THE DYNAMICS OF THE JAVANESE PRIYAYI AND THE CHINESE GENTRY: INDONESIAN AND CHINESE SOCIETIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Adrianus L.G. Waworuntu
Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya, Universitas Indonesia
adri581@ui.edu ; algw@dnet.net.id

Abstract
It is assumed that some important changes in Indonesia and China in late nineteenth century were strongly influenced by the presence of Western powers in their respective countries, partly as their responses to the political and cultural situation of the time. Using selected readings of historiographical research on Indonesia and China, I look into the problem by means of the so-called Western impact approach to probe the situation in China and Indonesia (Dutch East Indies) of that period, which were facing almost the same situation and changes; which in due course bring about reform movements and (later) revolts in China, and the rise of nationalism that led to independence in Indonesia. The focus of this paper is the role of the actors of these changes, the Javanese priyayi and the Chinese gentry, also known as the indigenous aristocrats. The goal of this paper is to give some brief account on the Javanese priyayi and Chinese gentry in late nineteenth century, to look at our past, and our common heritage. It is part of my past research on the thoughts of a Javanese priyayi (Ki Hadjar Dewantara, 1889-1959) and a Chinese gentry (Huang Zunxian 黄遵宪, 1848-1905), in order to look at the backgrounds and the aspects of similarity that could contribute to the understanding of their reform thoughts.

Keywords: nineteenth century, western impact, gentry, priyayi

I. Introduction:
This paper is a preliminary research on the Javanese priyayi and Chinese gentry in late nineteenth century, to look at our past, and our common heritage. It is based on the introduction of my past research on the thoughts of a Javanese priyayi (Ki Hadjar Dewantara, 1889-1959) and a Chinese gentry (Huang Zunxian 黄遵宪, 1848-1905), in order to look at the backgrounds and the aspects of similarity that could contribute to the understanding of their reform thoughts.

Since I assume that some changes social and political dynamics in Indonesia and China at that period were strongly influenced by the presence of Western powers, partly as their responses to the relevant social and political circumstances they were facing at that time, I began to probe these responses by giving a summary of the situation in China and Indonesia (Dutch East Indies) of that period, which were facing almost the same predicament, which eventually leading to the rise of nationalism and independence in Indonesia, and reform movements and later revolt in China. These responses are also
closely, but not solely nor crucial, related to the so-called Western impact, an approach which regarded that the presence of Western entity(ies) in their related countries as an external factor that helped triggered changes and progress in non-Western nations such as Indonesia and China.

Western impact on most of the Asian nations in late nineteenth century was generally related to the rise of nationalism in those countries. These impacts mostly as the result of Western colonialism and imperialism that intruded social, political and economic structures of the indigenous societies. Although the process of colonization and intrusion on the political and societal life in these countries had been going on for several centuries, it accelerated and became more intensive in late nineteenth century due to several reasons. The most common cause was the aggressiveness of Western countries as the result of industrial revolution, to gain more markets for their product as well as access to cheap materials in their colonies or other independent non-colony countries such as China. While it could be said that Chinese nationalism arose and inflicted by its bitter encounter with Western powers, Indonesian nationalism was the product of elongated hardship caused by exploitation under the colonial system.

However, there were also other processes at work among the indigenous societies which also contributed to the rise of nationalism and independence. While some processes might be related to the Western intrusion into their societal life through colonialism and imperialism, there were also those which emerged from domestic problems that touched political and cultural aspects of the society. Therefore, there were on-going debates among the Chinese intellectuals on the correctness of Confucianism in late nineteenth century which led to debates on how to rule China appropriately. This process, especially after China was faced with natural disasters and population explosion which led to internal rebellions, then led to the need for institutional reform in order to strengthen the government which can bring long-lasting peace and prosperity to the people. There were two failed reforms, the Tongzhi Restoration in 1860s\(^1\) and the Reform of 1898\(^2\) launched in China by the Qing government before they succumbed to

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\(^1\) The Tongzhi Restoration (simplified Chinese: 同治中兴; traditional Chinese: 同治中興; pinyin: Tóng Zhì Zhōngxìng) (c 1860–1874) was an attempt to arrest the dynastic decline of the Qing dynasty of China by restoring the traditional order. The harsh realities of the Opium War, the unequal treaties, and the mid-century mass uprisings of the Taiping Rebellion caused Qing courtiers and officials to recognize the need to strengthen China. The Tongzhi Restoration was named for the Tongzhi Emperor (1862–1874), and was engineered by the young emperor's mother, the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908). The restoration, however, which applied "practical knowledge" while reaffirming the old mentality, was not a genuine program of modernization. Academics are divided as to whether the Tongzhi Restoration arrested the dynastic decline, or merely delayed its inevitable occurrence. The Tongzhi Restoration was a direct result of the Self-Strengthening Movement led by the statesmen Zeng Guofan (who became viceroy) and Li Hongzhang to revitalize government and improve economic and cultural conditions in China. A number of reforms were implemented such as the development of an official foreign ministry to deal with international affairs, the restoration of regional armies and regional strongmen, modernization of railways, factories, and arsenals, an increase of industrial and commercial productivity, and the institution of a period of peace that allowed China time to modernize and develop. (Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tongzhi_Restoration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tongzhi_Restoration))

\(^2\) The Hundred Days' Reform (Chinese: 戊戌变法 Wǔxū biànhuà, which refers to name of the year of 1898 in Chinese lunar calendar) was a failed 104-day national cultural, political and educational reform movement from 11 June to 21 September 1898 in late Qing Dynasty China. It was undertaken by the young Guangxu Emperor and his reform-minded supporters. The movement proved to be short-lived, ending in a coup d'état ("The Coup of 1898") by powerful conservative opponents led by Empress
the nationalist cause that accelerated just after the second reform movement and gained their goal in 1911, despite several institutional reforms had been carried out such as the abolition of traditional educational system in 1905 and the introduction of parliamentary system.

Meanwhile, a different path of nationalism was taken by indigenous Indonesian. It was a fact that Western impact in the form of colonialism did alter the social structure of the Indonesian society, especially in Java, which tended to approve the assumption that said “colonialism was a process of change” as insinuated in the conclusion of one study of colonial policy in Indonesia. This process was best represented by the Javanese priyayi, the elite of this society whose social function could be paralleled with that of the Chinese elite in the imperial era, the Chinese gentry. In later colonial era in Indonesia, reform movement of the colonial policies were initially voiced by the Dutch liberals in the Netherlands and later ‘transmitted’ by the priyayi in Java. And it is more than a mere coincidence that Chinese nationalism was initially voiced by the gentry.

Who were the Javanese priyayi and the Chinese gentry? Priyayi originally refers to the officials of the Javanese kings, but gradually to include their families and their descendants. Priyayi in later colonial period refers to the members of aristocratic Javanese administrative system and also to the educated class who served the Dutch colonial government as bupati or regent. In later development, it was also implied to other native administrative officials whose ranks below the bupati (i.e., wedana or dowager Cixi, Guangxu (1875–1908), ordered a series of reforms aimed at making sweeping social and institutional changes. This was in response to weaknesses exposed by China's defeat by Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894-5, not long after the First and Second Opium Wars; this blow came as a major shock to the Chinese, because Japan had been regarded as a tributary state, was much smaller than China, and was regarded as inferior. Moreover, the defeat of China by Japan led to a scramble for 'privileges' in China by other foreign powers, notably the German Empire and Russia, further awakening the stubborn conservatives.

