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# Enamel Advertising Sign and the Making of Consumerism in the Indies

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**Abstract**— 'Enamel' is a coating technique for steel by applying high temperature (760° - 850° C) to create strong-durable plate and brilliant color. Triggered by euphoria of mass production of commercial goods during the 1800s European's industrial revolution, the technique was then applied to make printed advertisement called 'enamel sign'. The deployments of enamel sign were until Southeast Asia, and especially in the Indies (Indonesia) after the 'Liberal Policy' (1870) or when colonial government promoted mass industrial and became the indication of a growing consumerism. The marketing competition had led the used of enamel sign as the main tool for promotion. This research describes and analyses the development of enamel sign in Indies from 1910s-1940s. With the qualitative approach, this research's aims were to determine the depth of history and the development of enamel sign related to the formation of cultures of consumption among the society especially the indigenous. The author has analyzed this colonial advertising as the evolution of advertising media in which the pattern was still adopted into modern advertising. The concept of outdoor media on enamel sign inspires the formation of a media technology that is used in today's media such as Billboard, Neon Box and digital LED (light-emitting diode) advertising. By reconstructing the enamel sign, the author gave the depiction on how consumerism can be understood as the process of appropriating objects material to earn the value of social status as well as prestigious place in the society.

**Keyword:** Enamel advertising sign, consumerism, cultures of consumption

## I. INTRODUCTION

The European dynamic revolutionary industry back to the second term of nineteenth century brought the significant thought on the way human were assessing the meaning of manufacturers productions. The term of products were then perceived as the commodity which were replacing the traditional paradigm on the way its utilization and creation of new massively objects necessity. The media information became the most demanded strategy to introduce and penetrate new modern product to its potential consumer. The regulations and the mass communication media were founded in order to strengthen the goal of industrialization. Therefore, advertising throve dynamically as the answer to cope the needs of creative and persuasive messages.

This paper will discuss the history of advertising at the Indies (Indonesia) colonial periods, especially the types of advertising, which is considered as the most advanced manufacturing technology to produce strong and durable advertising plate. It was about enamel advertising sign or the

type of outdoor media advertising who had growing rapidly concomitant with the penetration of European goods and product services in the Indies. Thus eminences then led to the way on people understanding and appropriation of the enamel sign' messages.

The deployment of enamel sign was started from around 1910s or as the impact of national growing economy after the Dutch initiated the '1870's Liberal Economy Policy' where subsequently to dismiss the *Culturstelsel* (*Sistem Tanam Paksa*) or forced cultivation system, the colonial government open the access for infestation and expansion from mostly European industry. The system allowed the introduction of western modern products together with the development of modern infrastructures to support the existence of industrialization.

The establishment of 1900s modern industry in Indies and others colonized countries, such as in other Asian countries region, Africa, and in South America, mainly was because Europeans were invaders who had not only interested in the political control of the area, but also the economy interest as well. Furthermore, after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 more people would travel to various places in other parts of the world as tourist, workers, immigrant, and pilgrims. In that way, the global trading systems were run dynamically where colonized countries became potential direct trade market expansion.

The history and civilization of enamel sign were still rare or even faded in the context of its development and decline. It is still difficult to track the information or publications and researches about enamel in Southeast Asia and Indies in particular. Whereas enamel can be seen as an important artifact, not only mainly because of its visual richness but also as the consequences of the consumer culture that works actively in its society.

Therefore, this research was conducted to answer: **how enamel sign can be an indication of the consumerism among the society in the Indies? By using economic, social and cultural values, what are the symbols that occur in the cultural consumption?**

Also mentioned in this paper are the enamel technique and the media attribute that was used to make outdoor advertisement. The method and concept that were applied in the enamel sign still used in today's media publications.

The research's aims were to investigate the history and the idea of consumerism related to the formation of the taste and cultural appropriation that was imagined by products offered on enamel sign. The enamel sign analyses of this research are from 1910s-1940s from many different types of product and service advertisement, such as: sales agent services, bank, assurance, bicycle, perfumes, pen, milk, candy, cigarette, drugs, alcohol beverage, sewing machines and blades.



