

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Kantor Pos
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Mr. W. S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

In two months, our house has greeted a succession of visitors. At any time of the day, I am apt to see a silhouette appear in the immense opening of our front door. Because the thick-walled house is dark and the day outside is normally blinding bright, I see just the dark outline of a figure against the light, framed by the doorway, the two huge banyan trees which guard our gate and the blue-gullied cone of Mount Welirang in the distance. Approaching, I am apt to find that a farmer, the lurah (village headman), an inquisitive junior high school student, or even the local communist party chairman has come to call.

During those first days, the coffee pot was almost always boiling back in the kitchen pavillion, and I very nearly lost my American accent in saying "Silahkan masuk! (Please come in)". Once inside, the guests might be stiff and overly polite until coffee was served, but the situation would gradually relax if the conversation stayed clear of politics and concentrated on village beliefs and customs. Actually, nothing is more pertinent to the study of Indonesian politics than the fascinating complex of beliefs found in a village such as Mlirip.



Village Spirits

An early visitor was Papa Sakri, the crusty, enterprising contractor who remade the house. Sakri is famous for his firmness of resolve and his

What will the youngest generation believe in?

two well-run households, each with wife and children, which he maintains three miles up the river in the town of Modjokerto. Sakri talked frankly about business conditions, which are bad for building contractors, and business prospects, which are discouraging. He was delighted to have the job of putting a clean new face on our hundred-year-old house.

Relations with Sakri were businesslike for two weeks. Small problems of paint, cement and tile arose and were disposed of. Then one day Sakri came in very early and hemmed and coughed with what seemed to be embarrassment. Finally he smiled and told me the story of our well and its problem.

For years, the villagers of Mlirip and the workers in the irrigation machine shop next door have had reason to believe that a devil lives in the well behind our house. Two years ago, a test was made and fear became fact. A workman was lowered into the well to scrub and clean the bottom. He finished his work in one morning and went home. A week later, he was dead. When Sakri started his work on the house, he had trouble finding a worker who would descend to the dangerous depths. Finally a man from Lengkong across the river agreed to do the job. He had barely started when he fell ill, saw spirits and began talking in strange tongues. For two weeks he was out of his mind. As the man directly responsible, Sakri felt obliged to call in the local dukun (spirit-doctor). The dukun prescribed proper medicines, performed ceremonies and brought the patient back to sanity. He charged Sakri forty-five rupiahs.

So Papa Sakri's problem now was to find a worker brave or foolish enough to clean the well in the face of evil opposition. Of course no one could be found. We talked the problem over and finally decided to hire a man from Djombang, thirty miles away, who would be brought to the house at break of day and urged down the well before he heard the news of devils from local citizens.

Unfortunately, the worker didn't come early enough. He heard the story of the well from our neighbors and went home unpaid.

The problem was at last disposed of that afternoon when Sakri got hold of a worker at the machine shop. Hasan didn't believe much in spirits. He went down the well in buoyant good spirits, shouted, sang and splashed for an hour, and came up happily for his wages. The devil in the well had been somehow overcome, and we settled in the house in a happy atmosphere of good omens.

Our next visitor, the lurah, laughed when he heard the story of the well and admitted that many of the village people are still superstitious. Later, he gave me a model for my speech for our house-

warming party, in which the devils got full recognition. Part of it read,

"...and we are holding this feast for no other purpose than to respect your local customs, so that we may free this house from the influence of devils and may receive the protection of God Almighty."

The villagers of Mlirip are Muslims, but their Islam is in some ways a mixture and compromise. Since the religions of Java have come in successive waves and from different sources and social groups, the present pattern of belief is spotty.

Take our immediate neighborhood as an example. The original animistic beliefs of the area provided the villagers with a means of placating the spirits which dwelled in their trees, wells, rocks and fields. These spirits are still recognized and feared today, though the typical ceremonies of appeasement have been infused with Muslim prayers and a concept of God as a single unity. In Mlirip, five principal feasts are held during the year to create favorable relations with the powers that control agriculture. Such feasts are given the name selamatan.

