

**THE CULTURAL APPROACH IN PROMOTING AGRICULTURAL EMIGRATION TO LAMPUNG
IN JAVA 1931-1940****Mutiara Agustina, Abd. Rahman Hamid, Aan Budianto**

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Abstract

This study aims to explain the promotion of emigration of the Javanese people to Lampung using a cultural approach. There are two main issues in this article: first, how early emigrants who had already settled in Lampung promoted the overseas land (tanah sabrang) in Java; second, how the Javanese cultural approach could attract the interest and trust of the Javanese people to emigrate. The method used in writing this article is the historical method, which includes the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, thus producing a historical narrative that is chronological, causal, and imaginative. The results of this research show that the cultural approach through sending back Javanese who had previously migrated to Lampung to return to Java, staging ketoprak performances, sending gamelan to Lampung as gifts, and featuring wayang figures in films about tanah sabrang, successfully captured the attention of the Javanese people and had a significant positive impact on the trust level of prospective emigrants who were to be relocated to the emigration land in Lampung.

Keywords: Emigration; Emigrants; Cultural Approach; Lampung; Java.**INTRODUCTION**

On April 15–16, 2025, a folk festival was held in Pringsewu, Lampung, to celebrate the 16th anniversary of Pringsewu Regency. The event featured various traditional art performances such as wayang kulit (shadow puppetry), kuda kepang (flat horse dance), reog, and several other performances (Hayat, 2025). This event reflects the strong cultural traditions that remain deeply rooted among the Javanese community in Lampung. Historically, this cultural bond has deep roots, tracing back to the period of emigration that took place during the Dutch colonial era.

In the early 1900s, the Dutch colonial government implemented an emigration policy as part of the Ethical Policy. This policy was intended to improve the welfare of the indigenous population, particularly farmers, following a long period of suffering caused by the cultuurstelsel (cultivation system), which had brought widespread poverty among them (Sondarika 2015, pp. 64-65). The implementation of emigration was not purely coercive but was also accompanied by cultural propaganda aimed at attracting the interest of the Javanese people to emigrate.

In a social context, culture is understood as a concept related to the way humans live, think, feel, believe, and act according to values considered appropriate. Thus, culture can be seen as a social phenomenon that reflects a society's identity. Jerald G. and Rober explain that culture is a shared mental program that determines an individual's response to their environment (Syakhrani & Kamil, 2022, p. 783).

Culture is viewed not as a complementary aspect but as a fundamental foundation that influences how individuals and groups behave and respond to a policy. During the colonial period, the promotion of Javanese emigration to Lampung did not rely solely on economic promises of vast land but also employed a cultural approach through the success stories of earlier emigrants, as well as the use of traditional media such as Ketoprak performances and wayang characters as appealing

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Article History | Submitted: 2 July, 2025 | Revised: 14 October, 2025 | Accepted: 6 December, 2026 | Publish: 5 January, 2026

HOW TO CITE (APA 6th Edition):

Agustina, Mutiara., Hamid, Abd. Rahman., Budianti, Aan. (2026). The Cultural Approach in Promoting Agricultural Emigration to Lampung in Java 1931-1940. *Juspi: Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam*. 9(2), page.329-340

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.30829/juspi.v9i2.25247>

elements in films about the “land across the sea.” Through these means, the government sought to build the trust and interest of the Javanese people in ways aligned with their familiar customs, symbols, and modes of communication.

As a response to demographic pressure on the island of Java, the Dutch colonial government designed a population relocation program from Java to less densely populated regions. This program, known as emigratie, became the early form of the transmigration policy in the early 20th century. In colonial documents, this program was also referred to as emigratieproof (Halwi Dahlan 2014, pp. 343-344). After Indonesia gained independence, the term emigration was replaced by transmigration (Prihatin 2013, p. 58). The idea of the Ethical Policy was first voiced by Van Deventer, a figure from the Dutch Liberal group, through his 1899 publication titled “Een Eereschuld” or “A Debt of Honor” (Deventer 1899, p. 205). In the article, Van Deventer stated that the Netherlands owed a moral debt to the people of the Dutch East Indies for all the suffering they had endured. This concept of a “debt of honor” became the foundation for the emergence of the Ethical Policy, including the emigration program.

