

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Enroute Genoa
August 14, 1956

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

Like the flavor of Indonesian food, the flavor of Indonesian life cannot be easily captured with wholly western materials. After tasting and deploring the food served at semi-westernized hotels in Java, Sumatra and Sulawesi, I have begun to suspect that the Dutch food is usually cooked by a native Indonesian and the Indonesian food by a Hollander.

Much the same impression descends on me when I read articles on Indonesia--including my own--which use western words and concepts as their basic material. It is the feeling of an important flavor missed.

This incongruity will of course remain with us, and it will not lessen the value of the good work being done in Indonesia by western political observers, social scientists and newsmen. Certainly we will all benefit from the results of the important project recently carried out by a group of young American scholars in the Kediri region of East Java. I haven't seen their published volumes yet, but the comments of Indonesians in Kediri, Surabaya and Modjokerto lead me to think that their task was accomplished with a very successful blend of scientific integrity, respect and good manners.

To be successful in work of that sort, it is well to realize from the start that certain immensely important Indonesian words cannot be easily translated into English. Even the expert in comparative semantics will miss by a shade in explaining the word segan (reticent, averse to) which I discussed in a recent letter. Political reporters can miss by a mile if they accept too western an interpretation of what Indonesians mean by "nation", "responsibility", or "political party". I suppose this difficulty faces anyone who deals with a foreign language.

With these thoughts and limitations in mind, I have gone ahead and compiled a short list of words which describe particularly Indonesian feelings and values. Some of them almost defy translation, while others fit quite easily into familiar niches in our western frame

of reference and meaning. Taken as a whole, the list represents an attempt to corner and test a challenging phrase often used by Indonesians: Tjara Ketimuran ("The Eastern Style"). The term is used most often to mean that Indonesian life is or should be dominated by a style and flavor which have nothing to do with the West. At times, the phrase is used defensively by those who would turn by the flood of western values, styles and fads which is rising in Indonesia. But it is also a brave, positive effort to find those essentials of Indonesian life which are graceful, harmonious and indigenous.

Without attempting a full evaluation of "The Eastern Style", I would like to present ten words which would be important in any discussion of the concept.

HALUS (small, fine, refined, civilized, spiritual). This is the supreme value for most of the cultural groups of Indonesia. Interestingly, the most helpful examples of this type of "refinement" come from the life of the Javanese people who inhabit the middle two-thirds of the island of Java. The most popular heroes of the Hindu-Javanese wayang puppet dramas are halus in spirit and gesture. Ardjuna is slim, deceptively languid in his movements, and incapable of looking directly in the eye of his adversary or friend. Being perfectly pure, refined and gentle in spirit, he is a mighty warrior and lover. The hairy, muscled, staring giants fall like blades of grass under the slashes of his sword; maidens clamor after him. His successes prove that spiritual fineness is power, but power is almost an accidental consequence. Halus is also the word to describe the movements of the slow, graceful srimpi dance of the central Javanese courts; the tiny hands of the maiden srimpi dancer weave a pattern of incredible delicacy. They appear to have no material substance. The child who watches the wayang or learns the srimpi receives a moral education which he will treasure if he or she is halus in spirit.

The person who is halus is also lemah-lembut ("weak and pliable") He adjusts to circumstances passively, thereby dominating his situation. President Soekarno is often praised as lemah-lembut. Because of his refinement and humanity, he will forgive almost any sin if only the person in error appears passive and repentant. But if the erring one does not subscribe to refinement as the supreme value, if he is a bustling, proud individualist like Major-General Simatupang, he can hardly be forgiven.

The opposite of halus is kasar (large, rough, rude, uncivilized). It is important to note that some of the wayang heroes are admired despite their crude conduct and spirit. Wrekodoro (Bhima) has very little refinement, but he is impressively honest and loyal. Such a warrior cannot hope to attain the pinnacle of personal spiritual

development, but he is admirable for making the most of good qualities fate has willed him.

HORMAT (respect, deference). Respectfulness dominates Indonesian social relations. All human beings must be shown respect, but in a manner that conforms with their station in life. Above all, parents and guests must be esteemed. Their wishes are not to be ignored or even judged. The web of mutual respect catches everyone.

