Japanese Painter on Mooi Indie Period: Case Study of Kojyo Kokan in Indonesia Early 20th Century

Dikdik Sayahdikumullah
Visual Art Study Program, Institut Teknologi Bandung
sayahdikumullah@yahoo.com

Abstract
Mooi Indie is a significant category of presenting beautiful natural landscape on history of Indonesian modern painting in early twentieth century. Research on Mooi Indie mainly produced by Japanese painter Kojyo Kokan in Indonesia that almost never taken and early information recording his existence on the same period is only a few. His finesse in nihonga style that well-known throughout Japan, but for being a Japanese painter on Mooi Indie period was not so familiar until now. Investigation based on historical artefact from his traveled to Indonesia through evidences of photos, book, sketch, paintings, exhibitions, and newspaper clippings results indicate that Kokan had experienced in Mooi Indie period. The aim of this study was to discover his journey, existence, and artistic activity which indicate as first Japanese painter who portray natural landscape painting on period of Mooi Indie in Indonesia.

Keyword: mooi indie, landscape, kojyo kokan, painter

1 Introduction
Mooi Indie on history of Indonesian modern painting in early twentieth century is a significant category that presenting beautiful natural landscapes with implied various artist intentions such as theme, views, object, atmospheres, time and space. This beautiful scenery painting of highlands, rice fields, trees, and villages depicted by foreign artists who traveled to East Indie (now Indonesia) with their exotic feelings after seeing and realizing the atmosphere of natural landscapes was rarely found in their own countries. In most of picturesque mode of Mooi Indie emphasizes a nostalgia that was swallowed up by time. Haaxman [1] argued that initially Europeans who worked as draughtsman and painters concentrated for depicting a condition of landscape such as landmarks of villages, mountains and hills, forests, and volcanos views with brushes and pencils stroke. According to Protschky [2] the beauties landscape shown their observations, views, and feelings from Europeans eyes who came to East Indies. Early reference about Mooi Indie landscape painting written by an Indonesian researcher was Imam Buchori Zaenuddin on his thesis of Modern Indonesian Painting from 1933 until 1950 that analyzed the formation of landscape paintings in the history of modern Indonesian painting from a sociological perspective [3]. These views about an early emergence of landscape painting were later widely quoted by writers or researchers afterwards. However, researchs on Mooi Indie paintings, especially produced by Japanese painters in Indonesia has not much discover until now. This study intends to investigate a scope of Mooi Indie landscape was also influenced by other than European, even Hax and Maris [4] declared that was Japanese painters, Kojyo Kokan who had a successful career and lived abroad long before
World War II broke out in Indonesia, but his story was still unknown in connection with Mooi Indie painting period.

2 Method

This study uses a historiography method based on tracing of Japanese painter’s archives in Indonesia that correlates significantly in context of Mooi Indie’s paintings. Among the previous studies of Mooi Indie painting which indicate from early critic on Mooi Indie terms in Indonesian Modern Art history perspective until a different point of view, such as Ushiroshoji and Rawanchaikul [5] explored the cross section of Mooi Indie with the development of Modern Art in Southeast Asia, in this case only a few are known as Mooi Indie painters from Japan such as Mori Kinsen (1888-1959) and Yazaki Chiyoji (1872-1947). In fact, Hax and Maris [6] noted there were many European painters include Kojyo Kokan, while his activities almost unknown even never tracked his career, works and exhibition during the Mooi Indie period. This is the first study to describe Kojyo Kokan on his traveled and documented of Indonesia through an analysis a number of his works before the outbreak of World War II.