The population density on the island of Java during the colonial period had led to a high rate of poverty in the region. To address this issue, the Dutch colonial government assigned H.G. Heyting to study the feasibility of relocating Javanese people to more habitable areas. In his 1903 report, Heyting recommended the island of Sumatra as the ideal destination for implementing the emigration program (Khoiriyah et al. 2019, p. 222). Following this recommendation, the Dutch government began relocating people from Java to the Lampung region. Lampung was chosen as the main destination because it had relatively easy access, a low population density, and abundant land availability, making it a strategic location for carrying out the emigration program. (Budianto, Mustofa, and Hasanah 2022, p. 5).

Gedong Tataan became the first location for the implementation of the emigration program in Lampung, beginning with the relocation of residents from Kedu, Central Java. In the initial phase, around 155 Javanese households were moved to this area (Asri 2022, pp. 126-127). The transmigration program was then continuously promoted by the colonial government, which in the long run contributed to the large Javanese population in Lampung that persists to this day. Several decades later, the global economic crisis of 1929 worsened the condition of farmers in Java, leading to widespread hardship (Zainun 2018, p. 117). In this situation, the colonial government was pressured to take immediate action. On the other hand, the earlier emigrants in Lampung faced a shortage of labor to harvest their crops and desired the presence of their relatives. In response to these conditions, the government eventually approved and reopened the emigration program under a self-supporting scheme.

In general, emigration is defined as the movement of people from one country to another. (Achsin and Rosalinda 2021, p. 3). However, in this study, the term emigration is used because the discussion focuses on the Dutch colonial period, during which the term transmigration was not yet known. The term transmigration itself was only introduced after Indonesia's independence. Therefore, although an older term is used, this study still refers to the contemporary meaning of the concept of population migration.

Based on the 2023 Population Census of Lampung Province, the total population was recorded at 9,269,110 people (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Lampung, 2024). The Javanese are the largest ethnic community in Lampung, most of whom arrived through emigration programs that took place from the colonial period up to the New Order era. Even today, around 70% of Lampung's total population consists of people of Javanese descent. Previous data from the 2018 Population Census recorded that Lampung's population at that time reached 8,370,485 people, with 70% of them being Javanese (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Lampung, 2019). When calculated, the Javanese population in Lampung in 2018 reached approximately 5,859,337 people (Putri, 2024).

There are five articles related to the discussion of emigration during the colonial period, focusing on the implementation of emigration and its consequences. However, these five journal articles do not specifically explain the promotion of emigration. The first article was written by

Budianto, Hasanah, and Mustofa (2022), the second article was written by Prameswari et al (2024), the third article is a thesis written by Suharno (2024), the fourth article was written by Putra (2019), and the last article was written by Amir (2020).

This study highlights the cultural approach as a medium to attract the interest of the Javanese people to willingly emigrate to Lampung. This writing is based on two main reasons. First, emigration is an important part of social history that requires serious attention in the narrative of Indonesian national history, particularly regarding the use of cultural approaches as a means of promotion. Second, the fact that the Javanese have now become the majority group in Lampung can only be understood by examining the history of their large scale migration in the early 20th century, particularly during the period of 1931–1940. Based on this background, this article seeks to answer two questions: first, what was the role of earlier emigrants in promoting emigration in Java? Second, why was the Javanese cultural approach a successful means used in the promotion of emigration?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs the historical method, which consists of four main stages in reconstructing past events: heuristics (source collection), source criticism (evaluation and comparison), interpretation (analysis of meaning), and historiography (historical writing) (Hamid & Majid, 2011). Primary sources were obtained from magazines, articles, and Dutch-language newspaper archives that discussed the emigration program. Several primary sources were used, including *Kolonisatie Bulletin* (1938–1939), the newspapers *De Locomotief* (1932) and *Telegramen* (1931), as well as an article written by H.G. Heyting a pioneer researcher of emigration in Lampung and the first head of colonization there titled *De Les van Wortelvast Gedong Tataan* (1938) in *De Indische Gids*. Other important sources include the book *De Javaansche Landbouwkolonisatie in de Buitengewesten* (1937) by Maassen, an agrarian affairs colonization advisor, and the report written by Jacobus van der Zwaal, a Dutch researcher, titled *Transmigratie van Javanen Naar de Buitengewesten* (1936). In addition, observations were also conducted on cultural artifacts brought by the Javanese to Lampung, which are now preserved in the Lampung Transmigration Museum. Subsequently, all these sources were selected, analyzed, and processed to form a historical narrative that is both chronological and causal. The discussion begins by tracing the role of earlier emigrants in the promotion process, followed by an examination of the cultural approaches used in the emigration promotion to attract the interest of the Javanese people to migrate to Lampung.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Early Emigrants in the Promotion of Emigration in Java

