

FROM EMANCIPATION TO WOMEN'S EDUCATION: AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF R.A. KARTINI'S THOUGHT 1899–1904

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution of Raden Ajeng Kartini's thinking from the concept of emancipation to the establishment of a school for girls during the period 1899–1904. The research is motivated by the conditions of Javanese society during the colonial era, which was still influenced by patriarchal culture and feudal customs that restricted women's freedom and access to education. The study aims to explain the emergence of Kartini's critical consciousness, the development of her ideas on emancipation, and the realization of her ideas through education. The research employs Kuntowijoyo's historical method, which encompasses heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography, utilizing colonial archives, Kartini's letters, contemporary newspapers, and various supporting literature. The results of the study indicate that the experience of being confined fostered the growth of Kartini's critical awareness of gender injustice, which evolved into ideas of emancipation emphasizing freedom, equal rights, and education as a means to elevate women's dignity. These ideas were realized through the establishment of a girls' school in Rembang as a concrete manifestation of her struggle. This study demonstrates that the transformation of Kartini's thinking from criticism of gender inequality to educational practice contributes to the fields of intellectual history, women's historiography, and the history of education in Indonesia.

Keywords: Emancipation; Women's education; Kartini.

INTRODUCTION

From the 19th century through the early 20th century, women's lives on the island of Java were shaped by a social system heavily influenced by patriarchal culture, resulting in their access to education, freedom, and public spaces remaining severely limited (Indriani & Yustisia, 2023). A patriarchal social structure places men in a position of greater power in various aspects of life, both within the family and in society at large. In such situations, women are often viewed as having limited roles, so their opportunities, particularly in education, freedom of expression, and participation in public life, become severely restricted (Padang, Parhamah, Kinanti, Tarigan, & Wijaya, 2025). This situation deprived women of the freedom to make their own life choices, including regarding education. Men, as heads of households, were typically responsible for their children's education. At that time, boys were given higher priority in education, as they were considered the heirs to the family name and the primary breadwinners. On the other hand, women were raised to fulfill their domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers, so formal education was not considered particularly important for them (Hikmah, Sriyono, & Taufik, 2023).

In Javanese culture, women's roles are often defined by the phrase "*manak, masak, macak*". This phrase describes women's primary duties as bearing children (*manak*), managing household needs, particularly cooking (*masak*), and maintaining their appearance (*macak*). This concept reflects a traditional view that confines women solely to the domestic sphere. As a result, women were considered to have no need for roles outside the household, and their education was therefore deemed unimportant. This view subsequently became one of the factors that hindered women's development during that era (Hapsari, 2017).

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These circumstances are also reflected in the letters written by Raden Ajeng Kartini. In one of her letters to Mrs. R.M. Abendanon-Mandri in August 1900, "I have heard and seen so much, far too much, that my heart aches, and it spurs me on to fight against these evil traditional customs that have taken root and have become a curse on women and children!" (Artanti, 2024). This statement illustrates the depth of Kartini's concern regarding a social system that restricted women's freedom. Tradition began to be viewed as an obstacle to "progress," rather than as something that developed naturally and deserved respect. As time went on, it became increasingly clear that freeing oneself from the shackles of ancient traditions was necessary to achieve progress (Kartodirdjo, 2014).

Raden Ajeng Kartini was a figure who played a key role in raising awareness of the need for social change during her time. Through her ideas and activism, Kartini sought to change society's views of women and fought for equality between women and men, particularly in accessing education and developing intellectual abilities (Khamdiah, 2016). Her ideas regarding equality are a tangible manifestation of women's emancipation. Kartini believed that women have the same rights to learn, express their opinions, and participate in social life. In the historiography of Indonesian women, R.A. Kartini holds an important position as a figure who marked the emergence of women's awareness in the struggle for access to education and equality. In its early stages, Indonesian historiography primarily portrayed Kartini as a heroine of women's emancipation who played a pivotal role in raising women's awareness through her letters. However, developments in women's history have revealed a shift in perspective. Kartini is no longer understood solely as a symbol of emancipation, but also as a thinker whose ideas emerged from the social, cultural, and colonial context of her time and influenced the development of women's education in Indonesia. On that basis, this study places Kartini within the framework of intellectual history by tracing the evolution of her thought, from her critique of gender inequality to its realization through the establishment of educational institutions for women during the period 1899–1904 (Amini, 2018). This is important because humans are social beings who cannot survive without interacting with others (Hikmah et al., 2023).

