

The History of Beauty Discourse in Indonesia

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Abstract Beauty is an interesting object to discuss. Beauty would always associate to women but beauty also part of human culture. Beauty discourse that created from power and industry have so many effects in human's life and society. This study aims to describe the history of beauty discourse that exists in Indonesia This study is conducted through Michel Foucault's archaeology method in order to disclose the various system and ideas, as well as to examine the origin and development on the beauty discourse in Indonesia. The results of this study are a description of the history of beauty discourse that exists and emerged in Indonesia. Those discourses of beauty are sorted into four periods: (1) the era of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom, (2) pre-independence era, (3) post-independence era, and (4) reformation era. The discourse of beauty that emerged during the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom and pre-independence until post-independence was closely related to those who were in power. Meanwhile, the discourse of beauty that existed during the reformation period was more related to those who were dominant in the beauty industry. Currently the Korean beauty discourse is the dominant one. It emerged and developed along with the growth of Korean popular culture in Indonesia.

Keywords: *history, beauty, discourse, beauty discourse*

1. Introduction

Women and beauty are two inseparable things. The word "beauty" will always be associated with women. Beauty is a trait that always desired by many women. Beautiful, together with "graceful", "pretty" or "sublime", "marvellous", "superb" and similar expression is an adjective that we often employ to something that we like, which in this sense, is same as what is good [1]. For women, looking good is important, especially in the social media era [2]. Beauty is a physical form that grants social acceptance as well as personal satisfaction [3].

Some people think that the meaning of beauty is a relative matter. Each individual will have their own definition of the meaning of beauty. Aphorisms such as "Beauty is only skin deep" and "Do not judge a book by its cover", allegedly reflect the belief that beauty is a trivial quality and should be ignored but in practice, the pursuit of beauty has always been an integral part of every human culture [4]. On the other side, in reality, the meaning of beauty has been generalised and is considered true. Someone is called beautiful if they meet the criteria such as clear skin, straight black hair and slim body.

Each country has its own beauty discourse with different beauty values and standards. In China and much of East and Southeast Asia, the possession of a fair complexion is perceived as desirable quality in a woman [5]. While in the broad US discourse of beauty focuses on physical appearance and the external self [6]. Indonesia has its beauty discourse that is evolving and changing every time. The discourse of beauty has existed since the days of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom. We can find the trace through ancient books, scripts, inscriptions and carvings on the temple. Tilaar [7] revealed that if we look at the reliefs of temples in Central Java, it could be concluded that the beautiful women in ancient times were women with fertile bodies.

The beauty discourse that is currently developing in Indonesia is the Korean beauty discourse. Korean beauty discourses emerged and developed along with the growth of Korean popular culture (Kpop) in Indonesia. The ideal value of beauty in Korean beauty discourse is healthy skin that looks radiant, or people usually called it “healthy glowing skin”. This beauty concept with glowing healthy skin can be seen in Indonesian skincare products and cosmetics, for example in the *Pixy* cosmetic product with *Pixy Make It Glow* series.

The existence of Korean beauty discourse certainly raises questions about the emergence and development of beauty discourse originating from outside in Indonesia. It also makes us question the existence of Indonesia beauty discourse itself. Therefore, this article will disclose the history of beauty discourse that emerged and developed in Indonesia.

2. Research Method

This study use cultural studies paradigm. Cultural studies has been distinguished as a field of study by the ways it has engaged with theory and sought to apply it, rather than by its adoption or development of practical methods [8]. The object of this research is the history of beauty discourse in Indonesia. The data sources of this study are from advertisement and pictures on newspapers, magazines or internet also articles, books and research paper with beauty discourse as the main topic. The research data was collected by doing literature review on some advertisement or picture on newspapers and magazine, also review on some books, articles and research papers about beauty discourse in Indonesia.

The data analysis technique on this research uses Michel Foucault’s method, archeology of knowledge. Archaeology of knowledge is one of the approaches to analyse history. Foucault [9] himself states that history is never continuous; it cannot be summarised into a totality. Therefore, this approach focuses on the discontinuity aspects of historical events. This archaeological method aims to disclose various systems and models of ideas in history and examine the genealogy [9]. This archaeological method also tracks the discursive form, i.e. the study of the rules of discourse formation.