- (1) Kepunden is held just before the fields are ploughed for the year's first rice crop. Farmers usually congregate at the sacred tree near the supposed burial place of the original village settlers. Muslim prayers are said, flower offerings and incense are set out, and a simple but bounteous meal is served to neighbors and relatives from nearby villages.
- (2) Tingkep is a feast held just as the rice is beginning to head. A plea is made for a bountiful harvest. The same name is given to the selamatan which marks the first conception of a bride.
- (3) Barian is a selamatan which takes place after the rice has come to head. If the season has been dry, only drinks are served. If it has been too rainy, dry food is served.
- (4) Masuk Lumbung. A minor feast held when the workers store the dried sheaves of rice in the granaries.
- (5) A final selamatan is held after the rice has been in the granary forty days.

Other selamatans are held on moving into a new house and at times of circumcision, marriage and burial. In a less formal manner, the spirits which surround the village are propitiated by individual offerings of coins and flowers throughout the year. These offerings can occasionally

be seen at cross-roads, under ancient trees or at the foot of the ruins of monuments from the Hindu-Buddhist period.

Four universal religions have invaded the animistic world of the Javanese during the past fifteen centuries.

Hinduism came first and flourished in the larger towns and court cities, mixed inextricably during certain periods with Mahayana Buddhism. From the courts, the penetration of Hindu-Buddhism into village life was incomplete but significant. The vestiges of this influence are still to be seen in the performances of the wayang puppet dramas, based on the Hindu Mahabharata and Ramayana. Although the Hindu-Buddhist period ended more than four centuries ago, its imprint is still clearly seen in the etiquette and social values which Mlirip learned from the courts of pre-Muslim monarchs.

From present evidences, Islam did not enter Mlirip through wholesale conversion, but piecemeal. The most strongly Muslim section of the village is nearest the highway to Surabaja. An attractive mosque stands in the center of this hamlet, and the kiaji (Muslim teacher) living near the mosque conducts a small school in Islamic law and theology. In this neighborhood, prayers are said with some regularity and mosque attendance is of first importance. Significantly, our devoutly Muslim servant has found his friends in the neighborhood of the mosque, where he finds men who are "sincere" in their religion. One of the telephone guards at the irrigation office next door, a communist, also identifies this hamlet as the stronghold of Islam in Mlirip, but disposes of its inhabitants with the word, "fanatics".

So the pattern of religious faith in Mlirip is superimposed on a shared belief in spirits and animistic forces. The influence of Hindu-Buddhism--no longer a strictly religious influence--would seem to be strongest in the small village social elite which has had closest contact with the city aristocracy, while the power of Islam seems to be concentrated in a geographical corner of the village, which may have been the first center of Muslim missionary work here. Almost every villager accepts some aspect of all three beliefs.

The fourth religion of our area is Christianity. There are no Christians in Mlirip, but almost an entire sub-district near the former Madjapahit capital has been converted. In the regency capital, Modjokerto, Christianity also claims a limited but devout following among Chinese and Indonesians.

Ideals of the Wayang

I remember particularly well an afternoon a few weeks back,

when I heard an official from a neighboring regency claim that the personal values and ideals of the Indonesian official are not taken from the Koran, but from the Hindu wayang stories.

Wayang is the generic name for the family of dramatic forms in which stories adapted from the Mahabharata or Ramayana are staged with human actors, wooden puppets or shadow puppets made from ornately cut and painted leather. It may be true that the puppet drama was popular in Java before the advent of Hinduism, but it was only with the full flowering of the religion that the wayang attained its present treasure of adventure and ethical teaching.

Seldom have the courtly virtues of courage, loyalty, deference and refinement been more palatably presented for popular imitation than in the rousing, brave and complicated stories of the wayang. The spectator is kept in high excitement or laughter for hours on end as he absorbs the moral lessons which are the final reason for the wayang's existence.