Numerous studies have been conducted on Kartini's ideas. Endar Kusmiyati et al. highlight Kartini's ideas on gender equality and their influence on the development of women's education in Java (Kusmiyati, Jurahman, & Lestari, 2024). Abimayu and Seprina examine Kartini's feminist ideas in her letters as a form of resistance against patriarchal culture (Abimayu & Seprina, 2023). Meanwhile, Putri Intan Permata Sari examined the influence of Kartini's ideas on the transformation of patriarchal culture within family settings in Jepara. However, these studies still focus on emancipation, feminism, and the impact of Kartini's ideas on society, and have not yet conducted an in-depth analysis of the process by which Kartini's ideas evolved from social criticism of gender inequality to the establishment of educational institutions for women (Sari, P.I.P. 2023).

Given these circumstances, this study offers a novel analysis of the development of Kartini's thought as a historical process that began with a critical awareness of gender injustice, evolved into ideas of emancipation, then identified education as a means of social change, and was ultimately realized through the establishment of a school for girls during the period 1899–1904. Using an intellectual history approach, this study seeks to demonstrate the relationship between ideas and actions in Kartini's struggle.

This study aims to explain the process by which Kartini developed a critical awareness of gender inequality, the evolution of her ideas on women's emancipation, and the realization of those ideas through education and the establishment of a school for girls. To achieve these objectives, this study involves four key steps: heuristics as the source-gathering phase; verification or critical analysis of sources; interpretation of historical facts; and historiography as the historical writing phase, utilizing colonial archives, Kartini's letters, contemporary newspapers, and various relevant bibliographic sources (Kuntowijoyo, 2013).

RESEARCH METHOD

According to Kuntowijoyo, the historical method consists of a series of steps carried out systematically by historians to scientifically reconstruct past events based on available historical

sources. In historical research, there are four key steps that must be followed: heuristics (the collection of sources), verification or source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (the writing of history) (Kuntowijoyo, 2013). The heuristic phase involved collecting primary sources such as the colonial archives of J.H. Abendanon, obtained from ANRI (National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia). Contemporary newspapers such as: *De Locomotief*, July 25, 1903; *De Waarheid*, April 9, 1988; and *Nieuwe Apeldoornsche Courant*, September 2, 1918, accessed via the Delpher website, as well as relevant secondary sources, such as books and journals that discuss R.A. Kartini's ideas.

Source verification was conducted through external criticism to test the authenticity of the sources and internal criticism to assess the validity and accuracy of the information contained in those sources. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through historical interpretation of primary and secondary sources. Data that has undergone source criticism is analyzed comparatively and contextualized within the social, cultural, and political conditions of Javanese society during the colonial period to identify the development of Kartini's ideas on emancipation and education. The next stage is interpretation, which involves interpreting historical facts from various sources to gain a more comprehensive understanding. This interpretation connects the evolution of Raden Ajeng Kartini's thought to the social conditions of Javanese society during the colonial period. An intellectual history approach is employed to examine the development of Kartini's thought within the social, cultural, and colonial contexts that shaped the emergence of her ideas. Through this approach, the shift in Kartini's thinking from criticism of gender inequality toward education as a means of social change is analyzed as a historical process that evolved in accordance with the context of her time. Historiography is employed by presenting the research findings in the form of a systematic historical narrative to explain the development of Kartini's ideas, from the emergence of the concept of emancipation to its realization in the form of education for women (Kuntowijoyo, 2013).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Kartini's Critical Awareness