The archaeological method by Michel Foucault is a tool to test the statements that stand in the archives [10]. Archive, according to Foucault, is a statement system both as events and things [9]. The object of this archaeological analysis is a description of the archive in the form of a statement in the discourse. Through archaeological analysis, a discourse is explained where it emerges, who is the authoritative institution that plays a role in the truth of the discourse and the relation of the discourse with other discourses.

3. Results And Discussion

3.1 The era of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom

Beauty discourses emerged and developed in all parts of the world. Beauty discourse has existed in Indonesia since the days of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom. This can be traced through ancient books, script, inscriptions as well as statues and reliefs on the temple. Indradjaja's research [11] revealed that in the book Pararaton, there is a story about the beauty of Ken Dedes which make Ken Arok even have to kill TunggulAmetung. He also mentioned the Sri Tanjung script that wrote about the ideal woman which was a woman with the type of *padmanegara* with lip like open mangosteen, a sweet gaze, full and round breast and thighsas smooth as palm leaves. Tilaar [7]also states that beautiful women in the reliefs of temples are fertile women. The discourse of beauty that developed at that time will depend on the king who rules. If the king who rules embraces Hinduism, then Hindu's holy books will be used as a guide to determine the ideal type of beauty. For example, if a beautiful woman as *Padmini*, the book they used was the *Kama-Klapa* book which was used by the Hindu community [7]. If the Buddhist king is in power then the ideal type of beauty of women at that time will depend on the holy book they use.

3.2 Pre Independence

Beauty discourse that developed in the pre-independence until post-independence era can be tracked through advertisements of beauty products that published in newspapers. For example, the *Lux* soap ad that was published in 1938.

PERLOEMBAAN SABOEN WANGI LUX

Goenggoeng Kempal **f 1750** kanggé pris.

Beuteu leup geunjeun, bilih mang saboen wangi... (text describing the benefits of Lux soap)

SABOEN WANGI LUX

host, store, share
photobucket

Saboen ketjantikan dari 846 antara 857

Fig 1

In the advertisement shown in **Fig 1**, there are illustrations of women with Caucasian facial lines. This indicates that the discourse of beauty that developed at that time was European or Western beauty discourse. It is reasonable that the discourse was created during that time because Indonesia was still under Dutch colonial rule. According to Sahay and Piran's research in 1997[12], the hegemonic influence of the formal colonial system has left an imprint in the Asian culture [13]. This explain the reason on the development and domination of western beauty in Indonesia.

3.3 Post Independence

After independence, the discourse of Western beauty is still dominant. This can be seen from the shampoo ad published by *Majalah Wanita*, in July 1952 as shown in **Fig 2**. The ad still shows illustrations of women with Caucasian faces. The old order era (*Orde Lama*) was a transition period from the Dutch government to the Indonesian government so that the dominance of the Western beauty discourse is undoubtedly still left.



Fig 2



Fig 3

During the New Order (*Orde Baru*) Era, the discourse of Javanese beauty began to appear a little. This can be observed from the *Nyonya Meneer* herbal medicine advertisement published in *Kedaulatan Rakyat* newspaper April 05, 1987 (shown in **Fig 3**). The illustration display a woman with batik cloth and a face that no longer shows the Caucasian face.

During this time, beauty companies *Martha Tilaar Group* and *Mustika Ratu* were established. *Martha Tilaar Group* was founded in 1970 while *Mustika Ratu* was established in 1975. These two beauty companies are companies that aggressively campaign for Javanese beauty.

Martha Tilaar Group, through *Sariayu* products, always carries Indonesian trends. Martha Tilaar's founder even wrote a book called *Kecantikan Perempuan Timur*, published in 1999. She wrote in her book that in the 50s most Indonesian women recognised and adopted the beauty concept from European women. At that time traditional beauty was considered ancient, mystical, irrational, impractical and unscientific. Tilaar also revealed that in the 70s there is awareness to return to the wisdom developed by the ancestors in the form of herbal medicine.

