

Intellectual Movements in the Archipelago: Tradition and Modernity at the Turn of the 19th Century

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: 01/02/2025

Revised: 30/04/2025

Accepted: 02/05/2025

Keywords:

*Intellectual Movement,
Tradition, Modernity,
Nusantara, Late 19th
Century, Colonialism,
Globalization*

ABSTRACT

The late 19th century marked a pivotal period in the history of the Indonesian archipelago, characterized by the rise of intellectual movements that bridged local traditions with emerging modern ideas. These movements were shaped by the socio-political dynamics of colonialism and the growing influence of global currents. This study aims to examine the transformation of intellectual thought in the archipelago during this era, focusing on the transition from traditional to modern paradigms. Using a historical-qualitative approach, data were collected from archival records, personal correspondences, written works, and secondary literature. The findings reveal that traditional educational institutions such as pesantren and surau played a foundational role, while colonial education introduced modern concepts that reshaped the intellectual landscape. This synthesis of local and modern values fueled the emergence of organizations like Sarekat Islam and Budi Utomo, contributing to heightened social awareness, political activism, and the early development of Indonesian nationalism. The study concludes that the intellectual movement at the turn of the 19th century significantly shaped national identity and laid the groundwork for future socio-cultural transformation.

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OOSTHAVEN: JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC HISTORY AND CULTURAL RESEARCH

Published by the Center for History of Islamic Civilization and Lampung Society, Adab Faculty, Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan, Lampung, Indonesia, Indonesia

Please cite this article in APA Style as:

Risna. (2025). Intellectual movements in the archipelago: Tradition and modernity at the turn of the 19th century. OOSTHAVEN: Journal of Islamic History and Cultural Research, 1(1), 1–11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24042/oosthaven.v1i1.26204>

1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 19th century, the Indonesian archipelago underwent significant transformations in intellectual thought, particularly among Muslim scholars and emerging indigenous intellectuals. This period was marked by the rise of influential figures such as Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani and Sheikh Mahfudz at-Tarmasi, who played pivotal roles not only in the production of religious scholarship but also in establishing transnational intellectual networks. These networks connected the Islamic learning traditions of the archipelago with the Haramain (Mecca and Medina), reinforcing the position of the archipelago as an active participant in the global Islamic intellectual landscape. Despite the growing pressure of Dutch colonial rule, these scholars achieved notable intellectual prominence and became key agents in the processes of religious renewal (*tajdid*) and cultural adaptation within the region.¹ The intellectual movement that emerged during this era was a response to growing tensions between deeply rooted traditional frameworks and the new socio-political realities introduced by colonialism and global modernity. Institutions such as *pesantren*, *surau*, and local oral traditions began to interact with Western-style education introduced by the Dutch colonial government. This interaction catalyzed the emergence of new discourses and reformist ideas among indigenous scholars and the broader educated class. In many cases, these intellectuals sought to preserve local and religious identity while selectively absorbing modern elements they deemed relevant to their communities.

However, much of the existing literature has focused on either the theological contributions of these scholars or the political evolution of nationalism that followed. What remains underexplored is the transitional dynamic in which these intellectual movements operated: how indigenous intellectuals engaged with both inherited Islamic knowledge and modern epistemologies to form new hybrid modes of thought. There is also limited analysis of how their writings and teachings, viewed as texts, can be interpreted within their historical and communicative contexts. In this regard, this study adopts a perspective informed by Dominick LaCapra's and Quentin Skinner's approaches to intellectual history. LaCapra views intellectual history as "the history of texts," while Skinner emphasizes the importance of understanding what authors meant in particular historical and communicative contexts. This means not only reading texts for their content but also considering the intentions of their authors, the socio-political conditions of their time, and the intertextual relationships that shaped their meaning. By applying this lens, texts by scholars like Sheikh Nawawi and Sheikh Mahfudz become valuable windows into broader intellectual and societal shifts.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the intellectual movement in the Indonesian archipelago at the end of the 19th century as a transitional phase between tradition and modernity. It explores how indigenous scholars responded to modern influences while grounding their work in local religious and cultural traditions. Through historical-qualitative analysis of key texts, letters, and educational practices, the study highlights how intellectual networks, educational transformations, and textual production contributed to early forms of modern Muslim identity in the archipelago. As a result, intellectual history uses a lot of literary text criticism to understand the context alone. However, Pocock differs with Skinner because Skinner uses hermeneutical theory significantly to return the text to its author, like Which has mentioned earlier, Pocock