The center of wayang popularity is in Central Java in the neighborhood of the court cities of Djogjakarta and Surakarta (Solo), one hundred and fifty miles to the west. In this area, the wayang drama is immensely attractive to all levels of society. As you travel east in Java toward the regency of Modjokerto and the village of Mlirip, the popularity of the wayang decreases as you approach the former limits of the area held by the Central Javanese kingdoms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

After the destruction of the great Madjapahit Empire in the early sixteenth century, Modjokerto (then Djapan) fell under the control of the Central Javanese Kingdom of Mataram and was administered by a semi-feudal "regent" (bupati). As a cultural outpost, Modjokerto was certainly subject to some influence of the court language, beliefs and values as represented in the wayang dramas, but their direct influence was limited largely to the aristocrats of the town and their relatives who administered the districts and sub-districts of the regency. In 1812, Modjokerto was detached completely from Central Javanese control and entered the sphere of normal English (1812-1816) and Dutch (1816-1942) administration. It seems safe to assume that the cultural distance to Central Java was increased with the end of political ties.

Whatever the truth of these conjectures, the pattern of wayang popularity in Mlirip is quite clear. The greatest proponent of wayang is the family which has monopolized village leadership for nearly fifty years. Wayang performances are occasionally held at the house of the village headman (lurah), who is a member of that family, and the drama is said to be generally popular with the people of the hamlet surrounding his house. At our end of the village, near

the mosque, the wayang is decidedly less popular than the more boisterous ludruk comedies which are native to the coastal cities of East Java.

There is thus some evidence in Mlirip that the wayang is most influential with the socially ascendent family, which has had closest contact with the aristocracy of nearby towns and has had the greatest incentive to copy and emulate their culture and norms.

The Mlirip expert on wayang is not a villager, but the manager of the Irrigation Bureau repair shop next door. Suwarno was born in Central Java and originates from a middle-ranking aristocratic family. His formal education stopped at junior high school, but he reads rapaciously to satisfy his needs and curiosity. When Suwarno drops by the house, it is usually to borrow a book or to discourse on the one he has just returned. Although his belief in Islam seems seriously shaken by modern ideas, his love for wayang and devotion to its ideals remains intact. He kept my book on the history of the wayang for two weeks and has been eager to talk about it ever since, to my great benefit and entertainment.

Suwarno's first comment on returning the book showed something of the pervasiveness of wayang ideals today: "See these five puppet pictures on the cover?" he said, bending his bulky figure over to point discreetly with his thumb. "These are the five brothers who are the heroes of the Mahabharata. Did you know that each one represents one of the five principles of Bung Karno's Panchasila?" I had never heard the comparison before and listened as he listed,

Arjuna	Nationalism
Yudistira	Belief in God
Wrekodoro (Bhima)	Social Justice
Sadewa	Populism and Prosperity
Nakula	

I asked if the pairing of the principles and heroes was his own idea, and he assured me that he was only stating an opinion commonly held by Javanese literate in the wayang epics.

Suwarno is equally persuasive, whether he is synthesizing the wayang with Indonesia's revolution program or with the teachings of Islam. He insisted that the gods and heroes of the wayang exist in a universe created by the single God of Islam, and that a firm belief in the moral teachings of the Mahabharata does not preclude acceptance of the Koran. His own words best describe the concept of the compatibility of Hinduism and Islam found in the thinking of Javanese of his class: "It is necessary to realize that there is no conflict between the wayang and Islam. The field of Islam is religion, and the field of the wayang is morality and spiritual

values."

With Suwarno's amiable advice, I began the surprisingly easy task of memorizing the identifying marks of the main wayang notables. The outsider is confused at first by the apparent similarity of the puppets, but he quickly learns. One of the first things to look for is the tilt of the head. The finest and most refined characters look down at the ground, while the most uncultured look straight ahead. Suwarno pointed to Arjuna, the great warrior who has so often been compared to President Sukarno in current popular lore. Arjuna looks almost straight down. His brother Yudistira looks slightly higher. The coarser characters look straight ahead, eyes bulging. Suwarno then explained that, in Javanese thinking, the man who stares straight into your eye is crude and perhaps undependable, while the man who eyes the floor is likely to possess nobility of spirit and true courage.

At the heart of the drama is a struggle between the forces of good and evil, but throughout good is made to appear coexistent with the grace and refinement of those of high birth and the cause of evil is generally abetted by those of crude manners and low birth. The principal judgement to be made on character is not good or evil but refined (halus) or crude (kasar).