Mooi Indie painting is a tradition of landscape painting by painters who lived in East Indies from the nineteen until early twentieth century. Mooi Indie paintings can be assumed as creativity produced by Dutch painters as expressions of paintings of beauty and majesty of nature that were not actually obtained in the world of Europe which later for some Indonesian painters were accepted as expressions of beauty, forms, and techniques of established European painting. Etymological meaning of Mooi or Moy according to de Vries [7] in the Nederlands Etymologisch Woordenboek Dictionary was a beauty that is closely related to weather factors, and the word of mooi has been known since 1747 to expand its use in line with an influence of colonialism in Europe, include the Netherlands. Term Mooi Indie consist of two Mooi and Indie. Mooi its means beauty and Indie in this context refers to a Dutch colony in East Indies. While Mooi Indie term is translated into Japanese commensurate with the words (uruwashii no indo) referring to the results of Sayahdikumullah [8] and Ushiroshoji [9]. According to Kenji [10] term of Uruwashii in Japanese-Indonesian dictionary means beautiful; beautiful; beautiful beauty then Indie is the Indian archipelago under the Dutch colonial. This phrase implies different meanings to embed Mooi Indie into Beauty of the Netherland East Indies. Mooi Indie painting seems to stretch the tropical nature in the palm of hand where humidity of climate touches their skin of European painters but its physically far away from European continent, so every effort to portrays beauty of Indonesia’s landscape turn into an imagined utopia. A representation of a painting about amazing beauty of nature is beyond Europe, certainly different from an ideal beauty of the West. Even though colonialism era was ended, Holt [11] asserts that meaning, works and activities of Mooi Indie painters are used primarily in identical fields of fine arts and literature placing it as a beautiful landscape painting style. The term Mooi Indie in history of Indonesian modern art was first used in 1939 to describe painters who expressing natural landscape in East Indies region, but developed towards romance, to draw criticism from a painter Sindoeardarsono Sudjojono [12] by describing that Mooi Indie painting presents Trimurti component or three holy unity through visualization of mountains, coconut trees and rice fields. Identification of it confirms his efforts to erase eastern context of landscape painting formations in East Indies (East Indies). Meanwhile, revaluation of Mooi Indie itself in Dutch Colonial period actually took place quite briefly when a painter Frederick Jacobus von Rossum du Chattel (1856-1917) was declared as first person who use the word of Mooi Indie for his collection book of illustrated works Afbeeldingen in kleuren
van twaalf aquarellen (Beautiful Indies – Illustrations of Twelve Watercolours) published on format of off-set printing on paper ukuran 32,5cmx25,8cm in 1913. This for Brakel [13] has confirmed two important things: term Mooi Indie becomes fixed for a style of colonial painting that is embedded in the collective memory of Indies community and Sudjojono’s statement was not the coin age that first revealed the term Mooi Indie. Regarding similarity to use term of Mooi Indie was more due to historical closeness when Sudjojono had studied painting as a pupil of Mas Pirngadi (1875-1936), a Mooi Indie painter who had previously a student of du Chattel in 1935. A learning process that allows Sudjojono to read about du Chattel’s books until later there is a mismatch of the words Mooi Indie for description of the beauty of East Indies as a critical analysis later conducted by Ham [14], to a number of notes from the perspective Sudjojono himself. At this point there is a critical attitude and argument of Sudjojono [15] written on Harian Indonesia and Culture and Society magazine which contains the expressions, techniques, and themes of Mooi Indie’s paintings on several Dutch painters which are identical with Indonesian painters such as Pirngadi, Wakidi (1889-1979), Abdullah Suriosubroto (1878-1941), Raden Basoeki Abdullah (1915-1993) who had talented and proficient on Western painting techniques among native painters in Wisetrotomo [16], and Basar painters (1901-1990) in Sidharta [17]. Their works represent beauty of an ideal rural landscape in East Indies by adding fictional motifs about clear skies, mountains, trees, and rivers.

This critical argument reinforces on view of Mooi Indie’s paintings did indeed for Sudjojono [18] “Mooi Indie’s paintings which only create a sense of beauty are not enough to be seen as a style of painting”. More than that, Sudjojono is committed that search for self-expression of a painter does not have to follow mode of production of Mooi Indie’s works that were made by Dutch painters. Sudjojono’s view of Mooi Indie was also maintained through period of Indonesian independence, as his personal record [19] that published in 2017 showing the vision and ideology of the category of art practices which differed when compared between Dutch and Indonesian painters intention also attitude in describing the phenomenon of beauty while traveling around Indonesia.

3 Results and Discussion

Kojyo Kokan was one of a generation of Japanese who entered Indonesia in early twentieth century where the atmosphere of his appearance was more as a painter is really felt like a westerner painter of Mooi Indie painting. In 1943 he wrote a book Minami wo Egaku (Depicting the South) published by Taiga-do after returning to Japan, Kokan precisely succeeded in publishing a book Minami wo Egaku in 1943 (the year of Taigado) which features a reproduction of sketch on journeying in every country, including Indonesia which at that time was better known as part of the south archipelago regional (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Front and back covers pages of Minami wo egaku (depicting the south), (Kojyo Kokan, 1943)](image)
Investigation on his works aim to find out of his context as a painter along with European painters in Mooi Indie period and describe his landscape tendency through observes primary data sources such as sketch collections, notes, books, a collection of newspaper and museum archives about Kokan’s journey before and after living in Indonesia.