According to anthropology, culture is the totality of ideas, actions, and human creations within social life that are acquired and internalized through learning. The words budaya and kebudayaan originate from the Sanskrit term buddhi and its plural form buddhayah, which mean mind and intellect (Koentjaraningrat 1990, pp. 180-181). The British anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor defined culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by humans as members of society (Haviland 1985, p. 332).

In formulating a promotion strategy to encourage the Javanese to emigrate to Lampung, a cultural approach was chosen as the primary alternative. It is interesting to observe that Javanese culture in Lampung had already developed significantly even before Indonesia's independence. In promoting emigration, the colonial government utilized culture as a means of persuasion, one of which involved earlier emigrants (Javanese who had migrated to Lampung beforehand). Because of their shared background, these earlier emigrants easily became key figures in spreading their success stories to their relatives in Java.

Emigration in the 1930s experienced significant progress. The government intensified emigration propaganda or promotion by utilizing earlier emigrants who shared the same language

and culture to support the program. Several of these earlier emigrants were sent back to Java to share their success stories in the overseas land as firsthand testimonies that people could directly witness (Hamid, 2025e).

Convincing Javanese farmers to leave their homeland was not an easy task. They were generally reluctant to move due to their emotional attachment to their birthplace and their uncertainty about the future in a new land. This difficulty was addressed by providing concrete evidence of the fertile agricultural land in the overseas territory (KB, 1938b). To strengthen this promotion, earlier emigrants were brought from outside Java and sent back to their hometowns to share their experiences directly. However, the Javanese people often viewed these emigrants with suspicion. They believed that these envoys were exiled prisoners sent by the government, similar to noble figures who had been banished to remote regions and died in foreign lands, such as Sultan Hamengkubuwono II and Prince Diponegoro (Marinhandono 2008, p. 37; Dewi 2020, p. 157). Such fears and historical traumas made the promotion of emigration even more challenging.

In 1889, H.E.B. Sehalhausen published a small book titled *De Overbevolking op Java en Hare Gevolgen*, which discussed the issue of population density on the island of Java. In his work, Sehalhausen emphasized that population growth in Java had reached an alarming level, making it necessary to take immediate measures to relocate part of the population to the overseas territories in order to reduce demographic pressure (KB 1938b, pp. 1-5). This idea later became one of the key foundations for the Dutch colonial government in formulating the emigration policy as a solution to control population density in Java. Emigration from Java to other islands began in 1905, with the first relocation involving 155 families from the Kedu Residency to Lampung (Maassen, 1937, p. 4).

The Javanese who had migrated to the overseas lands never forgot their homeland. Likewise, the families they left behind in Java maintained strong ties with the emigrants. One of the ways they kept in touch was by exchanging letters to share news. In addition, earlier emigrants often returned to their hometowns with joy not only to reunite with their families but also to spread propaganda among the Javanese people, encouraging them to follow in their footsteps and emigrate to the overseas territories (P.S.J.A 1938, p. 4).

Emigration seemed to lose its momentum amid the crisis that struck in late 1929. However, during the recovery period in 1931, several Javanese individuals requested that their relatives be brought over to assist with agricultural activities in the overseas lands (KB 1938c, p. 3). This news then attracted the attention of the land affairs inspector, leading the government to launch a self-supporting emigration program that same year (Telegrammen 1931, p. 10). In this program, the government only covered the travel expenses of the emigrants and provided no further compensation once they arrived at the emigration site.

