overlook the limited access faced by indigenous Christian children. By providing a historical analysis of the foundation's efforts independent of the government, this study reveals the disparities in colonial education systems and emphasizes the colonial government's inability to uniformly provide intellectual resources to all segments of its colonial subjects. Thus, this article adds a nuanced understanding of colonial education's political and religious motivations in the Dutch East Indies, enriching the discourse on colonial policies' legacy in Southeast Asia.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs historical research as the primary methodological approach. Historical research aims to explore, gather, interpret, and analyze various historical sources to reconstruct the political or religious policies related to indigenous Christian education during the Dutch East Indies era. In this context, historical research enables the researcher to trace the policy dynamics that influenced the development of Christian education for indigenous populations, taking into account the political and religious contexts of the colonial period.

Data collection for this study involves examining archives, official documents from the Dutch colonial government, reports from missionary organizations, and relevant literature on this topic. These sources include official documents preserved in national archives in both Indonesia and the Netherlands, as well as secondary literature from

previous studies on education policy and Christian missions during the colonial period. Additionally, newspapers, pamphlets, and missionary reports are also utilized as important sources to provide a more in-depth perspective on the policies and viewpoints of various parties during that time.

Once data is gathered, the next stage is data analysis, which is conducted through a source criticism approach (both primary and secondary sources). This involves external criticism to verify the authenticity of the documents or artifacts used, and internal criticism to understand the content and historical context of the sources. External criticism ensures the credibility of the documents used, including their origins, authorship, and the purpose of their creation. Meanwhile, internal criticism aims to interpret the content of the documents within a specific temporal and spatial context, leading to a deeper understanding of the motives and objectives behind Christian education policies of the time.

The final stage of this historical research method is the reconstruction and interpretation of events. The researcher will reassemble the events that took place in the Dutch East Indies related to Christian education policies for indigenous communities, connecting the historical data analyzed. This interpretation will be framed within the colonial political and religious context to reveal whether the Christian education policies were primarily driven by colonial political interests or by religious motives for Christian evangelization. Beyond factual reconstruction, an interpretive approach is also used to understand how different actors of the period—the colonial government, missionary organizations, and indigenous communities—participated and interacted within the Christian education process. This interpretive approach allows the researcher to delve into the meanings and implications behind the policies adopted, as well as their impact on indigenous communities at that time.

By employing this historical research method, the study aims to produce a comprehensive understanding of Christian education policies in the Dutch East Indies, while also highlighting the political or religious dimensions underlying these policies.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Colonial Education Policy**

As with Western colonial rulers in Southeast Asia, the Dutch colonial regime in the Dutch East Indies incorporated the education sector into its political policy program, with the indigenous population of Indonesia as its target. This approach stemmed from the prevailing political views among colonial policymakers in both The Hague and Batavia, particularly since the late 19th century. It was inseparable from the principle of geopolitical integration between the mother country and the colony, which was intended to perpetuate Western power.

Apart from colonial politicians' concerns about the perceived threat from Islam to their political hegemony, education was also viewed as a means to transform the indigenous people's mindset. The aim was to shift them from a traditional worldview rooted in their cultural values to a new worldview oriented towards admiration for Western culture. Through this shift, policymakers sought not only to make the indigenous population more submissive and loyal to the colonial regime but also to weaken their ties to their own cultural values, including their religion (primarily Islam). This weakening of traditional ties was intended to reduce the escalation of radicalism and resistance to Western culture, particularly the colonial regime. The policy aimed to strengthen cultural bonds between the indigenous people of the Dutch East Indies and Western society, as represented by the Dutch government. Thus, the goal was not to erase indigenous culture and replace it with Western culture, but rather to integrate Western cultural elements into their lives, fostering loyalty to the colonial regime among the indigenous population (Aqib Suminto, 1985).

This view crystallized in the policy program proposed by Prof. Dr. C. Snouck Hurgronje, a Dutch scholar in Islamic studies who was appointed as the government's Advisor on Islamic and Indigenous Affairs (Adviseur voor Inlander en Islamistische Zaken) before becoming the rector of Leiden University in the early 20th century. Drawing on his experiences in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Aceh, Snouck suggested during his inaugural speech at Leiden that cultural association would be a vital approach for ensuring the loyalty and obedience of the indigenous population to the colonial government, thereby preserving Western hegemony over them.