With the help of certain senior officials of the Qing court, who were supporters of reform, Kang Youwei was permitted to speak with the Emperor, and his suggestions were enacted. Some of Kang's students were also given minor but strategic posts in the capital to assist with the reforms. Some essential preconditions of reform were:

- Modernizing the traditional exam system
- Elimination of sinecures (positions that provide little or no work but give a salary)
- Creation of a modern education system (studying math and science instead of focusing mainly on Confucian texts, etc.)
- Change the government from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy with democracy.
- Apply principles of capitalism to strengthen the economy.
- Completely change the military buildup to strengthen the military.
- Rapidly industrialize all of China through manufacturing, commerce, and capitalism.

The reformers declared that China needed more than "self-strengthening" and that innovation must be accompanied by institutional and ideological change. The reason that conservatives like Prince Duan opposed the reformers was that they suspected foreigners were behind the plot. He wanted to expel foreigners completely from China. (Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_Days'_Reform](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_Days'_Reform))

4 This social function of the priyayi, according to Van Niel, provided cohesion to Javanese society above the local level and provided the intellectual, cultural and cosmological basis of Indonesian society. See Robert Van Niel, The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite (The Hague and Bandung: W. van Hoeve, 1960), p. 23. This social function was also provided by the Chinese gentry to the Chinese society.
assistant *wedana*). Therefore, the term *priyayi* used as a collective reference to Javanese elite, including the bupati.  

General definition of a *priyayi*, therefore, that he is:

“a well-born Javanese man holding high government office, thoroughly versed in the aristocratic culture of the courts. He should be familiar with classical literature, music and dance, the wayang kulit (puppet shadow play), and the subtleties of (Javanese) philosophy, ethics and mysticisms. He should have mastered the nuances of polite behavior, language and dress, and well into nineteenth century -- , he was expected to be at home in the arts and war, skilled in the handling of horse and weapons.In addition to these required skills, the *priyayi* was meant to be a man of integrity and honor, imbued with a deep awareness of the moral demands of his position, and his obligations to the rulers, the people and the high ethical code of the elite. In short, the image of the *priyayi* was a man able to meet the spiritual and ceremonial as well as technical demands of office.”  

This definition of Javanese *priyayi* quite similar in many ways with the definition of a Confucian gentleman, the *junzi* 君子, in traditional Chinese society.

In his anthropological approach to distinguish the Muslims in East and Central Java, Clifford Geertz categorized the *priyayi* as nominal Muslim and syncretic and

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6 Heather Sutherland, “The *Priyayi*”, in *Indonesia* no. 19, April 1975, pp. 58
7 君子 *junzi*, (Chinese: “gentleman”; literally, “ruler’s son” or “noble son”) Wade-Giles Romanization *chün-tzu*, in *Chinese philosophy*, a person whose humane conduct (仁 *ren*) makes him a moral exemplar.

The term *junzi* was originally applied to princes or aristocratic men. Confucius invested the term with an ethical significance while maintaining its connotation of noble refinement. Unlike the petty person (小人 *xiaoren*; literally, “little person”), who cannot transcend personal concerns and prejudices and acts only for his own gain, the *junzi* is cultured (文 *wen*) and knows how to act and speak appropriately in any situation; he is thus an exemplar whose virtuous influence promotes a flourishing human community. Although the *junzi* is not quite as cultivated as the sagely person (聖人 *shengren*)—the rare person whose cultivation is so great that humane behaviour in any circumstance is practically natural—he is a person of profound capacity and importance.

Although the term appears in several classical texts—for example, it appears in one chapter of the *Daodejing 道德經*—the philosophical and moral senses of *junzi* are primarily Confucian. Always promoting humane government, Confucius was first a bureaucrat and then a teacher of young men aspiring to government service. As stated in the *Lunyu 論語*(Analects), the collection of sayings attributed to him, Confucius placed at the foundation of human life both study (not only of books but also of human relations) and the repeated practice of what one has studied. Becoming a *junzi* is the goal of all who practice such self-cultivation and who truly love learning—regardless of their birth, their social status, or (at least in subsequent interpretations of the tradition) their gender. Before the 20th century, most translations of *junzi* into English and other Western languages drew upon a literal rendering of the term as a man of noble birth or upon later texts in the Confucian tradition that seemed to emphasize the *junzi*’s moral nobility or superiority. Thus, until the late-20th century, many Western scholars and Chinese scholars writing in Western languages translated the term as “superior man” or “superior person.” From the mid-20th century, however, it was increasingly common to use such translations as “exemplary person,” “gentleman,” or “gentleperson,” which highlight Confucius’s point that the *junzi* is not a commander of or ruler over inferior subjects but rather a moral person who leads by his character and conduct. (Source: http://www.britannica.com/Ebchecked/topic/116929/junzi)
called them the *abangan*, while the other category of devout Muslim as the *santris*. It was from this Javanese social category did come the pioneer reformers of late colonial period such as Pangeran Ario Hadiningrat (1847-1915) of Demak and P.A. Achmad Djajadiningrat (1877-1943) of Banten, influential regents or high-*priyayi*, who became the pioneers of modern Indonesian nationalist movement.9

What is it or who are the so called Chinese gentry (Chinese: *绅士* shenshi) which was also known in the West as the mandarins? Many of us perhaps has already knew and quite familiar with this traditional Chinese social category. I quote the late professor Franz Michael of University of Washington, an authority on Chinese gentry whose definition on this group as follows:

“The gentry of imperial China were a distinct social group. They had recognized political, economic, and social privileges and powers and led a special mode of life. The gentry stood above the large mass of the commoners and the so called “mean people.” They dominated the social and economic life of Chinese communities and were also the stratum which the officials came. They were the guardians, the promoters, the representatives of an ethical system based on the tenets of Confucianism which provided the rules of society and man’s relation to man. Educated in this system, they derived from it their knowledge of management of human affairs which was the main qualification of their leading role in Chinese society. During the later dynasties the gentry’s position and qualifications become formalized. A system of examinations and degrees controlled by the government determined the membership of the gentry group, which thus came to be more easily recognized and defined. Protected by a ring of formal privileges, which relieved them from physical labor and gave them prestige and a special position in relation to the government, the gentry were all the more free to act in their dominant role.”10

II. Western Impact as An Academic Approach

In many cases of historical writing on pre-modern China and Indonesia of late nineteenth century, the emphasis was given to the importance of Western presence and intrusion which instigated social and political changes in these societies. In China’s case, this comes from the dominant interpretation of the so-called ‘Western impact’ in the 1950s and 1960s by American academicians on Chinese Studies, such as Fairbank and Teng Ssu-yu, which proposed that, (1) most part of Chinese history at that period was dominated by China’s confrontations with Western powers, and furthermore, (2) it was the West who played the more active role than China in these confrontations.11

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8 Akira Nagazumi, *The Dawn of Indonesian Nationalism: The Early Years of the Budi Utomo, 1908-1918* (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1972), p. 20. In anthropological approach to distinguish the Muslims in East and Central Java, Geertz categorized the *priyayi* as nominal Muslim and syncretic together with *abangan*, and the *santris*, the devout Muslims as the other category. The difference between the priyayi and abangan is that the priyayi represent the largely Hindu-Javanese ‘Great Tradition’ focused on the courts, the abangan is the ‘Little Tradition’ of the village; see Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (London: 1960), passim


Meanwhile, almost similar assumptions were applied to interpret Western impact on Indonesia. Kahin’s study assumed that while the Western impact, by the Dutch in this case, on Indonesian social structure started when they founded the merchant association, Vereeniging der Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) or East India Company in 1602, the importance of Dutch role in changing and modernizing Indonesian society was greatest in late nineteenth century when large scale estates were influenced into the agricultural sector. These interpretations suggest that, the confrontations with the West did leave significant impacts on these societies, and these impacts produced a breakthrough that was needed by the native traditional societies to catch up with Western modern societies.