The living expenses of the new emigrants were covered by the earlier emigrants under an agreement that the newcomers would help them during the harvest season in exchange for wages, while also clearing new land for their own use. Mr. Bastiaans, the Inspector of Agrarian Affairs and Civil Service, requested that the Resident of Lampung conduct a preliminary investigation regarding the request of the earlier emigrants. The results of the investigation revealed that the desire of families in Java to join their relatives in Lampung was far greater than initially expected. After registration, it was found that more than a thousand families were willing to receive their relatives, provided that their arrival took place in February and March (Maassen 1937, p. 12). During this transitional period, many challenges had to be overcome, particularly those related to financial constraints, which became the main focus. Every guilder had to be used as efficiently as possible. In an explanatory note from 1932, it was recorded that 7,000 people were relocated to Lampung Regency at a transportation cost of Rp. 18,500,000, or less than 3 guilders per person (Locomotief, 1932).

To support the smooth implementation of emigration, the government actively promoted the prospects of life in the overseas lands (*Tanah Sabrang*). In 1932, the emigration area was designated in the village of Gedong Dalam, Sukadana (Hamid 2025, p. 10), and emigrants were transported free of charge to the existing settlements. They were warmly welcomed by earlier

emigrants and then worked to assist with the harvest, receiving a share of the crops as wages to cover their initial needs. In addition to clearing land and building simple houses, they also sought additional income on plantations or construction projects owned by earlier emigrants and European companies, and they would again receive harvest wages during the season. This system of crop-based wages had been in place since 1903. Beginning in 1906, voluntary emigration started to occur, some at the emigrants' own expense. Hundreds of emigrants who had settled in Lampung later returned to Java, indirectly promoting the success of the emigration program (Heijting 1938, p. 1114).

A village head who had arrived twenty years earlier stated that he initially owned only a small plot of land but now possessed five rice fields and lived comfortably. Therefore, he could no longer support new families arriving without capital. New emigrants who arrived during the harvest season could immediately work and meet their needs, but those arriving off-season became the responsibility of the earlier emigrants. To address this, the Agrarian Inspectorate collected the names and addresses of prospective emigrants and sent them to the Residents in Java. The Residents were asked to investigate the readiness of the emigrants' relatives in Gedong Tataan to migrate, as well as to hold meetings with district and regency heads to disseminate information about emigration opportunities in Lampung, particularly in densely populated areas (Maassen 1937, p. 12-13).

In February 1932, the Agrarian Inspectorate sent officers to Purwokerto, the initial center of emigration propaganda. However, the results were still limited, as many registered prospective emigrants were difficult to locate because they had moved, passed away, or were unwilling to emigrate. To strengthen this effort, an earlier emigrant who had settled for 20 years in Gedong Tataan was sent back to Java to find his relatives. There, he discovered that his younger sister, who had been a child at the time, was now married, while his mother had grown elderly.

During the first emigration promotion meeting, a former tenant expressed a desire to join his relatives in Gedong Tataan but was hindered by financial constraints. He left sadly, followed by several others who also faced monetary difficulties, while some remained to listen despite lacking funds. This created a new problem: how to handle prospective emigrants without relatives in Lampung. As a solution, the government negotiated with the resident emigrants to accommodate the newcomers. The response was positive; the emigrant residents agreed to receive them, provided they arrived during the harvest season and were willing to work, as that year's harvest was abundant and required significant labor. In the reactivated emigration program, to prevent losses for the earlier emigrants, the bawon system (harvest-wage payment) was implemented.