Fig. 3. The sophisticated performance of enamel advertising sign, which informed 'Promonta' the advance of new healthy supplement in 1920s

The studies of the Indies advertising newspaper print and poster media at the colonial period have already accomplished by researchers, especially in the field of marketing media, advertising, and also history discipline. Henk Schulte Nordholt (2011) concluded that the modernity took shape in daily indigenous middle class, which was depicted on school program advertisement and poster as 'an education of desire' (440). Nordholt materials of research were focused in 1920-1940 where the Indies indigenous middle class was gaining the development of modernity and cultural citizenship as to be connected with the colonial system (455-6).

Bejo Riyanto (2000) examined the local newspaper advertisement in Surakarta over periods of 1887-1915 and found that the Javanese people experienced the economic growth that was lead to westernization by the European manufacture industry and products. The ads mentioned the cultural hybrid between local and European whereas local people were illustrated using traditional batik sarong together with the tuxedo and tie on the top, then used one of the products advertised (189).

The conceptual framework in this research highlights the practice of consumption as the process of formatting the taste, which by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) be understood as cultural consumption and can be exchanged through symbolic capital that running in the community environment. With the advance look of bright, durable and known as European-made advertising, enamel sign then was trusted and played an important role to penetrate the consumption awareness of European goods which actively confronted with forms of modernity in the new modern Indies society.

This research used a qualitative methodology as the way to study the experience of consumerism comprehensively, as well as the profundity of the history and development of enamel sign related to the formation of cultures consumption among the Indies society especially the indigenous who

happened to be the emergence of new middle classes in around 1920s. The author has collected 29 enamel signs and categorized them all based on the benefit and usefulness, which were: 4 products of services, 12 household utensils, 6 foods and beverages, 7 cigarette and tobacco.

Dry process enamels were the first to be used on large scale, which resulted a firm shape and color. The high demand of enamel sign generated new way of making by applied the stencil that could carry out successive colors until the most intricate designs and patterns were achieved (Baglee and Morley, 1978: 15-17). Those change of enamel performance lead the indication of the way depicted the new and sophisticated product to attract potential consumer.

By observing visually and technically making of enamel ad sign can be the tendency to reflect the content to symbolize the consumer. It was also translated as the model of the shifted meaning in a way people can accept and internalized the information from enamel ad sign to define their position in the society. Furthermore, it was described and can be analyzed as the experiences of consumerism by means of using products and services in 1920-1943.

## II. HISTORY AND THE CIVILIZATION OF ENAMEL ADVERTISING SIGN

The world of 'enamel' is related to the decorating technique that fusing (to melt) powdered glass on metal surface and introduced into a furnace at about 900°C. The hot ware was then withdrawn, and powdered glass dusted through a screen onto it (Baglee and Morley, 1978: 13). This powdered glass melted as it fell on to the surface of the ware and formed continuous layer. When vitreous enamel technique applied to produce advertising sign, the content was then depicted with metallic oxides color application based on the visual or verbal concordantly. The enamel advertising sign then raised steeply the image of content regenerate using stencils. The stencils cut to the appropriate design, were placed on the plate and the exposed color brushed away, left the design intact (Baglee and Morley, 1978: 15-17).

The earliest enameled objects were made in Cyprus in around the 13th BC to produce religious objects and jewelry on ductile metals such gold, silver, bronze and copper. Some scholars argued that this technique was used in Egypt long time before Mesopotamia made enameled ceramic and colored glass (Encyclopedia of Arts, no year: 269). During European revolutionary industry in 19th century, most of the enamel process applied to make company or brand signboard, which placed in front of building where the company or brand exists. Furthermore, enamel was used for sign system and board rules in the public spaces and facilities; also for home steel furnishings, the body of cars, trains and other heavy steel equipment.

The presence of enamel advertising sign company started in England by Benjamin Bough who founded the first company board enamel maker named "Patent Enamel Company Limited" (Baglee and Morley, 1978: 12).

