SOEDJATMOKO

The Modernization of the Soul



Kacabenggala Editions

Publisher Note

This thought-provoking address by His Excellency Soedjatmoko, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia, was delivered at a session of the Institute on Southeast Asia at Saint Joseph College on November 23, 1968. Directed by Professor Kenneth P. Landon of the Southeast Asian Center of the American University, Washington, D. C., and Professor Thomas Leonard of Saint Joseph College, the Institute was supported by private foundations. When His Excellency Soedjatmoko visited the Leonard home, he wrote the message reproduced on the opposite page to Thomas Leonard, Jr.

We took the liberty to name this address **The Modernization of the Soul** in accordance with its content.

Digitizer Note

This digital edition is a faithful typeset of the printed text, preserving the original layout, spelling, punctuation, and front matter as closely as possible.

All original rights remain with their respective publishers and translators. Where copyright has expired or the material falls under fair use for preservation, the text is reproduced for historical study.

The Kacabenggala Editions are non-commercial and undertaken for study and admiration, shared purely for archival and educational purposes, without commercial intent.

STANDING here before you, I feel at a considerable disadvantage. I am sure that most of you have come here to see the music and dance performance and not to listen to a speech. I will, therefore, try to be brief, and cast my remarks as a sort of prelude by trying to link up some reflections on the culture of which the dance and music you will savor tonight is an integral part, with some of the general problems we face.

I hope that the music you will hear and the dances you will see will be able to give you a whiff of the character and vitality of music and dancce in Indonesian culture.

Apart from these enjoyment we find in it, it is one of the roots that feeds our modern sense of national identity and, as such, it is a source of our national pride and strength, as well as an expression of the continuity of our history as a nation. At the same time, apart from a source of pride and strength, this music and dance also reflects a problem, one of our central problems.

Art is an expression of the totality of culture. It mirrors not only the concepts of beauty and artistic form, but it also reflects, though less directly, through the perception and feelings it visibly expresses and through its function in a society, the value system that infuses that culture. In a sense art in a particular society, at a particular point of time, reflects the balance or imbalancce, the harmony or disharmony, that exists between the natural, the supernatural, and the culture, i.e., the man-made products, arrangements, and concepts and beliefs by which man lives.

There is not enough time for a full discussion of Indonesia art from this angle, and I will, therefore, have to limit myself in my remarks to some aspects of Javanese traditional music, ignoring the many other strains in the total mosaic. Seen in this light, Javanese music cannot be disassociated from what is central in traditional Javanese culture. Its music and dance are both deeply rooted in the magico-religious matrix of traditional society.

As you will undoubtedly notice, the music does not only affect one's sense of harmony and structure, but it also, if listened to a whole night through, has an impact on one's sense of being. Central to the traditional Javanaese outlook on life is the search not so much for knowledge, but for inner perfection and the wisdom and power that go with it. The emphasis is less on knowing than on beng, and I think the music reflects this. Inherent in this attitude towards life is the notion that the state of one's inner being is reflected in one's relationship to the outside world. The king's capacity to maintain order for instance is very much seen as a function of his state of inner perfection. So is the place a nobleman occupies in the social hierarchy. The social order and the social hierarchy are seen as a reflection of the cosmic order and the fidelity of that reflection is determined by the king's inner state of being. Of course, this *Weltanschauung* is only tenable in a static agrarian society, at a relatively simple level of technology, and at a slow pace of social change. The function of the state in such a situation consists of the maintenance of the proper relationship between the social and the cosmic order through rituals,

the maintenance of law and order, and the provision of its members with sufficient food and clothing. This was the traditional Javanese idea of the perfect state.

No wonder that such a social system proved to be incapable of coping with rapid social and technological change, or with the challenge to its power by the technologically superior European traders who in the seventeenth century came in search of spices and ended up by colonizing the country. Still, despite the increasing loss of political independence, leading eventually to the establishment of colonial rule, the arts continued to flourish at the courts. But, if I may say so, the refinements in the arts as well as in philosophy and cultural life in general, centered around the traditional courts, became also increasingly socially irrelevant.

And so, when finally the early twentieth century saw the first stirrings of the Indonesian nationalist movement for independence, it is not surprising that that movement of renewed self-assertion was accompanied by a firm rejection by many of the young nationalists of what they could only see as the ruins, however magnificent, of a culture that had proven to be incapable of defending their nation against colonialism and exploitation.

This radical rejection of traditional culture, the search for new values that accompanied it, the discovery of the individual and of his right to dignity, ia short the emergence of a new sense of lile—*Lebensgefühl*—led also to a new surge of creative energy, and to new artistic forms of expression. It led to the growth of a new pictorial art, a new literafure:

modern Indonesian literature in the Indonesian language, more expressive of the new spirit, more adaptable to the requirements of modern life. In music there was a movement away from the classical Javanese pentatonic system to the western tone scale. In the field of political thought, the renaissance implicit in the nationalist movement was characterized by a radical rejection of the traditional feudalism and the search for political ideas that could guide us to a more modern and more democratic society. The popularity of Marxism in this periode stems in large part from the capacity of that ideology to explain colonialism and the loss of independencce in terms that were not destructive to the newly found self-respect.

