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AN APPROACH TO INDONESIAN HISTORY: TOWARDS AN OPEN FUTURE

Soedjatmoko

TRANSLATION SERIES

MODERN INDONESIA PROJECT

Southeast Asia Program
Department of Far Eastern Studies
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York
1960

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AN APPROACH TO INDONESIAN HISTORY:

TOWARDS AN OPEN FUTURE

Soedjatmoko

An address before the
Seminar on Indonesian History
Gadjah Mada University
Jogjakarta, December 14, 1957

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PREFACE

Independent Indonesia emerged from colonial rule virtually bereft of anything which could be described as a comprehensive history. The existing pre-colonial chronicles were regionally focused, and with a very few exceptions Dutch writers concerned with Indonesian history had a primary preoccupation with Holland's role -- frequently in their approach to the 17th and 18th centuries regarding the history of Indonesian states as a mere adjunct of the history of the Netherlands East India Company. For Indonesia this problem was compounded because of the disinclination of the Dutch to provide facilities to Indonesians for training in history. At the close of colonial rule, no more than two or three Indonesians could be described as having received a scholarly training in history.

Although concurrent with the beginning of the Indonesian Revolution in 1945 there was widespread recognition of the need for a scholarly, Indonesian-centered history of Indonesia, most of that handful of Indonesians capable of effectively addressing themselves to this task were pressed into the more urgent service of political leadership and government administration. In the decade since the attainment of independence almost all these people were again burdened heavily with governmental tasks. Most of the history written during this past decade has been largely -- the exceptions have been disquietingly few -- a rehash of history books written by Netherlanders, many of which, even from the standpoint of a Dutch-oriented history of Indonesia, were of poor quality and lacking in scholarly foundation.

Consequently the need to rewrite Indonesian history, both at the scholarly level and at the level of instruction in Indonesian primary and secondary schools, has during the past few years been generally and acutely felt. The central question has been how the writing of this history should be approached, with which major foci, from which point of view and by whom. Agreement concerning these questions has not yet been possible, and a dispute as to how they should be resolved has developed with great, if sometimes disguised, intensity. Although the range of opinion is

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considerable, the major difference lies between those who are convinced of the propriety of using history to create and maintain support for a national ideology and those who would protect history from the immediate demands of nationalism with the objective of developing its study in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom, maintaining as high scientific and scholarly standards as possible -- writing history for the sake of a general deepening of social understanding, rather than subordinating it to any particular ideologically or politically determined end. This is, of course, a problem which while of immediate concern is destined to have long-term consequences.

Reflecting the widely felt need to resolve this issue and related problems and generally to encourage the writing of Indonesian history was the conference held in Jogjakarta in mid-December 1957 upon the initiative of Gadjah Mada University, the University of Indonesia and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The approach of the conference was well described in the program drawn up by its secretariat. In the introduction to the program it was stated:

> "In the struggle of the Indonesian people to build up a free and independent country and to search for new values in all spheres of life in accordance with its own identity, the need has been felt for compiling a national history.
>
> By decree of His Excellency, The Minister of Education and Culture, a seminar on Indonesian history will be held from 14-18 December, 1957 in Jogjakarta, Central Java.
>
> Since, for the greater part, the existing books on Indonesian history still contain points of view of the colonial period and as such are not in accordance with the real history of the Indonesian people, the purpose of the seminar will be to stimulate the collection of materials and to seek a new approach towards the writing of the nation's history."

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The first, and in terms of the problem noted above, probably the most important item on the agenda was entitled: "The Philosophical Concept of National History". The speakers were Professor Mohammad Yamin and Soedjatmoko, the two presenting rather different views with respect to the desirable philosophical approach. We should have liked to have here presented translations of both statements. Unfortunately, however, on attempting to secure permission to translate Professor Yamin's address, we were informed that he had not written it out and had spoken only from notes, consequently no text being available. We regret this and, having recently learned that Professor Yamin's address has now been written out and published, we hope that he will be willing to give permission for its translation and publication in our Translation Series.

Mr. Soedjatmoko, author of the address here presented, is one of the outstanding intellectuals of Indonesia's revolutionary generation, having attained a position of prominence both as a writer and as a publisher. The Cornell Modern Indonesia Project is pleased to have this opportunity for making his important statement to the history seminar available to a wider audience.

George McT. Kahin
Director

Ithaca, New York
May 30, 1960

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My presence as a non-historian at this gathering of historians calls for an explanation. A part of the explanation has been given at the beginning of our meeting, but I feel that it is still necessary for me to give an account of the reasons why I have been so bold as to accept the invitation of the sponsors of this seminar to speak here.