Emigration promotion meetings to Lampung were held again, this time including a Q&A session about the conditions there. Although all questions were answered clearly, only a few attendees were genuinely interested in relocating. At the next meeting, the strategy was changed. In 1932, the government invited Djajasentika back to Java due to his previous success in persuading residents to emigrate (Hamid 2025a, p. 10). He came from Gedong Tataan to fetch his family. In front of the audience, he recounted that three years earlier he had moved to Lampung with his son at his own expense. Although he owned land in Karanganyar, managing it with eight children was difficult. He had heard that fertile land was available for free in Lampung, and this proved true. By now, he had cleared five rice fields and had returned to bring his family. His appearance dressed in a neat black suit, carrying a keris, and a red handkerchief containing 150 guilders for travel expenses—made a strong impression. His successful and convincing presence caused many attendees to begin believing in and hoping for a better life in the overseas land (Maassen 1937, pp. 17-18).

After hearing Djajasentika's account, the prospective emigrants decided to depart immediately, eager to see the overseas land whose beauty they had often heard about. During the Q&A session, the audience asked Djajasentika questions about the various items they needed to bring. They were scheduled to travel to Lampung aboard a KPM ship. Upon arriving at their destination, some of the new emigrants participated in the bawon system (Maassen 1937, pp. 21-22).

At the beginning of the emigration program, irrigation was not a priority. However, as the number of emigrants increased and the need for stable agricultural output grew, irrigation development became essential. The Way Sekampung emigration was launched in 1932 with several hundred emigrants, primarily former contract workers from Teluk Betung (Hamid 2025a, p. 10). By the end of the year, the emigrant population had reached around 1,000 people. In 1932–1933, research in the Sukadana and Way Jepara areas prompted the decision to develop the Way Sekampung irrigation network. The government temporarily halted the flow of emigrants in 1933 because the land required a stable water supply. Once the area was irrigated, the number of emigrants increased rapidly, reaching 5,000 people. By the time dam construction began in 1935, the population had already exceeded 10,000. The government estimated that emigration would grow to 60,000 people, with an additional 10,000–15,000 emigrants arriving each year (Zwaal 1936, hlm. 322).

The role of earlier emigrants was crucial to the success of the government's emigration program. They served as the most tangible testimonies capable of convincing the Javanese population to migrate to other islands. Success stories from these earlier emigrants attracted many people to the overseas land. In fact, the government did not need to spend large sums on the program, as the earlier emigrants were willing to assist newcomers, provided the bawon system was used. Moreover, the arrival of emigrants played a role in irrigation development, thereby facilitating the advancement of agriculture in Lampung.

Cultural Approach among the Javanese Community

In addition to the success stories of earlier emigrants in promoting emigration in Java, the colonial government used Javanese culture as a means to instill confidence among the Javanese people. Ketoprak performances, the sending of gamelan as gifts, and well known wayang characters such as Semar, Petruk, and Gareng were employed as promotional tools.

The number of Javanese who emigrated to Sumatra with government assistance actually represented only a small percentage of the total Javanese population settled in the region. According to the 1930 population census, 1,229,930 Javanese lived in Sumatra. Of this number, only about 35,000 resided in emigration areas established with government support 28,500 in Gedong Tataan, 3,500 in Wonosobo, and several thousand others in Bengkulu. The current total of Javanese in Sumatra is likely lower, as many contract workers have returned to Java. From 1930 to several years afterward, around 45,000 Javanese were recorded as emigrating to Sumatra to settle in government-prepared agricultural settlement (Zwaal, 1936, p. 412). The use of a cultural approach in promoting emigration attracted significant interest from the Javanese population, reaching its peak in 1940 with a marked increase in emigration to Lampung.

The economic crisis in Java caused many farmers to lose their jobs or face layoffs. In contrast, conditions in Lampung were favorable, with large-scale harvests requiring additional labor. This situation encouraged the pioneers and veteran emigrants in Lampung to welcome new arrivals to assist with the harvest. To ensure the livelihoods of these newcomers, the bawon system was implemented a sharecropping arrangement in which laborers received one-quarter or one-fifth of the harvest they helped produce (Levang 2003, pp. 10–11).

