

THE PRIYAYI*

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This essay is a discussion of some assumptions and as yet unanswered questions which surround the term *priyayi*, one of the most commonly used categories in Javanese studies. The term *priyayi*, referring to Java's governing upper class, has been used for a long time both by the Javanese themselves and by Dutch scholars, but it has attained a high degree of currency among English speaking students of Indonesia since Clifford Geertz published *The Religion of Java* in 1960.¹ Even though Geertz's study has sometimes been criticized, the trichotomy of ideal types he presents has been widely accepted as a standard organizing principle, a boon for many students struggling to impose patterns on intractable realities.

Koentjaraningrat has pointed out that Geertz's *santri-abangan-priyayi* taxonomy confused a legitimate division between two religious traditions (syncretist *abangan*, Muslim *santri*) by treating *priyayi* as a comparable category, when essentially it refers to a social class. In actuality, *priyayi* could follow either *abangan* or *santri* religious-cultural traditions.² Koentjaraningrat's criticism seems completely valid, and this essay is not intended as a further examination of the Geertzian trichotomy. Rather, it is an attempt to place the *priyayi* more firmly in context, by showing how their cultural, political and social roles were shaped by their essential function of mediator, connecting centers and regions, elites and common people.³

There is considerable consistency in the image of the *priyayi* presented in Javanese court literature and hence also in most academic accounts. Originally the term was *para yayi*, meaning "younger brothers"

* Part of this essay is based upon material from my Yale University (1973) doctoral dissertation: "Pangrèh Pradja. Java's Indigenous Administrative Corps and Its Role in the Last Decades of Dutch Colonial Rule." The ideas expressed here grew out of the research for this thesis and for the two-part article, "Notes on Java's Regent Families," *Indonesia*, No. 16 (October 1973), pp. 113-49; No. 17 (April 1974), pp. 1-42. I am grateful to Dr. M. C. Ricklefs and Mr. C. W. Watson for their comments on earlier drafts of this article; neither of course bear any responsibility for its content.

1. Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960); Harsja W. Bachtiar, "The Religion of Java: A Commentary," *Madjalah Ilmu-Ilmu Sastra Indonesia*, V, No. 1 (1973), pp. 85-118.
2. See Koentjaraningrat's review of *The Religion of Java* in *Madjalah Ilmu-Ilmu Sastra*, I, No. 2 (1963), pp. 188-91. See also Robert B. Cruikshank, "Abangan Santri and Priyayi: A Critique," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, III, No. 1 (1972), pp. 39-43.
3. For a valuable account of a *santri* broker, and a discussion of the "broker" function, see Clifford Geertz, "The Javanese Kijahi: The Changing Role of a Cultural Broker," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, II (1960), pp. 228-49.

(of the king), and by extension it came to include the governing aristocracy.⁴ Nobles and officials, court-based administrators and local chiefs could all be classed as priyayi. Ideally speaking, a priyayi was a well-born Javanese holding high government office, thoroughly versed in the aristocratic culture of the courts. He should be familiar with classical literature, music and dance, the *wayang kulit* (puppet shadow play), and with the subtleties of philosophy, ethics and mysticism. He should have mastered the nuances of polite behavior, language and dress and, until well into the late nineteenth century, he was expected to be at home in the arts of war, skilled in the handling of horse and weapons.

In addition to these acquired skills the priyayi was meant to be a man of integrity and honor, imbued with a deep awareness of the moral demands of his position, and of his obligations to the rulers, the people and the high ethical code of the elite. In short, the image of the priyayi was of a man able to meet the spiritual and ceremonial as well as technical demands of office. The extent to which this image reflects reality depends upon several factors, most importantly, the degree to which the courts themselves followed a standard pattern, and how far the courts imposed their norms upon the regional elites under their sway.

The relatively high degree of consensus concerning the priyayi model reflects a tendency of both scholars and, to a lesser extent, the Javanese elite itself, to accept the individual court of Mataram and its values as a proper standard and example. Mataram, a south central Javanese state which reached its peak in the seventeenth century, was one of the two major powers encountered by the Dutch East India Company or VOC when it first arrived in Java. The other was the mercantile, Islamic maritime state of Banten, but this declined during the seventeenth century and was abolished as a sultanate in the early 1800s; its impact on Dutch and later conceptions of indigenous politics was not comparable to that of Mataram. Far less is known about the structure and attitudes of the Bantenese court than of Mataram and the latter has remained Java's best known native state, either in its original united form or through its heirs, the four courts of Surakarta, Yogyakarta, Mangkunegaran and Pakualaman. Moreover, since during its expansionist career Mataram had succeeded in conquering most of Java, at least temporarily, her influence was widespread, particularly among the upper classes, those most exposed to both political and cultural penetration.

The predominance of the Mataramese model in accounts of the Javanese state is perhaps inevitable, as the highly developed culture of the court and its political importance to the Dutch ensured extensive documentation in both indigenous and European sources. But this model is closely tied to a particular political and cultural perspective and reflects the interests and values of the capital's upper classes. We are informed only of matters which were important to that elite, and the information and interpretation is heavily biased. This *kraton* (court) centered approach cannot be automatically accepted as representing the viewpoint of provincial and local authorities and, moreover, cultural differentiation in Java is such that some discussion of regional variation is essential if we are to assess the validity of the model. Therefore discussion in the following pages will tend to focus

4. L. W. C. van den Berg, De Inlandsche Rang en Titels op Java en Madoera (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1887), p. 44.

upon provincial elites--a major source of the modern priyayi--and upon the effects of regionalism.

It is possible to divide Java into a number of regions each made up of areas linked together by centuries of interaction which focused upon a court or a linked network of political capitals, and usually shared some sense of cultural identity. The boundaries of such areas were fluid; each comprised a number of subregions, which in turn consisted of a mosaic of local communities; hence the selection of a particular level of regionalism as a framework for discussion depends upon the individual research topic. Despite the paucity of material, it is possible to sketch in, rather tentatively, a regional pattern which provides a better context for discussion of the priyayi than does an unjustified assumption of the overall applicability of a uniform Mataram-style milieu.

The most obvious division in Java is between three major cultural linguistic groups: the Sundanese speakers of Priangan, West Java; the Madurese of Madura island and much of northeast Java; and the Javanese proper. But even on this level frontiers are difficult to define, given the linguistic mixture in areas like Banten and Cirebon, and also the existence of subdivisions. The Javanese, for example, distinguish between the heartland Mataram area, often referred to as *kejawèn*, and beyond this, but also Javanese speaking, the north Java littoral or *pasisir*, and the areas of the east, *bang wétan* and *ujung timur*.⁵ These can be broken down still further: the *pasisir*, for example, includes a number of recognizable entities, sometimes just a port town and its hinterland, often a continuation of a pre-colonial "city state," or sometimes a larger more separate region which was formerly a considerable power, such as Surabaya. Moreover, despite considerable Javanese speaking populations, Banten and Cirebon, once independent sultanates, had their own distinct identities; the former in particular lay outside the frontiers of the main Javanese world.