The more I talk with Suwarno about the wayang, the more I am struck by the degree to which the wayang message of deference and refinement has been absorbed into the manners and outlooks of the people of Mlirip. Although the villagers are incomparably more direct and assertive than the former aristocrats I meet in the government offices in Modjokerto and noticeably more so than the peasants I have met in the Djogjakarta-Solo area, they are nonetheless bound by the norms and values represented in the wayang dramas. To a certain extent, they are exposed directly to the message of the wayang through occasional attendance at performances. To a greater extent, they are exposed to its constant example in the conduct of their Javanese officials, the greater number of whom owe their present positions to aristocratic lineage.

The wayang culture of the Javanese courts is by no means the sole force molding the social personalities of the people of Mlirip, but it is a major element. If the wayang ideal comes often in conflict with Islam or the more modern values of the "movie-and-soccer" generation of Indonesians, the wayang philosophy itself provides the key of compromise and adjustment to mediate the clash.

The mental world of the pre-war Javanese villager was an arena in which elements of animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and western legalism and materialism clashed and found their place in

the stagnated colonial society. The former balance, which produced the gentle and refined Javanese personality, has now been upset by the new conditions of freedom and educational opportunity nurturing Indonesia's youngest generation.

The New Generation

The forward echelon of Indonesia's second revolution rolls in on our house like a wave every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 11:00 a.m. I had sent word around that the American would be glad to lend Indonesian books to responsible village children, hoping that I would soon have the opportunity of meeting several or even a dozen youngsters. During the first month, more than two hundred came to pick their books and sign their names in laborious primary school scrawls on the library list.

At first I thought that the response might be due to the natural curiosity of children who have never seen an American up close. I have changed my opinion now, partly because the flood of borrowers keeps coming, but mostly because I've become slightly acquainted with tiny Nono, pugnacious Tjuwarno and dignified Suwandi. I respect their seriousness.

Tjuwarno was a problem at first. I was typing during library hour and he came over to my table to stare, his head about the level of my typewriter carriage.

"What do you want, Tjuwarno?" I asked.

"I want to do that," he answered, pointing solemnly at the typewriter.

"But do you know how to type?"

"Sure. It's easy."

I didn't want to call his bluff just yet, so I asked about the book in his hand. It was an involved history of the Djogjakarta Sultanate, written for college students.

"What's the book about, Tjuwarno?"

"A story book," he snapped.

"That's a book for people at least seventeen years old. How old are you?"

"Seventeen." He was emphatic and had settled the matter of his age once and for all. Then his sister yelled from the other corner, where she was waiting in line, "No, he isn't! He's only eight."

Tjuwarno didn't say a word. He handed me the book as if obliged to conform with an overwhelming and irrational prejudice. His face was blank as he thought of a way out.

"Gimme a book on the PKI (Communist Party)." I went to the book case and gave him a biography of Aidit, the Indonesian communist leader. He leafed through knowledgeably and slowly. After his small thumb had turned and bent the last page, he handed the book back with a look that spoke of my failure to pick the right book.

"It doesn't have any pictures."

I haven't won a gambit with Tjuwarno yet, but still have hopes.

The main body of our library group comes from the fifth and sixth grades at the Mlirip primary school. A few youngsters have begun to visit us from the three neighboring villages, and a small group of junior high school students come in from the town of Modjokerto. It is easy enough to find books for the oldest and youngest groups. The young adolescents can read my few Indonesian novels (Sitti Nurbaja, The Atheist and Smuggling Arms from Singapore are favorites) or an assortment of books on elementary science, history and agriculture. The eight-to-ten year old group also seems satisfied with simple readers like Achmad in the Village or with the Classic Comics published in Indonesian on themes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

It is the in-between group, however, which is most revealing in its tastes. Ravenously hungry for reading material but not in the least sophisticated in their tastes, the ten-to-fourteen year olds give our library its atmosphere of good-natured seriousness.