After completing her elementary education, Kartini entered a period of seclusion as part of the tradition of Javanese aristocratic families. From 1892 to 1896, Kartini spent this time in seclusion alone in a rural district, experiencing a life so restricted that she likened it to "living in hell." This seclusion continued for the next two years alongside her younger sister, Roekmini, and was later joined by Kardinah, until all three were finally released in 1898 (Djojonegoro, 2024). Kartini experienced profound emotional distress during her seclusion. She felt torn between traditional life, which restricted her freedom, and her desire for a more progressive and free life. This situation reflected Kartini's inner struggle between traditional values and modern ideas. Although she tried to find a way out of these limitations, Kartini was unable to free herself from the customary rules that bound her life. In addition to her experience in seclusion, Kartini's intellectual development was also influenced by her access to reading materials and her correspondence with friends in Europe. Through this correspondence, Kartini had the opportunity to engage in dialogue about education, the status of women, and developments in Western society, thereby broadening her perspective on the issues faced by Javanese women (Maziyah & Dwi Trivia, 2020).



Figure 1. "Kartini, Kardinah en Roekmini, vermoedelijk te Semarang". Source: (KITLV, 1902)

Life in the Jepara Principality reflected a blend of aristocratic luxury and the strong traditional bonds that governed daily life. As the daughter of a regent, Kartini lived surrounded by

various amenities and the services of the court servants. However, behind that comfort, she had to adhere to a strict set of rules and etiquette. Everything from the way she spoke and walked to her attitude toward older family members was dictated by norms that could not be violated. For Kartini, who had a strong desire to think and act freely, this situation felt like a “golden prison.” Although she lived in an aristocratic environment that still strongly adhered to Javanese customs, her father's position as Regent of Jepara gave Kartini access to colonial officials, European families, and a variety of books, newspapers, and modern ideas that were unavailable to most Javanese women. Kartini often questioned various rules she considered irrational, such as the obligation of a younger sibling to show excessive deference to an older sibling simply because of an age difference, or the expectation that women should always be passive, keep their heads bowed, and limit their self-expression in public (Kurniawan, 2026).

As time went on, Kartini began to realize that her rebellious attitude and constant sadness were unable to change the circumstances she faced. This realization prompted Kartini to use her time more productively, through reflection and critical thinking about the various issues arising from her secluded life. Isolated from the outside world, Kartini began to question the traditional customs that society had long taken for granted. Her innate curiosity and inquisitive nature continued to flourish. Kartini sought to gain a deep understanding of the nature of the old customs prevalent among the Javanese nobility, particularly those traditions that restricted women's freedom. She questioned why noblewomen had to be “dipingit” from a young age, live in isolation, and be deprived of the opportunity to interact with the outside world. Through this process of reflection, a critical awareness began to take root within Kartini regarding the injustices faced by women of her time (De waarheid, 1988).

“I have heard and seen so much, far too much, that my heart aches, and it spurs me on to fight against the evil traditional customs that have taken root and have become a curse upon women and children!” August 1900 To Mrs. R.M. Abendanon-Mandri (Artanti, 2024).

In her reflections, Kartini began to understand that the tradition of *pingitan* was part of an ancient custom that had long been practiced among the Javanese nobility. Noblewomen were regarded as figures of great honor and value, and thus their movements within the home had to be guarded and restricted. This view led to women being treated as precious objects that had to be “secured” and kept away from the outside world so that the family's dignity could be preserved. On the other hand, men enjoyed greater freedom and a more privileged position in social life. From a young age, boys were given the opportunity to study, socialize, and prepare themselves to become heads of households. In addition, men also had the right to choose their own life partners and were even permitted to have more than one wife through the practice of polygamy, which was accepted by the customs of the time. For Kartini, married life for women at that time brought more suffering than happiness. This was because men were allowed to have more than one wife through the practice of polygamy, and some even had relationships with other women outside of marriage. These conditions subjected women to social injustice and limited their ability to make choices or refuse treatment they considered harmful (Pratidina & Pasaribu, 2023).