Originally enamel advertising sign was still limited and even marginalized in the context of civilization regarding the raw material and its complicated manufacturing process. The dynamic of European industry demanded the improvement of communication media in order to encourage the growth of the industry itself. The enamel process then applied for advertising purposes because it answered the challenge of durability and strength of modern advertising, which was outdoor media, compared with once used only of paper-based material such as newspaper ad and poster. However, the productions of goods were still quite few variations so that the competitions between the same items were still limited. Durability and strength material of outdoor media became the most essential part in order to make long-lasting sign.

Regular update of visual design content did not heed anymore since the enamel ad sign making process was labor intensive. For one particular design can take months of production depending on the amount of order. This was not including the distribution in many countries and outside the continent, which can cause more than a year.

During the first decade of 1910 was the enamel outdoor-ad sign euphoria where most of buildings, public space, market center, and train stations in some big cities in Europe affixed by the enamel ad signs. Public transportation such as trams, horse trains, buses were also attached with the signs. To optimize the products promotion, the company also made indoor enamel sign as an attribute of point of sales in the retails and as product merchandise, which was given to the customer for free.

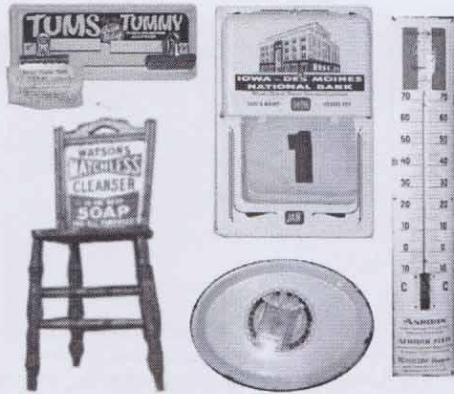


Fig 4. The attributes of enamel sign as P.O.P (Point of Sales) and as product merchandises

The deployment of enamel sign outside European was related to the rapid development of industrialization colonialism and imperialism system conducted by some European countries such as United Kingdom, Dutch, France, Germany, Belgium, and Spain (Baglee and Morley, 1978: 29-32). Those countries expanded their market oriented by exporting the product and promoting it through the enamel sign. Therefore, these 2-3 millimeters thick advertising sign, so much associated with the European manufacturing

technology and idiom style. The distinct element generates precisely European representation of finest, modern, and advance manufacturing for most of people in colonized countries, which then lead to the westernization.

The Dutch government in the Indies took the important roles of European goods and services distribution together with enamel ad sign firstly because in 1900s there was more and more European immigrant, especially from Netherland who already settled as government or private staffs and brought their family and relatives in the Indies. Most of the immigrants were lived in big cities in the Sumatra and Java coast. Therefore, the first wave of enamel sign was mostly for those immigrants segment where the visual artefact more likely to be followed what was depicting in the European original enamel ad.

Secondly, the economic growth in the late of 1910s was then open more possibilities for local market expanded. The Chinese and Arabic descendant involved as traders for imported European product. The invasion European goods and services together with enamel sign, which was then displayed mainly in the area of trade in big cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, Cirebon, Semarang, Solo, Yogyakarta, Madiun, Malang, Surabaya, Padang, and Medan, also through distribution agents in other cities<sup>1</sup>.

The enamel ad sign manufactures had never been presented in the Indies regarding to the technology, complexity and lack of human resources. Therefore the order had to be made through the company agents that most of them were from Netherlands such as *Langcat Bussum*, *T Raedhuys Amsterdam*, *Posta Amsterdam*, *Verenigde Blik Fabrieken Amsterdam*, *Verblifa* (Interview with Henk Embden). All of the order was made in Europe and shipped to the Indies that could take more than a year process before it appeared in the Indies main streets.

All of the agents faced bankruptcy after Japanese invasion in 1942. But, the making of enamel ad sign continued to be produced by Japanese enamel sign<sup>2</sup>, which also related to the expansion of Japanese brand products in the Indies (during Japan' order called Indonesia)<sup>3</sup>. India<sup>4</sup> also produced and exported the enamel sign as the extension production of United Kingdom' enamel sign company that stand as the

<sup>1</sup> The cities mentioned was founded and appeared on the enamel ad sign content (addresses of agent distributor, company or retail store), which became indication of the places where enamel diffused and placed. See fig.3.