Emigration promotion had a clear legal basis, namely the 1936 Emigration Act. This law was designed to strengthen government control over all emigration activities, including promotion and labor recruitment. According to Article 5, any form of outreach or information dissemination to prospective emigrants required government approval. Meanwhile, the recruitment of laborers to be sent outside Java also had to be conducted with government consent, as stipulated in Articles 6 and 7 (van Bolhuis, 1937). These provisions indicate that the approach was meticulously designed as part of a strategy to both control and convince the population of the benefits of relocating to emigration areas outside Java. In practice, the government also employed cultural methods to attract public attention, such as films infused with Javanese cultural elements. This aligned with the increasing support and interest from the government, bureaucracy, and society toward the

emigration program for Javanese farmers to areas beyond Java in recent years (Heijting 1938, p. 1106).

On January 29, 1937, the central government established a body called the Central Commissie voor Emigratie en Emigratie van Inheemschen, tasked with overseeing the emigration program. The commission was led by J.H.B. Kuneman, with F.A.E. Drossaers as Director of Internal Affairs (Binn), H.J. van Mook as Director of Economy, and C.C.J. Maassen as Secretary. The commission's main responsibility was to conduct propaganda to support the emigration program in cooperation with local governments. Various methods were employed to attract prospective emigrants, including publishing magazines and brochures, sending veteran emigrants to villages in Java, and organizing cultural performances such as ketoprak, ludruk, and screenings of the film *Tanah Sabrang* (Hamid 2025a, p. 10).

To ease the homesickness of Javanese emigrants in Lampung, the government took cultural measures to foster comfort and emotional attachment. One approach was naming the new villages after their original hometowns, such as Desa Bagelen in Gedong Tataan, the first emigration settlement. As a form of respect and remedy for longing, the emigrants also received a set of gamelan instruments from the Sultan of Yogyakarta. This gift was presented during a visit by several officials from Java to the Lampung Resident in early June. The visit was warmly received by the Javanese community in Lampung, who felt valued and remembered. Attending officials included the Regent of Bantul and Raden Ayu, the Wedana of Sleman, and the Assistant Wedana of Semin, representing the Sultan of Yogyakarta. The gamelan handover took place in Metro, beginning with a speech by the Regent in Malay and Javanese, and concluded with a song of gratitude accompanied by gamelan music, creating a moving and proud atmosphere (P.S.J.A 1938, pp. 5-6).



Figure 1: Javanese Gamelan from the Lampung Transmigration Museum collection

Source: Research documentation, 2025

Additionally, the Javanese emigrants who moved to Lampung brought various items as mementos to soothe homesickness, such as wayang golek and gamelan, which are hallmarks of Javanese culture. Beyond serving as remedies for longing, the wayang and gamelan were also regarded as religious symbols for conveying Islamic teachings. To this day, these cultural artifacts are well preserved at the Transmigration Museum in Pesawaran, Lampung, demonstrating the strong attachment of the Javanese people to their cultural heritage.



Figure 2: Javanese Wayang Golek from the Lampung Transmigration Museum collection

Source: Research documentation, 2025

The cultural approach in the form of ketoprak performances was also part of the promotion. Following the recommendation of the Gunung Kidul government, a ketoprak show was held in Gunung Kidul. The performance attracted around 3,000 viewers at the first show and approximately 7,000 at the second. The first show in Playen was performed by a ketoprak troupe from Yogyakarta, but the performance was unsatisfactory because the actors did not understand the meaning of emigration or what benefits farmers could gain by moving to the overseas land. The second performance, however, depicted the fortunes of emigrants in the overseas land and aimed to inspire their relatives to join them in relocating there (KB 1938d, p. 20).

The ketoprak performances were considered less effective in conveying the emigration message because the actors did not fully understand the content of the emigration campaign. As an alternative, on January 31, 1939, the film *Tanah Sabrang* was screened and officially introduced to the Governor-General and Mrs. van Starkenborgh Stachouwe. The film was produced by Mannus Franken, with a script by van der Kelk, Jonkers as advisor, and Magelang Regent R.A.A. Danoesoegondo as sound director. The film aimed to promote emigration in Java and beyond, designed to be easily understood by the general public. Since December 1938, *Tanah Sabrang* had been shown in various villages across the Javanese residency and successfully sparked public interest in emigrating, as it depicted emigrants living happily and prosperously (KB 1939, pp. 1-5).