3.4 Reformation Era

In the Reformation era, more beauty discourses emerged. Mainly because there are significant developments in the field of technology and information. The discourse of Western beauty still seems to dominate and Javanese beauty discourse also rival. There are many beauty producers besides Martha Tilaar and MustikaRatu in the market such as *Paragon Technology and Innovation* (PTI) who produce *Wardah* brand that initiated a halal beauty campaign also there is a Japanese company, *Mandom*, which established a subsidiary, *Mandom Indonesia*, with the *Pixy* brand that highlights Asian beauty.

In 2005 along with the entry of Korea's popular culture, a Korean beauty discourse emerged. The discourse has developed and now shifted the dominance of the discourse of Western beauty in Indonesia. This is shown in the *Pond's White Beauty* ad, starring Gita Gutawa with the claim “*putih cerah, berseri, cantik seperti Korea*”. According to Sari's [14] research, *Pond's White Beauty* ad shows stereotypes of Indonesian women's beauty portrayals. Now the standard of beautiful women is no longer a woman who looks like Western women but Korean women. Even Korean beauty products have entered the Indonesian market. Some have opened outlets in shopping centres in several big cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Yogyakarta and others. This shown on some creation of tutorial videos about “Korean Makeup Looks” using halal-certified cosmetics on Youtube. This phenomenon is one of the hybrid culture that happened in Indonesia [15].

There are some reasons on why Indonesia women really fond of Korean beauty trend. South Korea itself is a country with advanced beauty technology. Not only plastic surgery technology but Korean women's skincare methods are trends within Indonesian women who crave for healthy glowing skin. This skincare method was eventually followed by many Indonesian cosmetic manufacturers. It can be seen from the rise of beauty care products released by these cosmetic manufacturers [16].

Amid the dominance of Korean beauty discourse, there is one discourse that is also developing, called the halal beauty discourse. This discourse was campaigned by *Wardah* brand since 2002 and developed rapidly when the explosion of some Islamic-content shows in Indonesia. Now the brand is increasing its innovation by including Korean elements in their promotion. They invited Ayana Moon, a Muslim from South Korea as one of the models. If we look from the business perspective, this is a pretty smart move because *Wardah* can combine two trends that are currently quite influential in one promotion. On the other hand, this shows more about the domination of Korean beauty discourse because *Wardah* as a brand that has been carrying the trend of halal beauty uses this discourse as a tool to promote their products.

4 Conclusion

Based on Foucault's archaeological knowledge, the history of beauty discourse in Indonesia can be divided into four periods, (1) the era of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom, (2) pre-independence era, (3) post-independence era, and (4) reformation era. In Hindu-Buddhist era the discourse of beauty that developed depend on the king who rules at that time. While in pre-independence era, western beauty was the dominant one because during that time, Indonesi was under colonialism. In post independence era, western beauty still remain the dominant discourse because the colonial hegemony really affected Indonesian people but in the New Order (Orde Baru) the Javanese beauty began to develop through the industry of jamu. Western beauty and Javanese beauty still dominant in Reformation era but in 2005 when the Korean Wave hit Indonesia, the Korean beauty began to develop and now Korean beauty discourse was the dominant beauty discourse in Indonesia.

Beauty will forever be attached to women and become their identity. The meaning of beauty itself will always be different for each individual and always changes according to technological developments and times. Beauty discourse will continue to be created in various regions and will change according to those who hold roles in that field. The dominant discourse of beauty in Indonesia will also continue to evolve. In the past, the discourse of beauty in Indonesia was created depending on the party who rules politically. Now the beauty discourse can be created by the authorities in the field of technology and information. Western beauty discourse that has dominated Indonesia for more than three centuries can be displaced slowly by the Korean beauty discourse that just entered through cultural distribution. It is not impossible that someday the dominance of Korean beauty discourses will be displaced by new beauty discourses or other beauty discourses in Indonesia such as halal beauty discourses or perhaps by Indonesian beauty discourse itself.

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