This approach was partially modified by later historians who argued that while Western role was quite significant, however, there were inner dynamics in the traditional societies of Indonesia and China which also contributed to those changes. The rich tradition of the Chinese scholar-officials, the gentry, with its various schools of thought was regarded as one of the important factors that contributed to the issues of reform in nineteenth century, issues that had been going on within the tradition, relatively free from external interference. These issues of reform gained more emphasis when China was faced with external invasions and humiliations in late nineteenth century.

The importance of the Western impact here then is seen as an external element that gave fresh ammunition to the existing condition, not merely as response to Western intrusion. There are studies on Indonesian history that support the idea. The Javanese as the major element of the Indonesian multi-cultures society did have rich tradition. However, its major social structure was vulnerable to the Dutch political intervention. Thus, the political status of the Javanese aristocrat-official class, the priyayi, was susceptible to the Dutch colonial policy until their actual demise in 1945 when Indonesia proclaimed its independence.

Modern Fate (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) which gained popularity in the 1960s. He was later being attacked for overlooking major social and political changes in 18th century China, prior to the Western onslaught.

13 Studies by Onghokham (1975) and Heather Sutherland (1979) gives details account of the western impact on the Javanese priyayi. Both scholars argued that the priyayi class was transformed during the colonial period of the Javanese society. While Onghokham’s study showed the transformation of the Javanese priyayi in the nineteenth century, Sutherland’s study stressed on the priyayi on twentieth century.
14 In Chinese intellectual history, Thomas Metzger is the forefront of this approach with his study entitled *Escape from Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) which basically argued that most of the modern Chinese intellectuals were still attached to the basic moral goals and aspirations of the Confucian tradition, and “western learning,” especially the new technologies and institutions, were adopted in order to accomplish these goals and aspirations.
The reform movements in Chinese and Indonesian societies that came after their intense interactions and confrontations with the Western powers might have established supporting evidence to the idea of Western impact and its response. As result of the impact, these societies searched for the appropriate means to revamp their “traditional” societies vis-à-vis the “modern” West. In Qing China, these movements arise from consecutive military defeats against Western powers and Japan, the defeats that sent alarm to the Chinese pride psychologically. This form of psychological response to military defeats generated from Middle Kingdom (Chinese: Tianxia or Zhongguo) syndrome which placed China and Chinese civilization as the centre of the world. 17

Similar interpretation of impact- response along this line was also given by Schrieke and supported by a notable Indonesian historian 18 to rationalise the awakening of national pride of the Indonesian people by using individual psychology to approach the source of this movement to a psychological phenomenon of inferiority-complex which, ‘easily leads to sensitiveness, peeverishness and irritability, to a feeling of being encroached upon, of being wrong. This leads again through the mechanism of compensation, to the rejection of every form of dependence, to resistance against every form of subordination, to an often exaggerated strengthening of self consciousness and to non cooperation. The humiliating feeling of inequality is compensated by self-exaltation’ 19

It was granted that the popular feeling of inferiority complex did give a fertile soil for the growth of anti-Western attitude. As one study said that the role of these intellectuals, whether to be found in countries under colonial rule or not, have faced common problems, and have responded in similar ways: ‘Nationalism, populism,
xenophobia and nativistic revivalism, inferiority feelings, curiosity and resentment in the face of the metropolitan culture are found throughout the Asian continent. 20

In both cases, reform movements in late Qing China and national awakening of the indigenous Indonesian were seen as a cause to regain political and cultural supremacy over foreign intruders, as the result of this so-called inferiority-complex syndrome. Therefore, late Qing China began to reinvigorate their cultural and national identity vies-a-vies the western powers that did not only succeeded in defeating them militarily, but also brought and introduced them some forms of alternatives to the existing traditional institutions and values. Meanwhile, after passing through several political and economic motivated reforms by the colonial government of NEI, and after being subjected to western style education, some elements of the Indonesian native society, especially the Western-educated intellectuals, mostly came from the lower-priyayi class, began to think differently from their colonizers on crucial issues, such as the legitimacy of the colonial government over indigenous population and their lands.

These reform movements in Qing China and Netherlands East Indies consequently instigated debates on social and political issues, such as national and cultural identity, freedom, and political legitimacy over the people. Nationalism and liberalism, in later stages, loaded with indigenous cultural interpretations, were the key words among many nationalists’ social and political agenda. This trend began after they were disappointed with the available avenues to address the reform, or simply realized that Western values and institutions were not enough to redress their society to a better and ordered life. Therefore, many intellectuals of that period looked for concepts and thoughts from their own culture to counter or supplement Western liberalism and simultaneously grab the newly-found notion of Western-inflicted nationalism as their means to access moral and political support from the people; using nationalism to legitimize their attack on Western powers and their cultural manifestations which were looked as the threat to their own tradition and culture.

In later developments, cultural concepts and symbols of indigenous tradition were used to back up nationalism by the intellectuals in the nationalist movements of Asia, and directed for dual purpose: (1) to gain support from their own people. By using concepts and symbols that were already familiar and accepted by the majority of the society, the movements gained the right momentum and (2) to resist and fight against the encroachment of Western culture and civilization and all its manifestations. In Indonesia, nationalism was placed as the antithesis of colonialism, therefore, ‘Cultural movement which isn’t directed to counter colonialism is considered one without national character, and is not the manifestation of national consciousness.’21

In sum, the Western impact approach on Chinese and Indonesian societies of late nineteenth century, though quite acceptable in explaining major changes that took place in that period, it contained several deficiencies, as written in one study on this approach on Chinese history which is applicable to Indonesia as well: ‘In the broadest sense, the problem with impact-response approach is that it predefines what is important about nineteenth century Chinese history in terms of a set of questions prompted by the Sino-Western encounter. More specifically, it fosters several kinds of

21 Slametmuljana, ibid., p. 45
distortion: It discourages serious inquiry into those facets of the history of the period that were unrelated, or at best remotely related, to the Western presence; it is prone to interpret Western-related aspects of nineteenth century China as “Chinese responses to the Western challenge” when they were partly - in some cases principally - responses to indigenous forces; and, finally, insofar as the emphasis is on conscious “responses”, the approach is naturally drawn toward intellectual, cultural, and psychological modes of explanation at the expense of social, political, and economic ones.22

However, the validity Western impact approach is still intact despite some imperfections that inherent in every modes of explanation. Impact-response paradigm is valid if applied selectively in a broad-minded manner. Western influence did bring effect of reforms in China and Indonesia, a historical fact which is hard not to acknowledge.

Bearing this in mind, this study will incorporate eclectic approaches to look at Western impact in China and Indonesia during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, Western impact here is treated as a logical consequence of a process, of incidents, that happened when two civilizations get in touch and collided. The emphasis of this paper is to look for any mechanism of response and resistance on the part of indigenous societies, conscious or unconsciously, as the result of this impact.

III. Western Impact in Netherlands East Indies

The Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, especially their bad practices and policies such as the infamous Cultuurstelsel (Cultivation System or popularly known by Indonesian as Tanam Paksa or Forced Cultivation) was used to boost nationalism and the heroism of Indonesian people to fight for their independence from the evil of colonialism. This kind of episode is being used to display the resilience of the Indonesian people against the foreign aggressor.