In his association program, Snouck stated:

"De eenig ware oplossing van dat problem ligt in de associatie der Mohammedaansche onderdanen van den Nederlandschen staat aan de Nederlanders. Gelukt deze dan bestaat er geen Islam-quaestie meer; dan is er genoeg eenheid van cultuur tussen de onderdanen der Koningin van Nederland aan de Noordzeestrand en die van Insulinde om aan het verschil in godsdienstige belijdenis zijn politieke en sociale beteekenis te ontnemen." (C. Th. Van Deventer, 1911)

*"The only solution to this issue lies in the association of Muslim subjects of the Dutch state with the Dutch people. If this succeeds, there will no longer be an 'Islamic problem'; a strong cultural unity between the Queen of the Netherlands' subjects on the North Sea coast and those in the Indies can eliminate the political and social significance of religious differences."*

According to Snouck's view, the policy of association was primarily aimed at Muslims, who, by the end of the 19th century, were seen by colonial politicians as the group most opposed to Dutch political dominance in the Indies. When military force was deemed ineffective, Snouck proposed that the subjugation of Muslims, seen as key to colonial dominance in the Indies, should be pursued through cultural means—specifically, through the cultural and political association outlined above. If successfully implemented, religious differences would no longer be a barrier to subjecting the indigenous population to Western power.

Snouck's perspective quickly garnered support from the colonial political elite, particularly those from the right-wing faction (comprising religious and anti-revolutionary groups) who held power in both the Executive and Legislative branches of the Dutch government in the early 20th century. One such figure, F. Idenburg, a former Minister of Colonies and Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies in the second decade of the 20th century, stated the following in an address to the Upper House of the Dutch Parliament (Eerste Kamer van de Staten-Generaal):

"Ik betoogde dat alle jagen naar associatie buiten de religie om utopie is; dat waarachtige associatie alleen kan tot stand komen in het centrum van het volksbewustzijn; dat associatie tussen Oost en West, naar Christelijk inzicht allen kan bestaan in Hem, van Wien de Apostel ons zegt dat in Hem niet is 'Griek en Jood, besnijdenis en voorhuid, diens knecht en vrije', en ik voeg er bij; ook niet is Oost en West, omdat Christus is alles en in alleen." (H.A. van Andel, 1921)

*"I argue that all attempts at association outside of religion are utopian; that genuine association can only occur at the heart of the people's consciousness; that association between East and West, from a Christian perspective, can only exist in Him, of whom the Apostle tells us that in Him there is neither 'Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, slave nor free,' and I would add: nor East nor West, for Christ is all and in all."*

As an official directly involved in implementing colonial policies based on ethical ideas and imbued with the spirit of association, Idenburg's views might be seen positively for applying the Christian principle of egalitarianism to daily life, where distinctions and discrimination are no longer acknowledged.

### Colonial Education Politics

However, was the implementation of colonial policies, inspired by Christian teachings, truly aligned with its intentions, particularly regarding cultural association in the education sector? This question finds answers within colonial politicians' views on education as a social action undertaken by rulers for their people, aiming to enhance public knowledge and improve their quality of life.

Colonial education figure P. Huizenga shared the following as a foundation for the colonial education policy toward indigenous society:

*“Ten aanzien van de Indische onderwijspolitiek, het pacificerend optreden volgt uit het wezen van het humanism zelf; hoeveel men daar ook van kan zeggen, de kern ervan is in een zin. Aldus; eerbied voor de mens. Deze eerbied heeft een verzoenende werking, want onderwijs in deze sfeer geeft aan elke mens zijn waarde, uit welke cultuurkring, van welk volk, van welke sexe ook. Daarom kunnen op de basis van de humaniteitsgedacht zich in onze tijd verenigen; al diegenen, die algemeen religious voelen; al dienen die onder alle omstandigheden waarlijk democratisch voelen.” (P. Huizenga, 1939)*

*“In regards to education policy in the Indies, pacification emerges from the very nature of humanism itself; though much could be said on it, its core lies in one concept: respect for humanity. This respect brings about tolerance, as education within this scope provides dignity to every individual regardless of cultural background, nationality, or gender. Therefore, on this basis of humanity, all who adhere to common beliefs can unite in our time, as can all who, in all circumstances, feel genuinely democratic.”*

From the principles upheld above in European modern education policy, it appears that the fundamental humanist principle of equality for all human beings as God's creations became the main focus. This aligns with the spirit of the era that inspired colonial policymakers at the turn of the century, when Ethical Policy served as the foundation for colonial education policy.