Kartini was known as a figure with a critical mind and a keen awareness of the social conditions around her. Her life experiences, marked by many limitations, combined with the reality that women were often treated unfairly in society, prompted Kartini to gain a deeper understanding of the causes of these inequalities (Ali & Wachidah, 2017). The social conditions that relegated women to a subordinate position did not cause Kartini to resign herself to her fate; rather, they sparked a drive within her to question the various values and norms of the time. Through her reflections, Kartini began to focus her attention on the issue of women's status in society. She questioned why women were often treated as objects of men's pleasure and denied the space to express their own thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Kartini believed that women should be granted equal recognition as individuals possessing rights, status, and dignity as human beings (Ali & Wachidah, 2017).

Furthermore, Kartini also questioned the attitude of men who viewed women as weak and subject to being treated however they pleased. Women seemed to be regarded merely as an accessory to men's lives, without the freedom to make their own life choices. These questions reveal that Kartini was beginning to recognize the gender inequality that was deeply rooted in the customs and society of that time. Kartini's critical awareness became the starting point for the emergence of emancipatory thought, which subsequently drove her struggle to fight for women's equal rights through education (Hasbi, 2026)

Kartini's determination to challenge old traditions that were considered detrimental to women grew stronger over time. However, Kartini was still searching for the right way to address the situation. Through deep reflection and critical thinking, Kartini began to analyze the reasons why feudal customs had persisted for so long in society (Pradita, 2020). Kartini then realized that one of the main factors contributing to the persistence of this tradition was women's tendency to accept their circumstances without putting up a fight. Women rarely defied customary rules because they feared the consequences they would face (Karkono, Maulida, & Rahmadiyah, 2020). One of the greatest fears is the possibility of being divorced by one's husband. Although divorce can free women from domestic pressures, it actually creates new problems, namely the loss of financial security and an uncertain future. It is this situation that leads many women to choose to stay and submit to prevailing customary rules (Djojonegoro, 2024).

Through various readings and stories shared by figures such as Mrs. Ovink (the wife of the Assistant Resident of Jepara), Kartini also read extensively the works of European authors as well as Pandita Ramabai's writings on women's education in India. These readings introduced her to the ideas of freedom of thought, education, and equal rights, thereby encouraging Kartini to compare the conditions of Javanese women with those of women in other countries (Djojonegoro, 2024). This modern world, which was rapidly developing in the West, presented a picture of a more advanced and open way of life compared to the social conditions experienced by Javanese women at that time. Kartini then observed differences in the treatment of men and women in the field of education (Asmarani, 2017). Boys were given the opportunity to attend school and continue their education to higher levels, even as far as the Netherlands. Meanwhile, girls were largely confined to the home and did not have the same access to education. As a result, boys became more advanced in knowledge and thinking, while girls remained behind due to a lack of educational opportunities.

This situation has led to a widening gap between men and women in social life. Kartini observed that women were often placed in a lower position than men due to limited access to education. Based on this observation, Kartini concluded that education is a crucial means of improving women's status, dignity, and role in society.

Emancipation as an Idea

In a letter written by Kartini to E.H. Zeelandelaar on May 25, 1899, "Even in my childhood, the word 'emancipation' rang in my ears. That word held a meaning far beyond my understanding, and it awakened in me a constantly growing and evolving desire for freedom and independence a desire to be self-reliant. The circumstances around me broke my heart, and this pain made me long for the rebirth of this nation." (Artanti, 2024). The term "emancipation" essentially refers to efforts to free oneself from various forms of domination or bondage. For Kartini, women's emancipation was a struggle to free women from the shackles of Javanese tradition and culture, which at that time restricted their freedom of movement. This idea is reflected in the various letters she wrote, which contain critical views on the status of women in society. Through her ideas, Kartini fought for women's right to live more independently, particularly in gaining equal access to education, and opposed the practice of polygamy, which she considered detrimental to women (Mustikawati, 2015).