Each of these levels was recognized as an historical unit, and reflects the richness of regional differentiation in Java. But the primary framework for most priyayi was probably even more restricted, their vision not extending much beyond their own small towns and the linked network of surrounding villages. In Dutch times many such complexes were given formal identity as regencies or *kabupatèn*, which were regarded as the most "traditional" of the supra-village administrative categories.

The priyayi must be placed against this diverse background, for in reality the setting modified major dimensions of priyayi identity. The remainder of this essay examines three aspects of the priyayi: as cultural type, as a group with a particular political function, and as a social class. In general attention is focused upon the importance of regional variation and the effects of the priyayi's "broker" functions.

The Priyayi as Cultural Type

Priyayi culture was subject to considerable variation, reflecting the interplay of local traditions with responses to such outside stimuli

5. Bang wétan, the east, seems to refer more to the Surabaya region, while ujung timur, eastern end, is the very easternmost end of the island, the Dutch Oosthoek. I am grateful to Dr. Ricklefs for clarifying this distinction.

as Islamization and European influence. The relative strength of these strands was shaped by the intensity of contact with cultural metropolises, depending on geographic location, position within the social-political hierarchy and overall openness to innovation. Some priyayi were in intimate communication with the courts and ports from which change spread. Others remained in their isolated towns, indifferent to new fashions or remote power struggles. Only the officials of the larger towns could be described as urban, and even so, their outlook may have been less cosmopolitan or worldly than the term might suggest. Although priyayi culture has been described as "the outcome of nearly sixteen centuries of urban living,"⁶ many priyayi were probably more at home in their dusty market towns or small harbor settlements than in the glittering world of the central courts.

It has been remarked that "classical Javanese culture," the milieu par excellence of the priyayi, was basically a creation of the nineteenth century, as it was only then that the court culture of Surakarta and Yogyakarta became recognized as *the* genuine Javanese civilization.⁷ Since these two "self-governing" (indirectly ruled) states were created by the mid-eighteenth century division of Mataram they can, despite the often emphasized differences between them, be regarded as continuations of the preceding court. So their eventual cultural dominance must be linked to earlier processes, the extension of Mataramese influence, as well as to their position under colonial rule, when as nominally semi-independent states, they tended to be regarded as guardians of tradition. During Mataram's period of political expansion her cultural influence also spread further and deeper in the subjugated or vassal regions. There was, for example, limited "Javanization" in Sunda and Madura, with kejawèn language, styles and ideas being very influential. The local aristocracies were the chief disseminators of this central culture, although the Mataramese practice of establishing strategic plantations of Javanese settlers also contributed, particularly at the popular level. Nonetheless, these regions retained their own languages and literatures, including both local material and adaptations of borrowed forms, and their own special traits.⁸

Javanization reinforced kejawèn influence on local elites in the outer parts of the island: this much seems obvious, but no real assessment of the cultural implications of this process is yet possible, as so little is known of regional history during this period. Since Islamic influence was being extended and consolidated at the same time, it might seem tempting to view the era as one of competition between two aggressive cultural traditions: those of "Indianized" Mataram and "Muslim" pasisir. But this is too simplistic a dichotomy, as kejawèn cultural traits were shared by the northern port cities, while there were major centers of Islamic learning in Mataram. There was competi-

6. Geertz, Religion, p. 231. M. C. Ricklefs, Jogjakarta under Sultan Mangkubumi 1749-1792. A History of the Division of Java (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 419 note 2, queries this figure of "sixteen centuries."

7. Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, Literature of Java (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967), I, p. 8. Unfortunately there is no discussion of the evidence lying behind this intriguing remark.

8. D. H. Burger, Structural Changes in Javanese Society: The Supra-Village Sphere (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1956), pp. 14-16. There is a wealth of material on Javanese local culture in Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, Javaanse Volksvertoningen (Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938).

tion and sometimes hostility between original Javanese and Islamic values, but the situation was so complex and is so little understood that any attempt to describe the resulting cultural pattern would be meaningless. It seems certain, however, that the impact of these influences upon local societies did not produce a standardized culture, but resulted in the development of a number of variant traditions. Different regions retained their own characters, and these distinct identities also shaped the priyayi culture of the area. It could be expected, for example, that the priyayi of Cirebon show some differences from those of Central Java, not only in their favorite art forms, in language and music but also in their underlying patterns of values and beliefs.

Any attempt at a detailed discussion of the self-perceptions of Java's governing elites would require lengthy and sophisticated research in a number of fields, ranging from linguistics and comparative literature to psychology and anthropology; it would also require inordinate self-confidence, particularly for a non-Javanese scholar. However, on a generalized level it is possible to give a tentative and impressionistic description of regional cultural identities. The particular character of the main regions is best revealed by focusing on those periods in their several histories which have come to be regarded either as the formative era in which regional identity was established, or as the "Golden Age" in which their specific qualities were most highly developed or displayed to best advantage.

Such "Golden Ages" may never have existed in reality, and probably bear little resemblance to actual events or circumstances in the period in question. They may simply be retrospective glorifications of the past, and relatively recent creations. Nevertheless, they can be revealing of a people's values and attitudes. This crystallization of identity in some semi-mythic past was particularly important for the local priyayi, as they conceived of themselves as guardians of tradition and heirs to long-dead heroes. In many cases, priyayi genealogies document this link to the "Golden Age," and constitute an important element in the elite's legitimation of its rule. But for all local people, legends and stories of past glory played a major part in shaping their conception of the politico-cultural framework of their lives.

For the north coast of Java, from Banten to Pasuruan, the definitive era was that of the *wali sanga* (nine saints), the time when Islam was brought to Java and the first Muslim states achieved renown. During this period--the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries--so the legends go, wandering holy men founded towns, built mosques, composed chronicles and won wars. These wali were usually remembered under the name of the place with which they were most intimately associated, the site of their school or grave, prefixed by the honorific Sunan. They were apt symbols of the pasisir, as their parochial identification combined with the all embracing sweep of Islam paralleled the coast cities' ability to reconcile a proud independence with a sporadic recognition of common interests, competition with cooperation.

