

# Mooi Indie Image Style in Salon Photography Works

Sjuaibun Iljas<sup>1</sup>, Regina Octavia Ronald<sup>2</sup>, Akhmad Yani Surachman<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Bandung, <sup>2</sup>Universitas Pasundan

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Islam Nusantara

<sup>1</sup>abah1711@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>reginaoronald@unpas.ac.id, <sup>3</sup>ayanis@uninus.ac.id

## ABSTRACT

The application of the Mooi Indie image style in salon photography depicts the natural beauty and traditional life of the archipelago inherited from the colonial era. The image depicts the view of Western nations who consider the Malay region to be exotic and pure as an orientalist discourse. The urgency of this study lies in the need to document and preserve cultural heritage through photography media. The aim is to understand how Mooi Indie elements are applied in contemporary salon photography and have an impact on the appreciation of local culture. The methodology used includes visual analysis of salon photography works. The results of the study show that works with the Mooi Indie image style display a 'beautiful' utopian impression in aesthetic composition, dramatic lighting, and subjects that represent the beauty of nature and tradition. The implication is that the application of this style in salon photography enriches visual aesthetics while contributing to the preservation and promotion of local culture, encouraging public appreciation of Indonesian cultural heritage.

Keywords: Mooi Indie, Salon Photography, Local Culture, Visual Aesthetics, Cultural Heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

During the colonial period, the natural beauty and simple life of the *pribumi* (indigenous people) were always an interesting object of view for Westerners. Paintings with the theme of Mooi Indie were very popular with foreigners, especially Europeans. Natural scenery such as rice fields, mountains, and beaches are generally complemented by images of animals and exotic-skinned local people. The calm and harmonious atmosphere, green trees on the hills, and bright sunlight depict the pure eastern nature as if without problems (Purnomo, 2014; Wahyudi, 2019). In photography, the Mooi Indie aesthetic is also visible in the representations of the Dutch

East Indies made by colonial photographers such as Kassian Céphas, a Javanese photographer who worked for the colonial government and often photographed natural landscapes and portraits of the Yogyakarta royal family (Siegel, 1997).

The research on the Mooi Indie imaging style is Miguel Covarrubias. In his book entitled "Island of Bali" (1937), he stated that the newly discovered last paradise had become a substitute for the 19th century romantic conception of a primitive utopia that had been the exclusive property of Tahiti and the South Sea Islands (Covarrubias, 1973).

Mooi Indie which also means 'Hinda Molek', in <https://kbbi.web.id/> molek means beautiful or beautiful which explains

physically. Hindia molek refers to the beauty or beauty of the Southeast Asian region, more specifically the Malays. This beauty is depicted in paintings with romantic-idealistic and utopian-primitive concepts by Du Chattel in 1930. This image depicts the views of Western nations who consider the Malay region to be exotic and pure as an orientalist discourse. This view creates a dichotomy of identity between colonies and colonialists as a strong-dominant-modern identity space, which then becomes a new way to introduce the Indies region as a tourist attraction (Clifford, 1980; Crang, 1997; Ekici Cilkin & Cizel, 2022a; Hapsoro & Yeru, 2022; Said, 1977). Indonesia as a Malay nation cannot be separated from the orientalist ideology formed by the West. The image in Mooi Indie in Indonesia is a depiction of a cultured nation featuring traditional houses, Javanese dances, women wearing kembang, people bathing in rivers, and natural panoramas and simple farmers. This is the legacy of the construction of thought about the dichotomy of Western civilization versus Eastern primitiveness since the period of imperialism. Over time, this image style has become one way to document and preserve the cultural heritage of the archipelago (De & Wirajati, 2023; Hapsoro & Yeru, 2022; Nofrizaldi, 2023; Purnomo, 2014; Riris Setyowati, 2019; Seni & Mooi, 1942).

Photography is a visual medium for depicting the preservation of the cultural heritage of the archipelago. The application of the Mooi Indie image style has been applied in photography since it entered and developed in the archipelago. The birth of photography in Malay brought by the colonialists was to document the life of the archipelago from an orientalist perspective. Then Kassian Cephas (1845-1912) was born as

the first Boemi Poetra to pursue photography in Indonesia (Knaap, 1999; Newton, 2017).