4 Early Career Kojyo Kokan As a Painter

Kojyo Kokan’s has the original name San’nosuke (1891-1988) born from couple of Genzaemon’s father and Yoshinoko’s mother in Takaono town, Izumi city, Kagoshima prefecture. Around the age of 15 he lived in Tanaka Kunihiro village to studied Japanese painting techniques under the guidance of Kawamoto Kizan (1875-1957). His sketch received recognition from Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924), one of the pioneering of Japanese modern art as explained by Masaaki Noda [20]. In 1911 Kokan was just 21 years old and decided move to Tokyo city for visit Kuroda Seiki who introduced to a Japanese painting (Nihongga) professors at Tokyo Bijutsu Gakko named Fukui Koutei (1865-1937), until Kokan was motivated to absorb Shijo school style painting or Maruyama-Shijo in Tenshijuku (天真塾). In Mio’s notes [21] mentioning that after a year later Kokan moved to Kyoto to study painting with Yamamoto Shunyu (山本真由) (1872-1933).

In his 28 years old Kokan participated at the 12th Bunten exhibition, and luckily his work was bought by Mr. Kawasaki, president of a shipbuilding yard. After this, he had a chance to journey around the world, beginning from Japan to Paris, French. Its normally that wherever painter travels always equipped with a conventional world atlas sheets on Japanese language with black outline lines, this was intentionally made by Kokan as a sign that during the trip indeed friendly with a painter named Fujishima Takeji (1867-1943), see the explanation from Noda [22].

Kokan began his journey outside of Japan marked since December 1922 when he arrived and dropped anchor for the first time at Taiwan until stayed for a year. It was motivated to sketch and paint a Taiwan scenery then after reaped success exhibition encouraged him to contact with other Japanese community in Hong Kong, where he staged solo exhibition at Japan Club at Hong Kong on December 4th until 8th in 1921. Several months later, on 13 June 1922, Kokan leave voyage to Singapore by the Suwa Maru ship where Makihiro [23] affirmed that by chance he met a Japanese man named Shimo Harukichi (下田春吉) (1883-1954) who was about to return to Italy. Observation on his travel album and world map shows a sea route lines that required him to pass through the south archipelago islands.

5 From the East to the South Archipelago

Complete information about the arrival of Japanese painting artists at Singapore in the early twentieth century was rarely reported by English local media written in Chinese or Japanese with consider their popularities in Singaporean art scene. Singapore city was known as one of the port centers that visited many Japanese’s who want to go and return from Europe. They generally arrange a specific geographical location of minami (south islands) for ocean and archipelagos region in south of Equator referring to the territory located at the south ocean among others including cities in the Dutch East Indies such as Batavia, Semarang, Surabaya and Yogyakarta on the island of Java. The phrase of southern term on literally consists the word of nanshin for the Japanese peoples similar with nani or minami and the word of shin or susumu which means advanced, so nanshin can be interpreted as a movement or migration to the south according to the
results of Puji’s research [24]. This context has opened his path of journey to Europe through the path of south archipelago. As seen from the world map from Kokan’s archive. The flow lines start from Japan to Europe through southern islands including a stopover in Singapore and Java before finally returning to his hometown (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. World map of Kojyo Kokan's journey (Source: Painter's archive)](image)

The existence of Kokan in Singapore can be further known after author interviewed with one of his children, Mr. Kojyo Tairiku [25] live in Japan. He said Kokan arrived in Singapore lived in a Suzurida Inn, but this was not suitable for producing any works, then he rent a big room of the official house of a lottery company. Other information also known from one of the East Indies newspaper clippings without date, time and publishing company which said:

“Western painters came very often to Singapore, but the appearance of Kokan was the first one for a Japanese painter” … “Japanese painting exhibition like this was never held before.” (source: painter’s archive)