The idea of emancipation that developed in Kartini's thinking cannot be separated from the social conditions of Javanese society at that time. Kartini believed that the customs and patriarchal culture prevalent in Javanese society had placed women in a subordinate position and restricted their freedom in social life. This was evident in the societal view that prioritized sons because they

were considered capable of upholding the family's honor, as reflected in the expression "mendem jero lan mikul duwur." (Sumarti & Hakim, 2022). This situation indicates that men were accorded a more privileged status than women. Kartini believed that women's emancipation meant the struggle to free women from various forms of oppression and cultural control that restricted their lives. The emancipation Kartini fought for was not intended to oppose men, but rather to advocate for women's rights to equal opportunities, particularly in the fields of education and the freedom to determine their own futures. In her letters, Kartini emphasized the importance of women receiving an education and rejected practices that were detrimental to women, such as polygamous marriage and restrictions on women's freedom.

Kartini's views on emancipation were also influenced by her life experiences while growing up in her hometown of Jepara. The opportunity to receive an education and interact with Dutch children broadened Kartini's perspective on the outside world and introduced her to modern values that differed from the Javanese customs she had been raised with. These experiences made Kartini aware of the backwardness of the indigenous community, particularly the low status of women in social life. This realization sparked a strong desire within Kartini to learn, acquire knowledge, and advance her people through education. Her aspiration to become a teacher stemmed from her belief that education was a vital path to transforming society.

In addition to expressing her ideas through her writing, Kartini also sought to encourage young women from aristocratic and official families in various regions to join forces in the struggle to elevate women's dignity. Kartini hoped that women could work together to bring about change in social conditions that were still influenced by feudal customs. However, this call did not receive a widespread response because many women had become accustomed to living within a system that favored men, leading them to accept their circumstances without resistance.

Nevertheless, Kartini realized that, in fact, many women felt dissatisfied and suffered as a result of these conditions. In her letter to Stella on August 23, 1900, she wrote, "Having grown accustomed to a feudal system that favors men, women simply accept their fate. However, that does not mean they do not face difficulties. All the women I know complain about the current conditions. However, hatred alone will not help. Action is needed! Rise up, mothers and young women! To change this unbearable situation, let's work together." (Artanti, 2024). The ideas of women's emancipation put forward by Kartini later became a crucial foundation for her struggle to improve the status of women through education and social change. These ideas were subsequently compiled in *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* and became one of the key foundations for the development of the women's emancipation movement in Indonesia.

Education and Efforts to Establish Schools

Kartini viewed education as the primary path for women to gain freedom of thought, improve their quality of life, and achieve equality in society. For Kartini, the underdevelopment of Javanese women during the colonial era was caused not only by strong patriarchal customs and culture but also by women's limited access to education. Through a collection of letters she wrote, later published as *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* (After Darkness Comes Light), Kartini emphasized that women have the right to an education, to broaden their horizons, and to have the freedom to choose their own path in life. The discourse on women's emancipation in Indonesia evolved from these ideas (Padang et al., 2025).

Kartini believed that women's education was crucial because women would eventually become the primary educators within the family. A mother plays a major role in shaping a child's character, morals, and mindset from an early age. Therefore, women need to receive a proper education so they can provide sound guidance and set a good example for the next generation. According to Kartini, women who lack knowledge will struggle to raise their children properly. Thus, education for women is not only beneficial for themselves but also contributes to the progress of the family, society, and the nation. Furthermore, education is a means of liberating women from backwardness, injustice, and dependence. Educated women are better able to think critically, recognize their rights, and determine the course of their lives. In Kartini's view, women play a role not only as homemakers but also as bearers of civilization. Through education, women can become

pioneers of social change and participate in creating a more advanced, just, and knowledgeable society (Kartoppo, 1990).