The development of photography in Indonesia is marked by the emergence of photography associations or communities. The oldest photography community in Indonesia was born in Bandung City on February 15, 1924, established under the name Preanger Amateur Fotograafen Vereeniging by Dutch architect Prof. Charles Prosper Wolff Schoemaker with his brother Prof. Schermerhorn, which later changed its name to the Amateur Photo Association (PAF) in 1954. Currently, PAF has reached the age of 100 years with a membership of 3,463 people, with the oldest active member born on December 13, 1931, the youngest active member is a junior high school student. Meanwhile, the Chandra Naya Photography Institute (LFCN) was founded in 1948 in Jakarta, becoming a photography institution or association in the nation's capital (Maxwell, 2020; Protschky, n.d. ; Tifentale, 2020). In mid-1972, PAF and LFCN formed a union of all photo clubs throughout Indonesia called the Federation of Photographic Societies of Indonesia—FPSI. FPSI was accepted as a member of FIAP in 1973, with the consequence of having to demonstrate national unity in the field of photography. Thus, the forum to achieve this was the holding of the Indonesian Photo Salon (1973) in Jakarta. The chairman of LFCN, A. Moehammad and R.M. Soelarko from PAF invited Adam Malik, who at that time served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, as a patron and donated the rotating trophy 'Adam Malik'. Seen in the documents owned by FPSI shown in Figure 1 below, is the process of forming FPSI and holding the annual Indonesian Photo Salon event (FPSI, 2023).



Figure 1.

Documentation of the formation of FPSI in 1973  
(Source : PAF 100 Year Book, taken in May 2024)

Both associations have a photographic salon image style adopted from the visual styles of idealistic romanticism and utopian-primitive. Seen in figure 2, the photographic work with a salon approach that displays the visual style of idealistic romanticism is taken from the March 2024 Fédération Internationale de l'Art photographique (FIAP) catalog (FIAP 25, 2024). Then in figure 3 which is taken from the 2023 Indonesian Photo Salon (SFI) catalog which depicts the same style from FIAP, where eskositime, romanticism and idealism are depicted in the medium of photography. Thus, the Mooi Indie image style is adapted to the salon photography style that has developed in Indonesia to this day (Burhan, 2008; De & Wirajati, 2023; Hapsoro & Yeru, 2022; Nofrizaldi, 2023).

Salon photography is a genre of photography that emphasizes aesthetic beauty and artistic techniques, often exhibited in competitions or art galleries (Prabowo, 2019). In the Indonesian context, salon photography has developed since the colonial era and has adapted much of the Mooi Indie aesthetic through: 1) Composition and Framing, namely a broad perspective with a backdrop of mountains, rice fields, or rivers that reinforce the impression of

exoticism (Yampolsky, 2016); 2) Selection of Subjects, namely villagers, traditional dancers, or farmers in a romantic and harmonious atmosphere, ignoring social realities such as economic inequality (Clark, 2012), 3) Lighting Techniques, namely dramatic lighting and fog effects are often used to create a mystical and melancholic impression (Gunawan, 2021), 4) Use of Color or Black and White, where colonial photographers often used sepia or black and white to add a sense of nostalgia and historical documentation (Taylor, 1994).

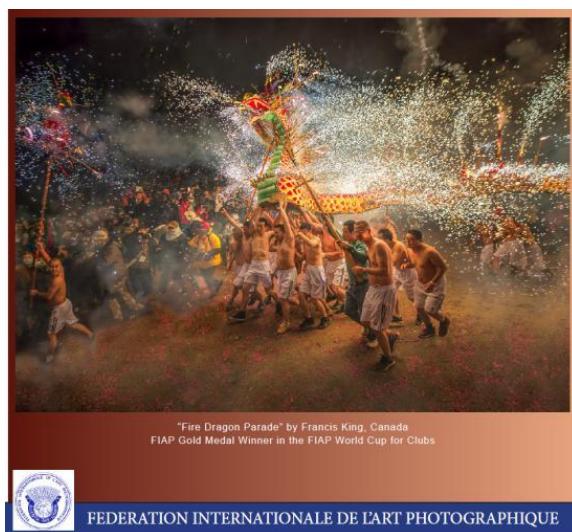


Figure 2. Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique March 2024 catalog cover  
(Source: <https://online.flipbuilder.com/tklq/ezeo/>  
taken on May 2024)