The political elites of the pasisir region were in most cases connected by descent to the wali and, often, to each other--at least according to traditions. The sultans of both Banten and Cirebon were descended from Sunan Gunung Jati, and most of the Banten aristocracy traced themselves from these sultans, from Sunan Gunung Jati's granddaughter Ratu Pembayon or from two Bantenese followers of his son Hasanuddin. Both Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Giri established small "princedom," rooted in spiritual authority but encompassing political power

as well. Until 1883 the group of settlements clustered around the head village of Kadilangu (or Adilangu), in Demak, was under the administrative and financial control of Sunan Kalijaga's descendants, who were usually known as Pangeran Wijil. Giri remained the seat of the "priest-kings" until the late seventeenth century when the last, together with most of his family, was killed by the ruler of Mataram.⁹

Similarly, many coastal regents or *bupati* (the highest native administrative official under the Dutch) claimed descent from the wali sanga or the royal houses which sprang from them. The old regent families of Kudus and Tuban traced themselves back to Sunan Kudus and Sunan Kalinyamat respectively, while the bupati of Kendal located their origins on the one hand with Sunan Ngampel and Sunan Kalinyamat, and on the other with the sultans of Demak. This sultanate was also the source of the regent dynasties of Tegal and Semarang.¹⁰ According to one Dutch authority, early seventeenth-century Surabaya, Gresik, Tuban, Pati and Demak were virtually independent kingdoms ruled by descendants of the wali.¹¹

Although the wali were bearers of Islam to Java, they were also closely linked to the mainstream of indigenous culture. The *pasisir* was not orthodox in its Islam, as it fused existing traditions with Muslim belief, but nevertheless it seems probable that the coastal elites tended to be more santri in their orientation than were, for example, many *kejawèn priyayi*. *Pasisir priyayi* often had apparently amicable working relationships and family ties with Muslim teachers, while some coastal political elites--notably those of Madura and Cirebon--were frequently also religious leaders. In any case, any analysis of *pasisir priyayi* religion and culture must still remain based on assumptions, as the interaction between social structure, Islamization, Central Javanese influence and specific coastal characteristics requires investigation.¹²

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9. Among the most important wali were Sunan Ngampel-Denta (from Ngampel or Ampel in Surabaya), who was linked to the last king of Hindu-Javanese Majapahit, his sons Sunan Drajat (of Sedayu, though sometimes claimed by Tegal) and Sunan Bonang (Tuban), and his powerful son-in-law Sunan Giri (near Gresik), first of the "priest-kings" of Gresik who were termed "pope" by the Protestant Dutch. The other major wali were Sunan Gunung Jati of Cirebon, who brought Islam to Priangan, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Kalinyamat (south Jepara) and Sunan Kali Jaga (Demak area). See Ricklefs, *Jogjakarta*, pp. 3-8, also H. Aboebakar, *Sedjarah Mesdjid dan Alim Ibadah Dalamnja* (Djakarta/Banjarmasin: Adil, 1955); Solichin Salam, *Sedjarah Islam di Djawa* (Djakarta: Djajamurnij, 1964); P. J. Veth, *Java, geographisch, ethnologisch, historisch* (Haarlem: Bohn, 1896), I, pp. 229-40; Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 25-29; H. J. de Graaf and Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, "De eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen op Java. Studien over de Staatkundige Geschiedenis van 15de en 16de Eeuw," *Verhandelingen van het Koninklijks Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (VKI)*, LXIX (1974).
 10. Sutherland, "Notes on Java's Regent Families," Part I, pp. 132-38; *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* (8 vols.; The Hague and Leiden: Nijhoff, 1917-46), entries "Demak," "Giri."
 11. Van den Berg, *Rangen en Titels*, p. 32 note 1. On the period, see H. J. de Graaf, "De Regering van Sultan Agung, Vorst van Mataram, 1613-1645, en die van zijn Voorganger Panembahan Seda-ing-Krapjak, 1601-1613," *VKI*, XXIII (1958).
 12. For interesting reflections on Islam and Javanese religion and culture, see for example Pigeaud, *Literature of Java*, I, pp. 6-7; Soebardi, "Santri Religius

In Priangan, West Java, similar problems complicate attempts to define priyayi culture. Here also the local version of the priyayi, the *menak*, have an apparently amicable working relationship with Islam; many local *ulama* come from aristocratic governing circles. But here the question of Javanization is more pressing, as the cultural frontier between Sunda and the Javanese speaking lands to the east is much more defined than that between pasisir and kejawèn. How far the ethos of the menak differed from the Mataramese priyayi model is also an open question, but the particular nature of Priangan suggests that at least the concept of domination by a single court is inappropriate; in the absence of a continuing strong capital, the menak elite almost entirely derived from rather independent regional chiefs.

The Priangan does have its own "Golden Age," that of the Indianized empire of Pajajaran. Founded in the twelfth century, Pajajaran remained the dominant center of Priangan until about 1526 when the last king, Siliwangi, was dethroned by victorious Muslim armies from Banten. Pajajaran is the focus for many Sundanese legends and traditions, and most of the local governing families trace their descent from Siliwangi or other Pajajaran kings. But it would be a mistake to assume that the Sundanese elite was focused on a single center; the authority of the old capital of Pajajaran, near Bogor, was probably largely symbolic, with the court not completely in control of mountainous and sparsely populated Priangan.¹³ The basic political pattern seems to have been that of the later regencies, with networks of villages grouped together under ruling families, regional dynasties which continued to provide the highest native officials throughout the colonial period. These locally based bupati (regents) with their extended families, comprised the true elite of Priangan, so that although they were all closely related, and continually strengthened these ties by intermarriage, the dominant system was polycentric.

This decentralization was also evident in Sundanese culture. Regencies were known for their own specialities and dialects, and the Citarum river formed a general dividing line. Cianjur was the main center west of the river, while Sumedang was dominant to the east; typically, both areas were known for their specific cultural achievements: Cianjur became well known for its own songs (Cianjuran), while Sumedang *wayang golek* (puppetry) and music were highly regarded. Usually, it was the local aristocracy which provided the patronage to maintain and develop local cultural forms. In religion, too, the Priangan elites recognized a particular center; in this case, the Cirebon court provided the Islamic focus.

Even more striking examples of cultural diversity occur in ujung timur, the extreme east of Java. Here Madurese influence was very strong in the north coastal districts of Probolinggo, Kraksaan, Besuki, Panarukan and Bondowoso. The staunch adherence to Islam which was characteristic of the Madurese was not only brought by the waves of

Elements as Reflected in the Serat Tjentini," Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (BKI), CXXVII, No. 3 (1971), pp. 331-49; M. C. Ricklefs, "A Consideration of Three Versions of the Babad Tanah Djawi, with Excerpts on the Fall of Madjapahit," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, XXXV, No. 2 (1972), pp. 285-315.

13. On Pajajaran see Veth, Java, I, pp. 214-19; on Priangan in general see F. de Haan, Priangan de Preanger-regentschappen onder het Nederlandsch bestuur to 1811 (4 vols.; Batavia: Kolft, 1910-12).

immigrants who came to Java, but also by traveling teachers; many of the *alim ulama* were Madurese, and some were connected to the rulers of Madura. The court of Sumenep, in east Madura, was an important cultural influence on the northeast Javanese, and some local bupati claimed descent from Sumenep rulers.