The attainment of independence, however, in a very ironic way partially revelsed this trend. Then the need for self-identification put a renewed emphasis on the distinctive elements of our own traditional culture and the traditional arts received a new stimulus. And so one finds in Indonesia today the new and the old side by side, the traditional next to new, often daring experimentation, in form as well as in content.

The emergence of Indonesia as an independent state made it necessary to define the national self in relation not only to the former colonial ruler, but in relation to the outside world in general. It also became important to redefine ourselves in relation to our own past as well as to our future, our new goals, our new hopes and aspirations. No nation can hope successfully to undertake any major task without having such a clear sense of its, own identity.

In a way, the process of change through which the United States seems to be going at present also involves such a redefinition of the national self, such a reexamination of the underlying assumptions, and of the unspoken goals of American society.

The task Indonesia started to face their the attainment of independence, and is still facing, was the task of rapid economic development, nation building and modernization.

The problems that will have to be worked out in this connection are tremendous. Indonesia's transition towards a modern society capable of sustaining a rate of economic growth that will outstrip its population increase not only requires more skill, more capital, but entails a basic restructuring of our society. We will have to reorganize the nation and its institutions in such a way that all the social dynamism, all the desire and capability for change and development that exist among the people can be harnessed and used creatively. And this means not only social and political change, but fundamental cultural change as well.

As long as life in this world is only seen as a training ground for the development of those virtues of inner perfection that would enable man to live in harmony with the cosmic order, it is not to be expected that a society with this kind of value system can generate the social dynamism that is required to make economic growth a self-propelling process. It is crucial to the development of the basic motivations and drives that should sustain such growth, that life on this earth is seen as something that is meaningful in its own right, and that the

enjoyment of life and the fruits of one's work are accepted as legitimate goals in human life.

Progress and the amelioration of the human condition should be seen as essentially within the reach of man and as an important goal to strive for.

This is a long way from the view that emphasizes inner perfection, and from the emphasis on the development of man's mystical capacity for direct communication with the divine, which characterizes the most sophisticated forms of traditional Javanese culture.

Of course, no culture is against improvement of material living conditions *per se*, but at the same time to throw traditional values overboard just for the sake of material improvement is not something that in the eyes of many can be easily justiffed. It becomes fully justifiable—and capable of moving a whole nation—if the improvement of material conditions also makes sense in relation to other inter-connected goals that the nations could subscribe to, and that would give meaning to life on the individual as well as on the collective level.

The problem in many transitional societies is that new values, patterns of behavior, new goals have not crystallized sufficiently while the old value systems have started to crumble. And this has led to a deep sense of uncertainty and insecurity that, I think, accounts for much of the excesses of nationalism that we have seen in the recent past.

What price modernization? That is the question that vexes many in transitional societies like Indonesia. Should we modernize at the risk of our soul, of our most precious values? The answer is yes. For we have no choice. Freedom requires the capability to defend it, and the capacity to maintain our own individuality as a nation in the twentieth century. In order to survive as a free nation we will, before anything else, have to develop the capability to meet the twentieth century on its own terms.

What adds to our problem is that modern society really does not present a vision of self-evident moral superiority to entice us, and the crisis that seems to beset both the western and the Communist model is too well known to be ignored by the peoples in the new nations, in their search for clear answers to their problems.

Why, you will ask, do I speak about music, dance and traditional culture in connection with these problems of modernization?

I am doing this for three reasons. Firstly, in order to make clear that it is almost impossible for a modern Indonesian just to lose himself completely, as he would often wish to, in the enjoyment of the traditional arts. More often than not he will be very deeply concerned witll development, economic, political, and social, and with modernization in general.

In this light it is important to realize that as Iong as we think of economic development only in terms of investment, skills, productivity and the statistics of economic growth,

we are really only speaking about the externals of a process that is of a much more fundamental character. As we have seen, this process involves change in the outlook on life, in basic values, in motivation and in goals, on a personal level as well as on the level of the nation as a whole. We are concerned with changes in social structures and we are in a very crucial sense faced with the ultimate questions that underlie a society: the ultimate questions regarding the meaning of life, the meaning of man's relationship to man, to society and to the divine. "What is it we live for?" It then becomes understandable that economic development is inevitably accompanied by a cultural crisis of great magnitude, and that some very deep and powerful emotions are involved.