He organized solo exhibition at the Japan Club from July 27th to 29th in 1925. Among his activities in Singapore, by chance he met a Japanese painter Yazaki Chioji (1872-1947) that stayed at the same hotel. Chioji presence was more interested to capture moment and documentary of daily live in tropical landscape countries. Their meeting were implicitly revealed in Sannosuke own confession [26] that one days he was worried when Chioji’s shoes considerably torn, then he ordered new shoes as present for Chioji. It was delightful for him then gave one box pastels color to Kokan as a sign of the separate paths. Actually Kokan has scheduled plan to Thailand on July 29, 1925, but Thailand was hit by an endemic outbreak of Cholera, then decided go to Java by the Dutch ship, Deli Maru. He begin journey from Batavia, Bogor, Sindaraya, Sukabumi, Bandung, Garut, Cilacap, Jogjakarta, Solo, Magelang, Semarang, Surabaya, Tosari, Mount Bromo, Malang, Bali, Lombok, and Madura. He return by train through northern coastline of Java from Pekalongan, Cirebon, and Batavia. In Java, he also met social life of Japanese people had settled and work as managers of Japan Bank or plantation companies. They welcomed his arrival, guided for tourist trip attractions and hot spring areas.

He depicting everyday life and scenery on pencil sketches, watercolor on paper and broadens his life’s insight into solo exhibitions in several times. It is not surprising if news report echoing response and written in a Dutch newspaper article in Java as a Japanese painter who painted a
seasonal view of Java.

6 Depicting Landscape of Java

Once time Kokan departed from Batavia through Bogor Botanical Gardens and then stopped in Bandung to depict the natural scenery of North Bandung highlands. The shape of Tangkuban Perahu and Manglayang mounts correctly visible on a distance with rice fields and foliage touch-scale from above the hills (Figure 4). This attracted him to sketch or portray highlands uses neat line to determine his position from Mr. Otani’s farmland around Garut mountain region in West Java. Garut city at that time was already famous for hot springs and volcanic landscape.

![Figure 3. Tangkuban Perahu and Manglayang mountain sketches are depicting from the south area around the plantation in Garut. (Source: Painter’s archive)](image)

Kokan’s also uses green and blue colors stroke for depicting pathways, huts, watering rice fields, grass, stones, coconut trees, puff of clouds, soothing blue mount, with patchwork of rice farming on gently sloping hills. In this works he catch beauty landscape signs as local type of peasant activity in morning time (Picture 5).

![Figure 4. Kokan attracted by beauty of mountainscape and hills seen from roadside in Cipanas at Garut region, West Java. No title, 27.9x41.7 cm, pencil and pigment techniques on paper, The Folk Museum Collection of Takaono City Museum. (Source: Painter’s archive)](image)
In both sketch there is gestural line stroke and a thin wash of watercolor technique to emphasize on impression of external atmosphere as natural phenomena at first glance. While outline frame in his picture plane used to construct an objective correlation between external perception and sensibility of visual impairment on his left eye.

His journey continues to Central and East Java at the end of 1925. Semarang city was chosen as his preferred places until create many landscape sketches during visit from January 4 to April 6, 1926. He held 34 pieces of paintings of rural landscapes in East Indies on exhibition at the Rosche Club, Pontjol Semarang, Central Java as seen on Figure 6. Later he was more established as professional Japanese painter after adequate sold 45 works.

Figure 5. Kokan room exhibition at Rosche Club, Pontjol Semarang City, Central Java (Source: Painter’s archive)

His exhibition also reviewed on the newspaper columns without the author’s name and publisher’s of Japansche Kunsttoonstelling articles on May 1926 that state “Het grootste deel van het werk van de heer why is aquarellen op zijde, terwijl hij zoowel oop japansche als westersche wijze schildert” (Figure 7). In capturing natural objects through gestural lines, bright colors, and atmospheric space, Kokan have similar ideal impression with their Western painters who depicts natural beauty that hardly feels the misery of natives life of villages in East Indies.

Figure 6. A newspaper article reviewing the Kokan exhibition titled Japansche Kunsttoonstelling on May 14-16,
After a successful exhibition in Semarang, Kokan returned to Batavia through north coast railway train until arriving on May 29, 1926. He revealed memorable experiences on personal notes that; “I will disappear from Java, I think Java is an island that calls out and is fully poetic...without saying pleasantries for example hot and rich paradise” (Author Archive Source). Here, he has built a reputation as a Nihongga painter accepted by the Japanese community, Dutch and Chinese in East Indies as newspaper notes written in several languages.