The situation further east and south was very different. Here Balinese influence was obvious in language, music and such popular cultural forms as the *barong*, a type of "lion dance." This was the site of the last Javanese Sivaite kingdom of Balambangan; it had supposedly provided a temporary refuge for a son of Brawijaya, Adipati Gugur, who fled Central Java following the Muslim conquest of his father's Indianized state of Majapahit. He founded the line of Balambangan kings who survived the ravages of Mataram's armies and early Dutch attacks until a series of expeditions in the 1760s and 1770s finally put an end to their rule.¹⁴

Perhaps it would be possible to characterize the governing elites of the northern ujung timur as "santri priyayi" and those of the southeast as "abangan priyayi," but this seems to be pushing the categories too far. For one thing, it is difficult to locate clearly defined elites in this area, much of which was only opened to intensive settlement and development with the post-1870 plantation boom, and for another the existence of very pronounced local idiosyncracies implies that any classification of social groups or cultural types should await field research rather than draw too heavily on Central Javanese models. Even the census takers in 1930 were forced to adopt regional categories when listing Banyuwangi's inhabitants: roughly one-third were described as "Oesingers," with their own dialect and culture.¹⁵

Similarly, a high degree of local differentiation can be found in the other areas of Java: in Banten, between the north and the south; in Cirebon between the core area of Cirebon itself and the more Sundanese influenced southern regencies; in kejawèn, between the mancanegara and the various inner rings, between eastern and western mancanegara, and within all these areas as well. Centuries of settlement and strongly rooted local societies set some areas apart from those recently opened up which drew their immigrant population from a number of different areas, as was the case in the area Geertz investigated.¹⁶ Some villages or districts had been known for lawlessness or skilled craftsmanship, or as centers of ancient magic or modern Muslim learning for hundreds of years, while special historical circumstances also marked the *perdikan desa* (tax exempt villages) or the *particuliere landerijen* (privately owned lands) as unique communities in their own right.¹⁷ Such marked variation in local society also impressed itself

14. See Veth, *Java*, I, pp. 252-57 on Balambangan.

15. *Volkstelling 1930*, III, *Inheemsch Bevolking van Oost Java* (Batavia: Landsrukkerij, 1935).

16. Research for *The Religion of Java* was mostly carried out in "Modjokuto" (Pare) in east Central Java during the mid-nineteen fifties. Pare was opened up by migrants from Mataram, from the Brantas river valley, the Kediri plain and the pasisir north coast during the nineteenth century. Geertz, *Religion*, pp. 131-33.

17. *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië*, entries "Desa's (Vrije)," "Particuliere landerijen," and "Depok"; L. W. C. van den Berg, *Het Inlandsche Gemeentewezen op Java en Madoera* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1901), pp. 135-40.

upon the regional priyayi, either because they themselves originated from the area, or because, as officials sent in from outside or chiefs newly risen, they were forced to come to terms with the particular interest groups and factions in the community they were expected to lead.

Neither Mataram's military adventures nor the coming of Islam had been able to replace cultural particularism with a more uniform and standardized civilization, although they undoubtedly did increase the common ground between regions. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the gradual Pax Neerlandica and consolidation of Dutch administration created a climate within which exchange of ideas and mutual influence could be expected to increase. Ease of communication was also fostered by greater mobility following the elaboration of the road and rail network in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the growing tendency towards population concentrations resulting from demographic change, economic development and nascent urbanization. Twentieth-century extensions of the education system and the rapid growth of mass media, particularly the press, must also have broken down the relative isolation of local elites. While these generalizations seem reasonably safe, there is very little data available on social and cultural change within the Indonesian community, particularly as it relates to provincial areas and either traditional or middle echelon leadership groups.

The extension of Dutch education to the Indonesian elite, coupled with the systematization of a more uniform civil service increased solidarity within the priyayi class and did much to create its image as a homogeneous group. But under the Dutch, as in earlier kingdoms, there was by no means a complete acceptance of the dominant center's culture, as was only to be expected given the alien nature of many European ideas and attitudes. New elements were combined with old, with no single pattern being followed, although in general it can be said that the generation of government-employed priyayi who entered the administrative training schools or who passed through the Dutch academic school system in the twentieth century were exposed to far more consistent and effective Westernizing influence than the priyayi of the preceding generation. Except for a handful of unusual men, these earlier officials were educated in traditional ways, or attended the vernacular elementary schools or, at most, the rudimentary chief's schools (*hoofdenscholen*).¹⁸

The relationships between peasant traditions, regional "courts" (for example, the *dalem* of the Priangan regents or the capitals of Banten and Cirebon), and expanding influences such as those of Mataram's *kejawèn*, Islam or European culture are extremely complex, and could probably be best approached by intensive research within specified limits. It is possible to identify centers of cultural life and to trace the dissemination of certain traits or forms, but it is very difficult to locate frontiers, as no clear, generally applicable boundaries existed. Cross-cutting patterns of regionalism, social and, probably, religious orientation could mean not only that what was true of Cirebon was not necessarily true of Banten, but also that generalizations about the Serang (North Banten) upper class were misleading either when applied to lower social strata in Serang itself, or to a comparable class in south Banten's Pandeglang.

18. Sutherland, "Pangrèh Pradja," pp. 180-207, 414-27, and *passim*.

"Priyayi culture," then, is hard to isolate, and certainly the Mataramese image would only be used with caution in many other areas of Java. While the priyayi were, as a class, in relatively close contact with such influential "Great Traditions" (to borrow Redfield's term)¹⁹ as the Hindu-Javanese, Islamic and European, they still had cultural roots in the villages, even though they had risen above the peasant mass. It is probable that the priyayi's intermediary role shaped their cultural as well as their political development. Just as there was a compromise between center and regions in the balance of power, with the provincial elites hoping for enhanced prestige through their connection with the capital, so too cultural ties between local chiefs and sophisticated courts could be to their mutual benefit. The introduction and elaboration of new styles and art forms was convincing proof of the regional elites' closeness to the center, their mastery of complex and impressive techniques. But it could have been unwise for provincial chiefs to completely lose contact with the dialect and special art forms of their regions. A combination of local accent with cosmopolitanism may have proved the best middle path, showing sophistication without alienation, blending regional traditions with the prestigious forms of the famous courts. The priyayi, as "brokers," would ideally have been at home in the cultural vocabulary of the two worlds they connected.

The Political Function of the Priyayi

Clifford Geertz has remarked that "the Javanese aristocracy had, until the Dutch came, but two ways to hold the peasants in order . . . simple military terror and religious enthusiasm."²⁰ But this statement ignores the very real economic, social and political ties integrating Javanese society, and implies that the priyayi were simply instruments of the center, imposed upon the peasantry by a powerful court, with little local basis for their high position. While it is perhaps possible that this was true of the priyayi most closely integrated into the central administrative network, it is far from adequate as a description of the provincial priyayi. When such excessive stress is placed on priyayi links to the court, so minimizing their connections with the common people, then there is an inevitable tendency to exaggerate either the spiritual and ideological bases of their position, or their coercive and exploitative role.

The priyayi derived their status, power and authority from two distinct sources: their ties with the ruler, and their control of fundamental resources: agricultural produce, labor and potential soldiery. These resources were produced by the land, not by urban technology or skills, and so the provincial priyayi with their rural bases were often in a very strong position. Both central and regional priyayi strengthened their ties with ruler or people in various ways; inter-marriage and elaboration of patron-client networks knit the heterogeneous hierarchies of chiefs and officials into factions and interest groups within the priyayi class, and also linked them to nobility and commoners. Once established in high positions, men also found that attitudes towards office holders and possessors of the attributes of power (regalia, and so forth) gave them great authority even though they might

19. Robert Redfield, The Primitive World and Its Transformations (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1954); and Peasant Society and Culture (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956).