J. van der Sluis connected the spirit of Ethical Policy with respect for human dignity based on Christian beliefs. He stated, among other things:

*“De ethische richting gaat niet uit van een begrip maar van het leven. Zij neemt dit beginsel aan voor alle kennis. Het leven gaat steeds voor het bewustzijn, de kennis, de leer. De ethische richting ontkent niet de bijzondere openbaring der Gods. Deze bijzondere openbaring kwam tot Israel eerst door de profeten en daarna door den Christus, het is bovenal door den Christus, dat de Vader zich geopenbaard heeft. Door deze bijzondere openbaring zijn indrukken, opvattingen, gewaarwordingen, ervaringen gewrocht.” (J. van der Sluis, 1920)*

*“The ethical direction does not stem from a concept but from life. This principle is accepted for all knowledge. Life precedes consciousness, knowledge, and teachings. The ethical direction does not deny God's special revelation. This special revelation first came to Israel through the prophets and then through Christ, above all through Christ, through whom the Father revealed Himself. Through this manifestation, all experiences, impressions, perceptions, and views were formed.”*

Of course, the statement above reflects a strong religious undertone, as J. van der Sluis was a Dutch pastor. However, the implied meaning in his views cannot deny the ethical policy direction taken by the colonial regime in the early 20th century as a core component of its policy program in the Indies, particularly in the field of education.

This can be seen in public opinion published in *Nederlandsch Courant* regarding the shift in colonial policy toward an ethical direction: *“De regeering had gemeend aan hare Indische politiek zekere richting te moeten geven,*

*waardoor deze in overeenstemming zou komen met hare hier te lande op den voorgrond gestelde beginselen van coalitie Christendom. De uitslag der verkiezingen beteekent mede, dat aan het werken in die richting een einde moet worden gemaakt. Tegen het waandenkenbeeld dat het onze koloniale plicht kon zijn, de leeuwen van het Islamisme in het oerwoud te jagen, heeft het oordeel der kiezers uitspraak gedaan.” (‘s Gravenhage, 1913)*

*“The government thought it should give a certain direction to its Indies policy, aligning it with the Christian coalition principles prioritized in this country. The election results also signify that the efforts in this direction should be brought to an end. Against the illusion that our colonial duty might be to hunt down the lions of Islamism in the wilderness, the voters’ opinion has been clear.”*

The quote above comes from a piece written in the early 20th century, when Ethical Policy was implemented in the Dutch East Indies. Although concerns about the threat of Islam had not completely subsided among high-ranking colonial officials, especially with the formation and expansion of Sarekat Islam (Islamic Union) replacing the previous Islamophobia of the Aceh War and other regional Islamic-inspired resistance, there was growing awareness among the Dutch public that the perceived threat of Islam and Pan-Islamism might have been exaggerated, possibly more as political propaganda than reality.

Regardless of the shifts in opinion above, the issue of education during the last five decades of colonial rule encompassed multiple aspects. Among these were the Ethical Policy that represented colonial interests, the roles of missionary and religious missions that contributed to education among the people and became partners of the government in its Ethical program, as well as the complex relationship between the central government in the Netherlands and its colony in Indonesia.

### **The Relationship Between Christian Missions and Indigenous Education**

Apart from the Dutch East Indies government, there were other parties invested in providing education for indigenous people in the Dutch colonial territories: the Christian Protestant and Catholic missions. Although the Dutch East Indies government and the church shared certain objectives, such as educating the indigenous population and introducing them to Western civilization, their ultimate goals differed significantly.

For both Protestant and Catholic churches, educating the indigenous people was closely tied to ideological factors, representing a sacred duty commanded by God to elevate human dignity according to their faith-based values. Based on this perspective, the church saw education not only as a means to make indigenous people socially aware and knowledgeable but also as a means of imparting Christian faith and eventually integrating them into the church through baptism. Thus, for the church, education was a pathway for religious conversion among indigenous communities.

