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Dear Mr. Rogers:

The night before Christmas was so quiet in Pekadjangan that the distant rain could be heard approaching across the flooded rice fields. It reached the coconut palms on the edge of the darkened village with a higher pitched din, then swept on and flooded the tile roofs of the nearby textile sheds in sheets of water. The first large drops splattered outside, then the house was suddenly curtained in a pounding tropical rain. It was eleven o'clock, and this devoutly Moslem village was sleeping with no thought of Christmas.

Five days before, I had left Djakarta to spend Christmas vacation with my friend Ibrahim, a native of Pekadjangan. It seemed like a fine opportunity to practice Indonesian and investigate the famous batik (native textile) industry in the area. As we boarded the train in Djakarta, Ibrahim all but eliminated the first objective with his short briefing: "Whatever you do in Pekadjangan, don't speak Indonesian. The people will hear your accent and think you're Dutch. Speak nothing but English. If there 's any incident in the streets, we can clear it up when we get to my mother's house."

We squeezed into the third class car, found seats, and waited while the train filled up with students, Chinese traders, farmers lugging baskets of vegetables, and mothers carrying their yelling babies. Two young Chinese couples in western dress were speaking Dutch. A wide-bottomed Arab with a white pitjis (moslem hat) had already fallen asleep; he relaxed and spread out, forcing a wrinkled old woman off the bench; she mumbled something through her red betel-stained lips and sat on a basket of vegetables. Passengers made last minute deals with food hawkers, and the new Krupp locomotive was soon puffing east. The bamboo huts, banana trees, brown canals, and mansions of Djakarta rolled by, and we headed out onto the rich plain of Java 's north coast. On the right we could see the range of volcanoes which forms Java's backbone and gives her bandits a fairly inaccessible hiding place. On either side of the train, the story of rice culture could be seen from beginning to end.

The rainy season reaches the western end of Java last, so when the fields around Djakarta are just being flooded, the rice crop is already half grown at the eastern end of the island. From Djakarta to our destination, we saw the stages of flooding, cultivating, planting, the first two weedings, and finally one small field ready for harvest. From a train window, the most striking aspect of rice farming in Java is the system of gotong-royong (mutual cooperation) which persists among Javanese farmers even in areas where land is no longer owned communally. Groups of eight to ten farmers could be seen hoeing together on one plot, the silt-rich water splashing

as they cultivated. Farther on, groups of women were rapidly planting the young rice shoots which had been growing in the scattered communal seed beds.

Here and there, individual farmers were using water buffalo to prepare their fields, but the principal work in this terraced landscape was obviously being done by human hands. The celebrated Dutch economist, J.H. Boeke, claims that, "...the intensity with which food crops are cultivated on permanent fields has become so high, and thereby the productivity of the labor spent on it has dropped so low, that permanent wage labor can no longer be afforded; and the help of cattle no longer is remunerative..."¹ The overabundance of hand labor in the countryside, which amounts to tremendous "disguised unemployment", carries a constant threat to welfare in the countryside. But it is also a potential advantage, for it means that a giant labor force is already available for the development of small-scale, decentralized industry. The utilization of this potential labor force is currently one of Indonesia's biggest headaches.

Water is king in predominately agricultural Java, and the pattern of cultivation and habitation is largely determined by the presence of rivers and their irrigation systems. Between Djakarta and Cheribon, rice cultivation is carried on in broad irrigated strips along the rivers. The higher land between the river systems is devoted to plantation crops, such as rubber or teak, and to villages with their vegetable patches and fruit trees. Approaching the ancient port of Cheribon and beyond toward Semarang, the land flattens out and takes on a typical central Javanese appearance. The broad alluvial plain is devoted partly to wet-paddy farming and partly to sugar, which was at one time Java's chief export crop. Far off to the right, where the plain rises to meet the volcanic uplands, the larger rubber, tea, coffee, and teak plantations could be seen.

The intensity of cultivation and population in the lowland region is due partly to the intricate irrigation system built by the Dutch. When Coen established the Dutch East Indies Company base at old Batavia in the early seventeenth century, the population of Java was probably less than six million, concentrated mainly in a few coastal trading ports and in the intensive rice culture areas of the inland river valley kingdoms. With the population growth and the construction of larger scale water control projects, new areas were opened to rice culture. In fertile Java, this development made available a large enough rice surplus to support the huge labor force necessary for the production of export crops. Java became a huge agricultural factory, with its labor force highly organized and somewhat specialized. The Javanese surplus eventually found expression in the prosperity of tiny Holland and the Dutch colony in the Indies. Overpopulation--which is now an appalling problem--can be considered as evidence that the system itself was astonishingly productive.