This line of thinking led Kartini to pay close attention to the education system during the colonial era. She believed that the education system implemented by the Dutch colonial government did not provide equal opportunities to the indigenous population, especially women. Education was still largely reserved for certain groups and was often differentiated based on social status, race, or gender. As a result, the majority of the indigenous population remained underdeveloped and struggled to find opportunities for growth. Kartini rejected the notion that the indigenous people were incapable of progress. In her view, this underdevelopment was not caused by a lack of ability among the indigenous people, but rather by the unequal distribution of educational opportunities (Sari, 2019).

Kartini's ideas regarding the importance of women's education caught the attention of J.H. Abendanon, Director of Education for the Dutch East Indies. The relationship between Abendanon and the family of Raden Mas Adipati Ario Sosroningrat developed through correspondence. Through this relationship, Abendanon gained various insights into the conditions of Javanese women and the importance of establishing schools for indigenous women. Previously, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje had also suggested that Abendanon establish a relationship with the daughter of the Regent of Jepara, Raden Ajeng Kartini. This suggestion was considered appropriate because Kartini was known as a native woman with modern ideas and lofty aspirations to advance Javanese society through women's education (Djojonegoro, 2024).

Through various explanations he received from Kartini and her family, Abendanon came to better understand that Javanese women, especially those from the nobility, still faced many restrictions due to strong feudal customs. This understanding led Abendanon to conclude that Kartini's ideas regarding women's education were well-founded. As a supporter of Ethical Policy, Abendanon believed that the colonial government had a duty to expand education for the indigenous population. The influence of Kartini's ideas was later evident in Circular Letter No. 15336, dated November 20, 1900, which Abendanon sent to the district chiefs in Java and Madura. The letter requested opinions and suggestions regarding plans to establish schools for indigenous women, particularly those from the aristocracy (Djojonegoro, 2024).

These ideas did not remain merely at the conceptual level; Kartini put them into practice through concrete actions. In Jepara, Kartini had already taken the first steps by establishing a small school in her neighborhood. The school was intended primarily for indigenous girls, who at that time had very limited opportunities to receive a formal education. Through teaching and learning activities, Kartini provided basic knowledge, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as practical skills that would be useful in her students' daily lives. The establishment of a small school in Jepara demonstrates that Kartini's struggle was not merely a critique of tradition and social injustice, but was also realized through educational practices. For Kartini, education was a means to liberate women from backwardness and dependence. By receiving an education, women were expected to develop their thinking skills, improve their quality of life, and play a greater role in their families and communities. Although the school was still modest and had a limited number of students, its existence marked the first step toward realizing Kartini's vision of advancing women through education (Arifah & Novita, 2023).

The progress of the school in Jepara can be seen in Kartini's letter to Mrs. R.M. Abendanon-Mandri dated July 4, 1903, which reads: "Madam, we have begun our work. We are grateful to Sir for suggesting that we start immediately, even though we do not yet have teaching certificates. We did not expect it to be easy to get started. Our first student is the daughter of the most devout civil servant in this area. We had previously spoken with the child's parents, and they finally sent their daughter to us." (Artanti, 2024). In the letter, Kartini explained that the educational program she had started with her two younger sisters, Kardinah and Rukmini, was beginning to gain acceptance from the community. The students who attended came from various backgrounds, including the children of employees and the daughters of local officials. The fact that parents trusted Kartini

enough to entrust their children to her showed that the idea of women's education was beginning to gain attention and support from the surrounding community.

As her wedding to the Regent of Rembang, Raden Mas Adipati Ario Djojoadingrat, approached, Kartini remained determined to continue her educational journey. In a letter to Mrs. M.C.E. Ovink-Soer in 1903, she wrote, "My future husband will support my work. And I will continue to study even after I'm married. Unfortunately, I have to leave our school, but Rukmini and my younger sisters will continue running it. I hope to be able to carry on this work in Rembang. If parents previously hesitated to entrust their children to two unmarried young women, once I am married and leading a school, those concerns will surely be put to rest. My marriage will bring benefits to our cause." (Artanti, 2024). Kartini stated that her fiancé supported her aspirations. Although she had to leave the school she had founded in Jepara, Kartini hoped to continue that work in Rembang. Her fiancé's support was a major motivator for Kartini to expand women's education more broadly (De locomotief, 1903).