The film was made in a simple and easily understandable manner because it was intended for farmers, many of whom had never seen a film and were still illiterate. Compared to modern films, its appearance was naturally very different, adjusted to the educational limitations and understanding of the people at that time. The film was designed so that viewers could feel as if they were experiencing the journey to the overseas land themselves, creating a strong emotional experience. It was crafted with a close cultural nuance, incorporating wayang characters such as Semar, Petruk, and Gareng, who not only entertained but also provided humor amid the propaganda message. Emotion-filled scenes, such as farewells at the station or harbor, were interspersed with appearances of Semar to lighten the mood and alleviate sorrow (KB 1939, p. 6).

The plot of the film “*Tanah Sabrang*” is as follows: One morning, Sakrama and his son Pardi went to the village office to inquire about the emigration recruitment schedule to the overseas land. Sakrama was eager to move for a more prosperous life, as he felt conditions in Java were increasingly difficult, and he worried that Pardi would struggle to make a living in the future. However, his desire was not fully supported by the villagers. Many objected because Sakrama was known as a smart and respected farmer. One of them, Kario, even doubted Sakrama’s explanation and the village head’s statements. To overcome this skepticism, the village head organized a wayang kulit performance as propaganda. Characters such as Semar, Petruk, and Gareng appeared, with Semar acting as the puppeteer in the story *Wayang Wasiat*, a tale depicting Kario’s future success in the overseas land, intended to inspire him to emigrate.

At a gathering for the recruitment of prospective emigrants, 300 families registered to depart for the overseas land. Among them, a former contract laborer briefly attended but left upon realizing that the event was not intended for him. Soon after, an elderly man named Djajasentika arrived, having just returned from the overseas land to fetch his family. He brought 150 guilders for travel expenses. Djajasentika, a community leader from Central Java, was known for his wisdom and concern for his children’s future. Before migrating, he handed over his position and rice fields to his eldest son; his second son had become a police minister, and his third son accompanied him to the overseas land. Recruitment continued, and both Sakrama and Kario were accepted. Meanwhile, Semar and his two children also wished to go, but since the children were unmarried, they were initially considered ineligible. Nevertheless, they were allowed to participate because they served as instructors in the emigration propaganda.

Sakrama finally departed for the overseas land after bidding farewell to his parents with feelings of sadness and emotion. The prospective emigrants gathered and carried their belongings toward the harbor. Upon arriving at the dock, the atmosphere was bustling and chaotic, as for many, it was their first time seeing a sea vessel, evoking fear and hesitation. However, these feelings gradually faded as they boarded the ship, which was equipped with safety gear and provisions. As the ship began to sail, sadness returned, enveloping the emigrants leaving their homeland. In this emotional moment, the character Semar is depicted pushing the ship, symbolizing spirit and hope for a new future in the overseas land.

Upon arriving in the overseas land, the new emigrants were warmly welcomed by those who had settled earlier. They were accommodated and assisted in adapting, including in their work, through the bawon system, which provided a share of the harvest as wages. When the harvest season arrived, the newcomers were amazed to see rice stalks much larger than those they were used to in Java, to the point that the ani-ani tools they brought were not strong enough to cut them. After occupying the provided houses, they immediately had enough rice supplies to last seven months. They also gratefully received the kitchen utensils provided by the colonial government.

However, a new challenge soon arose: they had to clear land still covered with dense trees. Nevertheless, once the trees began to fall, Sakrama managed to build his first hut on that land of hope. Meanwhile, Kario received the most difficult plot, but his friends helped him. One day, while Sakrama was in Kario's yard, Semar, Petruk, and Gareng arrived, intending to return to Java. They asked whether life in the overseas land had made the emigrants happy. Sakrama and Kario acknowledged their happiness, although Kario complained about the harsh terrain. He even asked Semar to use his magical powers to clear the large trees. However, Semar refused, emphasizing that true magic is not a mystical object but the belief in happiness and the hope for a better life in the new land.