In contrast to the colonial government’s more secular approach to education policy, the church’s strategy for providing education to indigenous communities throughout the Dutch East Indies underwent significant changes. This shift reflected a change in the church’s perception of the indigenous populations who were the targets of their mission work, which had begun with initial encounters in the 16th century. The arrival of the first Christian missionaries, accompanying Portuguese and Spanish fleets, was part of an era of maritime exploration driven by a strategic alliance between the church and state. This strategy cannot be separated from the medieval context, especially in Europe and parts of Asia, which had been marked by the Crusades since the 11th century. Hostility between Christianity and Islam became one of the defining aspects of the Portuguese and Spanish expeditions to Asia, alongside economic motivations (Brian Harrison, 1968). Consequently, at that time, the process of baptizing

indigenous people was viewed as a means of saving them from sin and from the influence of Islam, which was seen as a common enemy.

Three centuries later, at the end of the 19th century, a major shift occurred in both the strategy for Christianization and the perspective of mission leaders, including the conversion model. For the Catholic mission, which saw renewed opportunities for its missionary work, the early 20th century brought significant changes, particularly in its social function. This shift was marked by a change in approach by missionaries towards local traditional authorities, who became their partners and eventually the objects of conversion (Karel Steenbrink, 2003). After a prolonged period during which missionaries were restricted to serving colonial authorities (such as VOC officers, the Dutch government, and Europeans), missionary activities were limited by Article 123 of the 1854 Regeerings Reglement, published in the *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch Indie* in 1855, number 2. This restriction aimed to maintain public order (*rust en orde*), which could potentially be disrupted by missionary activities. Therefore, the government reserved the right to intervene, requiring every missionary to obtain permission directly from the Governor General, who could revoke it at any time as deemed necessary.

In the latter part of the 19th century, the Dutch government in Europe began to allow greater opportunities for missionary work, particularly in areas outside Java that had not yet been exposed to Western civilization. While mission work remained restricted in certain areas, such as Aceh, Banten, and Bali, most of the Dutch East Indies became accessible to Christian missions. Some regions remained closed to missionary activities, including Bali, where the local population was unwilling to accept Christianity, and the government sought to preserve the island's unique cultural and religious identity (J.L., Gravenhage, 1948).

When the colonial government opened the door for missionary work among indigenous communities, a new perspective emerged among the missionaries, different from that of previous centuries. Among the Christian missionaries, particularly the Protestant *zendeling* (evangelists), a new understanding of indigenous people developed. This view was expressed as follows:

*"Even though some of the seeds sown still fall by the wayside, or on rocky ground, or among thorns, some fall on good soil. Where the Gospel is preached with sincerity of heart and the power of love, it works. Slowly but surely, it overcomes mountains of obstacles and finds its way into the consciences of people. Even when it is brought to those not deemed ready, it is not without result. Although it may not instantly transform sinners into saints, it brings a new principle of life to the nations and gradually awakens an appreciation for the higher things that had not been perceived before" (Anon, 1886).*

This perspective clearly illustrates two key elements in the missionary process: knowledge and transformation of purpose. The knowledge imparted was not limited to religion but also encompassed scientific knowledge that would transform human lives, while the missionary objective shifted towards uplifting human dignity, moving away from the crusading spirit.

From this perspective, Christian missionaries and the Church believed that evangelism needed to be accompanied by the dissemination of modern knowledge from the Western world, whether through government or private educational institutions. Over time, with government policies supporting the development of Western-style education in the late 19th century, Christian mission circles prepared to integrate educational resources into their evangelistic efforts among the people of the Dutch East Indies.

The importance of education for missionaries is reflected in the following statement: "The second type is closely related to education. Because education is a highly essential and necessary task, one must strive to educate those who are well-suited for it. In this regard, a basic knowledge of Dutch, reading, writing, fundamental religious

knowledge, geography, history, and other relevant knowledge is required, which can be used to broaden understanding and civilize humanity.” (J.C. Neurdenburg, 1863)

The education envisioned by the missionaries was not limited to religious instruction, whether for training cadres of evangelists or for preparing the indigenous people to be baptized as Christians. Instead, it encompassed general knowledge similar to that provided by the government in public schools, with the key difference being religious instruction, which was not included in government schools.

Given its importance, education became an integral part of the mission program in various regions, especially after colonial authorities granted permission to Christian foundations and churches. This was evident from the establishment of schools by mission workers as educational centers for indigenous communities in their areas of work, which later evolved into independent educational institutions. Over time, these schools could stand on their own, independent of mission foundations and churches, as more qualified teachers were recruited or trained locally by mission workers.