¹ Syarif Firdaus et al., "Masa Penjajahan dan Puncak Intelektual," n.d.

seems more interested in language itself, especially in terms of the development of meaning and the use of conceptual language. The history of thought or the history of ideas had emerged before the historical thinking developed by Pocock and Skinner, but its methodological formulation only emerged around the 60s. Fernand Braudel developed the Annales paradigm, which changed domination history. According to the paradigm, thoughts, which are contained in text, are considered as core of historical reality. However, according to Braudel, structure, like climate and geography, is the most important. Conjuncture, such as social and economic relations, then comes to political events and thoughts over a long period. Therefore, thoughts are only the upper part of history, the mental layer. As a result, Burhanudin tries to appreciate the literature of Islamic thought as well as economic-political documents that are often used in historical reconstruction through an intellectual historical approach.²

The process of modernization that occurred in the Dutch East Indies had a major impact on society, including changes in behavior, lifestyle, and identity. At the same time, the influence of colonialism strengthened the existing social structure, creating a new middle class that became the driving force of modernization. In globalization, the people of the archipelago began to adopt modern elements while still maintaining local traditions. This created complex dynamics between traditions and modernity, and gave rise to new discourse in social and cultural thought.³

Understanding the dynamics of intellectual movements at the end of the 20th century, 19th very important to highlight the transformation of social and cultural conditions in the Archipelago. This movement not only reflected a response to colonialism but was also part of a broader search for national identity. In this context, the thoughts of ulama and intellectuals are key to understanding how the Nusantara community adapted to the changing times and how they constructed new narratives that integrated local values with global influences. Thus, a study of intellectual thought during this period provides deep insight into the process of identity formation and the collective consciousness of the Nusantara community.⁴

Through this writing, Researchers hope to reveal how intellectual movements in the late 19th century contributed to the formation of national consciousness, social transformation, and the construction of modernity in the archipelago. Thus, this writing is not only a historical reconstruction, but also a reflection on the importance of intellectual movements in forming an inclusive civilization that is deeply rooted in local values.

2. METHODS

This study employs a historical-qualitative approach combined with a systematic literature review to examine the intellectual movements in the Indonesian archipelago at the end of the 19th century. The historical approach enables the researcher to trace the development and transformation of intellectual thought over time, while the qualitative method allows for a deeper interpretation of the meaning and context behind the texts and events analyzed. Data for this study

² Agus Iswanto, "Sejarah Intelektual Ulama Nusantara: Reformulasi Tradisi Di Tengah Perubahan," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 11, no. 2 (2013): 455, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v11i2.77>.

³ Nur Rahmah, "Khazanah Intelektual Ulama Betawi Abad Ke-19 Dan Ke-20 M," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 16, no. 2 (2018): 195–226, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v16i2.564>.

⁴ Tryana Pipit Mulyah, Dyah Aminatun, Sukma Septian Nasution, Tommy Hastomo, Setiana Sri Wahyuni Sitepu, "Iklan Perempuan Dalam Surat Kabar Bataviaasche Nieuwsblad: Gaya Hidup Masyarakat Batavia Tahun 1930- 1933," *Journal GEEJ* 7, no. 2 (2020): 1–18.

were collected from a range of primary and secondary sources, including classical works and manuscripts written by key scholars such as Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani and Sheikh Mahfudz at-Tarmasi, colonial-era educational materials, biographical accounts, correspondence, and scholarly literature, including journal articles, books, and theses relevant to Islamic intellectual history and education under colonial rule. Sources were accessed through physical libraries, digital databases, and accredited academic journal platforms such as JSTOR, Moraref, and Google Scholar. The data collection process began with the identification of relevant literature through keyword-based searches, followed by documentation and cataloging of selected materials. The researcher then classified the data according to thematic categories such as educational institutions, reformist discourse, colonial influence, and transnational networks. Data analysis was conducted through a descriptive qualitative approach, which involved interpreting the content of texts using relevant theoretical perspectives. This included synthesizing insights from various sources to form a cohesive narrative and evaluating the validity and relevance of the information to support the research argument. Critical attention was also given to the context in which the texts were produced, including the authors' intentions, social conditions, and interactions with other intellectual traditions. Through this methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the intellectual movement in the archipelago during a crucial transitional period.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The intellectual movement in the 19th century in the archipelago was inseparable from many factors that moved it, following factors that create intellectual movements in the 19th century.