An American Point Four functionary is expected to understand the importance of the feeling of hormat. As a guest in Indonesia, he will probably not find his suggestions opposed, though they might of course be ignored. But he in turn must show formal respect for the chief in the department or region where he works. In the Indonesian family-concept of government, the chief is father and his position will be badly shaken if a guest in his realm does not work hard to maintain the appearances of subordination and deference. In this sense, respect may seem to be a matter of appearances and formality, but it is more than that. It is a recognition that the solidarity of the group is always more important than its material progress.

The annual Lebaran holiday is the season par excellence for respectfulness. In Muslim regions of the islands, sons of all ages go home to give honor to their fathers and ask forgiveness for their sins. The modern university student joins the parade to the family home; if he finds that his marriage has been arranged for him, he will probably respect the parental decision. Very few revolt, despite all the talk about filial disrespect and moral crisis.

The qualities of halus and hormat work in double harness for the maintenance of "The Eastern Style". The persistence of these values may account for the surprisingly conservative personality of the generation which fought the revolution. The disrespectful individualist is a rarity and even the very young may condemn him.

SOPAN (proper, polite). Propriety or politeness is a third condition of gentility in most of Indonesia. A person is sopan who has good manners. He shows his deference toward elders and respect for the group by his choice of terms of address, using a soft voice, taking the correct seat in a room or by eating and drinking in a proper manner. Sopan is thus the outward sign of a halus spirit. Politeness could conceivably be used to mask a lack of inner refinement, but Indonesians usually expect that formal appearances will conform with inner conditions.

Good manners can be taught, but they should be accompanied by an inner realization of their significance. The principle of proper conduct is respect for other persons in the group and an unwillingness

to hurt their feelings or make them lose face. It is nearly impossible for a chief to fire an employee, for a family head to refuse a request for money from a relative or for the Chief of State to turn down an appeal for the commutation of a sentence in a criminal case. If guests drop in at five p.m., just as the family is rushing out of the house to make an appointment, they must be entertained with no hint that their visit is an inconvenience. The guests might stay for several hours, but the head of the family will make no comment unless he is exceptionally modern and western-minded. If the other appointment is missed entirely, the third party will of course understand that an obstacle has arisen. He will not expect a detailed explanation on next meeting.

The characteristic Indonesian method of teaching good manners is by example rather than admonishment. The word djangan (don't!) is seldom heard, even in families with small children. Children are of course punished, especially for showing a lack of respect, but they should not be disciplined for errors.

In government, proper conduct demands that a higher official act as a loving father toward his subordinates and not as a disciplinarian. He should supply detailed instructions and constant moral education to the officials under him, but he should not give harsh criticism. If he is too direct and critical, he is likely to meet with failure.

RAMAH-TAMAH (sociable, friendly in manner or speech). There is little stuffiness in Indonesian social life at its best. It can be saturated with refinement, propriety and respectfulness, but at the same time gay and even boisterous. In fact, gaiety is nearly obligatory, and many a gathering flounders along on forced laughter until the spirit catches on.

Again, the personality of President Soekarno comes to mind as the embodiment of national traits. Mixing gentility and good manners with relaxed humor, he is the model of the remarkable sophistication which Java can produce. He is always ready with the famous smiles and jests which put his associates at ease.

Djakarta is a good training ground for the "slap-on-the-back" type of friendliness which is essential to the post-revolutionary personality. There, young people from all over the archipelago meet for purposes which hardly existed for Indonesians ten years ago: political maneuvering, business contacts, labor union meetings and congresses of all sorts. They are associating on a wide scale with people they do not know well. To come up to the Djakarta standard, they should not only show sociability but positive cordiality. Some carry this cordiality to the extreme and are condemned as "crude". Others blend it nicely with the standard of refinement (halus) which

also demands that personal feelings and motives be carefully, cheerfully hidden.