Figure 2. "Kartini met haar echtgenoot Raden Adipati Djojoadingrat, regent van Rembang". Source: (KITLV, 1903)

After getting married on November 8, 1903, and settling in Rembang, Kartini began to put her ideas into practice by opening a simple learning center for women. Located east of the Rembang Regency Office, this educational facility served as a place of learning for girls, particularly those who previously had not had adequate opportunities to receive a basic education. In her letter to Abendanon on December 11, 1903, she wrote, "I hope to open our little school in January. We have not yet found a good teacher, so I will teach the classes myself. If something unexpected happens and prevents me from doing so, one of my sisters will take over my work until I am able to resume it." (Artanti, 2024)

The educational activities organized by Kartini in Rembang subsequently expanded and garnered public attention. In her letter to Abendanon, dated December 11, 1903, in Rembang, she wrote, "The parents are so confident and have asked us to take their children. This is our opportunity. We must get started. In a little while, I'll write to you at length about our plans. I'm absolutely certain that the school for girls, which will operate out of our home under the guidance of a European teacher as principal, will be a success. We have great plans, and we'll do whatever it takes to be able to discuss this with you both in person." (Artanti, 2024). The number of students continued to grow, including among women who wanted to gain knowledge and skills. Some parents even sent their children to live and study in the regency. In addition, interest in the education movement led by Kartini also came from local officials. This showed that Kartini's vision for women's education was beginning to be accepted and trusted by the community.

Despite the various limitations she still faced, whether in terms of facilities, teaching staff, or the social conditions of a community that strongly clung to old traditions, Kartini's efforts to establish schools in Jepara and Rembang demonstrated that the ideas of emancipation expressed in her letters did not remain merely theoretical. Through education, Kartini sought to open

opportunities for women to gain knowledge, improve their quality of life, and participate more broadly in social life. The schools she pioneered became a concrete manifestation of the transformation of emancipatory ideas into educational practice. Although Kartini did not live to realize her dream of establishing more schools for indigenous women and passed away in 1904, the ideas she pioneered did not end there (Hartutik, 2015). The school established in Jepara and later expanded to Rembang became a crucial foundation for the development of women's education in the years that followed. Thus, the period from 1899 to 1904 can be understood as a pivotal phase in the evolution of Kartini's thinking, a shift from critiquing gender inequality to establishing educational institutions as a means of empowering women. This process demonstrates that, in Kartini's thinking, emancipation was realized not only through discourse and social criticism but also through the establishment of educational institutions that would later inspire the founding of Kartini Schools in various regions in the early 20th century (Nieuwe Apeldoornsche Courant, 1918).



Figure 3. "Graf van Kartini te Rembang" Source: (KITLV, 1904)

CONCLUSION

The development of Raden Ajeng Kartini's thinking during the period 1899–1904 unfolded through a series of interconnected stages. Her life experiences during her seclusion, supported by an intellectual environment and access to modern ideas, fostered Kartini's critical awareness of the gender inequality faced by Javanese women. This awareness evolved into a vision of emancipation that emphasized freedom, equal rights, and the importance of education for women, which she later realized through the establishment of girls' schools in Jepara and Rembang as a tangible expression of her struggle. The findings of this study contribute to the field of intellectual history by demonstrating that Kartini's thinking evolved from a critique of gender inequality toward the practice of education as a means of social change. Furthermore, this study enriches the historiography of women and the history of education in Indonesia by positioning Kartini not only as a symbol of emancipation but also as a thinker capable of realizing her ideas through the establishment of schools for girls.

Nevertheless, this study is still limited to an examination of the development of Kartini's thought during the period 1899–1904, drawing on Kartini's letters, colonial archives, contemporary newspapers, and various supporting sources. Therefore, future research is expected to expand the scope of the study period, enrich the use of historical sources, or conduct comparative studies with other Indonesian women figures in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the development of women's thought and the history of education in Indonesia.

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