Role of Education, Religion, and Local Tradition

Education can be implemented politically and ethically by the government colonial Dutch. At the beginning century the 20th century brought significant changes in access to education for natives in the Dutch East Indies. This policy was driven by a moral awareness to improve the welfare of the native population after exploitation during the forced cultivation period.⁵ This gave birth to an elite group of intellectuals who not only absorbed knowledge West, but also raised national awareness. It was from this circle that national movement figures emerged who founded various movement organizations during the Dutch East Indies era.

Before the implementation of the Ethical Policy, education for natives was very limited and was more aimed at meeting the need for cheap labor for the colonial government.⁶ With the implementation of the Ethical Policy, the colonial government began to expand access to education for the native population. Mr. JH Abendanon, who served as Minister of Culture, Religion, and Crafts between 1900- 1905, played an important role in the establishment of schools intended for both the nobility and ordinary people in various regions.

⁵ Rahmad Ardiansyah, *Politik Etis: Sejarah, Latar Belakang dan Kebijakannya*. (n.d.). SMAN 13 Semarang Progresif. <https://sma13smg.sch.id/materi/politik-etis-sejarah-latar-belakang-dan-kebijakannya>

⁶ Indriawati, T. (2023, December 11). Tujuan pendidikan sebelum penerapan politik etis. KOMPAS.com. <https://www.kompas.com/stori/read/2023/12/11/162328679/tujuan-pendidikan-sebelum-penerapan-politik-etis>

Improving access to education produces an educated birth group among the natives. They not only mastered Western science, but also began to realize condition social and political conditions in their land and water. This awareness triggered the emergence of figures and movements of nationalities, which established various organizations in the Dutch Indies, like Budi Utomo and Sarekat Islam. Thus, education becomes one of the main drivers in raising awareness and fighting for the independence of Nusantara. Overall, the implementation of Ethical Politics paved the way for social transformation in the Archipelago through education, which finally contributed significantly to the national movement's effort to reach independence.

Religion, as Islam, plays a crucial role in shaping the identity and awareness collective Indonesian society. Through various traditional religious and integration with local culture, Islam has become a foundation in life social and spiritual aspects of society. The role of Islam in shaping collective identity and awareness is the Formation of Social Identity, Religious beliefs can form the social identity of society by determining the values that are upheld. And influence choice in various aspects of life, such as education, work, and social connections. Identity religion can influence method individuals interact with other people and how they see themselves in a social context.⁷ Pesantren Education, Pesantren, as a traditional Islamic educational institution in the archipelago, plays a role in transmitting religious teachings and moral values to the younger generation. Through education in pesantren, Islamic values are instilled, forming a strong character and identity of students in carrying out religious teachings in everyday life.

Integration between the teachings of Islam and local culture creates a religious practice that is rich and unique in the Archipelago. Local culture influences the formation of a culture of Islamic education in the archipelago. Integration between local traditions and religious teachings can enrich the meaning of worship, respond to social and cultural needs, and create a stronger bond between the individual and religion.⁸

Thus, Islam not only functions as a belief system but also as a key element in forming the social identity and collective consciousness of the Nusantara community. Integration of Islamic teachings with local culture enriches religious practice and strengthens social bonds in the community.

Traditional plays an important role in forming the Islamic education culture in the archipelago. One example is the "ngaji" tradition in Java, which contributed significantly to the spread and understanding of Islamic teachings. Through activities, studying the Koran, values, morals, and spirituality are implanted from an early age, forming the character of individuals with noble morals. The Koran teacher, as an educator, has a vital role in teaching Islamic religious knowledge and instilling Islamic values. To students in madrasah, cottage Islamic boarding school, and Park Education Al-Qur'an (TPA). The goal is to form noble morals in the students.⁹

⁷ Rahmah, A., & Pisyah, A. (2023). Peran Agama Dalam Membentuk Identitas Sosial. *Religion: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, dan Budaya*, 2(6), 361.