"But isn't it nearly impossible for a foreigner to judge Indonesian personality? Isn't he always involved in a special type of social situation just because he is a foreigner?" The answer to both questions is more "yes" than "no". Visitors in Indonesia meet cordiality on all sides, but they seldom get close enough to their Indonesian acquaintances to create a true friendship which would show both parties as they are. Few foreigners are in a position to use the familiar terms of address ("aku" and "kau", meaning "I" and "you") with Indonesians. Some try too soon and thereby tax the great Indonesian capacity for making allowances. But if they are fortunate enough to establish a real friendship, they will discover how much Indonesians really prize a person who is ramah-tamah. They may be surprised to find that the big Djakarta reception--so often a fabric of pretense, strain and dullness--is an unfortunate exception in social life, and that the small, lively gathering of friends is the rule.

SAJANG (love, pity, sympathy, fondness). It is interesting that the two Indonesian words commonly used to denote love (sajang, tjinta) have a flavor of pity and sadness. Parents feel sajang for their children, leaders feel it for their followers, and lovers feel it for each other. The word has the passive connotation of sacrifice and identification, but it also carries the positive meaning of responsibility.

A feeling of sajang can be contrasted with nafsu (physical passion). If the history of western thought is littered with references to "sacred and profane love", Indonesians might speak of the contrast between human and animal love. The ideal of courtship and marriage is a relationship in which the man and woman feel the respect and intimacy of older brother and younger sister. If the two people involved are properly halus and civilized, a feeling of sajang will predominate in their relationship. Passion may come too, natural and unregretted, but it should be controlled and subordinate. Passion is not necessarily associated with guilt, but it is a lesser emotion for it is always selfish. A feeling of sajang is by definition selfless.

In man-woman relations, the feeling of sajang sometimes conflicts with the idea of western romantic love which is being advertised to Indonesians on a grand scale through American movies. Nothing could be more alien than the brush-off scene in our movies, in which Jane says, "I'm very fond of you, John. You're just like a big brother to me. But..." According to traditional Indonesian values, there would be no such "buts". John would have won his girl.

AKU (I). To an American, the Indonesian scene hardly appears to be wracked by a crisis of individualism, yet most Indonesian leaders

feel this to be the case.

Oddly enough, the great spokesman for individualism emerged during the Japanese occupation, when foreign rulers were straining to squeeze the maximum benefits from Indonesia's respect for communal solidarity. He was Chairil Anwar, who shouted out his revolutionary creed in a poem entitled, "I":

When my time is up
I want no mourners

No, not even you.

Enough of that sobbing!

I am an untamed beast
Cast out from the herd.

If my hide takes a bullet,
I'll thrash on in fury.

Wounded and poisoned, I'll charge on
And on
Til the ache and pain have vanished.

All the less will I care.
I intend to exist a thousand years more.

Chairil Anwar's poem was shocking not only to the Japanese but also to his fellow Indonesians. Even today, propriety demands that individual interests appear subordinate to those of the group. The wise individualist can get ahead best by utilizing appeals to group solidarity and inter-dependence.

One critic has tried to explain away Chairil Anwar's message by interpreting Aku (I) to mean the Indonesian nation as a whole in its struggle for existence and survival. Other less friendly critics have gone more to the heart of the matter and singled Chairil Anwar out as an enemy of traditional values. He has been called sombong (conceited, self-centered, despising others), the most terrible Indonesian insult; in many ways, the label is appropriate.

Nevertheless, the name of Chairil Anwar has been nearly sanctified since his early death. Very few will speak out so plainly today for the principles of egoistic individualism, but perhaps there are many who find in it a needed justification. Victory in the revolution has unleashed a storm of personal ambition, in which leaders of all groups appear insatiably hungry for office, rank and wealth. It has

been a revolution of individual activity, in which the breakdown of traditional, passive solidarity has brought some feeling of guilt to everyone. The next few years may tell us whether appreciable numbers of Indonesians are going to accept the raging poet's creed and sing with him in praise of the ego. To do so today would be almost like approving of the spiritual suffering which individual freedom has brought in these recent years.

RAMAI (busy, crowded, noisy, lively). If you enjoy yourself at an Indonesian gathering, you may say, "It's very ramai!" This is a fine compliment to the group, and it is the proper impersonal way of saying, "I'm enjoying myself."