The development process in fact is not just a matter of economics. It is just as much, if not more so, a matter that revolves around a nation's wellsprings for social action, its sense of new purpose, its will and determination and its courage. It is the modernization of the soul that lied at the heart of our problem, and all the arts as well as our creative capacity are bound up with it.

This leads me to the second reason for my discussion today. Once we have become aware of this cultural dimension to the problems of new nations rooted in old societies, it will become easier to understand some of the human and psychological causes underlying the political instability of most of the less developed nations, and specifically of the convulsive character of much of Indonesia's brief history as a new and independent nation. The social tension and unrest, the social and political instability, therefore, should in the first

place be seen as manifestations inherent in the underdevelopedness of these new nations, in their poverty and in their backwardness. Or, if you prefer, they point to the irrelevance of the social structure and traditional institutions to the problems that have to be faced.

In part, these problems also are caused by the modernization process itself. It becomes clear then, in the light of this interplay of political, economic and cultural factors, that the usual categories by which we try to understand political situations in underdeveloped countries, like communism versus anti-communism, democracy versus dictatorship, and left versus right, have only a very limited and secondary relevance to our understanding of tlie complexities that exist. And formal political allegiances in countries like this may not mean the same thing as in developed industrial societies. What is called for is the gradual development of a new terminology, a new set of categories that would enable us to see and understand the problems in the underdeveloped nations in terms of their own situation, from the inside rather than from the outside. This in turn will enable us not to be discouraged by present instabilities, but to see them in their proper perspective, to grasp the spirit of the nation that can move mountains, and the real thrust and direction of developments.

Thirdly, if for a moment we cast our eyes a little beyond the horizon of day politics, and look at the relations between our two countries in maybe a rather unorthodox fashion, there are two problems that each constitute a nexus through which the challenges that your society and Indonesian so-

ciety are facing, are connected. These are poverty and the search for a new meaning of life. I am sure that you have come to realize that much of what I have said just now about economic development and its human dimensions, is also applicable to the situation of the inner cities in your own society, for the basic problem in both cases is poverty. Much of the solutions that will have to be worked out in relation to the inner city problem will be of relevance to the solution of international poverty. In both cases we have to think in terms of large scale redirection of resources, in the first case on the national level, on the international level in the second. In both cases we are faced with the need for structural changes and the development of institutions for this particular task, and in both cases our capacity to be constantly aware of the human dimensions of this problem may determine failure or success.

The basic question that looms before all of us, the rich and the poor within each nation, as well as the rich and the poor among nations, is how much of the world's limited resources should be used for the fight against poverty within the developed nations, how much should be made available for our efforts to deal with the problem of international poverty, and how much for security and arms, internationally as well as domestically.

This question leads us immediately into the whole problem of the international order. For at the international level, too, there is the direct connection between law and order and social justice.

No peace, no stability of the international order can be envisaged in the years to come unless the problem of international poverty is effectively dealt with on the basis of a new sense of international social justice. Whether the world will continue to see an increasingly wide gap between the rich nations, of both West and East, and the poor nations, whether the world will move an integrated single economic system or develop into a number of power blocs and economic spheres of influence, will very much depend on our capacity to work towards a world order that is not only based on power and kept in balance by the exercise of power, but one that is also based on compassion and motivated by a clearer and stronger universal vision of man and the solidarity of man. In this respect much will depend on both of the world's superpowers, the U. S and the U. S. S. R. Nevertheless, it is not unfair to say that the way in which the United States will solve its internal problem of poverty, and will use its power internationally, will very much determine mankind's overall capacity to deal with the problem of international poverty and international social justice. The quality of man's vision of man and of his humanity, and his vision of the kind of society and world order he hopes to live in, however, is part of the general question regarding the meaning of life, or, if one prefers, of the meaning man chooses to give to his life, his own, as well as the lile of his nation.

This question is at present being posed anew by the younger generation the world over, and this is as it should be. Each generation should reinterpret the past, searching for new

meanings that are relevant to their situation. Each generation should set its own goals for their nations, thus redefining their nation's identity and basic purpose. And it is only befitting man's essentially moral nature that it is the sons and daughters of the affluent the world over who have now joined the sons and daughters of the deprived who are pressing home this question.

The tenor of my remarks this evening was to try to show how much in Indonesia and in other underdeveloped societies the search for a better society, more capable of providing its members with a meaningful life, with a decent standard of living, maintained in freedom and dignity, is inescapably bound up with the same ultimate questions which confront American society and other developed societies now. The only difference is that we in Indonesia are asking these questions within the context of poverty and you within the context of an affluent society. All of mankind, therefore, in poor as well as in rich countries, are bound together by the search for new answers to these old questions, only at this juncture of man's history his survival as well as his capacity for happiness may in large measure depend on his capacity to shape his answers.

I promised you a prelude. I am afraid I have only given you an indigestion. So, before it gets worse let us enjoy the performance that is about to begin.

I thank you.