The subject matter of our discussions here today is Philosophy of History, in particular National Philosophy of History. Now, philosophy of history happens to be an aspect of history which is most frequently and most congenially treated by non-historians. St. Augustine, Hegel, Marx, Spengler, Croce, Alexander Rüstow, Nietzsche, Cassirer, Ortega Y Gasset, Alfred Weber, Jaspers, Sorokin -- none of these are historians, although their thinking has clearly had an influence on both history and historical understanding. Indeed historians rarely seem to concern themselves with philosophy of history. The names of Burckhardt, Toynbee, Huizinga and Romein should be mentioned among the few historians who did or do concern themselves with this subject.

A second and more important reason why I, as one who is not an historian, accepted this invitation is that I regard myself as having a personal interest in the issues at stake. Every Indonesian is directly involved in what we are to discuss in this history seminar. The ways in which we look at history in general and at Indonesian history in particular, the ways in which historical research is going to be conducted and the atmosphere surrounding this research, and again the ways in which historical knowledge will be made available to the public and will be imparted to the younger generations of Indonesians -- all this will directly contribute to the moulding of the thinking and the national character of the Indonesian people. Our view of history will have a definite impact on the outlook of the Indonesian people toward the future, and in this way on the destiny of our people and country. My presence here stems from that awareness of the inseparable ties which link the future we want with our choices in the present and our concept of the past. This essay presents some reflections of an intellectual who is not a specialist on the problem of history in Indonesia at the present time. So much for explanations of my presence here. I do not mean them as apologies.

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OUR PROBLEM AT THE PRESENT TIME.

When a people finds itself at a turning point in its history, it is only natural that it should ask itself questions about itself. There is the expectation that these questions and this act of self-examination will result in a clearer definition of who they really are, a definition which may be more suited to the needs of the new historical phase into which they are entering, and which may also be able to generate within them the strength and the faith needed to face the problems which arise from the new situation. We should therefore not be surprised at the fact that questions about our identity as a people, its roots and its historical development, invariably arise whenever we face the problems which are bound up with our independence and with our present period of critical change.

Probably never before in the history of our people have we felt so much at a loss and so bewildered in the face of our problems as a country and as a people. It is very clear now that in facing these problems we are divided. We differ in our understanding and evaluation of them, and both emotionally and rationally we react differently to them. Indeed our reactions are often mutually opposed. It is as if our unity as a people were split, with the several parts divided from one another, now along ethnic lines, then as between the center and the regions, sometimes as between religion and secularism, or again between the forces of tradition and of change, and sometimes, of course, as between the different political ideologies. And so we often feel ourselves confronted with a perplexing accumulation of somehow related problems which sometimes threaten to overwhelm us. In addition to the political and governmental crisis which for several years now has pervaded our lives, we also face the fact that a large flow of material goods, of cultural products and political thoughts is entering our country from the outside, as a result of the breaking of the bonds of colonialism and of our people's entry into the life of the twentieth century.

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WHO THEN ARE WE?

All these developments have produced an anxiety and confusion which appears now to have almost reached its climax. So the question forces itself upon us with all the more insistence: " Who are we then, who are we as a people and as a nation, who have only so recently felt ourselves a single people and now appear to be divided and no longer able to recognize ourselves in each other. What compass have we to use if we are to face this whole gamut of new realities and problems and not lose our personality and identity as a people? What is it that binds us together into a single people, and in what light are we to understand and place in perspective the differences and conflicts which divide us? How did we come to this condition of division and crisis which now appears to dominate our life? What are its origins, what are the remedies for it? Are we being swept along by an inexorable tide of history? If so, where are we now and whither are we being carried? If not, are we capable of controlling the course of this stream of development and in which direction are we to divert it? "

It is questions like these which have led many of our people to turn to history in the hope of finding answers to the anxiety and uncertainty which characterizes our life at the present time. Our immediate political crisis only adds to the urgency of this quest. It would seem that this quest lies behind the holding of this seminar, and behind the particular phrasing of today's topic, "Philosophy of National History". There also seems to be the hope that a philosophy of our history as a nation will be able to provide us with a basis for guidance in the development of history as a science, and with a framework and standards for the teaching of history in our country.

THE A-HISTORICAL VIEW OF LIFE.