The desirability of a ramai situation can be shown by a few examples:

A young man of Djakarta was offered the job of headman in his distant village. He told me that he gave up the idea because the village was not ramai enough. As village headman, he would be comparatively wealthy; in Djakarta, he is very poor. But if the young man and his family had returned to the village, life would have become unbearably sepi (quiet, dull).

It was moving day in our house in Mlirip. A packer had come very early in the morning, carrying his tools, nails, boards and wrapping paper in a big box. From eight until noon, he stacked, wrapped, hammered and packed in a great uproar of sound and movement. The telephone guards from the Irrigation Office next door watched. A few friends drifted in off the road or from nearby houses. The group grew to twenty or thirty persons, all anxious to watch, help and enjoy the bustle. One of them brought a flute, another a guitar. A spontaneous party started, and the songs, jokes and recitations lasted until the moon rose over the river. It was a very ramai occasion, a great outpouring of merriment brought on by a little noise and the excuse to get together.

Ramai is above all a word for young Indonesians bent on being "modern". It is ramai to be together with your school friends. It is also ramai to live in the big city and do the serious and frivolous things which show how completely you reject the stagnant, colonial past. It shows proper respect to return to the village at Lebaran, but it is best to seek your future in the bustling cities where life has begun to move at such an intoxicating pace.

MELANTJONG (to sight-see, go wandering). The younger generation of Indonesians is on the move. By truck, train, bicycle or on foot, they melantjong in all directions, as if pure movement could provide answers

to their questions about everything.

Melantjong is an especially important word for students, who have time on their hands, a few rupiahs, and an itchy curiosity. Any day, but especially on Sunday, they can be observed in groups on their way somewhere. Five youths from the village ride their bikes into town to look around. A junior high school teacher rents a truck; a big sign, "PICNIC", is hung on the front and off go the students to look at a monument, a village, a new building or a distant swimming pool. Three students decide to walk from one end of Java to the other, and the newspapers follow their route with wonder and approval. Or Lawalatta becomes a hero as he starts from Java on his brave attempt to walk around the world. The president gives him an audience and shakes his hand. He is the symbol of his generation's restless energy.

You may also use the word melantjong to denote the trips so many thousands of young Indonesians are taking abroad. Nearly every day, small groups leave from Djakarta on their way to study in Europe, Asia, America or nearby Australia. Their passports and visas are admission cards into a select group. Those who have studied overseas will later have a better chance for good jobs and advancement. They will be honored because they may bring back with them some of the technical skills so sorely needed in these pre-development years in Indonesia. But I do not think that they travel just for the sake of prestige, power or technical knowledge. They are part of a generation which is looking eagerly for new experiences which can be used for the construction of a new life.

But movement in itself is hardly enough. It is important that students melantjong to Banjulegi, Djakarta and New York; it is perhaps more important that they know what to make of their experience. Too often, they are confused when they arrive at their object. Many truckloads of students leave each Sunday from the lowlands of East Java for the cool plateau around Malang. Once in Malang, they stand around in groups apparently oblivious to their surroundings. They may go to a cheap restaurant to eat, visit a swimming pool to watch, or drop in on someone's relative to chat. Later, when I ask how they enjoyed their trip to Malang, the stock answer is, "It was enjoyably cool there." The answer should probably be disregarded, for it would be considered very impolite for them to analyse what they saw. But I wonder if the plight of these wandering students is not symptomatic of a generation which is moving restlessly without goal or clear purpose.

Whether its purposes are clear or not, the great movement of young Indonesians through the archipelago and across the world is a clear, impressive fact. Someday we will know its results.

BERANI (brave, bold, daring). The Indonesian Revolution was a great

showing of bravery and daring, and I suspect that Indonesians look on these qualities with more approval today because of the revolution. A young man who is berani among his fellow students or villagers wins respect and a position of leadership. His bravery or boldness may show a lack of refinement. He may be nothing more than a bully whose coarseness offends a traditionally polite community, but for the present he has the initiative. Those around him may long for a more comfortable type of leadership, but they will often bow before an aggressive will.