20. Geertz, Religion, p. 231.

have few obvious physical sanctions at their disposal. So even those without close ties to the court, who belonged to no high family, were nevertheless accepted as priyayi simply because they were powerful and had accommodated themselves to priyayi behavior patterns in both government and private life, and also because they used their ability to allocate patronage to create a strong clientele.

The problems inherent in applying European terminology to Javanese phenomena have contributed to the difficulty of distinguishing between various types of authorities and political relationships. The image of the priyayi as "officials" of the court is misleading; many would be better described as "chiefs" of particular regions or, in more powerful instances, as "lords" or even "princes," although in each case there are false connotations. Even on the most generalized level, it is apparent that the precursors of the modern priyayi were of several kinds.

Within the state of Mataram, for example, there was a clear distinction between the administrators of the three inner rings of the concentric model and those of the outer ring, the *mancanegara*. The inner rings, *kraton*, *negara* and *negaragung* were governed for and by court officials and nobles who lived in the capital, while the *mancanegara* was ruled through a hierarchy of locally resident, territorially based officials under varying degrees of central control; both types of administrators would be described as priyayi. But while it is clear that officials of the inner circles derived their authority from their association with the center, those of the *mancanegara* could claim that their status was determined by their local position, and merely enhanced by their link to the ruler.²¹

Mataram's control of the *mancanegara*, of the vassal territories of the *pasisir* and the nominally subject lands to the west and east, was established by the military campaigns of its aggressive rulers. While the *mancanegara* was regarded as part of the realm proper, even here the court's ability to impose its will was limited. Central intervention into local affairs was minimal, providing only that products, labor and armed men were forthcoming in appropriate amounts at the proper times. As Mataram expanded from its heartland base in the plains, it absorbed petty kingdoms and virtually autonomous settlements. Where logistics and local circumstances permitted, these new acquisitions were integrated into the court-supervised central zone; elsewhere, acknowledgment of subordination to central hegemony was extracted from the local authorities. In the *mancanegara* areas of Banyumas, Madiun and Kediri, local chiefs from the old governing families formed the backbone of Later Mataram's administration, if it can be called that.²² In the outer regions of the *pasisir*, much of the old power structure remained.

The more powerful local chiefs were stubborn in their opposition to any Mataramese efforts to increase court control. They may have acknowledged its hegemony, but to the regional elites this did not imply a complete abdication of their own rights and powers. To them, the relationship between center and provinces was not one of command

21. Seloemardjan, Social Changes in Jogjakarta (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 23-35; Soemarsaid Moertono, State and Statecraft in Old Java: A Study of the Later Mataram Period, 16th to 19th Century (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1968).

22. Sutherland, "Notes on Java's Regent Families," Part II, pp. 6-14.

and obedience, but rather a fluctuating bargain subject to constant review. The chiefs would place a proportion of their produce and manpower at the court's disposal, they would be loyal military allies and abstain from cooperation with enemies of the center, but these obligations were finite. And they also had their price: the court was to refrain from attacking the regions and provide them with some minimal aura of protection; the connection between ruler and chiefs was intended to enhance the prestige and hence the power of each in their own context. The ruler could point proudly to his many vassals, the chiefs could boast of their links to the court. But by no means were the regional elites going to renounce their independence in their local setting unless by force. They were prepared to give a proportion of their wealth and limited obedience, but they would resist attempts to uproot them, to destroy their local power bases.

Tension between central and regional elites was inevitable if the ruler was at all anxious to enlarge his state, which meant subjugating ever widening circles of local chiefs, or if he wished to centralize government, which entailed the progressive reduction of the regional leaders' independence. If it was at all possible, the dominant ruler would attempt to replace provincial dynasties with his own appointees, men dependent upon him for their advancement. But such a move could lead to rebellion or at least result in local obstructionism, so many kings were forced to leave the chiefs in power and tried to control them with traditional and somewhat crude techniques. The use of spies was common, assassination was resorted to when necessary; a judicious planning of marriage alliances combined with the allocation of patronage provided more positive incentives. When the powerful coastal lords who had already acknowledged Mataram's hegemony resisted further encroachments upon their freedom, the ambitious rulers, Sultan Agung (1613-1645) and Amangkurat (Tegal Wangi, 1646-1677), took harsh steps, putting the princely families of Pati, Madura, Surabaya, Semarang and Jepara to the sword.²³ But such efforts to alter permanently the balance of power in favor of the center were doomed to failure as long as communications were difficult and the regional chiefs retained their control of local resources.

Once the regional elites had formally acknowledged the ruler as suzerain then they could, from one point of view, be regarded as "officials" of the king. This was, naturally, the interpretation favored in court circles. But it would be a mistake to accept the court's version of relationships too literally, especially as the available accounts often formed part of the ruler's effort to legitimize his position. Mataramese literature on government forms the main basis for Soemarsaid Moertono's valuable study of the Javanese state. He concludes that in Mataram "the whole apparatus of administration was inevitably an extension of the king's rule," and that "whatever power his administrators might have was derived from above."²⁴ This was undoubtedly true of the theoretical basis of the court official's position, but it does not really apply to the region-based chiefs and, even so far as the officials were concerned, it does not take into account the politicking and

23. Veth, Java, II, pp. 14-15; B. J. O. Schrieke, "Ruler and Realm in Early Java" in his Indonesian Sociological Studies (The Hague: van Hoeve, 1957), II, p. 218, and passim; de Graaf, "Sultan Agung"; H. J. de Graaf, "De Regering van Sunan Mangku-Rat I, Tegal Wangi, Vorst van Mataram, 1646-1677," VKI, XXXIII (1961), XXIX (1962).

24. Moertono, State and Statecraft, p. 5.

competition which centered on the struggle to attain a certain relationship with the king.²⁵

The literature of the courts emphasized the unique, utterly central position of the ruler and the unity of the realm. But it could be argued that this vision of all faces turned towards the radiant king was an ideal rather than a reality, and the stress cannot hide--may even indicate--the persisting importance of local differentiation and the essentially conglomerate nature of political organization. Similarly, it is possible that the very image of the priyayi, steeped in the king-focused ethos of the court, was encouraged by the centers as a technique to counter the social and cultural idiosyncracies which encouraged political polycentrism. Unfortunately, little has been written on the ethos and organization of courts other than Mataram, so one cannot say how true that image holds for the other major kingdoms, such as the sultanates of Banten or Cirebon, while there is a lamentable lack of research on the social and political history of petty princedoms or provincial units. Until this gap is filled, it is likely that generalizations will continue to be based on our knowledge of Mataram, but at least the limitations of this perspective should be acknowledged.

The pre-colonial ancestors of the priyayi covered the spectrum from court officials, dependent upon the ruler's whims, to almost independent local chiefs, rulers of powerful vassal states or the rural headmen of village complexes. These men were intermediaries, linking a very diverse rural society with the complex world of the courts. Depending on their position in the connecting hierarchy, their relative distance from the center, the officials and chiefs were subject to varying degrees of pressure from both their local context and the central administration. Their vulnerability and need to accommodate to such pressures was determined by the extent to which they controlled their own sources of authority and power.