From the various landscape presence in south archipelago, Kokan understood the sight of landscape of Java had captivate him and difficult to ignore, the sight of landscape of Java had captivate him and difficult to ignore as shown by various displacement without change the subject where his works exhibited in Europe and America. For example in 1928 he participated the Salon des Artistes Francais exhibition still represent atmosphere beauty with accuracy on capturing daily life objects about fisherman activities in northcoast of Java (Figure 8).

He made different works with new highlight of Pictures in Pure Japanese Style where keeping mind to represent Fishing Village, A Batavia Scene in exhibition in New York at 1932. This show succeeded in attracting public attention until reported as special headline on newspaper article The Japan-California Daily News because collected by the Paris Museum of Modern Art Luxembourg (Figure 9).

Figure 7. Paysage on Java, printed on postcards at an exhibition at Le Salon des Artistes Français. (Source: Painter’s archive)

Figure 8. Illustration of the work of the fishing village Batavia scene in the Japan-California Daily News published in 1932. (Source: Painter’s archive)
Most of Kokan’s sketching technique for his under paintings can be a basic knowledge and methodology for creating works when he is in abroad of south archipelago. Especially observation in Java so attached and greatly affects his senses, memories, feeling, and position to represent natural landscape scenery. He realizes if cultural and life were really different, but the tropical beauty effect has captivated his heart, feels embedded in his memory, even though far away from the south islands.

Kojyo Kokan as a Japanese painter who visited Indonesia in the early 20th century has similar activities with Western Mooi Indie painters, who are interested to observes and capturing in East Indies plein-air with power of expressive lines to paint or sketch on papers. His works more than portrayed East Indies landscape circumstance under Dutch colonialism in early twentieth century, also succeeded for uses methods and drawing techniques as under painting to reveal various setting of mountainous and rural scape in Java.

7 Conclusion

Research about Japanese painters in case of Kojyo Kokan who have traveled to Indonesia in early 20th century gave explanation as Mooi Indie painter through historiographical analysis based on documentary evidence of photographs, personal notes, sketches, paintings, exhibition catalogs and newspaper pieces shown that Kokan well trained with Japanese painting techniques not only led him more successful as painter in tried to express his experiences of a place and memory in abroad country.

This study also proves Kokan’s life experiences, motives, and existence during early period of Mooi Indie that incorporated into his project sketch book of Minami wo Egaku not only offer attention to specific viewpoint, ideas, and personal sensitivity on visualizing rural landscape scenery in East Indies such as Western painters perspective, but also it could be shown that the Japanese painter has own idea which inviting a different sequential practical procedure on their works.

Analysis from primary and secondary data archives, most of which are stored as family collection has proven the fact that Kokan is a painter with a high curiosity to depicting characteristic of mountain, slope, foliage, rice fields, coconut tree, and rural scenes that indicates his individual fragment of memory on geographical attraction to the beautiful scenery of Java island. His sketch using continuous lines to observe natural landscape as subject matter with carefully distinction of every objects values that visible indicates about his mastery techniques of underdrawings phase as part of his painting method which represent the beautification of tropical life scenery in East Indies.

8 Acknowledgments

Authors appreciate to the local government museum at Takaono Town Izumi City, Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan to opened their collections and really grateful for the kindness of Kojyo Kokan’s family to lend his archives collection, time for discussion, observation, and interview also technical assistance of Ms. Miyuki Anai for translating reference sources. Thanks to members of the research team; Rizky Akhmad Zaelani and Oco Santoso who provided useful suggestions and discussions of this study.
9 Author Contributions

All members of research team have contributed to providing useful suggestions, gave input to discuss and explain the results of the study.

10 Funding

This research was highly supported by Innovation Program (P3MI) 2017 Institute Technology Bandung and Kelompok Keahlian Seni Rupa Faculty of Art and Design Institute Technology Bandung.

11 References

Harapan, hlm. 49, 1997.


[25] Interviewed with Mr. Kojyo Tairiku, the oldest son of Kojyo Kokan when author visit his studio’s in Chiba Prefecture, Japan on October 11, 2011.