According to C. Van Vollenhoven, an expert in indigenous law from Leiden: “The noble goal is to bring the unfortunate tropical inhabitants to the Gospel, who, until now, have been left neglected. He also proposed the formation of a foundation to spread Christian teachings among the indigenous people, as well as better education for preachers and teachers who must understand local languages. Furthermore, he wanted Christian dissemination to be entrusted to indigenous people who should receive education for it in their homeland.” (I.J. Brugmans, 1938)

This perspective clearly shows that education was viewed more as a tool than an end in itself for enlightening indigenous people and exposing them to the modern world. Education was more focused on spreading Christianity, a view held since the VOC era in the 17th century.

Among the missionaries themselves, the importance of education was well understood. On the one hand, they intended to spread the Gospel and baptize those who had received religious instruction to become Christians. On the other, they had a humanitarian aim to make the indigenous people educated and dignified citizens, like Europeans and other foreign nations. Therefore, they prioritized not only education for prospective pastors, religious teachers, and congregation leaders but also trained secular educators who would serve as teachers for their own people.

Albert C. Kruyt, a missionary who successfully established a Christian community in Poso, Central Sulawesi, also recognized the role of education in his missionary work. In his early years of service, Kruyt faced challenges from the local community regarding education, as they feared it would make their children smarter than their parents and unwilling to obey them. In traditional Javanese society, particularly in East Java in the 19th century, attachment to land and its production was significant. Consequently, when education was seen as irrelevant to agriculture, parents hesitated to send their children to school (*Tijdschrift voor*, 1859). Even worse, education was seen as potentially undermining old values and replacing them with new structures, erasing ancestral memory and reverence. Nonetheless, Kruyt found a solution with the following approach:

“School will be held at dawn to allow children to help their parents afterward. Then, a plot of land at the school will be managed by the students under the teacher’s guidance.” (M.C. Capelle, 1951)

In the solution Kruyt pursued above, there was no element of evangelism, but he linked the community’s educational needs with its social and economic needs. Thus, Kruyt adopted a community-based approach, studying the traditions, social values, and economic practices of his community to incorporate education through school establishment rather than embedding Christian values by founding churches.

Albert Kruyt, who also worked as a missionary among Javanese people in Mojowarno, East Java, followed the same approach of spreading the Gospel through education. This was evident before he arrived in East Java when,

in 1892, he initiated the establishment of a missionary teacher training school (Zendings-kweekschool voor Inlandsche Onderwijzers) for prospective indigenous teachers on Sangir Island, Residency of Manado. His goal was to produce indigenous teachers to instruct indigenous students in schools established as primary schools with a modern curriculum. Similarly, in Mojowarno, Kruyt obtained a government subsidy of 400 guilders to establish an industrial school for indigenous children, as well as an annual subsidy of 1,200 guilders to support its operation (A.G. Honig, 1900).

Likewise, within the indigenous Christian communities, which flourished in some areas both in Java and outside Java during the early 20th century, particularly in the second decade, general education started to gain traction. Although priority was initially given to training local missionary teachers (Javanese, Batak, Sundanese), general education factors also began to spread. They also realized that education needed to align with the development of mission work and especially with the needs of the congregations (opleiding dient zich aan te sluiten bij heel den ontwikkelingsgang van het zendingswerk en met name ook bij de behoeften der gemeenten, (D. Pol, 1939).

In principle, Christian missionaries believed that education was not only an inseparable part of their work but also an independent and strategic component for different purposes. The following view reflects this belief:

“After the sermon comes education. When it concerns knowledge and there are questions about the way of salvation, they must be taught the sacred path so that they know what they should believe and do to inherit eternal life. The goal of education is baptism, which integrates them into the congregation of Christ.” (Anon, 1930)

Thus, education within the mission community had a unique character and function that distinguished it from secular government education, while at the same time posing a challenge to government policies.

### **Policy Toward Indigenous Christian Education**

Since its inception, the government’s policy on Christian schools open to indigenous children has been inseparable from its stance on Christian missionary work in the Dutch East Indies. On one hand, the government needed the presence of Christian missions to contribute to the development of Western education in its colony; on the other, there was concern about potential upheaval among the indigenous population in reaction to the presence of these schools (and churches) within their lives, especially given their differing religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds.