Therefore when Indonesians are asked on how long the Dutch colonized their country, the answer will almost unanimously be; three and half century. The calculation is derived from simply by counting back the year of the Independence Day in 1945 to the year of the first landing by the Dutch merchant vessel at West Java’s harbour of Banten in 1596. Consequently, the whole part of Indonesia was colonized for 349 years, and this is the official history of Dutch colonization in Indonesia which has been taught to the students ever since 1945 up to present. For those who are critical, they have to save their energy to debate when they sit in a history class at university level or in an open discussion outside the classroom. This reality perhaps stemmed not from ignorance but the pride of a nation that survived from centuries-long oppression; a lesson to all Indonesians that they did have a common historical bond that will always stick them together. This kind of political education of nationalism does ignore certain facts that don’t fit with what it claims, and it is not unintentionally, that is to boost national pride and unity. Furthermore, without colonization there won’t be any revolution and independence, two salient ingredients that further stick the nation, as justification for the founding of negara kesatuan, a unified state. As suggested in one study on intellectuals and nationalism in Indonesia that, ‘It has been always a matter of national pride that independence came to Indonesia not as the result of a negotiated

22 Cohen, Discovering History in China, pp. 52-53
transfer of sovereignty, though the process was completed in that way, but through a struggle of heroic proportions in whose fires the nation itself was forged. The revolution, indeed, is central to the Republic’s perception of itself.23

The above example is just a reminder in approaching the nature Indonesian historical writing that has to be aware by its reader. Perhaps this happens also in historical writings in all of the nations in the world, but the example mentioned above might distort or denied some historical facts, which in turn will effect a comprehensive conclusion. Therefore, historical facts about Indonesian colonial past still are not free from national pride. This is the legacy of the era that hailed nationalism as the antithesis of colonialism. As one scholar wrote that, “It was the colonial past that remained the important problem. For after all, it has been used by Indonesian to justify the war of independence and the politics of revolution.24

However, studies on Western impact and influences on the Indonesian societies in pre-colonial and colonial era suggested that the first impact was felt in Javanese political structure not long after the arrival of the Dutch merchants in Banten. In the course of Dutch colonization of Indonesia, Java became the centre of trade activities of the VOC and also served as the centre of Netherlands East Indies political activities. This region and its society were also most affected by Western intrusion and colonialism which lasted about 300 years. Among all regions in Indonesia, Java also has been the most populated.25 When the Dutch colonial government step up its direct administration in later decades of the nineteenth century, especially after the Aceh War, the Western impact also felt in outer Java area such as in Sumatera.

Since this paper is on intellectual history, the focus of the impact will be directed to the priyayi and gentry classes, which represented the privileged class that dominated their societies.

### 3.1. The Dutch and The Javanese Priyayi

As already mentioned above, the Javanese priyayi was the elite in Javanese society.26 Although this social category is associated with the Javanese aristocracy, but they are not descendants of the Javanese kings as sometimes assumed.

In pre-colonial Java, the role of priyayi was acquired by powerful vassals or successful adventurers who were able to assert political control over parts of Java.27

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24 Onghokham, The Residency of Madiun Priyayi and Peasant in the Nineteenth Century (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1975) p. vii
25 The population of Java and Madura in 1900 was 28,609,312 people. In 1930 the population grew to 40,890,244 people or about 68% of the total population of Indonesia in that year. This population lived in 132,174 sq. km or 6.94% of the 1,904,345 sq. km total land of Indonesia. These figures are taken from Amry Vandenbosch, *The Dutch Indies: Its Government, Problems and Politics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942), p. 14 and Ruth McVey, ed., *Indonesia, Survey of World Cultures 12* (New Haven: Yale University, South East Asia Studies, by arrangement with HRAF Press, 1963), pp. 14-15
26 This term originally refers to Javanese king’s officials but gradually to include their families and their descendants. For more insights on this theme, see Soemarsaid Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java: A Study of the Later Mataram Period, 16th to 19th Century* (Ithaca: Modern Indonesian Project, Cornell University, 1968), pp. 93-101
They became part of the indigenous power structure which centred on the royal court of Javanese state of Mataram whose reign encompassed most part of Java, Madura, Bali, and brought a large part of the archipelago and the Malay Peninsula under its indirect rule. In order to put the *priyayi’s* position in a perspective, we should first see how Mataram was structured. According to a study on later Mataram period, this kingdom was structured in a series of concentric circles which centred in the court (*kraton*), which was surrounded consecutively by the capital city (*nagara*), the core region (*nagaragung*), the outlying regions (*mancanegara*), and finally the other islands (*tanah sabrang*). The king of Mataram lived and ruled the kingdom from the court; his vassals lived close to him in the capital city who earns their income from lands in the core region received from the king. The regional chiefs, or *bupati*, and their subordinates controlled the outlying regions, the regions that were not under the direct rule of the king. These vassals of the core region and the *bupati* of the outlying regions were the forefathers of the Javanese *priyayi* whose social category in 1900 included the civil servants and individuals who might best be classed as intellectuals and professional men. When VOC began to exercise its power over the outlying regions, these regional chiefs were those who started to feel its impact.

After the successful expedition of Cornelis de Houtman to the East in 1597, the Dutch merchant companies founded the VOC in 1602 in Holland to whom it was granted a trading charter for all countries to the East of Cape of Good Hope. The Company existed until 1799 after the Dutch government revoked its charter and assumed its assets and debts. The main objectives of the Company was the monopoly of the spices and therefore to preserve the Spice Islands as a private trading ground which aimed at two of the principal spice producers, Banda and the Moluccas, as the main target. Although the Company did not want territory, this activity inevitably led to territorial expansion. Therefore, although it began as a commercial venture, the Company found itself increasingly involved in the politics of the archipelago. Mainly because most of the chief ports in the region which functioned as trading cities, such as Banten, situated in the western part of this island, Java then was chosen to be the base

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30 VOC or Vereeniging der Oost-Indische Compagnie, was founded by Dutch merchant companies which were supported by the State Generals (or Parliament) and civic corporations. These companies were not only competitors in trade but also instruments of civic rivalry. With the foundation of VOC, the rivalry was converted into cooperation for the common welfare of the State, initially, by six Chambers that represented cities and provinces of Amsterdam, Zeeland, Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen. See J.S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy* (Cambridge and New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944) pp. 21-25
31 The capital of the Company when it was founded was f. 6,449,588.4, and when it crashed in 1799 the nett loss amounted to f. 84.9 million. *Ibid.*
32 On its liquidation, the Company has debts amounting to f. 136 million. See W. Middendorp, “The Administration of the Outer Provinces of the Netherlands Indies”, in B. Schrieke, ed., *The Effect of Western Influence on Native Civilisations in the Malay Archipelago*, p. 38
33 The Dutch restricted the native spice production exclusively to these islands and a few small neighbouring islands. Other places were forbidden. See G.H. van der Kolff, “European Influences on Native Agriculture,” in Schrieke, *Ibid.*
34 The most important port of that time was Malacca where goods were exchanged at fairs or markets held periodically in this city and other chief ports. See Furnivall, *op.cit.*, p. 15

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of their trading activities in the archipelago, and consequently they had to annex and rule the adjacent area and other means to protect their base.

The Company’s aggressive activities in Java then led its encounter with the existing local leaders of the outlying region, the bupati, or the vassals of the Javanese kingdom.