That it is to history that these questions are addressed reflects a most important occurrence in the life of our people. It signifies the breakthrough of the historical mental outlook and view of life into the a-historical framework which has dominated the mental climate of a great part of our people in the past, and

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remnants of which still continue to make their influence felt. This cast of thinking in Indonesia has been closely connected with the static feudal-agrarian structure of society. This social structure is seen as the reflection of a cosmic order which provides an appropriate place and function for every member of society and every social group, all within a firmly established framework. Society is not seen as the resultant of component social forces. Nor is it seen as the confluence of conflicting group interests with a constantly shifting equilibrium of power. Rather, society is seen as a sphere in which there occur developments which find their roots outside the temporal world. For this reason the great events or occurrences which affect the life of society are seen not as amenable, at least in part, to rational human manipulation and control. They are not regarded as consequences of the success or failure of human efforts. On the contrary, they appear as occurring beyond the reach of human power and responsibility. And so one's hope of freeing oneself from the difficulties and misery of the present, one's hope for a better future in this world, is made to depend on the arrival of a Ratu Adil (1) or some sort of leader in whom the Wahju Tjakraningrat (2) might be vested, making him for the duration the steward of the cosmic order and its justice.

In this view the collective human experience is of significance only inasmuch as it provides lessons, pointers and warnings which prepare man for a deeper understanding of his relatedness to the world of the spirit and to the truths whose validity extends beyond life. The inner meaning of human life lies outside and beyond the temporal world. The significance of human efforts in the world is seen as not primarily related to the results of these efforts. It is seen to lie in the fact that these efforts test and forge the human spirit. Man's ideals are meaningful not because they are just or good, but rather because of their power to move men, to bring them to their spiritual trial.

(1) Messianic King, according to Javanese popular belief, expected to arise after a period of chaos and misery, restoring ideal conditions for the country and happiness to the people. Up to the present day there are constantly recurring press reports of people claiming to be the Ratu Adil.

(2) Divine sanction of the ruler. When the Wahju leaves him, it spells the end of the ruler. Sometimes the Wahju Tjakraningrat is invested in a potential ruler, thus making his impending succession to power certain.

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No sense of time is involved in man's immersion in the flow of transient things. For the sense of time has not been actuated by any sense of direct responsibility for this flow, or by any accepted necessity for choice and decision in the face of the sequence of events. Mankind's accumulated experience does not enter our awareness as history, but is condensed into stories which tell of the relation of man to the natural and moral order of the cosmos, and into tales which show the best ways for men to face the ordeals which confront them in this temporal world.(3) It is not difficult to see that the influence of this view of life, or of its remnants, in the life of our society is still considerable. We can see it in the style of our politics, in the fact that we frequently show little sense of urgency about making decisions or taking irrevocable steps, very little of the feeling that the decisions we take may very well influence, and sometimes indeed determine, the course of history and of our future, and all this even though at the level of rationality we may be aware of these things. The point is that there is no acceptance of the decisive importance of the here and now and no consequent sense of responsibility. These matters are not accepted because they are not felt. This picture requires some qualification. Buginese-Macassarese historical writings and likewise Malay and Javanese historiography provide evidence of the fact that the a-historical point of view did not characterize the higher social strata in several Indonesian cultures of the past. Buginese-Macassarese historical writings in particular demonstrate an impressive degree of exactness and objectivity. In Java, aside from the great Chronicles (babad), which do not fall within this category, there is also a variety of local histories, of genealogies and family histories which show that a sense of history, in the more modern meaning of the term, was not foreign to the prijaji (4) group of Java.

(3) When a military clash between the Central Government and the P.R.R.I. rebels seemed inevitable, many people found some degree of consolation and justification for a kind of stoic resignation in contemplating the story of the Brathajuda, the great battle between the Pandava's and the Kaurava's as related in the Wayang literature.

(4) prijaji: bureaucratic aristocracy in Java.

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But it would seem that with our loss of political power, and with the consequent loss of direct responsibility for our own destiny and future, the a-historical elements of our culture gradually grew in strength to a point where these came to a position of virtual dominance in our view of life.

THE HISTORICAL VIEW OF LIFE.

In contrast to this stands the outlook on life which in the last hundred years gradually gave shape to the view of history as a scientific discipline. This in turn, of course, also did not fail to influence that outlook on life itself. According to this outlook, the experience of mankind is seen as a series of events which can and must be understood in terms purely of secular factors. In the view of history which goes with this outlook on life there is no place for the occult or the mysterious as factors of interpretation. If an historian, on the basis of his religious views, sees a particular historical sequence as the work of God or as God's intervention in history, he will interpret this intervention in terms of secular factors operative at the time. He will not see the intervention as an independent factor existing alongside the secular factors. He will regard society as a resultant of association and conflict as between different interests and groups.

In this view every happening is seen as having ascertainable causes. In every case it is believed to be possible to point to those who are responsible for a decision or a happening which has influenced the course of history. Today's happenings are seen as rooted in past events, just as they will have a direct effect on the shape of things in the future.