The Islamophobia prevalent in the late 19th century, which helped foster the politics of association previously mentioned, did little to influence the government’s attitude toward these privately established Christian schools. A number of fundamental issues quickly arose, presenting complex challenges that proved difficult to resolve. Tensions and disruptions frequently occurred between government education policymakers and missionaries implementing their programs, especially in areas outside traditional mission zones, such as the major cities of the Dutch East Indies.

From the missionary side, demands for government attention arose. Since they felt they were assisting the government in its mission to educate the colony’s population, they expected government support, in the form of subsidies for physical resources, personnel, and material needs. This expectation is evident in the following excerpt:

*“Het zou trouwens niet billik zijn den zending, de subsidie voor haar scholen te onthouden waar het doel dat zij wil nastreven voor de regering zeker niet minder waardevol is dan de door deze beoogde bestrijding van het analphabetisme. De zendingschool als opvoedings-instituut van Christelijke en maatschappelijke deugden is in vele gevallen meer waard dan de school als kweekplaats voor intellektuals”* (H. Th. Fischer, 1932).

*"It would indeed be unjust if missions were denied subsidies for their schools, as the goals they pursue are certainly no less valuable to the government than the fight against illiteracy. The missionary school, as an institution for instilling Christian and social virtues, is in many ways more valuable than a school merely focused on cultivating intellectuals."*

While this statement may seem exaggerated, it is undeniable that the presence of missionary or Christian schools within society held both strategic and delicate functions. They served as a bridge between Western and Eastern cultures, sometimes viewed as representatives of the European government within indigenous communities, thus bearing the risk of resistance from certain groups. Conversely, their relationship with the government was not entirely harmonious, as differences in perspective and interests arose on certain issues.

In principle, the Dutch East Indies government did not establish specific religious regulations for Christian schools founded and managed by missions. Apart from government-appointed teachers in these schools, along with subsidies to cover part of their operating or establishment costs provided specific criteria were met (including *Bijblad op het Staatsblad No. 5879*, which outlined subsidy rules for private schools training teachers, *School voor Opleiding van Onderwijzers*), the colonial government regarded Christian schools as partners in advancing the education of the colony's citizens. Regulations enacted by the colonial government for public and general schools were also used as the foundation for missionary school management, based on the school's level, rank, and classification. Consequently, graduates from these schools were treated as equivalent to graduates from public or other approved private schools. (In fact, graduates from private teacher training schools, including those run by missions, had opportunities to work as teachers in public elementary schools, especially for indigenous students.)

Problems arose regarding religious instruction. In government schools attended by European or primarily Christian children, Christian religious education was managed by teachers appointed by local government heads (residents), who held the authority to appoint them after conducting specific assessments. These religion teachers were generally appointed in agreement with local Christian leaders deemed capable of providing religious education to elementary and secondary students in public schools (*Regeringsalmanak over*, 1909).

However, issues became serious when Christian religious instruction was provided in schools established and managed by missionaries. Religious instruction was delivered by religion teachers who had been officially trained and recognized by the government to serve as Christian teachers (*Christelijke leraar*). This arrangement posed a problem when not all students in missionary schools practiced Christianity. In some areas lacking school facilities, indigenous Muslim students were enrolled in missionary schools and were also required to take Christian religious instruction (*Een Schoolfeest*, 1908).

This situation caused unease within the government, especially among local officials. They feared that mandatory Christian religious instruction for Muslim students could lead to social unrest and potentially incite public anger, particularly from the students' parents and families. When situations with potential for such tensions arose, government officials were expected to intervene and resolve the issue, though this could result in negative evaluations of their job performance, leading to reassignment or transfer. (A notable example of such unrest during this period was the rebellion in Barus, Central Tapanuli, which colonial officials and observers associated with missionary activity among the Batak Muslim community. Although this interpretation was later questioned, the rebellion, which involved people from Aceh, resulted in casualties among local Dutch officials *Muller*, 1917).