3.2. The Transformation of The Priyayi

As mentioned before, in pre-colonial era, the priyayi forefathers were the Javanese kingdoms’ administrative personnel, the only group in society categorized as “the king’s subjects” or kawula, which helped him rule the outlying regions or mancanagara. They were the most important stratum below the king and the royal family, composed of officials or punggawas of the realm. The regional chief or bupati became the king’s representative of a particular outlying region. The pre-colonial bupati generally came from two sources: local regional chiefs that surrendered to the Javanese kings and became his vassal, or a royal prince or king’s high official that was handed a conquered region. Therefore, a bupati was closely linked with central authority, which in Javanese traditional polity sometimes even threatened the king’s authority. One of the common practices that were taken by the king to control over their subordinates was to align with them through marriage. In late nineteenth century, the bupati or regent as they were called by the Dutch, tends to further their elitist position in the society by strategic marital alliances. These were the high-priyayi class, as opposed to lower-priyayi which comprised of the clerks, messengers, household and office personnel, guards, retainers, dependants and followers of the bupati.

There were some privileges that specifically attached to the priyayi. First of all they did not have to work on the land. Their income came from an appenage or lungguh from the king and with it the appropriate number of peasant families to work on it. On the lungguh the appenage holder fully exercised the king’s right over the land and the labor of the people. The office of Bupatis and other priyayis were not hereditary. Their position passed back to the king when the office passed into other hands by death, dismissal or other means. They were not being paid by the king to administer their territories, but from the appanage income they had to meet the costs incurred by their position, for in the Mataram state structure, the office holder was administratively as well as financially independent and autonomous. The clerks, messengers, household, etc. which composed the lower-priyayi class were also paid from the appanage. These people were assigned a piece of land and peasant labor out of the royal grant, and this practice made them regarded as priyayi by the peasantry.

The relationship between the king and his subjects on Javanese thought, which also applied to the relationship between the priyayi and the peasantry derived from these three major concepts:

35 Moertono, op.cit., pp. 108-109
36 Moertono, State and Statecraft, pp. 90ff
37 The tradition of the Javanese state have been handed down by its last royal house, the Moslem dynasty of Mataram which began in the middle of sixteenth century
38 Onghokham, op.cit, p. 16
1). A close, personal relationship accompanied by feelings of mutual love and respect is perceived as the standard mode of social communication.

2). Fate determines man’s place in society, whether he will be born a servant of a master. A consequence is that man has no choice but to do his duty as is ordained by fate. These two factors result in a practice of government in which:

3). the ruler (and his officials), in terms of practical administrative policy, must care for his subjects as a parent cares for his children; thus the ruler assumes in fact an attitude of protective superiority, and ruled an attitude of acquiescent subservience.  

Therefore, the relationship between the priyayi and the peasantry in pre-colonial Javanese society, at least theoretically, was not authoritarian. Both sides’ existence in the society was predestined by fate, not to be seen as antagonistic, but rather complementary. The ruler’s authority was guided by moral principle not to severe this relationship of the ruler and his subjects. So when the bupati and other priyayi exercise their rights over the land and the labor of the people, they practice it according to that principle. The peasantry who did the labor for the priyayi did their obligation according to the principle and maintained their rights to be protected. This was an ideal relationship which dominated the Javanese society in pre-colonial era, although perhaps in practice this ideal didn’t necessarily kept by both sides due to situational conditions. By and large, the priyayi and the peasantry relate to each other in this fashion.

When VOC began to expand their trading activities in Java, they came face to face with the Javanese bupatis of the mancanagara. VOC respected their authority and dealt professionally with these regional chiefs on delivering agricultural products to the northern Javanese harbours. Since their main interest was making profit, and not political, the VOC officials kept their distance from local politics, except insofar as this was necessary to secure and maintain their trading privileges. However, they realized that they need a monopoly to guard competition against Javanese, Arab, Chinese, and other European traders. Therefore they signed agreements with the local rulers to obtain privileges which they kept at all costs, which made them found it necessary, in later development, to intervene politically more and more decisively over wider and wider areas of Java, especially in the mancanegara. Instead of dealing with the local peasants and farmers, VOC officials dealt with the bupatis, mostly along the coastal regions of northern Java, and their administration which they regarded as the volksboofden or traditional chiefs. In this stage, the impact of the VOC to the Javanese society, if there was any, was almost non-existence, since their presence were mostly in the harbours where they receive the goods from the Javanese producers through their bupati counterpart.

This pattern of relationship between the bupatis and the Dutch began to change when VOC extended its political and economic control over two-thirds of Java between 1677 and 1777. In order to secure its political control necessary to achieve its economic objectives, VOC began to implement what was called indirect rule. The essence of this system consisted in the utilization of the indigenous power structure for its own interests. This means the Javanese priyayi would be maintained and their power

39 Moertono, loc.cit., p
40 Kahin, Ibid., p. 3
had to be enlarged and strengthened by Dutch military force. With this power, the Javanese society began to feel its impact. While before the Javanese peasantry had been able to force the *priyayi* to respect its rights now became weakened in its relationship with this aristocracy. This was the beginning of the exploitation of Javanese peasantry by the *priyayi*.

In 1798 VOC collapsed due to widespread corruption and the area controlled by it was then placed under direct authority of the Dutch government. The new authority kept all its practices and system, “nearly all the old institutions, such as forced labor, deliveries in kind, feudalism, and monopolies in certain crops were retained.”

Another major change came after the Java War (1825-1830) which could be regarded as a decisive event in Javanese history. This was a revolt against the Dutch by a prince of Yogyakarta, one of the Javanese principalities in central Java. This revolt was supported by a considerable number of *priyayis* and peasants. It was this war that brought Java under colonial rule, because Dutch interference in this war led inevitably to a more permanent Dutch control of Java. Therefore it commenced the end of the *mancanegara*, which meant that the princes of the Javanese principalities lost their control over the outlying regions. The Dutch decided to take over the control over the *mancanegara* and leave the princes with only the core regions and this give the chance for the bupatis to break their political dependence on the courts. At the end of the war in 1830, it was clear that the Javanese polity had been broken up.

After the war which depleted them financially, the Dutch government came up with a new system, known as *Cultuur Stelsel* or Cultivation System, lasted as a whole until 1877, after which it was progressively restricted until in 1915 it was completely abolished. Basically, the system substituted the peasant’s land taxes with his undertaking to cultivate government owned export crops on one-fifth of his fields or 66 days of his year on government plantations or other projects. Count Johannes van den Bosch, the governor-general who initiated the system relied on the success of this program heavily on the *bupatis* whom since then were called regent. Colonial authority elevated the regents’ position to that of a princet. Their powers were increased, lands were granted to them and in 1832 their office was made hereditary, and this principle was put in writing in the *Regeerings Reglement* (constitution) in 1854. They were even allowed to get a percentage of the crops collected from the peasantry. Honours, titles, promotions and dismissals were given by the Dutch. During the Cultivation System, the regents and the residents were the top managers of the agricultural production.

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43 Vandenbosch, *op.cit.*, p. 53. See also Furnivall, *Netherlands India, A Study of Plural Economy* (New York, 1941) p. 49
45 The principalities in central Java which were used to be the Moslem Mataram Kingdom: Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Pakualaman and Mangkunegaran.
46 Ongkhokham, *op.cit.*, pp. 84-89
47 *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85
48 *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95
49 Kahin, *op. cit.*, p. 11
50 Resident was the head of the *priyayi*’s counterpart, in fact their superiors or as the Dutch termed it the “elder brother”, was the Dutch civil service usually referred to as B.B. (Binnenlandsch-Bestuur). A residency controlled several regencies.
Regents became part of the Dutch native administration or *Inlaandsch Bestuur*. As consequence, they were given monthly allowance in money from the Dutch. Beside this allowance, his income also came from land and his rights on corvee labor and services from the population, and the percentages from the cultivation system. With this income, the regents became the highest income group of the Javanese society. The highest salary of the lower-priyayi, that was of a *patih*, was one-tenth of the regent’s salary.