<sup>2</sup> Lion brand was the Japanese company with high percentages to export their product in the Indie (Indonesia) including Southeast Asia countries.

<sup>3</sup> Japanese product was the second market leader and biggest competition of European product in the Indis. This also led to the statement that the Japan had market interest other than mere political invasion.

<sup>4</sup> See *Appendix 1 on Street Jewellery A History of Enamel Advertising Signs*, by Chistopher Baglee and Andrew Morley (1978).

highest country of enamel production. (Baglee and Morley, 1978: 83)

The production machines absence as well as the age of distribution of enamel ads sign happened only briefly (the early to mid-20th century), resulted lack of attention to its history and development. Even after the colonial periods the enamel ads sign recognition as the part of civilization, especially in the history of Indonesian colonial advertising studies was still unnoticed.

### III. ENAMEL ADVERTISING SIGN AS THE ARTEFACT OF CULTURAL VALUES IN THE INDIES

In the beginning of its presence in the Indies, the enamel ads sign was more targeted to the immigrant with the European' custom and civilization visual appearances. Manufacturing products and services were attempted to be the same as what exist at the mother country.

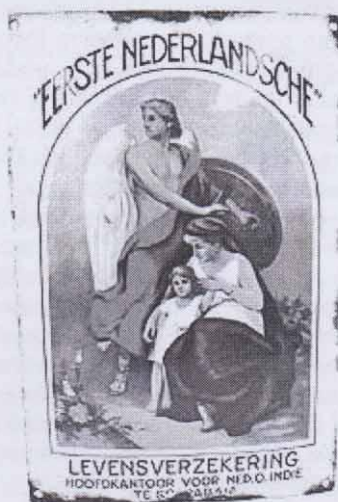


Fig. 3. *LEVENSVZERKERING* was an assurance company from Netherland, which open the branch in Surabaya (mentioned 'Soerabaya' at the last script which already exfoliated). In the tagline written "EERSTE NEDERLANDSCHE" or "Be the first Netherlanders (to use assurance)" was targeted for immigrant from Netherland

The immigrants who also came from the east comer foreigner such as Chinese, Arabic, and Indian took their role as traders and lied on the Indies middle class, just one class under the European community. On the other hand, the indigenous were the highest population in the Indies, which was the lowest social stratum.

The applications of Ethical Politic (*Politik Etis*) in 1880s gave the space for indigenous community to be introduced to an education system. By using the knowledge of the educated natives and later joined the work forces as low rank government regent staff, private company employee, or even took a step to establish and running their own business. This movement became the implication of emergence nobles

educated<sup>5</sup> or *priyayi terpelajar*, which taught by western education system and automatically internalize lifestyle by consuming the European product. That community gradually became the obsession and role model for general community in the Indies and led to be the deconstructing of the local and traditional culture.

The enamel ad sign then turned out to adopt local idiom to impress indigenous taste and consumer. The visualization then depicted how *inlander* or indigenous appeared with their local properties and attributes consuming and enjoying the western product. This was also mentioned with the benefits that consumer would gain by using the product. The persuasive tagline and impressive visual could be the elements to attract the local consumer to be provoked as what enamel sign pictured.

The culture negotiation between local and foreigner as we seen in the enamel ads sign creates an agreement and understanding in both sides to accelerate the product existence.

Furthermore, as the middle class, Chinese, Arabic, and Indian descended communities in the Indies were also become the western product segment, which then represented by their language script on the enamel tagline and body copy text. There were also several enamel ads sign that illustrating the product for not only one, but also two representation of target audience in one single plate. Although it seemed to be filled with many information and rough layout, the main purposes were to reach the effectively and efficiency at the same time.



Fig. 4. Enamel ads sign tagline using Chinese text and *Pegon* or Malay language written with Arabic script style as the representative of the market targeted.