The gradual establishment of Dutch control did not alter this situation in any fundamental way; alien rule did not result in a displacement of the provincial priyayi elite, although it sharply curtailed the scope of Mataram's court and abolished those of Banten and Cirebon. The VOC found it cheap and convenient to work through the native chiefs both in its early collections of produce and in its ultimate assumption of political power. The Company had no interest in recasting the ramshackle hierarchies of local chiefs and officials into a regular administration: instead, they merely backed chosen men who would meet their economic and political demands. This tended to confirm or even increase the independence of many headmen, since so long as they performed to VOC satisfaction they could use the Dutch as a source of support in their local power plays. Since the Europeans were neither interested in nor well informed concerning indigenous administrative rights and duties, their ignorant support enabled some of their regents to transgress the checks and norms of the native system.

In areas in which vital VOC interests were involved, the freedom of the regents was very circumscribed. But the Company had a narrow span of interest: it insisted only that the bupati acknowledge Dutch suzerainty, abstain from political or trade relations with foreign

25. Ibid., pp. 101-18, does discuss the regional chiefs, but in no great detail.

powers, keep the peace and collect and deliver required produce. But where local affairs were involved, in matters of custom or low level politicking the native chiefs were left to govern more or less as they liked. In some cases their power to punish and to allocate patronage may even have been expanded by their contact with the Dutch and their economy. Dutch control was arbitrary, personal and crude, supervision of local chiefs was loose and erratically maintained, so that the regencies were largely autonomous and self-regulating in noncommercial matters.

It was only after the abolition of the VOC that a more interventionist mood was displayed by Java's European governors: H. W. Daendels (1808-11) and the British T. S. Raffles (1811-16) tried to make the chiefs into officials dependent upon the European center and to establish more direct contact between the central administration in Batavia and native agents below the regent level, the village and district leaders who later emerged as lower echelon native officials.²⁶ But it was only in the middle of the century, when the Dutch parliamentarians were struggling to frame a constitution (*Regeerings Reglement*) for their East Indian colonies that some fundamental problems in the nature of Javanese administration were publicly examined.

The dilemma faced by the States General was now to phrase that section of the constitution which related to the native chiefs in colonial service. Here they came up against difficulty in reconciling central delegation of power with the existence of authority deriving from local social and political institutions. While this had some similarities with the earlier existence of different sources of power--court and local status--it was complicated further by the fact that the new central ruler was foreign, alien to indigenous ideas and structures.

The position of the pangrèh praja, the native administrative service, was set out in two major articles of the colonial constitution, articles sixty-seven and sixty-nine. Article sixty-seven stated that:

Insofar as circumstances permit, the native population are to be left under the immediate supervision of their own, government-appointed and supervised, chiefs, subject to such higher supervision as shall be fixed by general or particular orders of the governor general.

This article was heavily criticized in the States General, and equally strongly and successfully defended by its champions. Each point of view reflected a familiar approach to colonial affairs. The attack was led by J. R. Thorbecke, leader of the Liberals, and W. R. van Hoevell, an experienced and longstanding critic of the government's handling of colonial affairs. J. C. Baud and Minister C. F. Pahud (1849-56) defended their phrasing, denying that their opponents' criticisms were either relevant or useful.

Thorbecke decried the term *eigen hoofden*, meaning "own" or "natural" chiefs, and complained of its ambiguity. He asked that a clear distinction be made between *hoofden* (chiefs) and *ambtenaren* (officials), the criterion being the sources from which they gained their right to

26. For general accounts see Clive Day, The Policy and Administration of the Dutch in Java (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1966); B. J. O. Schrieke, "The Native Rulers" in his Indonesian Sociological Studies, I, pp. 169-221.

govern. "Natural chiefs," he said, "whether they be princes or village heads, are those who derive their authority from native institutions; the other officials, irrespective of whether they are native or European, derive their authority from the Netherlands government."

Thorbecke was opposed by the spokesmen for pragmatism who believed that as long as the system worked it was better not to create unnecessary complications and doubts by speculative thinking, theorizing and meddling in native society. Minister Pahud made two simple, flat statements in reply to Thorbecke: natural chiefs were those of the same race as the people, and, since all officials were appointed or confirmed in office by the Dutch, there was no point in distinguishing between sources of authority.²⁷

Both these viewpoints had a certain amount of truth and reason on their side. Thorbecke was being realistic in that he acknowledged the extent of the European role in Javanese political life. His approach also offered the advantages of flexibility in that it made no fundamental distinction on the basis of race alone between native and European officials. This would have meant that shifts in indigenous society, such as the social and occupational mobility resulting from the spread of Western education, could have been easily absorbed by the government structure, so providing for a relatively easy modernization of the native role in administration. But he was naive in thinking that the role of "chief" and "official" were easily distinguishable. On the contrary, they were closely interwoven and mutually reinforcing, the dividing line being as elusive and fluctuating as the old frontier between centrally-appointed and locally-based chiefs. Moreover, any attempt to translate such complex distinctions as those made by Thorbecke into administration regulations would have been doomed to failure.

As far as Pahud and Baud were concerned such analysis was futile and unnecessary. Their attitude was that as long as the basic principle was established that the Netherlanders held ultimate power, then it was best to keep things simple and vague enough so that, within broad guidelines, individual European officials had enough leeway to cope with local circumstances and developments. But they were wrong if they thought the actual situation was as simple as their formula, for they were ignoring the existence of a built-in contradiction in the colonial government structure.

This contradiction arose out of the simultaneous profession of two fundamentally incompatible principles. The Dutch were determined to keep all meaningful decision making in European hands; at the regional level, this meant that the native officials were utterly subservient to the European civil service, the BB (*Binnenlands Bestuur*, Interior Administration). Yet at the same time a basic principle of the Netherlands colonial state was that of ruling through the native chiefs, retaining the forms of traditional government and guarding the prestige of the old elite. Although most of Java had come under direct Dutch rule (with the exception of the four truncated principalities of Central Java), the native civil service was seen as being a direct continuation of the aristocratic governing stratum of the old states. The effort to reconcile a European monopoly of official decision-making

27. W. F. Winkler, "Zijn de regenten op Java volkshoofden?" Koloniale Studiën, XII, No. 4 (1927), pp. 153-73; G. W. Mossel, "Abmtenaar of volkshoofd?" Koloniale Studiën, XIII, No. 2 (1929), pp. 181-215.

with protecting the social status of the displaced class placed a considerable strain on regional officials, both Dutch and native, and placed the pangreh praja in an increasingly invidious position.