At this stage, the formerly independent chiefs and court officials were transformed into subordinate allies, compradors and ultimately into political and bureaucratic instruments of an alien regime. In the process, the *priyayi* lost their military functions and were restricted in their economic activities; they became dependent more upon the Dutch than upon their ability to work with local forces. "Bound by colonial restraints, unable to response vigorously to economic and related social change, the native officials of the late nineteenth century were an uprooted elite whose refined and over-elaborate life was probably more a result of impotence than of specifically Javanese traits."

The practical goals of Dutch colonialism eventually had distorted the relationship between *priyayi* and peasantry. Furthermore, the relationship which predestined by fate was not honoured anymore, and the authoritarian element of the Javanese aristocracy in their rule over the peasantry was established through this process. This was the legacy of VOC and Dutch colonial impact on the Javanese society in late nineteenth century. A legacy which will become a persistent political problem in Javanese society in twentieth century, and later became one of the drives behind nationalism and independence movements.

### 3.3. The *Priyayi* in Late Colonial Period

As already mentioned above, the Javanese *priyayi* became part of Dutch administration in Java under the so-called *Inlandsch Bestuur* (native administration) or *Pangreh Praja* (rulers of the realm), and they were controlled by a colonial foreign administration, the *Binnenlandsch Bestuur* (interior administration). The heads of the PP were the colonial regents, formerly the Javanese bupatis, who in their capacity as

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51 Their income varied depends on the importance of their position and the amount of the agricultural products they delivered. See table below, the allowances in money and cultivation percentages of six Madiun regents of Madiun regency in 1861:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regents</th>
<th>Salary</th>
<th>Cultivation%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madiun</td>
<td>f. 1500-</td>
<td>f. 1724-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magetan</td>
<td>f. 800-</td>
<td>f. 1231-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponorogo</td>
<td>f. 800-</td>
<td>f. 2911-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumoroto</td>
<td>f. 600-</td>
<td>f. 2040-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngawi</td>
<td>f. 600-</td>
<td>f. 625-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purwodadi</td>
<td>f. 600-</td>
<td>f. 483-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacian</td>
<td>f. 500-</td>
<td>f. 2919-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Onghokham, *loc.cit.*, p. 143)

52 Lower *priyayi* could be distinguished into two groups: bureaucratic and territorial. Bureaucratic: *patih* (chief of the bureaucracy), *kliwon* (regent’s messenger), *mantris* (officials in charge of police, irrigation, woods, etc.), *jaksa* and assistant-*jaksa* (attorney). Territorial: *wedanas* or district chief, assistant-*wedana* or *camat*.


54 Heather Sutherland, *op.cit.*, p. viii
traditional leaders or volkshoofden ruled a regency in directly ruled areas by the Dutch. A Dutch resident, the head of the BB, controlled over several regencies in his residency. At the apex of these two administrations was the governor-general who resided in Batavia (later called Jakarta).

Meanwhile, a change of policy came in the Netherlands East India under the influence of European democratic liberalism on Dutch colonial policy. This attack gained momentum when a liberal leader van Deventer published a study in the periodical “de Gids” (August 1899) called “A Debt of Honor”, in which he argued that the Netherlands was obliged to compensate the “surplus millions” which it had received from its colony and to recognize, at least in principle, its debt (about 832 million guilders). This figure was the whole amount that was received by the Netherlands since 1816. Therefore, the Dutch launched a new policy in 1901 that reflected a feeling of guilt and moral responsibility, the so-called Ethical Policy. As a basic principle, this policy had “the education and emancipation of Indian society with, as its means, the promotion of educational facilities of all kinds, the opening up of all possible positions to natives and native chiefs, and the initiation of all measures in making the native economically stronger”.

This implementation of this policy and its effects made the priyayi more and more Western oriented, and would become the impetus of social frustration among the priyayi and also precipitated their relationship with the newly founded intelligentsia. The education for the ambtenaren or civil servant, which at first directed to the native chiefs and their families would gradually applied to all natives in their attempt to broaden the existing administration which would result in growing social mobility. This social mobility threatened the priyayi’s position in the Pangreh Praja administration. Furthermore, the lower-priyayi now had a chance to become higher-priyayi through education. On the other hand, the colonial government also created professional schools for doctors (Dokter Jawa school which later became STOVIA), and teachers (Kweekschool or Teacher’s Training School). The professional schools were created as the consequence of the implementation of colonial policy for education and the welfare of the natives, and also the need to meet the growth of the colonial administration in early twentieth century. These new professionals and also journalists, who began to emerge in early twentieth century in Java, created new elite in the society, the intelligentsia.

Early twentieth century also saw a flow of Western liberalism and socialist thoughts into Indonesian society. These thoughts came in to the colony by Dutch politicians, administrators, teachers, and also labor unionist. The social and political situation in the colony began to heat up with the founding of the priyayis’ organization, the first political party in the colony, Budi Utomo (Excellent Endeavour) in 1908 which is usually seen as the marking the beginning of the Indonesian nationalist movement. This development then gave impetus to other social and political interest groups in the society to exercise their existence; the Moslems founded the Sarekat Dagang Islam (Islamic Trading Association) in 1911, the Dutch Indos founded the Indische Partij (Indies Party) in 1912, the socialist founded ISDV (Indische Sociaal Democratische

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56 Ibid., p. 14
Vereeniging, Indies Social Democratic Association) in 1914, and the liberals founded NIVB (Nederlandsch-Indische Vrijzinnige Bond, Dutch Indian Liberal Association) in 1916. In order to accommodate and monitor their activities the colonial government provide a new arena, the Volksraad (People’s Council) in May 1918. This new institution became an important forum for the less radical nationalists and the more ambitious Western-oriented priyayi.

It was in this situation a high-priyayi of nobility, a member of the House of Pakualam in Yogyakarta, one of the four principalities in central Java, enter into the arena. This man, Suwardi Suryaningrat who later changed his name to Ki Hajar Dewantara was a product of Ethical Policy of the colonial government. However, he was also a good example of the failure of this policy.

IV. Political Background and Western Impact in Late Imperial China

Nineteenth century China was “a period of administrative deterioration and severe social strain. This was, as it happens, also the period when China entered into more extensive contact with the West, when nationalistic sentiment developed, and when certain new values were introduced”.57 This is the period when China had to deal not only with problems that confronted the old order, but also new tendencies and movements that came from internal as well as external forces.

After enjoying the era of peace that followed the success of conquest campaigns over China and other small border countries, the Manzu regime (1644-1911) in nineteenth century began to face political weakening which mostly came from the lack of imperial initiative to anticipate the growing bureaucracy. Decision making on personnel and policy being so heavily concentrated in the throne. Moreover, instead of recruiting more able administrative personnel, the government began to sell official position; “during the last three or four decades of the century, roughly half of the local officials in all the empire between fourth and the seventh ranks qualified by purchase,”58 which means half of the administration of zhou (department) and xian (county)59 were in the hands of these magistrates. Administrative abuses among these magistrates began a constant theme of the local grievances. When these people ruled over China’s countryside, the obvious consequences became predictable. The growth of huge population and natural disasters made the political situation even worse. Those who were hit hard by these practices and disasters, especially the peasants and other segments of population such as the increasing number of discontented literati whose opportunities had shrunk, needed some actions to air their pent-up frustration. Popular uprisings and other form of social tensions began to escalate; White Lotus, Taiping, Nian and the Moslem uprisings broke almost simultaneously.

