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The future and the past. Wertheims interpretation of Indonesias social change

In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 117 (1961), no: 1, Leiden, 64-79

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THE FUTURE AND THE PAST

WERTHEIM'S INTERPRETATION OF INDONESIA'S SOCIAL CHANGE

I

Among the main views about history there are two which stand out in sharp contrast to each other. The finalistic view considers the past in relation to the present and the future, whereas the other view tries to disengage itself as much as possible from the present and the future in order to penetrate into other periods and cultural worlds and to understand them in and through themselves.¹

This second approach of history a well-known Dutch philosopher and historian of the 19th century, Allard Pierson, considered a typical acquirement of that century. The age of Walter Scott and Augustin Thierry was characterized by him as the age in which the dead were brought into existence again. "Our time" he wrote in 1886 "wishes to revive every past and gives up the way of feeding on the past by which so much of the past is neglected for the very reason that it can no longer be used as food". He explained that historians are no beasts in search of prey. "We are not watching for a prey. With respect we approach the sepulchres. The magic wand of our historical sense will open them. When the dead are alive before us it just appears that their lives have been different from what ours intend to be. That is no reason for us to be disappointed for it was not our egotism which conjured the past up from its sepulchre". Allard Pierson compared the work of the historian with the activity of the prophet Eliah. After raising a child which had already died he did not take hold of it, but he gave it to its mother and said: "See, your son lives". Pierson concluded that when we follow this beautiful example, the past says to us: "now I know that you are a man of history".²

¹ Cf. i.a. the inaugural address by J. C. Boogman, *Vaderlandse Geschiedenis in hedendaags perspectief* (Dutch History in contemporary perspective), Groningen, 1959.

² A. Pierson, *Oudere Tijdgenooten* (Older Contemporaries), 3rd ed., Amsterdam, 1922 pages 146—147.

This attitude towards other times and cultures we find again in later studies on Indonesian culture. Its approach made a deep contrast with the irreflective application of western systems, views and norms in the study of Indonesian languages, social organization, economics, law, art and religion. Instead of looking in the first place on Indonesian cultures as a hunting-field for material to construct phases of evolution towards the modern West these studies tried to understand the specific structure, type and character of those cultures and the changes they underwent through the influence of internal and external factors.

II

Wertheim's book *Indonesian Society in Transition*³ to which I am going to pay special attention in this paper, is based on quite another view of history. It belongs to the finalistic type. In his interpretation of the past and the present Wertheim consciously starts from his own expectation of the future.

In this respect it is very instructive to notice the words he addressed to the historian Romein at the occasion of his inaugural address as professor of Indonesian history and sociology at Amsterdam university. He first said that the Amsterdam sphere in which he felt so much at home was especially the sphere of Romein and then he continued: "He who has to practise sociology and history realizes every day that the past is never complete and that our view of yesterday and to-day is determined by what we expect from to-morrow."⁴

For the insider who knew Romein's ideas about history these words meant that Wertheim fundamentally agreed with Romein's theory of history. A clear statement of this theory is given by Romein in an article on certainty and uncertainty in history which appeared in 1937. When it was published again in 1946 in the collection *In opdracht van de tijd* (equals: *By order of the age*) the author said in his preface that in this paper he thought at last to have solved for himself the problem of historical objectivity.

According to Romein we have not to do with a closed past but with a past that is incomplete and is re-made again and again. He

³ W. F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition, A study of social change*, The Hague and Bandung, 1956, second and revised edition 1959. References to this book made in this paper concern the 2nd. ed.

⁴ W. F. Wertheim in his inaugural address, *Het sociologisch karakter van de Indo-Maatschappij* (*The sociological character of the Indo-Society*), Amsterdam, 1947, p. 17.

shares the idea that by willing the future mankind in one process makes both history and the past of that history. Mankind is not a unity, however. There is not merely one movement towards the future. A choice has to be made between conflicting spirits of the time. "I have made this choice" he said. "I see the true spirit of the time in the struggle for the emancipation of labourers and peasants, and as long as this struggle goes on dialectical materialism is the appropriate form of critical knowledge for me. It is my opinion that this form of knowledge guarantees us the highest possible degree of objective knowledge about the past.⁵

The publications of Wertheim show without any doubt that his expectation of the future is identical with the one of Romein. His central theme, therefore, is the emancipation of the people: the people not as a nation but as the masses of labourers and peasants.

It is the main subject of his *Indonesian Society in Transition*; not only when he explains the future development of Indonesia and analyzes the contemporary situation but also in his presentation of the past, in which he gives special attention to the agrarian population. In Wertheim's publications the people as "common people" play the same basic role in history as the nation does in the works of nationalistic historians. All events are considered in relation to the people and they are irrelevant if they do not have any effect on the situation of the masses.

In the introduction of his book Wertheim explains that he has given prominence to the social history of the present century, his special field of study. However, this stress corresponds with the role played by the masses in the events of Indonesia. Not only the composition of this book but his entire historical approach is dominated by the idea that the actual history of Indonesia only starts when the masses come to the fore as a result of the structural change of the whole society. The orientating chapters and paragraphs about the time before the arrival of the Europeans and about the period of the western influence until about 1800 are not only introductory remarks within the framework of this book, but they have essentially the character of a more or less static protohistory until the period in which the masses become a more prominent factor and actual history starts.