Most of enamel advertising sign was produced to represent the symbol of meaning in the way that the products and services penetrated the community and supporter. Long before the stencil design was applied on the plate, enamel sign was simply row typography as the brand awareness alone. The development of enamel technology lead to applied stencil, where the design was more likely to

<sup>5</sup> Most of them were common people and not the same as opposed to royal nobility or *bangsawan* or *ningrat*.

be *pictograph*<sup>6</sup> (Bejo Riyanto, 2000: 132) or symbols that describe general object as to overcome communication barriers due to language or cultural differences, as well as many people still cannot be able to read the text.

The enamel ads sign becomes the civilization of outdoor media that the concept of design, content, and deployment are inspired in today's outdoor media such as billboard or poster billboard consisting of panels, painted bulletin and shape the emerging of digital imaging. The way of enamel making was considered the most advance technology then led to the finest, bright, and durable performance. The standard of advance advertising quality has been adapting to the recent media such as Billboard, Neon Box and digital LED (light-emitting diode) advertising.

IV. CONSUMPTION AND THE PRACTICE OF MODERNITY

The public procurement infrastructures such as markets, shops, banks, office buildings, and public transportations marking a new urban civilization as well as bringing the changes to the economy growth that allows both immigrant and local residents to be involved in many working activities. The availability of funds from the involvement of working in various fields gave an opportunity for indigenous society to take part as one of economy driving. The emergence of the modern industrial manufacture in the end of 19 centuries marked the turbulent global economic system, including in the Indies that has sufficient natural and human resources to encourage economic growth by the Dutch colonial government (Frances Gouda, 2007: 47-9).

Enamel ads sign took an important part in translating the taste for consumers as a consequence of the dynamics cultures of consumption that was started when the enamel advertising made. Local idiom had been choosing to represent and facilitate the understanding of indigenous essential values as also to ease the intended information. Moreover by conceiving the way society perceive enamel ads sign, can be the text to reveal the dynamic change of society and economy system through the enamel performance in the context of visual and verbal element which then forming a differentiation that allows consumer to accept the ads that were matched to their background of life.

There were three points that affect the construction of lifestyle related to the dynamic of socio and consumerism practice in the Indies, which were depicted on the enamel ads sign visual and content. **First, the change of products value**, where traditionally individual were the center of the works, then using the modern product people can simplify and optimize their works. Modern manufacturer gave new perspective and redefinition of the mass production and the creation of new utilities, which were more complex and more variations such as foods and beverages, household utensils, medical drugs, cigarette and tobacco, and product services.

Engine vehicles replace utilization of animal power for transportation purposes; sewing machines simplify people to meet their need of clothing; sharp entity such as knife, axe, and farming machines to simplify the work on fields and gardens; also saws, scissors, screwdrivers change the perspective of new tools.



Fig 5. Local idiom was used to represent the market targeted as well as cultural negotiation between foreigner and local. Left: A man was illustrated wearing western tuxedo but still using *peci* or *songkok* as a cloth attribute mostly for indigenous. Right: Singer visual pictorial logo with the background woman using *kebaya* or local woman traditional cloth.



Fig 6. Most of the enamel ads sign depicted the products, brand name and tagline

Milk, chocolate block or powder, beer, and medical drugs change the way people supply their daily basic foods and beverages. Packaging technology was invented to support endurance also to export purposes. The awareness to improve the comfort and clean life was being realized with

<sup>6</sup> Pictograph or simply consider as a sign is a clear symbol of picture that correspond the physical state of the actual object to communicate the particular concept



the production of soap, shampoo, dental paste, perfume, and insect repellent.

Modern imported product replaced the kind of previously product, which before indigenous took a variety plants from their surrounding environment to be made and used with traditional process.

New products were invented not only to supply the needs but also to create the needs. It was a dynamic process where function and satisfaction always be preferred and will never be enough.

**Second, create value-added**, where the creation of variation products manufacturer were not only to satisfy the needs, but also to gain self-image that affected the social status. New sophisticated products were invented to meet the augment of usability standard in carrying out their daily life. By used the products, consumers felt the euphoria of the modern society.