So the present economy--with its vital irrigation system--is a colonial legacy. You see the inheritance on all sides. The main water arteries are controlled by permanent stone and cement locks, dykes, and canals. Water from these main sources is controlled and distributed by the government to the villages according to their needs and the water available. In the villages, the lurah, or village chief, controls the further distribution of water through

1. J.H. Boeke, The Interests of the Voiceless Far East, p.40

the system of smaller canals which are maintained by the village. Male villagers contribute their labor in rotation for the upkeep of this system. Because water is so precious, the village at a higher altitude has an advantage over its lower neighbor; if it uses more than the share allotted to it by the government, serious disputes can arise. The local irrigation network, and the attendant pattern of water rights, can reach an amazing degree of complexity. A small stream may enter a wet-paddy area and completely disappear in a maze of tiny ditches. It is not unusual to see water from one field flowing in a trough-bridge at right angles over another canal.

The Javanese landscape has an almost unreal beauty at this time of year, a beauty which my fellow passengers had seen many times and were now ignoring as they made conversation or slept. Seen at close range, the land seems to be an unending series of meticulously cared-for gardens. From a distance, it makes a fantastically romantic picture of rice fields rising in a green and brown stairway to the hill plantations and the volcanoes beyond, silhouetted coconut palms, and villages like dark green islands in a sea of water and young rice shoots. Painted, it would look like nothing more than post-card art.

Pekadangan

We were met at the Pekalongan station by one of Ibrahim's family cars, a 1951 Plymouth, and headed south from the big trading and textile center. Ten kilometers south on a well paved road, we entered Pekadangan. I was trying to remember to speak English and look out for "incidents" as we pulled up in front of the family house, a modern stone and stucco building which would cost around \$25,000 to build in a Long Island residential district; it would not look at all out of place if transferred there. My preconceptions of a Javanese village were rapidly disintegrating as we entered the house to meet the family. I shook hands around the circle of relatives, then Ibrahim turned to me and said in simple English, "They don't like you because you're a foreigner, but they accept you because you're my friend. Now just relax and make yourself at home." With this remark, I decided to ignore my friend's comments and started to talk with several relatives in Indonesian. They were extremely friendly and intensely interested in television, elections, movies, and everything American. During these talks and through the rest of the holiday, I was able to form a general picture of Pekadangan and its history.

My information would hardly stand the test of "scholarly" validity; I was asking the people themselves about their village and their lives. For most of the people I met, it is a very good life indeed.

Pekadangan should be called a village, for its population is only 7000. It is said that an Indonesian village does not become a town until it supports a Chinese community; Pekadangan's

population is entirely Indonesian. The startling thing about Pekadjangan is that it shows few of the characteristics we generally associate with a Javanese village. This is largely because of its economy—weaving and the making of batik sarongs—and its religion—Islam as represented by the Muhammadiyah.² Business and religion are inextricably entwined in the lives of Pekadjangan's prosperous middle class.

Pekadjangan is a relatively new village. Ibrahim and his cousin claim that it was founded by their grandfathers after the First World War and quickly became a batik producing center. In questioning one of the grandfathers, who has been lurah for over twenty years, I found that a small farming community already existed here when the two men arrived. It might be speculated that the two families moved here from Pekalongan to find space and cheap labor for their batik business. There are now about 150 batik enterprisers, most of whom are said to derive from four families. These principal families are closely related and approved marriages take place within the group. Ibrahim's marriage to a cousin was arranged some years ago, but he is now trying to find courage to rebel. From his comments, I sense that he is rebelling against a fat and undesirable cousin rather than the endogamous and controlled system itself. Another of his cousins also told me that he intends to choose his own wife, if he ever gets enough money to leave town again.

Physically, Pekadjangan lies astraddle a through, paved road which continues on to other batik villages, the hill plantations, and a dam. On the main road are most of the houses of the batik enterprisers: modern, expensive, and electrified. The batik sheds lie behind these houses, usually one enterprise for two or three homes. The houses of the workers are down the dirt side streets and alleys. The workers houses I saw were typical Javanese bamboo huts, few of them with tile roofs. As a guest of an employer, however, my chances of seeing the workers' living conditions were almost nil. There are two small shops on the main road, one a food store run by a Chinese from Pekalongan who goes home every night. The other small shop is run by an Indonesian. The most imposing building on the street is the large white mosque with the adjoining middle school. There are two other mosques in the village, one for women, and numerous small prayer houses. Across the street from the mosque is the large one storey building of the Pekadjangan Batik Cooperative. The picture is completed by two elementary schools, a large graveyard which will perhaps become the site of the new high school, and a well kept soccer field where the workers and employers compete almost every Friday.