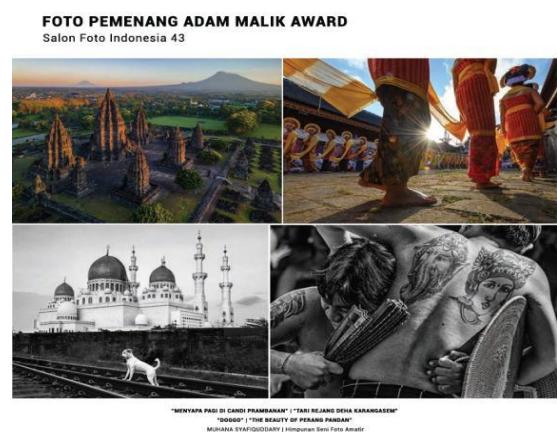


Figure 3. Photo Salon Works 2023, Winner of the Adam Malik Award SFI 43  
(Source: Indonesian Salonfoto Catalog 43,  
taken in May 2024)

Photography and technology are inseparable in their development. Photography moves dynamically along with the development of technology, from the analog era to the digital era. This significant development involves the use of sophisticated software and hardware (Azoulay, 2010; Bin Siri et al., 2022; Kember, 2012; Pace, n.d.; Protschky, n.d.; Rubinstein, 2016). This makes it easier for photographers to achieve idealistic, romantic and exotic image styles. Although digital technology makes it easier to take and edit images, it also poses challenges and risks, especially related to image manipulation. Image manipulation can distort facts, damage the credibility of news, and spread disinformation. In addition, unrealistic beauty standards are also a concern (Bin Siri et al., 2022; Tekic & Koroteev, 2019).

The research in this article is to understand the application of the Mooi Indie image style in salon photography and appreciation of local culture, which combines visual aesthetics with the theme of cultural heritage in the use of digital technology. This article aims to explore how photographic works can enrich the understanding and appreciation of local Indonesian culture as part of local cultural preservation through digital photography technology.

## METHOD

The research in this article uses a qualitative approach with a grounded theory design, which is a method that explains the differences that arise in generating theories based on existing data. One of the goals is to produce or formulate a theory that explains at a broad conceptual level, processes, actions, or interactions about the topic. In addition, it tries to verify the theory produced by comparing data conceptualized at different levels of abstraction, and this comparison contains deductive steps. Data were collected through observation and documentation of photographic works in the SFI catalog,

technical visual analysis of salon photographic works influenced by the Mooi Indie image style by identifying key visual elements such as composition, lighting, and subject selection, and linking them to digital utilization with the concept of Mooi Indie image and cultural preservation.

Mooi Indie's paintings that developed in the colonial era are shown in Figure 4 below:



Figure 4. "Portrait of a Javanese Couple" by Raden Saleh, doc. IVAA Archives  
(Source : <https://archive.ivaa-online.org/pelakuseni/raden-saleh/page:2>  
taken on May 2024)

The picture above is a painting by Raden Saleh entitled 'Portrait of a Javanese Couple' (1857) which shows the characteristics of Javanese people in the past. It depicts the style of dress and life in a particular community. The Mooi Indie style makes the image of the life of Indonesian (Javanese) society strong and deep-rooted. Natural conditions as aesthetic objects become the quality of the message presented. The Mooi Indie image also brings the impression of 'reminiscing' and 'nostalgia' so that the romance is represented in the painting (P. Carey, 2022; P. B. R. Carey, 1982; Shibasaki, 1993).