Generally, this group is more interested in world history than in Indonesian history. Strangely enough, books on the Indonesian revolution are not especially popular, but there is constant demand

for works on the earlier heroes of Indonesian history: Gadjah Mada, Erlangga, Untung Suropati, Diponogoro, Teuku Umar, and Teungku Tjik di Tiro. More popular yet are my few books in Indonesian on geography, biology and general science.

Several things are striking about the children who come to borrow books.

First, their numbers. From Achmad to Wahab, our card file includes 224 names. There are approximately 700 children in Mlirip under the age of sixteen, so the potential list of book borrowers (ages eight to sixteen) would probably be in the neighborhood of 300-350. Without attempting any sort of statistical study, it seems safe to say that approximately two-thirds of this group has come to the American's house to borrow a book, most of them two or three books by now. The mere size of the group is impressive if one remembers that the literacy figure for Indonesia in 1945 was said to be not more than fifteen percent.

Another very obvious fact about our young group is that it speaks Indonesian, clearly and adequately. Only a small part of the adult group in Mlirip has any command of the national language.

And it is no less important that the youngsters are reading books which concern Indonesia as a whole and, to some extent, the world at large. Story books and histories tell these Javanese children about the Atjehnese hero Teungku Tjik di Tiro, about a war in West Sumatra against the Dutch or about the home life of a child in Kalimantan. The focus of education and reading is the Indonesian nation, rather than the region. My conversations with the adults of Mlirip have revealed very little interest in or knowledge of the world outside East and Central Java or even the immediate area of the Brantas Delta and Surabaya.

Even more important than the extent of primary education in Mlirip and the "national" character of the school curriculum are the personalities of the children themselves.

First, I would like to insert a word of caution and reservation. I know that nothing is more important or elusive for an historian to consider than the attitudes and values of the characters involved in his field of survey. In viewing a culture which is not only foreign but in rapid transition, he is especially subject to various types of myopia, conditioned and uncorrected.

But if a striking and momentous fact about personality dominates his chosen field, he has to recognize and consider it,

hoping specialists in the study of culture or personality come along to verify, contradict or expand what he has said.

The youngest generation in Mlirip is clearly a new type of generation in Indonesia. I refer generally to those who were too young to participate in the revolution (those now twenty years old or younger), but especially to the group under sixteen years of age which has had an opportunity to pursue secondary education since 1950.

The striking new characteristics I believe to be (1) ambition and an awareness of personal goals, (2) determination and energy in pursuing goals, and (3) lack of deference and humility in the face of authority and tradition.

For the first time in remembered history, it is sensible to ask a young Indonesian what he intends to do in adulthood. Before 1942, only the most exceptional and fortunate could hope to change their social status. Now more than six million Indonesians are in primary school and approximately half a million are attending secondary school and university. The decisive change has not been the expansion of the primary school system (about 300% since Dutch times) but the elimination of the barrier to secondary education.

Before the war, Tjuwarno would not have been able to go on past sixth grade. He most probably would have had three years of primary vernacular education and then gone to work. To enter the Dutch language school system, the pre-war child generally had to be the son or daughter of an Indonesian official of the level of Sub-District Officer or higher. A fairly well-to-do but non-official Indonesian family would generally do its best to have at least one child adopted and sponsored by an official of suitable rank. The effect of the system was to limit higher socially profitable education to the very small socially ascendent class. In Javanese areas, this class was generally the native aristocracy (prijai).

Tjuwarno and his friends may now go on to junior high school, providing they pass their final primary school examination. This difficult examination--which approximately seventy percent of the students fail--has now replaced the birth certificate as the most important formal obstacle to educational and social advancement.

Other obstacles remain. If Tjuwarno's parents can afford the books, shoes and transportation to send him a few miles away to junior high school, it is less certain that they will be able to send him to senior high school in Surabaya or Malang if he happens to be among the twenty-five to thirty percent who pass their ninth grade examination. Tjuwarno is apt to be a poor farmer or worker in 1970, but this does not alter the fact that he now has an opportunity he

would not have had fifteen or twenty years ago.