Thus man is directly responsible for his future. He is aware of this responsibility and accepts it. Politics becomes a chessboard on which responsible men attempt to regulate and channel the various forces and conflicts in particular directions for the attainment of particular goals. Life in the world is seen as having meaning and significance in and of itself. Human effort and endeavor are important for their own sake, and not merely as tests of one's spiritual strength. The situation in which man finds himself

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today is seen as a consequence of the past. But at the same time man is also conscious that he is free, and therefore responsible for his future. His awareness of his situation in the here and now, which simultaneously comprises his notion of the total history of mankind and of his own people, also encompasses, and in its turn is molded by, his dreams of the future. Conscious of the past, then, we are free in the present and responsible for the shaping of the future. It is the concept of history as a scientific discipline which "arms our vision" in this confrontation.

Thus may be briefly sketched the historical view of life. As can easily be seen, it is a view which is different from the a-historical view examined earlier, and in many respects conflicting with it. I am of the opinion that in dealing with the problem of history or, as we can now put it more precisely, with the problem of the development of history as a science in our country, we are essentially faced with the question of our whole outlook on life. I am convinced that no development of history as a scientific discipline will be possible unless we are aware of this problem. In other words, unless we are constantly aware of the fact that by the Revolution of 1945 we, as a nation, have accepted full and permanent responsibility for our future. It should not be necessary to say this. However, we can observe how easily many of our people, including a great number of our intellectuals, when faced with problems of the present affecting their own lives or affecting the nation, jump away from the responsibility of rational decision-making, and fall back to the consolation and security of surrender to the cosmic order. They tend to accept in such instances decisions not rationally taken, but purporting to stem from a deeper knowledge of that order. When one sees how easily these people with this a-historical frame of mind accept the myth of a glorious past as a salve for their wounded self-respect, how they depend on the myth of 350 years of colonialism as a guide in facing the problems of today, then this point cannot be overemphasized. For we have now permanently left behind us the feudal-agrarian society. That society has broken down. In facing the task of building a new society we cannot find guidance in the a-historical perspective on life.

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The Revolution of 1945 constitutes the final breakthrough in which historical consciousness penetrated the a-historical frame of mind in Indonesia. It constitutes the climax of a process which finds its beginning in the birth of the national movement. And now we can no longer run away from it, even though at present only a limited section of the Indonesian people is consciously affected by it.

PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY.

Let us now return to the question of philosophy of history. Can a philosophy of history provide answers to the questions we have discussed earlier, and so take away the feeling of uncertainty and anxiety from which they stem? Can these answers in turn bring us closer to the formulation of a national philosophy of history, such as is the subject of our discussion here today?

It is inherent in man's nature that he should attempt to order his knowledge in such a way as to be able to comprehend it in terms of one or two basic principles. Thus man has long attempted to organize the wealth of historical data at his disposal in the light of one or more principles or patterns in order thereby to uncover history's meaning. In The City of God, St. Augustine has portrayed history as an unfolding of God's will from the day of creation to the day of judgment. Hegel has portrayed it as the unfolding in the material world of a Mind which is in the process of becoming conscious of itself and of realizing its own essential being. Marx and Spengler too each had his own theory of history. They are, of course, well known, and we will not deal with them here.

But since Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger, and in the face of the development of scientific historical criticism, the great edifices of historical theories with their closed thought systems, have collapsed. It is true that these men's views of history and man continue to exert their influence, and continue to be valuable in the world of thought; it is nevertheless also true that the era of the great philosophical systems of history has passed, and will never return. The progress of human thought, and of historical scholarship itself, has put an end to this era.

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We now know that the historical data available to mankind cannot be subsumed under one or two principles, but that they can only be understood by looking at them in terms of a multiplicity of viewpoints. They are henceforth poly-interpretable. In addition, we now know that no historian, and no one for that matter who thinks about history, can fully detach himself, or his outlook, from the historical situation in which he himself lives. In our efforts to find illumination from history for the problem of the meaning of human life, we are now more clearly aware of the relativity and the historically conditioned character of our thoughts and of the systems which we may build. And so philosophy of history has abandoned its ideal to synthesize the whole of human history into a great philosophical system, or, to borrow Karl Jaspers' term in Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte, to arrive at a total pattern of history (Totalentwurf der Geschichte). Today philosophy of history limits its concern to thinking, to reflecting about history.

A NATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY?

If then in the twentieth century, philosophy of history has grown in its understanding of itself and has become more humble in its claims, if what remains of it is simply philosophizing about history, can we still work with the concept of a national philosophy of history, or of a philosophy of national history? One thing is clear. Philosophy, and also philosophy of history, almost by definition, can only be universal in character. At least it claims to be. A philosophy of history necessarily encompasses or claims to encompass the whole of the human community with all its history. Such a philosophy cannot be concerned merely with the history of one people and one state -- not even one's own -- because the destiny of a state and people is not determined exclusively by factors within the geographical or mental boundaries of a single nation. It is not without valid reason that philosophy of history has always concerned itself with cultural units rather than with the destinies of the national states within such units.