The development of photography in Indonesia, the Mooi Indie image style was also adapted into the aesthetic practice of photography depicted in image 5, namely the wife of Colonel Pangeran Poerbanegoro, the commander of the palace in Surakarta, photographed by photographer Kang Ming L. The photographic work depicts the image of a Javanese woman with a stable socio-economic status, with a nostalgic and romantic message quality when the moment was frozen (opname image). Photography not only depicts the style of dress, gestures, facial expressions, but also the atmosphere built with aesthetic elements that complement it. Such as the placement of ornamental plants, tables, chair shapes, curtains that become the background with a narrow depth of field, tablecloths and floor patterns that are typical of that time.



Figur 5. King Ming, L. (Soerakarta) *Nederlands-Indië in foto's*, 1860-1940, Koninklijk Instituut voor taal-, land- en volkenkunde (KITLV), Copyright for information contact Koninklijk Instituut voor taal-, land- en volkenkunde (KITLV)  
(Source : Taken in May 2024)

The development of photography during the SFI era (1973-2023), the image style displayed in SFI is shown in images 6, 7, 8, and 9 below, depicting the charm of the beauty of nature and culture of the archipelago. The photographic works represent the photo salon that developed in Indonesia which displays charm through the medium of photography that allows the resulting photography to no longer be analog photography as shown in image 5, but produced through the use of digitalization in the process of creating photography, both from the light recording process (hardware) or the post-production process or the digital imaging stage through the use of software.



Figure 6. "Rejang Dancer" Paulus Ignatius Kurniawan, Bali Photographers Association.  
(Source: SFI Catalog 2023, p. 112, taken on May 2024)



Figure 7.  
"Bocah Bajang Dieng" Arif Widodo Al Aziz.  
Source: SFI Catalog 2017, p. 196,  
Taken on May 2024



Figure 8. "Ngeteh Bahagia" Febrijanti Wardhani, Tjapoengers Indonesian Photographers Association.  
(Source: SFI Catalog 2023, p. 137, taken on May 2024)



Figure 9. "Ready To Perform", David Lumentut, Himpunan Seni Foto Amatir.  
(Source: SFI Catalog 2023, p. 142, taken on May 2024.)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Mooi Indie image styl0065 in Salon Photography analyzed from the photographic 0077orks that are the sample studies

in this article are analyzed and described in the following categories:

### A. Aesthetic Composition

The image style produced by Mooi Indie displays an aesthetic composition on objects that are more dominated by central (center) or centered composition. Because with this composition, visual connoisseurs can directly capture the objects conveyed, see directly the beauty of nature, traditional life, or the beauty of the objects displayed. So that in Indonesian Photo Art works, more compositions are adopted that are centered on direct objects. Connoisseurs are rarely made to be directed by the leading line in the placement of objects.

The aesthetic impression produced by Mooi Indie which focuses on a calm, harmonious, romantic and utopian atmosphere can be seen in images 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Utopian here is that there is an effort to create an idealistic world, a concept that refers to an ideal and perfect place or condition, where everything functions perfectly and society lives in perfect harmony and prosperity. The character of utopia is described in the description:

1. Social and Political Perfection  
There is no conflict or injustice, and everyone is treated equally.
2. Economic Welfare  
All basic human needs are met without poverty or hunger.
3. Healthy Environment  
A well-maintained natural environment and high ecological sustainability.
4. Happiness and Welfare  
All members of society feel happy, satisfied, and prosperous.

The concept of utopia is often considered as something unrealistic or surreal that cannot be achieved in reality. Thus the term utopia is used to describe an idea or vision that is ideal but difficult or impossible to realize (Jameson, 2010; Mauro & Di Taranto, 1990; Vieira, 2010).

### **B. Dramatic Lighting**

The use of dramatic lighting to highlight aesthetic elements in photographic works is the main thing. Photography often depicts dramatic lighting that does not match the actual conditions. Lighting can strengthen the atmosphere and emotion in a visual work. An important aspect of the use of dramatic lighting in photography refers to the purpose or message conveyed in the work. Good lighting can highlight details of texture, pattern, shape and lines that can have meaning that strengthens the message. Contrast and shadow, light and dark, and visual depth in photographic works will display their own sense of message, mood and atmosphere (Clover, 2006; Demmer et al., 2023; MERKULOVA, 2022).