⁸ Admin. (2023, August 18). Pengaruh Budaya Lokal terhadap Pemahaman Agama Islam: Harmoni Tradisi dan Ajaran Keagamaan – Fakultas Agama Islam Universitas Medan Area. <https://fai.uma.ac.id/2023/08/18/pengaruh-budaya-lokal-terhadap-pemahaman-agama-islam-harmoni-tradisi-dan-ajaran-keagamaan>

⁹ Yeniningsih, T. K., & Hayati, H. (2023). Strategi Guru Mengaji Dalam Mengajarkan Karakter Religius Kepada Santri Di Tpa Al-Mukhayyarah. *Jurnal Edukasi El-Ibtida'i Sophia*, 2(2), 64.

Integration of local wisdom in Islamic education also helps strengthen identity culture in the circles that participants educate. For example, in Lombok, integrating Sasak local wisdom into the Islamic education curriculum has shown a positive impact in strengthening cultural identity among students.¹⁰

Thus, local wisdom such as the tradition of "ngaji" not only functions as a means of religious education but also as a mechanism for the formation of the identity and character of an independent and creative society. The integration of local cultural values in Islamic education ensures that religious teachings can be better accepted and understood by the local community, thus creating harmony between tradition and religious teachings.

a. Influence of Colonialism and Modernity

Influence of Colonialism, Colonialism by the government of the Netherlands brought significant change in the social and political structure of the archipelago. One of the important policies implemented was the Ethical Policy, which aimed to improve the welfare of the indigenous population through irrigation, education, and transmigration programs. This policy opened up educational opportunities for the indigenous people, which then gave birth to educated people. They became the driving force in the national movement to fight colonialism and for independence. The following are the impacts of ethical politics on the intellectual movement of the archipelago, including the emergence Circle Educated: Government Dutch to establish various educational institutions, such as the Hollandsch Inlandsche School (HIS), Algemeene Middelbare School (AMS), and the school of agriculture. Step this results in the generation of indigenous Which educated and aware of will social-political conditions at that time.¹¹ Increasing National Awareness: Access to education enabled the educated to understand concepts such as human rights, democracy, and nationalism. This awareness encouraged them to fight for the rights of the Nusantara nation and oppose colonial injustice.¹² Formation Organization Movement: People educated to establish various organizations that became a vehicle for national struggle, such as Budi Utomo in 1908. These organizations played a role in fostering unity and fighting for the independence of the archipelago. Thus, colonialism through the implementation of Ethical Politics indirectly facilitated the birth of educated people who became pioneers in the movement. National Indonesia. They utilise the education they obtained.

To awaken the public to the importance of unity and independence, and to organize resistance against colonialism. Modernity played a significant role in the transformation of Indonesian society, especially through the influx of Western ideas introduced through education and cultural contact. Indonesian intellectuals began to adopt and adapt modern concepts to local values, creating a unique synthesis in the intellectual movement in Indonesia. This process also sparked the emergence of the modernist movement in Islam, which sought to answer the challenges of the times while adhering to religious principles.

¹⁰ Murdianto. (2021). Pendidikan Islam berbasis kearifan Lokal: Memperkuat identitas Suku Sasak Lombok di era digital. Pendidikan Islam Berbasis Kearifan Lokal: Memperkuat Identitas Suku Sasak Lombok Di Era Digital, 1, 238-248. <https://doi.org/10.47709/v1i3.4921>

¹¹ Gischa, S. (2020, October 12). Pergerakan Nasional: Dampak dari Politik Etis. KOMPAS.com. <https://www.kompas.com/skola/read/2020/10/12/174657369/pergerakan-nasional-dampak-dari-politik-etis>

¹² Rahmad Ardiansyah, Politik Etis: Sejarah, Program, dan Dampaknya bagi Pergerakan Indonesia –Kompaspedia. (2022, May 29). Kompaspedia. <https://kompaspedia.kompas.id/baca/paparan-topik/politik-etis-sejarah-program-dan-dampaknya-bagi-pergerakan-indonesia>