The bully, of course, is the exception, and I only present his case to illustrate how much the traditional values of Indonesians have been upset by the revolution.

Courage was part of the character of the traditional Indonesian hero, but it was the refined, noble courage of the knight. The revolution gave approval to boldness verging on impudence. Even if this boldness conflicts with all that was graceful and harmonious in the old environment, it is nonetheless approved. Perhaps we can attribute this paradox to the deep-seated Indonesian belief that every aspect of life has its place and every quality its proper season. The Regent of one Indonesian district combines all the poise, refinement, responsibility and attention to forms which is demanded by tradition. He is an effective, acceptable leader. Yet he feels that he must retire soon to make room for a younger man whose energy, initiative and boldness will conform better to the new circumstances of free Indonesia. The Regent may be very wrong in this judgement, but it is shared by older officials and parents everywhere in the islands.

When parents look at the younger generation, they often say "berani!" with mixed approbation and alarm. They make unbelievable sacrifices to send their children off to school and are sometimes shocked to see the results: their sons may demand bicycles, loud sport shirts or petty cash to melantjong off on a doubtful journey; daughters may cavort around town in yukensi ("you-can-see") blouses and spend their book money on movies. To Americans, the Indonesian younger generation appears to be a model of seriousness and good manners. But Indonesian parents, accustomed to the old ways, see a frightening boldness. They may accept the situation philosophically as a concomitant of the new freedom, but they are very often disturbed.

BUNG (brother, comrade). The fate of the word "Bung" shows how quickly the ideas of a revolution can be clasped to the bosom of conservatism. During the brave, upsetting years after 1945, the Indonesian nationalist movement was permeated with feelings of equalitarianism. Anyone could be called "Bung", and the word became a common denominator for the common struggle. The highest leaders were Bung 'Karno and Bung Hatta, and the lowliest followers were also "Bung".

Now, in 1956, a strange transformation has taken place.

Soekarno and Hatta are still called "Bung", and old comrades of the revolution may still use the term in memory of the old days. But how great an insult to use it toward any other leader or toward an equal! The use of "Bung" today is limited to the calling of servants and low subordinates. In a roundabout way, it means that the master is acknowledging the theoretical equality of the inferior. "Hey, Bung, bring two cups of coffee!" Or to a pedicab driver, "Stop here, Bung." If Bung dared to answer in like manner, he would be guilty of gross bad taste. He should answer back "papa" or "tuan".

The word saudara (also meaning "brother") has shared a somewhat similar fate. On first meeting in a train or on the street, students will use this term of address to show equal station and situation. If they meet with a high official, he may use the word too, but they would not call him saudara in return. They would search for a term of deference and respect or run the risk of appearing ridiculous.

At the present time, the most common terms of address are taken from family life: Bapak (papa), 'Bu (mother), Mas or Abang (older brother), Kakak (older sister) or Adik (usually younger sister, sometimes younger brother). On the whole these terms fit comfortably into a hierarchy marked by both affection and respect for status. Stray terms like Bung have now found their place in the hierarchy.

The ten words in this list do not define the "Eastern Style", but they give some of its flavor. Some Indonesians would use the term to express their vain hope that all the harmony of the old dispensation be somehow restored. This cannot happen. The traditional values expressed in words like halus and sopan remain important, but their significance has been dimmed and changed by the environment of freedom and sudden social mobility. Boldness and personal ambition have their place on the Indonesian scene today. If we wish to speak of an "Eastern Style" which is distinctively Indonesian, we must keep in mind the new as well as the old, bearing always in mind that a situation which has changed once will change again and again.

An Indonesian artist supplied a useful guide for understanding his country's current search for standards and values. His work was criticized because it was not considered "national" enough. His reaction was, "I'm Indonesian, so how can I do anything that is not national." He did not feel that a politician or a maker of doctrines could decide for him about the meaning of a word which Indonesian society has not yet fully defined. As with all important words, the meaning and relative importance of the word "national" is being discovered in the processes of everyday Indonesian life.

Yours sincerely,

Boyd R Compton
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