### **C. Inconsistency with Reality**

Dramatic lighting is often not in accordance with natural lighting conditions. Photographers use this technique to create artistic and aesthetic effects that may not be realistic but are visually appealing. By adjusting the lighting, the photographer can manipulate the viewer's perception of the subject. For example, light from below can make an object look more frightening or intimidating, while light from above can give a sense of serenity or elegance (Arnheim, 2001; Leymarie, n.d.; Steiner & Messaris, 1994).

### **D. Traditional Subjects**

The main subjects include natural scenery, traditional activities, and daily life of

the community (Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9) referring to efforts to preserve and promote local culture. Photography is used to document elements of local culture. This can increase public appreciation of Indonesian cultural heritage through photographic works. In addition, daily activities such as traditional ceremonies, traditional dances, and rural life are also important focuses. Through this visual representation, photographers try to document and celebrate the richness of local culture that has been passed down from generation to generation. With the moment of opname, they not only create valuable visual archives but also offer an in-depth view of the life and traditions of the Indonesian people (De & Wirajati, 2023; Purnomo, 2014; Riris Setyowati, 2019). The use of photography as a tool to document elements of local culture plays an important role in increasing public appreciation of Indonesian cultural heritage. Photographs featuring traditional subjects can attract the attention of a wider audience, both domestically and internationally. It helps introduce and promote the uniqueness of Indonesian culture to the world. In addition, photography can serve as an educational medium, providing insight into the importance of preserving traditions and customs that may be endangered by modernization. Thus, photography is not only a form of visual art but also an effective tool for cultural preservation, raising awareness, and fostering a sense of pride in Indonesian cultural identity (Crawshaw & Urry, 2002; Ekici Cilkin & Cizel, 2022a, 2022b).

### **E. Development of Photography Technology**

The transition from analog to digital photography that allows flexibility in visual manipulation. The use of sophisticated

software and hardware, the use of digital technology to achieve idealistic and aesthetic results. The development of photography technology has undergone a significant transition from the analog to the digital era, which has brought about major changes in the practice and results of photography (Messaris, 2012; Tekic & Koroteev, 2019).

In the era of analog photography, the process of taking pictures and developing photos required technical expertise and a long time. Each photo had to be processed through a darkroom with special chemicals, which limited the number of images that could be taken and the ability to modify the final result. However, with the advent of digital technology, photographers now have much greater flexibility in capturing and processing images. Digital cameras allow for fast and easy shooting, with the ability to store thousands of photos in digital format that can be accessed at any time. In addition, advanced hardware such as high-resolution cameras and adjustable lenses provide the ability to capture fine detail and more creative compositions (Bin Siri et al., 2022; Hagoort Jaco, 1999; Lucas & Goh, 2009; MERKULOVA, 2022; Messaris, 2012; Siegle, 2012; Susanto et al., n.d.; van Nuenen & Scarles, 2021). The use of photo editing software, such as Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom, has revolutionized the way photographers work with their images. Digital technology allows for visual manipulation that was previously impossible with analog photography. Photographers can easily adjust lighting, contrast, color, and many other aspects to achieve idealistic and aesthetic results. This digital manipulation opens up new opportunities for creativity, allowing for the creation of more dramatic and artistic images that may not be true to reality but can convey a certain artistic vision

or message. In addition, digital technology also allows for the retouching and restoration of old images, as well as the creation of complex and interesting visual effects. Thus, the transition to digital technology has provided photographers with a powerful tool to explore and expand the boundaries of the art of photography, while maintaining the quality and integrity of the image (Harsanto, 2011; McCracken, 2012; MERKULOVA, 2022; Messaris, 2012; Shen & Yu, 2021; Steiner & Messaris, 1994).