The door to social advancement is at least partially open to the village children today. This revolutionary fact is realized to some extent by Mlirip's children and their parents, and I believe that awareness of opportunity is to a large extent responsible for the driving interest of our library visitors in books and knowledge. A surprising number of the children have a notion of what they want to do with their knowledge. The boys speak of becoming technicians, engineers, "an official", farming experts or policemen. Several of the girls want to become teachers. When I walk through the village in the late afternoon, I often see them reading the books they have borrowed; when they return the books, most of them are able to give a short account of what they have read. In short, reading seems to be done purposefully and seriously.

The general air of determination apparent among Indonesian school-age children everywhere is shared by the young people of Mlirip. I notice it most clearly in the serious discussions I have with the fifth and sixth graders who want to borrow books intended for high school. A tall twelve year old named Suwandi wanted a book on the Panchasila. We talked for awhile about the Panchasila, and I finally gave him two adult-level books on the subject. He brought them back in a week and reported that the simpler of the two books was very interesting. When he left, he took with him a general survey of the Indonesian nationalist movement. Wahab, fifteen years of age, has gone through two scholarly volumes on the Hindu period in Indonesian history; just a few minutes ago he borrowed two short, excellent works on nineteenth century history by Dr. Soekanto. All these books are college-level. Another junior high school student has taken several of my volumes of the challenging writings of Kiaji Hassan of Bangil on modern Islam. In each case, I warn the student that the book is complicated and difficult; in most cases, the student makes a serious effort to understand the work and satisfy his yearning for knowledge.

The effort of the Mlirip students to "reach over their heads" for knowledge is not uniformly successful, but it bespeaks a determination and purposefulness which is quite general in the younger generation of the village. Young Nono, our smallest visitor, won't take "no" for an answer. He has been after me for a month to get a book for him on Untung Suropati, a book which he will have the greatest difficulty understanding when I finally locate it. The other day he wanted our popular comic book on the Mahabharata. I told him that Achmad had it, and Nono disappeared on the run. In twenty minutes, Achmad came in to return the book, herded by the eager Nono.

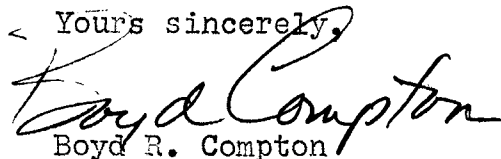
The aggressiveness of Nono, Tjuwarno and the rest in pursuing their individual goals may result in nothing but disillusionment and defeat in the long run, but in the year 1955 it stands as a challenge

to the culture which has sustained their parents through the past. As the youngest grow older, they will be more completely exposed to the influence of the lessons on deference, passivity, refinement and formalism which guided their parents. But at present, the aristocratic ideals of the wayang--as conditioned by generations of cultural warping under colonial rule--are in full retreat in Mlirip.

Paradoxically, the process is being aided powerfully by the parents of Mlirip. On the one hand, they despair of the decline in discipline and refinement in the younger generation; their children do not generally show the proper attitude of segan (deference) toward old values and higher station. On the other hand, the same parents contribute more than they can afford to the village school fund and many make heavy sacrifices to send their children away to high school. Several times, I have heard parents echo the sentiment of the Regent of Modjokerto that the older generation must give way to the younger as soon as possible if Indonesia is to progress.

I have heard almost identical comments from a school principal in Modjokerto, a technical teacher in Bandung and an Islamic School teacher in Sumatra to the effect that their most serious and energetic students are coming in a wave from the primary schools in the villages. This wave foretells a social revolution of some consequence in the coming two decades in Indonesia. If the active, assertive Mlirip children are typical members of this new generation, Indonesia's present leaders may one day be replaced by young men of strikingly different outlook and personality. Those who stay behind to farm will permanently transform the old village world of spirits, wayang ideals and incompletely assimilated Muslim beliefs.

Next Tuesday, most of Mlirip will gather around our house for a selamatan party to assure an auspicious residence here for the Americans. After the prayers, a folk opera (ludruk) troop from Surabaya will perform until dawn, and young and old will most probably forget the differences and conflicts I have described above and maintain rapt unity during the eight hour performance. If my camera performs well, I will write an illustrated letter on the party.

< Yours sincerely,

Boyd R. Compton