Batik making and weaving dominate the village economy, and farming takes second place. The village secretary, a young veteran of the revolution, admits that rice farming is relatively backward in the village. The emphasis on industry can be seen in the fact that 45 out of the village's 125 hectares are devoted to settlement, with only 80 hectares given over to farm land. The usual ratio of farm land to settlement is said to be much higher in the villages of Java.

2. My next letter will describe the work of the Muhammadiyah.

Batik production in the Pekadangan area almost came to a halt during the Japanese occupation, but revival was rapid after independence was won in 1949. With the rubber boom that followed the outbreak of the Korean War, Pekadangan prospered. Indonesia's general prosperity rises and falls with the price of rubber, but the economy of Pekadangan is even more directly tied to rubber production, according to Ibrahim. Sumatran plantation workers carry their raw rubber in from the trees in batik sarongs, and it is said that Pekadangan cloth is a great favorite. When the workers are busy wearing out sarong slings a thousand miles away, the little village prospers. Whether the tale is completely true or not, the village economy has suffered since the collapse of the rubber boom in 1952.

The batik enterprise of Ibrahim's family is quite typical of Pekadangan.

In front are the three family houses, one for Ibrahim's mother and step-father, one for his uncle and aunt, and one for his grandparents. Behind the houses are several tile covered sheds where about fifty workers turn out sixty batik sarongs a day and about the same number of woven sarongs. The workers specialize according to sex and age. After the white cloth is cut and washed, male workers apply the basic design with various metal chops which are about six inches square. The work is methodical, but it takes a trained eye to put the design on straight. These workers earn about 12 Rupiah a day according to a piece work system. The cloth then goes to a circle of women sitting on the dirt floor around a pot of hot wax. With a small wooden applicator, they wax the entire cloth except for the section which is to receive the first dye. For this work, they receive around 3 Rupiah a day. The sarong then is dipped into the first dye, which has been mixed by the foreman. After the dye is dry, the wax is washed off, and the process is repeated for a new color. The final cloth may have as many as five colors.

The designs for the most expensive sarongs are drawn entirely by hand, a process which may take as much as a year for exceptionally fine pieces. The Pekadangan batik makers admit that their hand drawn work is low in "art value". Significantly, the employers' families wear sarongs made in Solo, or in neighboring villages where the industry is less advanced but more conscious of art value.

Ibrahim's uncle, who manages the business end of the family enterprise, refers to the workers as "part of the family". He is proud that they have never staged a strike and points out that his labor turnover is almost nil. This picture of a big happy batik family is hard to accept when you see the poor living conditions of the workers, their low wages, and the tremendous gap between the living standards of employer and employee. The size of this gap struck me when one of Ibrahim's aunts said that her children get up to 2 Rupiah a day for candy or toys, while some of the workers in back are receiving as little as 3 Rupiah a day for nine hours work.

I asked about labor organization and found that the only union represented in Pekadangan is the SBII (Islamic Labor Feder-

ation). Perhaps it is worth noting that the SBII is a component of the Masjumi political party, which is led in Pekadangan by the employers. Of course there is nothing really weird in this arrangement, for it is duplicated in many parts of our own South, where boss and worker both vote Democrat. The workers of Pekadangan may eventually be jolted out of their passiveness by the impressive educational program being carried out by the Muhammadiyah. Many of their children are now going to school along with the children of the employers.

In 1937, the batik enterprises of Pekadangan formed a cooperative for the purchase of their expensive materials: white cloth from Japan and Europe, and dyes from Germany and Switzerland. These two imported materials still represent about sixty percent of the final price of a sarong. The cooperative now markets a part of its members' production and hopes to expand its role as trader in an effort to eliminate the profit of the Pekalongan middlemen. Shares currently cost 1000 Rupiah (about \$87.00), and a member may hold a number of shares.