The colonial government had to deny native institutions any right to confer official authority, reserving for itself the prerogative of formal legitimation, for it simply did not trust the Javanese. Yet at the same time the usefulness of the pangreh praja--the very foundation of the administration--lay in the control it exercised over the people by virtue of its prestige, and because of the informal legitimation of its authority by indigenous traditions. This prestige was felt to be created, or at least enhanced (opinions differed) by the identification of the native corps with local traditions and institutions. This identification was basic to the colonial conception of the native officials as *volkschoufden* (popular chiefs), and there was a continuing debate until the end of the colonial regime in 1942 over the relative importance of the two major elements determining the native official's status and function, that of the volkschoufd and that of the *ambtenaar* (the official).

As European economic involvement advanced and the elaboration of the corporate plantation system brought more capital and more white settlers to Java, there was an obviously increasing need for a more systematic and efficient administration. This meant more literate and skilled native officials; specifically, it meant some provision of Western schooling. But many Dutchmen feared that a European style education would alienate the officials from their society, and so destroy their useful influence over the people. The need for a more effective officialdom was finally reconciled with the "protect-the-traditional-chiefs" policy by a de facto specialization of function within the native corps. The maintenance of symbolic authority and the exertion of charismatic leadership increasingly became the function of the highest officials, the regents, while the regent's assistant, the patih, and the district chiefs (*wedana*) handled the actual routine of government under BB direction. In this way the Dutch hoped to get the best of both worlds, to keep selected elements of the past alive to serve the needs of present and future. The bupati, with their volkschoufd hold over the people, would harness them to the colonial plough to till the soil for the benefit of the Netherlands. Meanwhile, the lower officials would keep the roads and irrigation streams clear, and the files up to date.

To a considerable extent this specialization was a natural development from the early nineteenth century trend towards direct communication between Europeans and subordinate native officials, but it was also linked to traditional Javanese attitudes to government. Traditionally, the political and social styles of the lower chiefs were modeled upon those of their superiors; there were distinctions of degree between the various levels of chiefs, but no real differences of kind. But at the highest level, that of the sultan or sunan, there was a certain specialization as the rulers were felt to be too elevated to engage directly in the routine of government, which was controlled by their chief minister or patih. But the patih could never take over the spiritual and religious functions of the paramount ruler. There were parallels in this with the colonial situation, with its growing identification of the regents with the volkschoufd aspect and the other native officials becoming more and more ambtenaren.

This trend was made explicit in the second major article relating to native officials in the 1854 constitution. Article sixty-nine

stated that "Regents were chosen by the Governor General from among the native population" but that a son or close relative of the last bupati would be chosen as his successor insofar as this was reconcilable with the (very vague) preconditions of "ability, diligence, honesty and loyalty." Inheritance of office for regents was made a legally recognized right; it was no longer a favor granted by the central government, whose positive freedom to confer office had become the negative freedom of refusing to do so. An important shift in emphasis had occurred, and a barrier to change was erected which helped the regents defend their entrenched status when it came under heavy criticism in the twentieth century.

The implications of these developments were profound. There was not only a disjunction between the holders of ultimate power (the Dutch) and those who continued to hold the symbols of authority (the native officials), but there was also a distinction within the pangrèh praja between those most intimately associated with the traditional and culturally defined aspects of government, the bupati, and the lesser officials entrusted with the mundane technicalities of administration. The regents, prime symbols of indigenous political traditions at the local level, were often isolated from all involvement in administration, while being closely associated with the colonial overlords. This tended to discredit the priyayi ethic in the eyes of the intelligentsia and nationalist leadership which emerged during the early twentieth century; to many of these critics, the regents were men who sold their influence to foreigners in exchange for a shallow pretense of authority and the material perquisites of office. Also, many lesser officials, increasingly well-educated and influenced by Western social and political thought, resented their less capable but well-born colleagues' monopoly of the administrative hierarchy's apex.

The development of the nationalist movement placed the government priyayi in a difficult position. Although many of the new spokesmen, who denied that the colonial native officials represented the people, were themselves of priyayi descent, they based their own claims to popular leadership not on birth or government service, but on ideas of democracy and national independence. Often the sons of civil servants, they nevertheless condemned the foundations of the old priyayi status and ethic as both feudal and colonial, claiming that high birth, insistence on maintaining tradition, and employment by exploitative aliens conferred no right to lead, but on the contrary, exposed the moral and political bankruptcy of the established elite.

By the end of the colonial period the priyayi were more closely identified with the center than they had ever been; bureaucratization of the pangrèh praja, although partial, had created a single corps, replacing the loosely knit network of chiefs and officials, although many of the old attitudes and relationships remained. The interventionist policy of the Dutch government intensified priyayi interference in village life, and strengthened the view that they were mere "tools of colonialism." At the same time, emphasis on up-grading the corps' efficiency resulted in increasing Westernization and, although this process also was very far from complete, there were signs of real alienation between native officials and the people they were meant to lead. Dutch suspicion of Islam made it very difficult for the priyayi to achieve a working relationship with new Islamic movements, and any cooperation with political critics of the regime was also ruled out by colonial attitudes.²⁸

28. Sutherland, "Pangrèh Pradja," pp. 512-26.

The net effect of these developments was to set the priyayi apart as a special caste with a narrowly defined political function, that of serving the center. Hence the image of the priyayi as dependent agents of an exploitative government is truer of the late colonial period than of traditional polities, VOC times or the earlier nineteenth century. For centralization of government, improvements in communications and unquestionable Dutch control had eroded the local bases of priyayi power, leaving them no effective countervailing strength with which to face Batavia. So whereas the provincial priyayi had once been involved in a fluctuating contest with centralizing states, by the early twentieth century not much more was left of the original relationship than the theories of duty and obedience and a pallid continuation of the mediating priyayi role. Once the priyayi were actively involved in managing the interaction between people and centers, but in the fully developed colonial system they were subordinate, reduced to using the placatory and manipulative techniques of the weak facing the strong.

Nevertheless, the native officials were still a variegated group. Although the increasing influence of Western attitudes and behavior was reducing the cultural heterogeneity of the corps, it tended to sharpen the distinction between generations. Basic differences between regions remained, and attempts to impose complete bureaucratization and standardization were thwarted both by the colonial dogma itself and by the persisting geopolitical and cultural factors which had complicated the centralizing efforts of the indigenous states. Incompatibility of traditional attitudes to government and the continuing strength of intracorps personal ties also hindered the introduction of various rationalizing innovations. The convoluted interaction of indigenous reality, Dutch interpretations, colonial policy and social evolution, and their effects upon the priyayi, are well illustrated by the changing correlation between "priyayi" and "aristocracy." The Netherlands authorities tended to set great store upon the idea of the priyayi as a hereditary governing elite, but they did not always appreciate the pragmatic subtleties of Javanese ideas.

The Priyayi as Social Class

There seems to have been a strong tendency to hereditary appointment to office in Java. Sons usually succeeded fathers, or at least a man could expect to be followed in his position by a nephew, son-in-law or some reasonably close relative. This was an established practice, but not an inviolable rule. Inheritance of function or status was not inevitable in the way, for example, that titles automatically pass down among the English aristocracy. Instead the rule was that a son or close relative would succeed providing that there were no sound reasons for appointing an outsider. If the family had so abused their office that they were hated, and hence ineffective, or if the court was convinced that they were bent on treachery, then an outsider could be appointed. It was always easier to replace men serving near the court than the provincial officials or local chiefs.

