

opposed polygamy and supported girls' education but also criticized women who violated cultural taboos.

The inspirational social activist, Raden Adjeng Kartini, who shared the problems women faced under the colonial system as well as in their own cultures, represented a new feminist consciousness. The daughter of a Javanese aristocrat, she rebelled against the confined lives of her social class, in which young women were expected to obey men, especially their fathers, without question, stay home, and train for marriage. Her father was progressive, however, and sent her to a Dutch primary school. A good student, Kartini wanted to complete high school and study in Holland, but that would have required her to leave home. Because Javanese custom discouraged aristocratic women from traveling without their families, her father would not permit it. Despite her father's progressive views, in conformity to aristocratic custom, at puberty Kartini was restricted to her family's home and ordered to prepare herself for an arranged marriage by learning domestic skills. But Kartini had larger ambitions. From her experience in Dutch-language schools and friendships with Dutch women, she drew a model of personal freedom contrary to that of her Javanese society, including a commitment to educate Javanese women in order to give them more options in life. Eventually she bowed to the wishes of her parents and entered an arranged marriage with a man she scarcely knew who already had two other wives. But he agreed to support her plan to open a school for girls, the first in Indonesia, which combined Javanese and Western values. Kartini died in childbirth in 1904, aged 25.

In the decade before her death, Kartini wrote a series of fascinating letters to Dutch friends in Java and Holland that reveal the contradictions in her thinking. She criticized the constraints of marriage, family, and society. Caught between two worlds, she was both repelled and attracted by her Javanese heritage. Although she had doubts about the advantages of marriage, she declared, "But we must marry, must, must. Not to marry is the greatest sin which the Muslim women can commit. And marriage among us—miserable is too feeble an expression for it. How can it be otherwise, when the laws have made everything for the man and nothing for the woman. When law and convention both are for the man; when everything is allowed to him." She thought women were repressed: "The ideal Javanese girl is silent and expressionless as a wooden doll, speaking only when necessary." She also condemned religious prejudice, whether by Christians or Muslims: "We feel that the kernel of all religion is right living, and that all religion is good and beautiful. But, o ye peoples, what have you made of it?" But

she had hope for change: "I glow with enthusiasm toward the new time which has come. My thoughts and sympathies are with my sisters who are struggling forward in the distant West."<sup>7</sup>

Kartini's Dutch friends published her letters, and thanks partly to the royalties, the girls' schools Kartini founded multiplied after her death, educating thousands of Indonesian girls and ensuring her reputation. Although Kartini had criticized Javanese culture and admired Western ideals, in 1964 the Indonesian president named her a national heroine and honored her as the nation's *ibu* ("mother"). But conservatives accused her of abandoning Islam and Javanese culture, seeing her as an apologist for colonialism. Some contrasted her unfavorably to Rahma El-Yunusiah, a devout Muslim woman from Sumatra who taught Arabic and the Qur'an and who refused any contact with the Dutch. Today Kartini is honored as a proponent of women's rights and a precursor of Indonesian nationalist sentiment.

Colonialism opened Southeast Asia to increased immigration from nearby regions. Indian trading communities developed in most major cities and many Indians settled in Malaya and Burma, but the Chinese arrived in much larger numbers. Between 1800 and 1941, millions of Chinese immigrated to the region to work as laborers,



Raden Adjeng Kartini (left), photographed in 1903 with her husband, Raden Adipati Djojoadiningrat, an influential aristocrat, became an inspiration to many Indonesian women. Before her early death in childbirth she challenged traditional gender expectations for girls by attending a Dutch-medium school and then opening the first girls' school in the Dutch East Indies. KTHLY Leiden 15469