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Thinking about one's own country's history is a natural and legitimate preoccupation. But in pursuing it, it would be a mistake for us to see as special factors the forces which influenced the fate of our own people and determined the course of our own history, for us to see these as operative only in our special case and not for the rest of the world. We should not see ourselves as a nation with special origins, and a special calling in this world distinct from other nations. We should not view the glories of our past as closed to historical scrutiny, not to be examined with the same tools and methods applied to the rest of mankind. Such a view can arise only out of a deep-seated fear that the nation might lose its identity in facing the outside world and an unknown future. Or else it might be the consequence of a feeling of excessive pride and superiority towards other nations. The history of mankind itself abounds with examples of how dangerous it is for a nation to lose itself in a dreamworld of its own making. We ourselves have seen the destruction of the dream of the Japanese fascists, who regarded themselves as a nation with their own special provenance and their own special calling in this world. There is also China, which for centuries avoided contact with the outside world in an effort to preserve its uniqueness. Finally the reality of the outside world, both in a material and in a spiritual sense, broke through its Great Wall with the rise to power of an ideology whose origins lie not in China, but in Europe -- the ideology of Communism.

It is, of course, quite possible to think in terms of a nation's specific calling when one watches the role a particular country or state has played in a particular period of history. But it would seem that such a designation can only be applied after the event, after the role has been played. It cannot be regarded as the basis or point of departure for a nation in facing its future. In short, the particularistic nature of such ideas about one's own nation are clearly in conflict with the universalistic claims of a philosophy. Rarely, I feel, has this matter been more effectively placed in its proper perspective than by Jacob Burckhardt. Burckhardt wrote:

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> The truest study of our national history will be that which considers our own country in parallels and in relation to world history and its laws, as a part of a great whole, illumined by the same heavenly bodies as have shone upon other times and other peoples, threatened with the same pitfalls and one day to be engulfed in the same eternal night and perpetuated in the same great universal tradition. (5)

So, however understandable it is that in our love for our own country and our feeling of concern for its fate and future, our attention should center on the history of our own nation, we cannot regard this history as something which has developed independent of the influences and historical factors which operate elsewhere. All the regularities, patterns and rhythms which we might discern in the study of history should be looked at as applying universally to the history of all mankind. It is clear therefore that there is no such thing as a national philosophy of history, or a philosophy of a particular national history.

In putting forward the idea of a national philosophy of history we have in fact left the field of scientific history and entered another field, the field of ideology, the field of the use of history for political purposes, which in some cases may ultimately lead to demagogy. And there is no doubt in my mind that the participants in this seminar are here not as ideologues, not as politicians, not as demagogues, but purely as scholars.

It is, of course, right that we should think about and concentrate our attention on the history of our own country. That is our duty. But we cannot do this as something which is independent of our view of human history in general.

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(5) Jacob Burckhardt, Force and Freedom, Reflections on World History. New York: Pantheon, 1943, Pages 89-90.

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If then this is our conclusion, that philosophy of history has been reduced to thinking about, to reflecting on history, and that a national philosophy of history has no place in the field of history as a scientific discipline, nor in the field of the philosophy of history proper, can we then leave today's subject simply with this conclusion? I think not. Our need for more certitude, our anxiety about the present situation, about the preservation of our own identity and about the direction in which we are moving, all these things are pressing too hard and too seriously upon us. The questions which are agitating us at the deepest level of our being are too real to be pushed aside with simply a negative answer. The crux of the matter is that these questions have been addressed wrongly. If they are addressed to the philosophy of history or to a national philosophy of history, no answer will be forthcoming. The answer to these questions must, in my opinion, be sought from the science of history, from history as a scientific discipline.

A FRAMEWORK FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH.

In turning to the science of history itself for answers to our questions, let us go back for a moment to what has been said about philosophy of history, about thinking about history. We have seen that philosophy of history and reflection on history is possible only after the historical data have been unearthed, established and delimited by historical investigation and after they have been threaded into historical pictures. Historical research in fact precedes reflection on history.

OUR REAL HISTORY IS STILL UNWRITTEN.

The questions which have been raised above and which reflect our needs at the present time are therefore not in fact a matter of philosophy of history, but rather a matter of our historical research, its character and direction, its starting point and goals. The question before us is what should be the starting point of our historical work so that its results may meet our needs of the present time. The answer is, in my opinion, not difficult.

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At the present time the starting point of our historical investigations can be nothing other than Indonesian society itself, which throughout the ages has faced, undergone and absorbed waves of outside influence without losing its continuity or vitality, the same society which finally emerged as the nation and the state of Indonesia, a society whose history has in fact not begun to be written.