In Java, as in other Southeast Asian societies, there was a theoretical decrease in the degree of nobility as distance from the royal ancestor increased. Blue blood thinned with each generation. For a man to retain his aristocratic status birth had to be reinforced by office, and preferably by serving close to the ruler or the dominant family of the region, as politics remained highly personal. Rank also strengthened the aristocratic element in the most humble lineages, as

a man of position was sought after in marriage by well-placed families, and he could always employ the right experts to trace back his genealogy to suitably elevated ancestors. If village parentage stretched back several generations, there remained the possibility that a wandering scholar or fleeing prince might be located in the vicinity at a convenient time, or else a fairly close forebear could be shrouded in mystery, refusing to reveal his birth but suspected of being a man of the highest origins, and, in more distant generations, of great magical power. Since people usually reasoned that a man who attained high rank must be of good birth, little conscious deception or hypocrisy was involved.

So it was not axiomatic that position followed birth: birth could also follow position. Even when family succession was preserved, a son did not step into his father's shoes at once; some apprenticeship was usual, and he did not always receive the same titles and appanage lands as his father. Lands and titles were granted in recognition of changes in social position (for example, marriage, attaining a significant age, and so forth) or were conferred directly by the ruler as rewards for services rendered. Within both court and regional elites there was no firm principle of primogeniture: recruitment was usually of the more able members of the extended family. Since surnames were not used in Java and individuals could have several names during their lifetime, hereditary appointments or social status were not always obvious to outsiders. New names were chosen to reflect position as were titles: harmony was essential. Nevertheless, local people and those involved in administrative or aristocratic circles would always know each others' background, as it played such an important part in Javanese life.

Social mobility into the governing elites was allowed for within the indigenous system. Military prowess, loyalty, administrative ability or sheer good luck in being in the right place at the right time enabled common men to rise in the service of kings and chiefs alike. As they ascended the ladder, they acquired the coloring of their environment. They assumed the names, discovered the family trees and adopted the life-style which accorded with their rank. Their children received the usual training of their new class, being sent to live with noble families to learn the social and professional skills necessary to further their own careers, so confirming the family's rise from the *kampung* (village) to *priyayi* status. A careful selection of marriage partners enabled new families both to consolidate their political position and to ensure that their descendants could share in illustrious ancestry, embracing the kings of Majapahit, of Pajajaran or the Prophet Muhammad himself. No doubt too, in the manner of *homines novi* everywhere, the new *priyayi* punctiliously observed the cultural forms of the established elite. And, as the village provided able talent and fresh blood for the local aristocracies, so the provinces also sent their more capable and ambitious sons to the central courts.²⁹

But the Dutch clung to their belief that the *priyayi* were a simple hereditary aristocracy, and that much of the authority which made them so useful to the regime derived from their high birth. So the colonial authorities tried to buttress this aristocratic caste by introducing the hereditary principle for regents, and they tried also to ensure

29. For example, Moertono, *State and Statecraft*, p. 95; Sartono Kartodirdjo, "Struktur sosial dari masjarakat tradisional dan kolonial," *Lembaran Sedjarah*, No. 4 (1969), pp. 11-34.

that native officials were recruited from suitably elevated strata. Preference was always given to the well born in such matters as entrance into schools, selection for the civil service and promotion within it. Despite these efforts, the twentieth-century native officials were increasingly drawn from the lesser priyayi and commoners, partly because the well born were finding more rewarding and less restricted careers elsewhere, and partly because the need for efficient native officials provided the humbly born with a ready-made path for upward mobility.³⁰

Democratization within the pangrèh praja varied sharply from region to region. The bupati families in Priangan, for example, were apparently reinforced in their elite position by Dutch policy, and their relatives dominated the upper levels of the civil service. Many old pasisir families, on the other hand, seem to have been shattered by the combined attentions of Mataram and the VOC, so the region shows less elite continuity. An even more obvious case of a rather non-aristocratic pangrèh praja is the extreme east, the ujung timur, where the officials tended to be colonial administrators, shorn of the more elaborate manifestations of the priyayi mystique which still characterized the government priyayi of, for example, Priangan or the old mancanegara region.³¹

If, then, our image of Java's priyayi is to be at all realistic, we must give due recognition to their linking role connecting the common people with the courts. As both officials and regional chiefs, the priyayi were subject to pressure and influence from their local environments as well as from the capitals. Consequently, no single model can do justice to the many permutations of priyayi culture, nor to the variations in their political status and functions. A man earned the label priyayi not simply by his ties to the court, nor by birth or rank, nor by merely displaying correct cultural characteristics and life-style. No single factor conferred priyayi status, but rather a cluster of attributes, which included some or all of the above.

Any definite judgment as to the relative significance of the various sources of priyayi status should be limited to a particular place and time, as the fluctuations in the political position of regional elites, together with cultural evolution and variation combined to produce a highly differentiated upper class. There are many unanswered questions about priyayi development, including assessments of significance and range of Javanization, Islamization and Western influence, of the relevance and usefulness of class-oriented examinations of traditional society, of the role of rural middle level elites, and of the history and functioning of communities beyond the major capitals.

As Clifford Geertz himself has cogently argued, attempts must be made "to trace out the sociological links between cultural themes and political developments,"³² and it would seem that in the case of the priyayi we need to know more about the role of both court officials and, particularly, regional chiefs before we can generalize about the

30. Sutherland, "Pangrèh Pradja," pp. 414-27.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 476 note 89; Sutherland, "Notes on Java's Regent Families," *passim*.

32. Clifford Geertz, "Afterword: The Politics of Meaning" in Claire Holt, Culture and Politics in Indonesia (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 322.

bases of their power and their value systems. Moreover, it seems obvious that events during the colonial period were crucial in shaping priyayi development, and an awareness of this is essential if we are to avoid unwarranted assumptions of either change or continuity, based on a simple comparison of a Mataramese version of "the indigenous state" with post-colonial Indonesia. We must ask not only what Dutch rule meant in terms of Westernization, but how far the infrastructure it created affected the internal dynamics of native society. It would be very interesting to know how far the colonial situation facilitated the emergence of the Yogyakarta-Surakarta center as the dominant cultural model, or whether Dutch policies sharpened competition and antagonisms between Islamic and syncretist groups. The extension of modern large-scale economic activity, improved means of communication and security enforcement, intensified administrative interference and the spread of Westernized attitudes must also have altered relationships between groups in rural areas.

The location of various socio-cultural nuclei is essential in Java's ancient and diverse society, where such distinctions both define and reinforce other identifications, such as those of social classes, economic groups or ideological persuasions. Nonetheless, no single set of categories or ideal types should be allowed to obscure the existence or importance of other orientations and frameworks. Among the fascinations of Javanese politics and history are the permutations wrought by the overlapping and cross-cutting of various loyalties, frames of reference and cultural identities. It would be unfortunate if this richness should be reduced by a premature acceptance of oversimplified models, no matter how illuminating and appealing they may be.