Influence of Modernity West against the Intellectual Movement in Indonesia, Modern Education, The Dutch colonial government, through the Ethical Policy, opened access to education for natives. This gave birth to an elite group of intellectuals who not only absorbed Western knowledge but also raised national awareness. They began to adopt and adapt modern concepts with local values, creating a unique synthesis in the intellectual movement in Indonesia. Cultural Contact, Interaction with Western culture through trade, media, and migration, introduced new ideas such as nationalism, democracy, and human rights. Indonesian intellectuals began to adopt and adapt these modern concepts to local values, creating a unique synthesis in the intellectual movement in Indonesia. Modernity also triggered the emergence of a modernism movement in Islam in Indonesia. This movement seeks to answer the challenges of the times while adhering to religious principles. They adopt and adapt modern concepts to local values, creating a unique synthesis in the intellectual movement in Indonesia. Thus, modernity through education and cultural contact drove transformation in Indonesian society. Intellectuals adopted and adapted modern concepts to local values, creating a unique synthesis in the Indonesian intellectual movement. This process also sparked the emergence of a modernist movement in Islam, which sought to answer the challenges of the times while adhering to religious principles.

From the various intellectual movements below, there are many transformations from tradition to modernity in the archipelago. This is marked by intellectual movements that play a role in integrating local values. With modern ideas, as well as changes in social and educational structures.

- 1) Integration Values Local with Idea Modern. In the late 19th century, Nusantara ulama played a crucial role in integrating local values with modern ideas, especially through the adaptation and adjustment of Islamic thought to the local context. They not only maintained traditional Islamic science but also adopted modern thinking, which was obtained through interaction with the centers of science in Haramain (Mecca and Medina). This interaction enriches insight and broadens horizons. Science, which was then transformed, became a real contribution to the Muslim community in the archipelago.¹³ The cleric also built a network of communication and exchange of knowledge that crossed geographical boundaries. The experience of learning and interacting in Haramain shaped their views on the importance of adaptation and innovation in teaching Islamic sciences. They played a role in building a network of knowledge that close between cleric Archipelago and the cleric East Middle, which impact on the development of traditional interpretation in Nusantara in the late 19th century and the beginning 20th century.¹⁴
- 2) Change in Structure, Social, and Education
In the late 19th century, modernization introduced by the Dutch colonial government brought significant changes in the social and educational structure of the archipelago. The colonial government began to introduce a formal education system that adopted a Western curriculum, which was previously unavailable to the indigenous

¹³ Firdaus, S. (2024). Ulama Nusantara Abad Ke-19: Masa Penjajahan dan Puncak Intelektual Haramain. *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal studi Agama-agama*, 10(2), 99.

¹⁴ Muhyi, A. A., Umar, N., Raya, A. T., & Hasan, H. (2023). Jaringan Ulama Tafsir Nusantara Abad Ke-19 dari Nusantara Ke-Haramayn (Telaah Terhadap Jaringan Ulama Kiai Šaliħ Darat Abad ke-19). *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*, 8(1).

population. This step gave birth to a class of intellectuals who received formal education and later became agents of change in society. They played an important role in transforming traditional society into a more modern society. In addition, modernization also affects the social structure with the emergence of a new elite resulting from this education system. This educated class began to question and challenge the traditional social structure, which ultimately drove social changes in society. These changes include shifts in values, norms, and patterns of social interaction that are more in line with the principles of modernity. Thus, the cleric Archipelago during this period successfully integrated local values with the idea of modernity, through an adaptation of thinking, Islam, which by context locally. And build Network Science International, which enriches traditional intellectual in the archipelago.

In the late 19th century, the intellectual movement in Nusantara played an important role in transforming society from tradition towards modernity. The significant impact of this movement can be seen through:

1) Change in Awareness, Social, And Political

Implementation of Political Ethics by the government colonial Dutch in the beginning century the 20th century had a significant impact on the social and political awareness of indigenous people in Indonesia. This policy, which included infrastructure development, education, and transmigration, opened up access to education for indigenous people. As a result, appear group of educated Which start to question structure existing social and political conditions, and realize their collective identity as "Indonesians". This awareness became the basis for the formation of organizations that focused on improving the social and political conditions of indigenous people.¹⁵