58 Ibid., p. 114
59 These were the smallest administrative units within a province, headed by magistrates, which were grouped to form larger units: fu (prefectures), zhili ting (independent subprefectures), or zhili zhou (independent departments). To have comprehensive insight on the local government of the Qing regime, see: T’ung-tsu Ch’ü, Local Government in China Under the Ch’ing, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1988)
The Qing regime suppressed these uprisings successfully by using the governors-general and governors the right to create local armies. Regional military leaders such as Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) and his famous Hunan army and Li Hongzhang and the Huai army, were important in not only suppressing the uprisings but also successful in the rehabilitation of peace in the effected areas. Zeng, a Qing loyalist, treated the uprisings, especially the Taiping, as a serious challenge to the Confucian order. When he and his colleagues launched their pacification movements in the areas that were effected by the uprisings, they compelled to realize the Confucian ideal of good government through properly trained men. “It was this resurgence of Confucian idealism that made the Tongzhi reign (1862-1874) a period of restoration as defined by Mrs. Wright 60 - not just an epoch of dynasties survival, but one in which the inherited civilization was reinvigorated.”61 This success made him a powerful regional leader which led to the growth of “regionalism”.62

It was in this political condition the Qing regime felt further political strain when they encountered the West in hostile manner which later contributed to many social and political pressures for reform, especially after being defeated by the British in Opium War and its political consequences that followed, such as the opening of treaty ports, the establishment of extraterritoriality, and the penetration of interiors by foreign Christian missionaries. The foreigners were guaranteed many rights and privileges; residence in settlements policed and taxed by foreign municipal authorities, the determination of tariffs by treaty, foreign participation in the administration of the Chinese customs service, operation of foreign ships between the treaty ports, and missionary residence in the interior. Furthermore, at the end of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, the foreigners won the further privilege of operating factories in the treaty ports.63

The Western encroachments on the Chinese territory in this scale never happened in Chinese history. The immediate reaction to this defeats and penetration to the interior was xenophobia which came from the leaders of the society, the Chinese gentry. This xenophobia especially directed against the Christian missionaries who invaded their privileges, and mostly related to local issues. On the national level, more broad-minded people, especially those major players in Tongzhi restoration, confronted the Western threat by applying a pragmatic approach; using Western knowledge and technology to resist the encroachment. With the imperial support, some governors-general and governors launched a “self-strengthening” (zi qiang) movement in the 1860’s. The emphasis of this movement was to build up military and financial strength, by adopting the Western technology, to contest further foreign aggression. Li Hongzhang built Jiangnan arsenal in 1865 and Zuo Zongtang founded Fuzhou Navy Yard in 1866. Education along Western lines was also encouraged to attain the objectives; government established special schools in Shanghai and Fuzhou where sciences and foreign languages were taught. Furthermore, Chinese students were also sent to the United States in 1870’s where they were trained in science and technology.

61 Kwang-Ching Liu, op. cit., p
63 Kwang-Ching Liu, op. cit.
These and other modernization measures were taken enthusiastically which led to many promising innovations. However after so much effort and cost was spent, the result was far from expectation. It is suggested that in reality most of the projects could not be realized as initially expected due conservatism of xenophobic variety. And this movement was completely abandoned when China was defeated in Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 over the control of Korea. 

Despite its failure, perhaps the importance of this movement that its aim was shared by many modern-minded scholar-officials who were not in the position of policy maker. Most of them, like the promoters of the self-strengthening movement, had experienced or seen some aspects of Western civilization and they were compelled to share their experience to contribute for the betterment of their own society. People like Wang Tao, Yen Fu and Huang Zunxian had the chance living in Western and other foreign countries and felt the urge to spell out their knowledge of the secret of the “wealth and power” of those countries. Since then, the call for institutional reform was became a fashionable topic in late Qing period before it went further to political reform and finally to revolution. 

4.1. Chinese Gentry and Western Impact

“How should the gentry, a dominant social group, which was peculiar to China and unknown in other societies, be defined?” This question was posed by Etienne Balazs in his attempt to elaborate his definition of this unique social category in Chinese imperial society. It is not easy to make a solid definition of the Chinese gentry. So far there are several definitions made by Western scholars for this group, all refers to a certain individuals in traditional Chinese society, a distinct social group, which was so different from anything known in the West. Therefore it was very tempting for Western writers such as E.T.C. Werner, Max Weber and K.A. Wittfogel, in their attempts to describe this social category after examining various aspects of their role in society, which generally speaking, came out to define the Chinese gentry as a social group which hindered social advancement, did not contribute to the development of capitalism and, exercised power over the large mass of peasant labor.

Balazs, while objected the use of gentry terminology as unfaithful to the Chinese concept, defined the Chinese gentry into two folds, corresponding to their dual nature of being official as well as literati, as a class and a caste or a closed intellectual aristocracy, who dominated the writing of the Official Histories. Since, as Fairbank correctly described, the Chinese gentry “is a technical term with two principal meanings and an inner ambiguity”. The dual nature of the gentry is further explained by Wakeman as a status group and as a class. The Chinese gentry, had been largely

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64 Kwang-Ching Liu, *op.cit.*, p. 134 
67 Balazs, *loc. cit.*, p. 19 
monopolized China’s intellectual and political life since the eleventh century, whose continued dominance had made the transitional process from Ming to Qing possible.\textsuperscript{71}

Kuhn in his celebrated work, \textit{Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China}, wrote, “It was this elite, which by virtue of its undiminished community influence, its tradition of orthodox learning, and its ethic of administrative service, made possible the reintegration of the traditional state in a shape to that of its predecessor.”\textsuperscript{72} He further refuted the gentry definition made by Chang Chung-li and Ho Ping-ti \textsuperscript{73} on the question of where the boundary lines should be drawn, since “neither is quite successful in relating status to the context in which it is recognized, or power to the context in which it is wielded”.\textsuperscript{74}

Furthermore, Kuhn tried to distinguish the ‘gentry’ and ‘elite’ terms. Therefore he divided the gentry into three groups, each corresponding to their power and prestige on various scale of organization: the national elite, the provincial elite, and the local elite. In sum, he used the term ‘gentry’ to refer to degree holder in general, but he added, “my working analysis of the ‘elite’ will distinguish the scales of organization at which such person enjoyed status and wielded influence, and will also recognize that, at the local level, commoners might exercise powers that were in some cases hardly distinguishable from those of degree holders”.\textsuperscript{75}

This definition so far, is the most actual in defining the gentry in late Qing period, therefore is very helpful to perceive the role of the gentry in that period. However, probably the most extensive work about the Chinese gentry in the Qing period was Chang Chung-lei’s work, \textit{The Chinese Gentry}, which exhaustively surveyed thousands of gentry biographies collected in the voluminous biographical sections of local histories - the gazetteers of the provinces, prefectures, and districts. In this classical work on Chinese gentry, Chang described almost every aspect of the gentry’s institution and emphasized on their role in the society.