Indeed, two years after settling in the overseas land, Sakrama's life had transformed dramatically. He became a successful farmer, able to buy buffaloes, build irrigation channels, and cultivate his own fertile fields. His buffaloes plowed the fields as a symbol of his progress. One day, while plowing, his son called him because his wife was about to give birth, and a baby boy was born an event that marked a significant turning point in his life. Known as a diligent, intelligent, and virtuous farmer, Sakrama became a role model and was eventually appointed village head. At the end of the story, he is depicted living a peaceful and prosperous life. Sitting with his wife on the veranda, he gazes over the vast fields with chickens and ducks roaming freely and granaries full of rice. In this serene moment, Sakrama reflects on the difficult early days when he arrived empty-handed. With deep emotion, he tells his wife, "Let us name our child Bedja," as a symbol of fortune and hope.

The story of Wayang Wasiat, part of the emigration film titled "Tanah Sabrang", came to an end. As a finale, the film was accompanied by the resonant sound of gongs and showcased beautiful mountain landscapes, creating a solemn and inspiring atmosphere. In the final moment, the character Semar turned to the audience watching the film at the village hall and asked whether they were convinced of the happiness that awaited them in Tanah Sabrang. In unison, the audience replied, "*Inggih*," expressing their belief and hope for a better future. With that response, the film concluded (Franken 1939, hlm. 7-9).



Figure 3: Photograph of the community watching the film Tanah Sabrang

Source: (KB, 1939)

The screening of the film *Tanah Sabrang* took place in several regions and received an extraordinary response from the public. In the Plumpon area, the audience was estimated to reach around 80,000 people. For more than two and a half hours, viewers watched the film attentively in a quiet and orderly atmosphere. Only during a few humorous scenes involving Semar and his children did the audience burst into laughter briefly, before returning to a calm focus on the film. When asked about the film's content, most of the farmers replied that it depicted life in Lampung, even though the film did not explicitly mention the name Lampung. The second screening took place in Purworejo, with an estimated audience of around 45,000, and elicited the same response. Viewers understood that the film illustrated how the emigrants achieved a prosperous life in Lampung. Meanwhile, the third screening was held in Wonosobo and watched by approximately 20,000 people (Franken 1939, p. 10).

The film employed a strong cultural approach by featuring wayang characters such as Semar, Petruk, and Gareng. Their presence added a refreshing touch of humor, especially during the more somber parts of the story, such as when the train and ship departed from Java. These characters appeared to entertain and strengthen the audience's emotions. Just as in the wayang tradition they accompany the heroes, in the film they are depicted as companions to the Javanese people beginning a new life in *Tanah Sabrang* (Hamid 2025d, p. 10).

The film *Tanah Sabrang* became an effective tool in supporting the emigration program, as it was able to stimulate public interest in relocating to the overseas land. With its local cultural nuances, touching storyline, and simple yet powerful visuals, the film successfully created a positive image of emigration as a pathway to a more prosperous life. The results were evident by the end of the 1940s, when the total number of Javanese emigrants was estimated to have reached around 2,111,000 people, with approximately 145,000 of them settling in Lampung, while the rest were dispersed across other regions such as Sumatra, Southeast Kalimantan, and Sulawesi (Burger, 1970, p. 88)

CONCLUSION

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that the success of the emigration program did not rely solely on the colonial government's policies, but also on the approach used in its promotion, namely a cultural approach. The active role of earlier emigrants as informal information agents through their testimonies and visits back to their hometowns, spreading stories of success in the overseas land helped shape a positive perception of life in Lampung. This narrative was then utilized by the colonial government as a propaganda tool to reinforce the image of emigration as a solution to poverty and limited agricultural land in Java. The program's success demonstrates a synergy between colonial structural policies and the dynamics of Javanese farmers aspiring for a better life. Additionally, ketoprak performances, the sending of gamelan as gifts to Lampung, and the film *Tanah Sabrang* by Mannus Franken served as attractive elements in promoting emigration. Presented with strong Javanese cultural nuances and featuring wayang characters such as Semar, Petruk, and Gareng who were easily understood, the film subtly yet effectively conveyed propaganda, building trust and touching the hearts of prospective emigrants who were still hesitant to move to the overseas land. This strategy successfully won over prospective emigrants to Lampung, and to this day, the Javanese remain the majority ethnic group in Lampung Province.

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