In response to these concerns, the missions considered them an expression of "Christianphobia." They defended the provision of religious instruction to non-Christian students, as illustrated in the following newspaper excerpt:

*"De leerlingen van de particuliere inrichting komen enkele uren per dag op school. Zij krijgen daar eenige elementaire kennis en leeren dat men eerlijk en oprecht moet zijn. Het godsdienstonderwijs is in het uiterste geval niet-facultatief. Alle leerlingen wonen het bij. Wat blijft er echter in het algemeen over van dat onderwijs? Na schooltijd keeren de leerlingen terug in hun milieu, waarvan de school hen niet los kan maken, en ze blijven overigens de kinderen van hun ouders, wier levenslijn zij voortzetten met een heel klein beetje meer ontwikkeling en misschien met een wat dieper besef van goed en kwaad. Het zendingsonderwijs is niet slecht voor het kind, maar in deze streken alleen gevaarlijk als politieke drijvers zich er van den wapen smeden" (Van den Dag, 1916).*

*"Students of private institutions attend school for a few hours each day. There, they receive basic knowledge and learn that people should be honest and sincere. Religious education is compulsory in the most extreme cases, and all students attend. But what do they gain from this education in general? After school, all students return to environments the school cannot extricate them from, and they remain their parents' children, carrying forward their familial traditions with a little more education and possibly a deeper awareness of good and evil. Missionary education is not harmful to the child; it becomes dangerous in these regions only if politicians use it as a weapon."*

In their writings, the missionary defenders aimed to direct government officials' concerns toward the political objectives of a third party namely, political figures, particularly those who were anti-government and anti-Christian. Therefore, the potential for unrest was not rooted within the community or among students' parents but rather stemmed from agitation by politicians outside of local society.

For the missionaries, providing Christian religious education to students was both a means to recruit new baptisms and an opportunity to train students as church teachers who would work among the indigenous population. This is evident in the following statement: *"One should erect a monument for such a deed. When will the idea take hold that not only Europeans but also Christian natives have sufficient capacity to complete their studies successfully and to later independently lead a mission area? A shepherd from the people and for the people; who does not feel the appeal and the strength that such a figure embodies?" (Indigenous Missionaries, 1920)*

From the quotation above, it is clear that for the missionaries, Christian religious education in their schools was highly strategic. It not only equipped students with religious knowledge but also recruited new followers and nurtured indigenous evangelists who would spread Christian values within their communities. This approach was considered more effective for evangelization than relying on European missionaries.

Although the government maintained a neutral stance on religion from the outset, not permitting religious education in state schools attended by non-Christian indigenous children, they could not prevent the missionaries from offering Christian religious instruction or, at the very least, making it an optional subject for Christian students only. The Dutch government's proposal to prohibit non-Christian students in missionary schools from attending Christian religious classes was ultimately unsuccessful. The situation remained unchanged until the end of Dutch rule, when it finally shifted under Japanese military occupation and its religious policies.

## CONCLUSION

In examining the history of Christian schools established and managed by missionary organizations, whether dominated by Europeans or indigenous people, we see that at least three parties were directly involved and had vested interests: the missionary institutions or individual Christian figures, the government, and the community, which might later convert to Christianity or remain unaffiliated with it.

From the very beginning of this activity namely, the establishment of Christian schools—the interaction between these three parties has been ongoing, with each one bringing its own background and interests. They met in a shared space which, borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, would shape the nature and structure of Christian educational institutions established by the missions, as well as the colonial government's policies toward them. The interaction among these three groups, each with its own habitus, led to a unique process of structural formation that influenced not only education but also the Christian community within the framework of Dutch colonial law and governance.

As stated in the title of this article, the realms of politics and religion were, in reality, inseparable and intersected within the context of education. From at least the mid-19th century, when the first *Regeeringsreglement* was enacted in 1854, the colonial government took a dualistic approach to Christian education specifically and to the presence of missions in general. On one hand, the government saw the value in both entities, particularly in Christian educational institutions, as tools for educating its colonial subjects and for advancing associative policies aimed at curbing religious radicalism. On the other hand, the government feared that the presence of missions and their schools could spark resistance against colonial authority.

Nonetheless, in principle, colonial policies regarding Christian educational institutions in the colonies were not distinct from their overall stance toward missions and Christian churches. Strategic considerations of benefits and drawbacks were closely tied to the decision-making around limiting or facilitating missionary activities during the colonial era. This duality in policy often led local government officials to adopt ambiguous stances, influenced by instructions from the central government or the absence of a clear basis and direction in their decision-making process.

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