The history of the Hinduization of Indonesian society in Java has been studied, but only from an India-centric point of view. It has not provided us with any picture of the Indonesian society which absorbed this Hinduization. It is the same with historical studies of the entry of Islam into Indonesia. The history of the Netherlands Indies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is known only from the point of view of the Dutch East India Company. It does not add significantly to our understanding of Indonesian society either. The history of the last part of Dutch colonialism provides us with historical pictures which reflect primarily the Dutch image of themselves in the Netherlands Indies, consciously or unconsciously shaped by their expectation of continued power in the future. Let us start our research and studies with this Indonesian society, which, as we can judge from various small signs, proved to be strong enough in the seventeenth century, and even well into the eighteenth, to be able to face the Western world on terms of equality. This basis of equality existed not only as regards technological levels and the extent of trade and shipping, but also as regards military skill and weapons.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MYTH OF THE DUTCH EAST INDIA COMPANY.

It was the Dutch historian, van Leur, who first directed our attention to this. He was also the one who showed that the places of foreign occupation in Indonesia left almost no traces of influence on the life and strength of the Indonesian states until well into the eighteenth century. We are indebted to him for destroying the myth of the East India Company and the myth of the decline and weakness of the Indonesian states in facing the Company. Thanks to his work we

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can now ask the right questions of Indonesian historical scholarship, for we have freed our thinking from the restrictive framework of East India Company history and the history of the kingdom of the Netherlands. We can now put Indonesian history once again within its proper frame of Indonesian society.

Berg too has made a valuable contribution in this regard in that he has reopened the question of how valid Krom's theory of the process of Hinduization in Java is. In the same way Resink has destroyed the myth of the Netherlands Indies government, reducing the period of full colonialism from 350 to 35 years. It is Resink too who has drawn our attention to the range of activities of the Indonesian states in the field of international law right up to the end of the nineteenth century.

It would be best, therefore, for investigations of Indonesian history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and of the nineteenth century, to take, for some time to come, the direction which has been suggested by and in the works of van Leur and Resink.

One may say that for no period whatsoever has the history of Indonesian society been analysed in a meaningful way.

SOME QUESTIONS.

Many questions arise. Here I shall mention only a few, taken at random from a whole series. For instance, why did the imposition of Netherlands Indies power become possible in the nineteenth century? What happened inside Indonesian society itself which made this process possible? When did the disintegration of the old structure of Indonesian society begin and what were its causes? How did this process develop? What factors in the international situation influenced the Indonesian revolution and the establishment of the Indonesian Republic? And so on.

Study of historical developments outside Java will also add to our understanding of ourselves as a nation, and of the various problems which we now face.

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Studies of this sort would, for instance, show that differences in actual exposure to Dutch colonialism in Java as compared with the areas outside Java, have led to different reactions to that colonialism. Among other things they have led to a difference in the temper of nationalism as between Java and the areas outside Java. The fact that emotional radicalism in politics is stronger among the Javanese people than outside Java may very well be connected with differences in the length and character of their colonial experience.

In the same way, a person such as Daud Beureuh (6) cannot be understood fully in terms simply of the problems of today. We can have a full appreciation of the meaning of his role only if we place it against the backround of the history of his own region. Studies of the history of the various regions will show that, true as it is that the nationalist movement became the most important force and instrument in the struggle for independence, it is also true that many of the problems which are faced by the Indonesian state in its governmental policy in the period since the achievement of independence cannot be adequately understood or settled if they are looked at from the point of view of the nationalist movement only. The reason is that these problems are often rooted in the varieties of history in the different parts of Indonesia.

PROBLEMS OF HISTORICAL THEORY.

The study of Indonesian history which takes Indonesian society itself as its point of departure, will present us with various problems of historical theory. Van Leur has mentioned some of these, for instance problems of historical terminology and categorization. How far can the categories which originate in the development of European society be used to understand the development of Indonesian society? How far can we use terms like "feudal", "bourgeoisie" and so on? How far can terms like these be lifted out of the environment in which they have developed and brought to Indonesian society? Indonesian history, like Indonesian

(6) Achenese leader of the Darul Islam.

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sociology, will have to create its own terminology and categorizations in order that the history and society of Indonesia may be analyzed and understood on its own merits. In the same way the periodisation of Indonesian history will have to be rooted in the autonomous development of this history itself.