2) Birth, Nationalism, and Movement Updates Public

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, social and political consciousness among indigenous Indonesians underwent a significant transformation, culminating in on birth of nationalism and the movement to update the public. Factors that encouraged the rise of nationalism in Indonesia included prolonged suffering due to colonialism, memories of past glories such as the Kingdom of Srivijaya and Majapahit, and the emergence of the Majapahit people's intellectuals who became the leaders of the movement. In addition, external influences such as the emergence of new ideologies in Europe and America, the national awakening movement in Asia, and Japan's on Russia awakened countries in Asia to fight against Western domination. One of the early manifestations of this nationalist awareness was the establishment of Budi Utomo on 20 May 1908. Organization This was founded by Dr. Soetomo with the student School, All Opleiding van Inland Art (STOVIA) in Batavia. Budi Utomo focuses on improving education and culture as a means to improve the conditions of indigenous people. Although initially limited among the Javanese gentry, this organization became a pioneer of the national movement, which inspired the birth of

¹⁵ Disdik, A. (2021, May 20). SEJARAH HARI KEBANGKITAN NASIONAL. <https://disdik.grobogan.go.id/2-uncategorised/138-sejarah-hari-kebangkitan-nasional>

similar organizations in various regions. In 1912, the Indische Partij was founded, initiated by Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, Douwes Dekker, and Soewardi Soerjaningrat. This party carried the idea of more radical nationalism to achieve independence. Indonesia. They popularized the term "Indonesia" as a national identity and emphasized the importance of cross-ethnic and religious unity in fighting colonialism. Although short-lived due to pressure from the colonial government, the Indische Partij made an important contribution to shaping Indonesian national consciousness.¹⁶

Western-educated intellectuals played a crucial role in spreading nationalist ideas. They founded newspapers and magazines that became media for criticizing colonial policies and spreading ideas for reform. Their writings raised awareness of the importance of national unity and independence, and encouraged public discussion about national identity and the future of Indonesia.

Movement nationalism brings significant change to the structure of Indonesian society. The emergence of movement organizations opened up space for participation for various levels of society, including young people and women, in the national struggle. Awareness of national identity encouraged solidarity between ethnic and religious groups, which were previously fragmented. In addition, this movement also emphasized the importance of education as a tool of emancipation, Which Then gave birth to a generation educated that become the backbone of the struggle for independence.

With Thus, the birth nationalism and movement the social renewal of the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked an important phase in Indonesian history. This movement not only responded to colonial oppression, but also formed the foundation for the formation of an independent and sovereign Indonesian state.

CONCLUSION

The intellectual movement in the Indonesian archipelago during the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a significant milestone in the history of the national awakening. This movement was shaped by various interrelated factors, including the role of education, religion, local traditions, colonialism, and the influence of modernity. The implementation of Ethical Politics by the Dutch colonial government expanded access to formal education for the indigenous population, leading to the emergence of an educated class that became increasingly aware of the importance of national identity and self-determination. Simultaneously, traditional Islamic education institutions such as pesantren played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting local values and religious teachings, thereby contributing to the development of collective social consciousness. Although colonialism posed substantial challenges, it also indirectly fostered the rise of an indigenous intellectual elite who utilized their education to cultivate political awareness and initiate reform. Exposure to Western modernity introduced concepts such as democracy, human rights, and nationalism, which were gradually adapted and localized through dialogue with

¹⁶ Utama, W. S. (2017). Nasionalisme dan Gagasan Kebangsaan Indonesia Awal: Pemikiran Soewardi Suryaningrat, Tjiptomangoenkusumo dan Douwes Dekker 1912-1914. *Lembaran Sejarah*, 11(1), 64.

native traditions and Islamic values. This process led to a distinctive synthesis of thought that enriched the social, cultural, and political life of the archipelago. As a result, the period witnessed significant transformations, including shifts in social structures, the emergence of political organizations, and the rise of nationalist movements that laid the groundwork for the broader and more organized struggle for Indonesian independence. Based on these developments, several practical implications can be drawn. First, there is a need to improve education by integrating local cultural wisdom into modern educational curricula. This integration is essential for preserving national identity while nurturing a generation with strong character, broad perspectives, and respect for tradition. Second, the character-building role of traditional educational institutions, especially Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), should be strengthened and adapted to contemporary challenges, ensuring that they remain relevant in shaping future leaders who are rooted in cultural values and equipped to face global realities.

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