Given certain social function and privileges in Chinese imperial society, which they jealously guarded and, consequently, were labelled as opportunists, conservative and traditionalist. Granted that the qualifications above are correct in defining the Chinese gentry, therefore, it is inconceivable to undermine their role almost in every social and political event in late Qing period. Their participation in the reform movements in that period was definitely important. However, the question here is what was the motive behind their actions? Polachek on his account to reconstruct the Opium War \textsuperscript{76} argued that the literati or this elite group had played important role in encouraging the imperial government, through intrigue and political persuasion, to initiate the Opium War against England. This picture is totally different from what were

\textsuperscript{71} Chang Chung-li, op.cit., p. 137
\textsuperscript{73} To Chang Chung-li, the gentry comprises all holders of academic degrees, from the lowest (the \textit{sheng-yuan}, or district scholar) to the highest (the \textit{jin-shi}, or metropolitan graduate). While Ho Ping-ti regarded \textit{sheng-yuan} didn’t belong to the gentry definition, since their social status was incomparable to that of higher degree holders.
\textsuperscript{74} Kuhn, \textit{loc.cit.}, pp. 3-4
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{76} James M. Polachek, \textit{The Inner Opium War} (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1992)
written before on this subject which assumed that the war was forced upon China by England in order to force China opening up their interior regions for trade.

When China began to feel the impact of aggressive imperialism activities imposed on their land by Western powers sometimes before the Opium War, there were incidents against foreigners several localities which related to xenophobia and anti-Christianity movements. These movements were mainly led by the local elites which were the local gentry, and the incident of Sanyuanli was an example. This incident was a sample manifestation of a bigger movement by the gentry which involved the metropolitan and provincial gentry to check against Western intrusion on Chinese economic and political life as indicated in Polachek’s study.\textsuperscript{77}

4.2. Chinese Gentry and Reform Movements:

Reforms in late imperial China was the reaction to the decline of the central government and a correction for the failed restoration that followed rebellions. \textit{Tongzhi Restoration} (1862-1874) and \textit{Reform of 1898} were two reforms that earmarked major institutional modification of the late Qing period. These reforms were initiated by the Qing government to anticipate current social and political pressures.

After the failure of Tongzhi Restoration which only contributed to the reorganization of Chinese imperial military and the founding of \textit{Zongli Yamen} in 1861, Chinese history didn’t record any other reform movement until the Reform of 1898 and a warming up exercise several years preceding to the reform. With the growing presence of some elements of Western civilization which was trailing military and political encroachment on China under the famous title of ‘the scramble for concessions’, Chinese society began to feel the ‘impact’, and then reacted to the situation. In intellectual realm, there were people like Yen Fu who, after reading Western books on social and political thoughts and had the chance to live in England for several years, began to contemplate that there are good elements which were inherent in Western civilization that must be learned and adopted by China in order to become rich and powerful like the Western societies.\textsuperscript{78}

The emergence of pragmatic intellectuals like Yen Fu was the result of the introduction of Western social and political thoughts in the works of Darwin, Spencer, Adam Smith or Thomas Huxley. Some of these influential books were also translated by him into Chinese, for which he became famous in China as perhaps the first translator of Western social and political thoughts. At first this phenomena affected only to intellectuals in certain areas which were exposed and vulnerable to Western influence, in the extra territorials or treaty ports, such as Shanghai and Canton. But with the introduction of public press and the mushrooming process of newspaper publications made information easier. More and more intellectuals from other parts of the nation took part in heated debate on how to regain wealth and power for China after going through several humiliations. These debates were building up and led to what was called an intellectual ferment,\textsuperscript{79} which generated a reform campaign which culminated in the

\textsuperscript{77} Polachek, \textit{op.cit.}, \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{78} The life and thoughts of Yen Fu was critically written by Benjamin Schwartz, \textit{In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West} (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Harvard, Third Printing 1983)

\textsuperscript{79} Hao Chang invented this term to refer to a certain stage of Chinese intellectual history in late imperial period. See Hao Chang, \textit{Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971)
Reform of 1898. This process, however, did not start merely as reaction to Western intrusion, but was part of a long process of indigenous developments within the Chinese cultural condition in the late nineteenth century.80

In 1895 to 1898, government officials and intellectuals in Qing province of Hunan had started a movement which was considered as an exercise or prologue to the Reform of 1898. The question is, why in Hunan, a province which was labelled as the bastion of Confucian orthodoxy, and had given a reputation as the most anti-foreign and anti-modern in China became the first to start the reform movement?

Lewis argued that the anti-foreign attitude, especially among the elite, began to change during the 1890s as foreign encroachment revealed dynastic weakness. This came after several military defeats on the part of the Qing Court such as the British attack following the Yangzi Valley Riots, the Japanese demands in 1895, and the scramble for concessions in 1897-1898, which confirmed that “Confucian assumptions of moral superiority were no longer supported by a powerful central government.”81 The writer further argued that Hunanese leaders then saw a need to rely on their own abilities to save the provincial integrity, while protecting Confucian doctrine, and especially after 1895 they “saw a need to pre-empt for their own use the instruments of foreign penetration: steamships, railways, telegraph lines, and construction facilities”. Therefore, the reform actually began as a self-strengthening program of the province who was trying to increase their potentials by using Western technology.

This program was encouraged and supported by the Governor-General, Zhang Zhidong, and also by the Governor of Hunan, Chen Baozhen. The members of the Hunanese elite also joined the movement in a broad program of modernization. This situation then began to change in late 1897 and early 1898 when a new leadership gradually took control of the reform. Radical reformers, Kang Youwei and his disciple Liang Qichao, emerged to the surface and took over the leadership of the reform in Hunan. Under Liang’s directive, the reform then broadened the scope of institutional change. It seems that members of the elite, though ready for innovations, were still reluctant to go further beyond certain phase of the reform. Institutional change was not in their agenda. After a bitter controversy during the spring of 1898, Kang’s teachings were suppressed, and the reform ended in Hunan.83 The importance of the reform movement in Hunan because it was perceived as the warming up of the national reform movement exercised by the emperor, the so-called 100 Days Reform or Reform of 1898.

Initiated by Guangxu Emperor, the reform was started on 11 June and forced to be abandoned by Empress Dowager on 21 September 1898. In the days of the short-lived reform, there were more than a hundred decrees issued by Guangxu who seemed anxious to fix the dynastic weaknesses in almost every aspect. These decrees dealt with economic, military, cultural-educational, and at last institutional spheres. In the economic sphere, the government promote agriculture, commerce and industry. To realize this effort a series of decrees were issued: a bureau of agriculture, industry and

80 Ibid., pp 7-34
82 This was the guo (state) versus jiao (Confucian doctrine) issue, which colored the debate on how to save China (guo) without damaging the jiao.
commerce to be established at the capital with branch offices in every province; a mining and railway office in the central government; regulations to reward technological developments; post offices at the capital and other commercial centres; and monthly budgetary reports to rationalize government finance. In the military sphere, certain decrees were issued which emphasized on training modern armed forces, strengthening naval forces, and organizing baojia and the militia system, all to be undertaken by the provincial governments. In cultural-educational sphere, the government was committed to establish a Metropolitan University at the capital and of various primary and high schools in every province plus military and technical schools. Meanwhile in the institutional sphere, Guangxu began to remodel the government structure.  

In his effort to revamp the government through this reform, Guangxu invited all the reform-minded gentry to contribute their thoughts. The important individuals who helped him to attain his goal were Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao and other proponents of Hunan reform.

V. Conclusion

The life and times of the Javanese priyayi and the Chinese gentry as privileged social categories have already past gradually when the Indonesian and Chinese people determined to change their nations into new states and societies. The process of change and progress to become modern states and societies in these two countries might be different and unique, and still struggling until now. Nowadays, Indonesia is recognized as a democratic nation, while China has become a new leading economic super power in the world; totally different from the days of the priyayi and gentry.

The role of the priyayi and gentry in changing the states and societies in Indonesia and China a century ago is quite crucial and substantial. As time goes on, their existence fades away, but the spirit of the priyayi and gentry in changing their nations and societies becomes a valued heritage that could inspire their nations moving forward.

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