In our efforts to reconstruct the Indonesian society of the past we will perhaps find it useful to make an attempt at creating a typology of this Indonesian society. If the typology of Max Weber cannot, as it stands, be applied to Indonesia, it can at least suggest an approach. Perhaps Marx's thinking on Asian society, (which, interestingly enough, has been discarded by the Communists, but developed by Wittfogel in his theory of hydraulic society), can provide us with a point of departure in this direction. It is very important, however, that we should be aware of the dangers of relying too heavily on this sort of speculation. All of these methods contain the danger of confining the free play of our thought processes within narrow limits or influencing it unduly in a particular direction. But if they are used cautiously it may be that the results will be of significant help for further research. The critical examination of historical sources and their place in the framework of Indonesian history is also something that should receive attention. These are some of the problems of historical theory which should gradually be faced. But more important than all thinking about analytical tools and methods is that a new beginning should now be made by resuming historical research itself.

THE ORGANIZATION OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH.

For the resumption of serious historical research it is necessary that there should be greater coordination of effort than in the past. The fact that to date no single coherent body of Indonesian history exists is, to an important extent, a result of the heterogeneity of the historical sources which have been used, and of the heterogeneity of the types of skill of the historical scholars. It is also, of course, a consequence of the fact that there was not, in the past, a national consciousness which could function as a point of focus for historical research and studies. We should work for closer cooperation,

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cross-fertilization and mutual criticism among historians, archaeologists, philologists, sociologists, anthropologists and economists.

There should also be efforts to achieve co-operation with the historians of our neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, in China and Japan and with the centers of historical studies of the metropolitan powers who have had, or continue to have, colonies in this part of the world. On the basis of these scattered sources it should be possible to reconstruct the history and structure of Asian society of which Indonesian society is a living part.

The picture of Indonesian society which would be reconstructed in this way would undoubtedly be more complete than any based exclusively on sources available in Indonesia. In view of the international character of Indonesian history -- as seen in the ways in which Hindu influence came to make itself felt in Indonesia in the history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and also in the Asian revolution of this twentieth century -- the necessity for such international cooperation does not need to be stressed further.

However, before all this can be done, we will first have to train the specialists in sufficient numbers. This does not need to be discussed further in this paper; let me here simply mention it. The immediately relevant fact is that we cannot expect to have specialists in sufficiently large numbers in the near future. So our thoughts naturally turn to the elaboration of a plan for historical research drawn up from the point of view of the living needs and problems of the present period in an attempt to secure maximum efficiency.

Indeed, planning of this kind is, in greater or lesser degree, necessary. But, on the other hand, it raises again the question of freedom in scholarly historical investigation. Perhaps this problem should be looked at briefly at this point.

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"NATIONAL" AND "NON-NATIONAL" HISTORIOGRAPHY.

In our thinking about developing historical scholarship in our country the adjective "national" always seems to enter, and implicitly also its counterpart, "non-national". There is, apparently, a strong fear that historical studies which are not guided by a particular view of national history will lead to results which are harmful, weakening, or at least disappointing. For those among us who feel a sense of responsibility for the life of our nation and for the education of our younger generation to true Indonesian citizenship, it is a matter of great concern that, in what has hitherto been presented as Indonesian history or the history of the Netherlands Indies, there is no coherent body, no single focal point of illumination, no particular frame of reference. This concern is indeed understandable. And it may very well be that this is the reason why the organizers of this seminar, in formulating our subject today, have emphasized the specification of "national".

However, I feel that fears of this kind are groundless. I am convinced that in the period since the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia there would not have been a single serious historian of whatever nationality who sought to study Indonesian history and did not take Indonesian society itself as his point of departure for his research. It goes without saying that such persons would always have placed the historical events which they studied in their connection with Indonesian society as it appeared at the time of those events, and by doing so, in the context of Indonesian history in general.

It is a different problem if this adjective "national" refers to a particular political attitude, reflecting excessive and aggressive nationalism with its peculiar combination of xenophobia and exclusiveness. In that case we should realize that history as a scholarly discipline is not and cannot be made the handmaiden of a particular ideology -- cannot that is, as long as it is true to its scholarly character -- even though within certain limits the political ideology of the historian inevitably affects the methods and results of his studies.

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We ourselves have seen that history, as a result of continuing research, always destroys the myths of history, although these myths are often supported and protected by the powers who happen to be exercising political control at the particular time. Let us not forget that it was Dutch historians like Berg and van Leur and ones of Dutch descent such as Resink who destroyed the historical myths of the Netherlands Indies and the projection into the future of their assumptions of continued power. Science is indeed a revolutionary force of great strength, not only in the field of history.

For these reasons it is not necessary that research or teaching in the field of history should be subjected to specifications designed to safeguard its national character. Scientific investigation must be free if it is to produce significant results. It must have the freedom to formulate and disseminate opinions and conclusions which might be different or in conflict with the dominant political ideology or with the myths and views which are generally accepted at a particular time.