The new modern products were shaver, gramophone, pen, supplement, hand-watch, perfume, cigarette, also cloths with different model and style. Assurances were also started to create for different purposes such as life, health, safety, and property.



Fig.7. Poostspaarbank or Post Bank as product services

Those value added products were produced and placed as a label of satisfaction and marked as the improvement of life (Elisbeth Locher-Scholten, 2005: 238-40). The process of adaptation of elements in the modern product can be considered as cultural appropriation or order to gain and maintain the satisfaction of cultures of consumption.

**Third, the shift of traditional value into modern perspective**, where the commodification of new product perceived as the way modern industry can answer the problem of the enhancement of global population. In the Indies, industrialization and product exported from Europe spurred the acceleration in process of consumption not only for European community itself but also expanding segments to local indigenous who gradually can accept even became potential market.

The moment of strengthening the prosperity as the part of modern society could be obtained using modern European products and took those products as the symbol of prestige. The consumption affected Indies lifestyle and later considered as westernization (Elisbeth Locher-Scholten, 2005: 243-49).

This process was took European, (and especially for) royal nobility and noble educated or *priyayi terpelajar* as the *role model* and obsession to shape the taste for most of Indies society. For indigenous particularly, this process became the factors that were driving the pattern from traditional feudal shifted to be modern and consumptive society.



Fig.8. Dobbelman (left) and Neptune (right) using the symbol of the interaction of society through the clothing attribute

The establishment that involved indigenous entrepreneur as the owner, especially cigarette and Indies tobacco or *kretek* also used enamel ads sign as their promotion. Those ads used local idiom which more juxtapose with the local target audience and as the symbol of traditional representation authority wrapped with modern nuance.

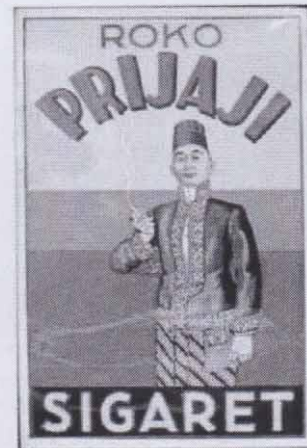


Fig.9. The Roko Prijaji brand using *Prijaji* or royal nobility person who considered as high state in Javanese society completed with aristocrat cloth attribute to attracted consumer

The involvement of indigenous into the modern industry was the sign of resources availability and the increased purchasing power. This event also created a new class of

consumer society especially in big cities. The increased of welfare and social status, which demanded modern lifestyle, such as the use of language, how to dress, how to eat, completeness appliance household furnishings, services, arts, religious, and time discipline (Djoko Soekiman, 2000:18).

#### V. CONCLUSION

Production and consumption is the model to encourage the modern economy. The industrialization in the first term of 20th century, which created the mass production and massive commercialization, would gradually constructed identities of modern consumerism. The system was also supported by advance advertising technology called enamel ads sign that reflects the social artifact where the social relation and interaction of values in its society as showed the dynamic of the ages.

Enamel ads sign became the indicator of product communication at the same time applied with high artistic value. The presence of this sign was largely determined by foreign intervention, especially the Dutch colonial government but the visual idioms then represents the evidence of negotiation between the local and foreign culture to form a dynamic hybrid culture. This cultural representation remains influential even till today.

By examining the enamel sign we can develop our understanding about the way advertising plays important role in constructing a dynamic culture of consumption as well as the formation of taste that occurred and developed in the community where it is made and disseminated. Consumerism can be understood as the process of cultural appropriating objects material to earn the value of social status as well as prestigious place in the society.

Comprehensive research about advertising enamel becomes very feasible. Not only the history of its development, but mainly related to patterns of penetration for a very broad

group of people. The research about enamel in countries that have a history and closeness area such in the ASEAN region has still undiscovered. Whereas the enamel ads sign were found in the region have the same visual appearance and the same pattern in a way people appropriate it. Those issues can be examined especially to gain the manner of economic sustainability in the region within a specific period.

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