#### F. Cultural Representation

The Mooi Indie style, which developed during the colonial era, has left a deep mark on the representation of local culture in Indonesia through its strong visual aesthetics. The images produced by this style highlight elements of romanticism, exoticism, and idealism, which were later adapted by contemporary salon photography. In this context, salon photography not only continues the visual tradition of Mooi Indie but also confirms local cultural identity by presenting beautiful natural scenery, people's daily lives, and rich traditions. The style adopted by Mooi Indie in this photography often features dramatic compositions and ideal lighting, which create a deep aesthetic impression and arouse feelings of nostalgia. Salon photography plays an important role in creating a sense of nostalgia and remembering a romantic and utopian past, which is a characteristic of the Mooi Indie style. The cultural representation in these works often takes the audience back to the colonial era, by presenting images that depict local identity with a touch of orientalism. This style influences the way people view local identity, where visual elements from the past are used to shape and confirm a romantic and idealistic cultural narrative. In the process, salon photography not only functions as a

documentation medium, but also as a powerful tool to promote and preserve local cultural heritage, while conveying stories that are full of nostalgia and strong identity.

The Mooi Indie style of imagery has a significant influence in depicting local culture through strong and captivating visual aesthetics. As an art style that developed during the colonial era, Mooi Indie depicts the natural beauty and traditional life of the Nusantara people in a romantic and idealistic way. This style emphasizes aesthetic elements such as beautiful natural scenery, the daily life of the people with a touch of exoticism, and a harmonious and utopian atmosphere. These elements create an image that depicts the Nusantara region as a peaceful, beautiful, and pure place, often ignoring the complexity and realities. This representation plays an important role in shaping the outside world's view of local culture, while also influencing the way local people see and understand their own culture.

The influence of the Mooi Indie style in depicting local culture is not only limited to painting, but also extends to the medium of photography, especially in salon photography. Salon photography that adopts the Mooi Indie style often features dramatic and aesthetic compositions, with a focus on visual beauty and traditional aspects of local culture. The use of dramatic lighting, symmetrical compositions, and subjects that depict everyday activities of the community are characteristic of these photographic works. Through this approach, salon photography successfully captures and promotes local cultural heritage, increasing public appreciation of existing cultural values. In addition, cultural representation in the Mooi Indie style also plays a role in preserving cultural identity, by presenting

consistent and easily recognizable images that can be passed on to future generations.

### **G. Challenges of Digital Technology**

One of the major challenges that has emerged with the development of digital technology in photography is the risk of image manipulation. Digital technology allows for highly sophisticated image editing, where almost any element in a photograph can be easily changed or enhanced. However, this capability also carries significant risks to the credibility of photography. Image manipulation can obscure or even change facts, potentially misleading viewers and spreading disinformation. In the context of journalism or historical documentation, for example, unethical image manipulation can undermine the integrity of the information and invite public criticism and distrust of the media and sources of visual information. Another challenge of digital technology in photography is the creation of unrealistic beauty standards. The use of sophisticated image editing software allows photographers and editors to remove blemishes, slim bodies, and refine facial features excessively. This can result in images that are far from reality, promoting an image of a perfect body and face that is unattainable in nature. These unrealistic beauty standards can have a negative impact on society, especially on individuals' self-perception and mental health, particularly among adolescents and young adults. When the public is presented with images that have been manipulated to appear perfect, this can create pressure to meet unrealistic standards and can lead to psychological problems.

### **CONCLUSION**

The application of the Mooi Indie image style in salon photography in Indonesia, reveals how aesthetic elements inherited from the colonial period remain relevant and

adapted in the practice of salon photography. Salon Photography uses aesthetic elements such as centralized composition, dramatic lighting, and traditional subjects to create works that display local culture in an idealistic and aesthetic way, which enriches visual aesthetics and supports the preservation and promotion of local Indonesian culture. The implications of the application of the Mooi Indie image style in salon photography play an important role in documenting and preserving local Indonesian cultural heritage. By displaying rich and aesthetic cultural elements, salon photography can increase public appreciation of local culture and encourage the preservation of traditions. Photographic works that highlight local culture can function as educational and promotional tools, introducing the uniqueness of Indonesian culture to the wider community, both domestically and internationally. This helps to increase awareness and pride in Indonesia's cultural identity. However, the presence of digital technology requires photographers and editors to maintain the integrity of their work. Unethical manipulation can damage the credibility of photography as a medium for documentation and information.

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