The Pekadangan cooperative now takes part in two national organizations which were formed in the late thirties under Dutch rule: the Batik Trading Company, which purchases dyes and cloth abroad, and the Alliance of Batik Cooperatives, which will represent its members in attacking the thorny problem of mechanization. The cost of the present hand-made batik eats up a disproportionate amount of the average family's income in Indonesia, so mechanization is a social problem which has already gained the attention of the government. The Pekadangan enterprisers realize that their present method of production, lucrative as it is, will have to come to an end someday. The present plan is that they will participate in and profit from mechanization, but they see many dangers and disadvantages in the use of machines. These dangers are of course quite real to the thousands of small batik producers in Central Java. No matter how hard the government planning boards work, the batik industry is in for a tremendous dislocation when the machine age comes.

Whatever the fate of Pekadangan's economy in the uncertain future, the past has been prosperous. In 1951, the cooperative paid its members a healthy seventeen percent dividend on their shares. A visitor gets the impression that the batik enterprisers live on a scale comparable to that of the upper middle class in the west: large well-furnished houses, radios, a protein rich diet, college education for their children, and perhaps an automobile. To this picture must be added the Indonesian sign of status: houseboys, washwomen, and maids.

The employers' relatively luxurious scale of living brings up a problem often mentioned by Dr. Sumitro, brilliant Minister of Finance. This is the tendency among Indonesian businessmen to spend their earnings on houses, cars, and consumers goods, rather than saving, investing, or expanding production. This trait works against the accumulation of capital which is so necessary for industrialization and the development of a strong middle class. An example usually cited is the fate of many Indonesian importers of the favored and

protected Benteng group, who went bankrupt using not only their profits but also their capital to buy cars and homes. With them it was evidently partly a problem of book-keeping and partly a question of culture. The opposite tendency is typified by the Chinese merchants who live frugally, despite their wealth, and devote their entire resources to their business. One of the Pekadjangan producers explained to me, "We Indonesians are different from the Chinese or Dutch. When we make enough money to live well, we're happy." The influence of this cultural factor on Indonesian industrialization is worth considerable attention. My impression in Pekadjangan was that the investment in personal family property was considerably higher than in the family enterprise. This is perhaps due to the nature of the industry: rudimentary equipment for hand work, cheap labor, and a steady demand for the product. An employer can live well without adopting a "Dutch" or "Chinese" attitude. The question is how much a change in the economic situation--machine competition, for example--will change his "Indonesian" attitude. It is worth pointing out that the biggest recent change in the economic situation has been toward cooperative association, not mounting competition.

The government is actively encouraging the formation of cooperatives and associations of cooperatives as an answer to the problem of capital formation. This is being done through the bait of low interest loans, technical assistance, government contracts, or preferential taxation. No doubt the formation of the Pekadjangan cooperative with more than 150,000 Rupiah capital places its members in a stronger position to meet the future. The creation of enterprises such as the Batik Trading Company makes possible the accumulation of really significant amounts of capital, and perhaps points the way to the development of a type of native industry which is neither capitalist or socialist. The principal problems, however, remain in the future. Technical and organizational experience cannot be provided by plan.

In the last analysis, Pekadjangan is a thriving industrial village, and its batik producers, for all their problems and tendencies, constitute a vigorous middle class. They have many of the same attitudes and interests we associate with a middle class in America or Europe. This outlook, which is closely tied to Pekalongan's religion, will be the subject of my next letter.

I would like to close this sketch with a short "success story" of one of Pekadjangan's former residents. It illustrates the possibilities open to an enterprising man in one village of this land of supposedly little opportunity.

A.K. came to Pekadjangan twenty years ago from East Java to serve as teacher in the Muhammadiyah grammar school. Through his connections, he was able to start trading in batik, first on a limited scale. He did well and married a local girl from a family of batik enterprisers. The marriage didn't last long, and he moved to Pekalongan, the large batik center nearby. His business expanded and he married again. Now he is head of a large import-export firm, and he continues his trade in batik through branches in several cities. He owns two cars, two houses in Pekalongan, and a city

block in a middle class residential district of Semarang. He is head of the Masjumi Party in the district of Pekalongan, a position of considerable political power considering the almost certain victory of the Masjumi in the scheduled elections. He is still in his forties. I found it hard to believe A.K. when he repeated the claim that Indonesians do not make energetic businessmen.

Pekadjangan is by no means a typical Javanese village. It offers a tremendous contrast to the villages of the agricultural hinterland. But perhaps it proves that J.H. Boeke's famous and pessimistic prescription for the Javanese masses, "plain living and high thinking", does not apply universally. Villages such as Pekadjangan should be studied thoroughly by competent sociologists and economists, for they represent the feelers of a revolution which is reaching out into the Javanese countryside.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Boyd Compton". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Boyd Compton

Received New York 12/27/53.