Only if this freedom is safeguarded can historical scholarship be of use for our country. Only in this way can it continue to enrich our culture, and widen our awareness of ourselves. Only in this way can it continue to add to our understanding of the present time, by bringing new historical facts to bear upon that understanding in such a way that we become better capable of facing our future.

So, if and as long as we approach our historical work by taking Indonesian society itself as the starting-point and framework of Indonesian history, there is no need for us to hold on desperately to the "national" idea. The contrast between things "national" and things "non-national" is not useful and not fruitful. It is not necessary for historical research to be limited by any sort of qualification intended to secure its national character.

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Limitations of this kind will become restrictions and will eventually lead to political interference in the sphere of scientific investigation. This will make historical work more difficult. It will misguide it and it will stifle it. Finally it will isolate us in our thinking and make us close our hearts and minds as we face the outside world and our own future.

This means that freedom, an atmosphere of intellectual freedom, is an absolute prerequisite for historical studies. It is also an absolute prerequisite for a country's mental health.

In what has been said here we have placed Indonesian historical research and writing in its proper perspective, the perspective of Indonesian society. Historical research carried out in the ways described here, in an atmosphere of freedom, will certainly produce new materials and new angles of vision which will gradually broaden and deepen our understanding of our situation. The historical pictures which will be produced by such a development of history in our country will certainly change our view of ourselves, a view which, at the present time, is rather limited in its differentiations and nuances. This investigation will gradually cast a clearer light on our collective personality in all its complexities. It will cast light on us as a nationalist movement, on our different experiences in our various regions, on us as a part of the Asian upheaval, on us as a part of the changing world.

Historical study and research will teach us the lesson that what binds us as a nation is indeed a common past, however different that past might have been for each of us. It will make us conscious of the fact that we are also bound together as a nation by the fact that we face the same problems today, problems which result both from the destruction of traditional Asian society and from the task which we face of building a new society in accordance with the requirements of the twentieth century. But over and above all this, it will also make us realize that what binds us is something more than a common past and common problems of the present -- the will for a common future.

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We now know that the pictures which are put together as a result of historical research are not fixed and definite pictures. They keep changing to accord with new findings produced by continuing research, and also as a result of the fact that the questions which are asked of history change with the changing historical situation. This indeed is the nature of historical work. History cannot provide final certainty. Those who are looking for this sort of certainty should not look to history for it.

Historical myths, based in part on materials gained from historical investigation, will, of course, always arise in the life of a nation. Such myths, representing "socialized historical narratives" ("gesocialiseerd geschiedverhaal") arise in answer to particular needs in the social and political life of men and in this respect fulfill certain functions. This creates no problems.

However, if we let ourselves become tied to these myths, we will be misled in the way in which we place ourselves in the context of the realities of the present and in the way in which we face the future. Historical consciousness and free and continuous historical investigation will free us from this danger. Thus the most valuable contribution which history and historical consciousness can make is to free man by adding to his understanding of himself in his existing situation, to his understanding of the historical roots of that situation and of the historical processes which have brought him there. This frees man, because it makes him more aware of the possibilities open before him, of the range of choices which he faces and which will determine his own future.

This frees man from the idea of historical inevitability but it also brings him to face unlimited responsibility. So, to think about history and to live historically is in fact to unlock the door to an open future.

It is a bad habit but a useful one for a writer or speaker who is not sure whether he has succeeded in showing his readers or listeners the way to his thoughts and ideas, to end his piece of writing or speech with a summary of its main points. I will here follow this custom.

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The points I have tried to present are as follows:

1. The most important task, as far as the problem of Indonesian history is concerned, is seriously to resume historical research.

2. Historical research need not and indeed cannot be made dependent on a particular philosophy of history. Philosophy of history and thinking about history is possible only after, and on the basis of, historical investigation.

3. The concept of a national philosophy of history is out of place in historical scholarship and in philosophy of history. The concept is philosophically indefensible.

4. Research into Indonesian history must take Indonesian society as its point of departure and frame of reference.

5. The subject matter of investigations of Indonesian history -- Indonesian society itself -- will guarantee the national character of the historical pictures built up from the materials gained from these investigations. There are no further guarantees of the national character of Indonesian history, and none are necessary.

6. A free atmosphere is an absolute prerequisite for historical work.

Furthermore:

7. Historical factors must be taken into account in attempts to understand many of the problems which we as a nation today face. Political leaders and statesmen will not be able to solve these problems if they do not take these historical factors into account, if they see problems exclusively from the point of view of the ideas and feelings which prevail in their immediate environment.

8. History is an important instrument for men and nations in their efforts to grow in awareness of themselves, to understand their place in the situation of today and to face the future in freedom and responsibility.

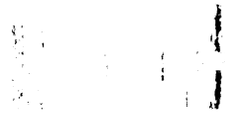
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