This is already explained in the first Chapter: "On the surface

⁵ Jan Romein, *In opdracht van de tijd (By order of the age)*, Amsterdam, 1946, pages 39-40.

Indonesia's dynastic and religious history seems to bear the imprint of dynastic change, but this picture hardly holds up under thorough investigation. One of the salient features of Indonesian history is that the numerous changes within higher social strata did not appreciably affect the total structure of society. Within a period peasants might suffer more than usual from feudal or military suppression or they might sometimes starve as the result of calamities such as flood, war or crop failure; but their general way of life did not change greatly. The imperial or feudal superstructure remained only a loosely built edifice on a solid base of peasant life. Dynasties might follow upon each other, and each of them might bear its specific cultural mark, but not appreciably change".⁶

The life of the higher social strata was also highly traditional in that time, and even the coastal towns may not be regarded as dynamic islands in the midst of a static oriental society. These towns were dominated by aristocratic groups, and as a rule the economic and social function of the artisans and traders was also determined by tradition.⁷

Wertheim distinguishes three cultural patterns in early Indonesia, viz. the pattern of the *ladang* areas, the pattern of the harbour principalities, and the pattern of the island states based on the growing of rice on irrigated fields. They become already apparent to us, he says, when we are getting a somewhat clearer picture of Indonesia from archeological and historical sources. All three are of a traditional character.

Neither the influence of Hinduism nor the influence of Islam or the West during the first centuries of contact brought about an appreciable change in the basic structure of these types of societies. About 1800 they were still characteristic of the Indonesia of that time.

He therefore agrees at the beginning of the third Chapter with the characterization by Marx of the old Asiatic society as a static society. Marx spoke of "the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic states, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the stormclouds of the political sky". And of India Marx stated emphatically that it had no history. "What we call its history is only the history of conquerors following upon each other and building

⁶ op. cit. p. 6.

⁷ op. cit. p. 7.

their empires on the foundation of that obsequious immovable society".

According to Wertheim the arrival of the Europeans did not bring about a change in Asia for the time being. "In general neither Asian agriculture nor Asian industry was affected by Western influence in an appreciable way before the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was only after 1800 that Western impact made itself generally felt in Asia So the bases of Eastern society were shaken by Western capitalism for the first time in history".⁸

However, when the Dutch expanded their authority and influence over an ever growing part of Indonesia this did not involve the replacement of the old eastern society by the type of modern western society which we know in the home country. The 19th century colonial society on Java had its origin in the social stratification of old Batavia and was by no means a reflection of the social stratification in the Netherlands in which the free citizens held such an important position. In the older period of the Dutch East Indies religion had played an important part in determining the status, but this changed in the nineteenth century. The ethnical origin became a preponderant factor and racial discrimination became more and more important as a social criterion. A colonial "caste" developed above the actual Indonesian society which was transformed into the stratum of the "Inlanders" (natives) of the colonial society.

For many people Islam became the symbol of resistance to this "colonial caste system", says Wertheim, and he adds: "as previously it had been the symbol of resistance to the Hindu caste system".⁹ Islam did not bring about a structural change of Indonesian society after its arrival in Indonesia. It came to Indonesia in a secularized form and rather supported than undermined the existing social structure. Wertheim points out, however, that there was also an under-current which laid more stress on the equality of man, the value of the individual and the spiritual side of life. This current was represented by teachers of religion, who often opposed the secular authorities and enjoyed a high prestige with the urban dwellers, traders and craftsmen. This trend in Islam gave the small man a feeling of individual value as a member of the Islamic community. "According to Hindu ideology he was merely a creature of lower order than the member of the higher castes. Under Islam he could, as it were, feel himself their

⁸ op. cit. pages 39-40.

⁹ op. cit. p. 207.

equal or, even, in his quality as a Moslem, the superior of such of them as were no Moslems themselves, even though he still occupied a subordinate position in the social structure".¹⁰

In this sense Islam, according to Wertheim, can be regarded as a fermenting agent towards the revolutionary process of the 20th century, i.e. for him the social revolution. In his line of argument the national revolution has only a positive meaning in so far as it is a form of social struggle against the reactionary forces. Progress is the criterion of his appreciation of Indonesian history in the last century and a half, and that implies the replacement of the old society by a new one in which the common people will be better off.

From this point of view he applauds the interference by the Dutch in the old society to abolish "feudal" conditions and to establish a certain degree of public peace and order.¹¹ It is a conscious undermining of the old society and the masses benefit by it. But the Dutch government is also the exponent of Western capitalism, which shakes the eastern society to its base but does not give freedom and social progress to the common people. Both in the towns and in the country the masses revolt and this resistance finds expression first in Islam and then in nationalism. "Islam and, later, nationalism were for the rural and urban masses first and foremost symbols of class solidarity in the struggle for a better existence."¹²

In general Wertheim is more subtle in his appreciation of Islam than in his evaluation of nationalism. He understands that Islam has not only its significance as a symbol of class solidarity and class struggle but that it is a spiritual force in the life of many of its followers. He does assume, however, that in the future the bond between Moslems and non-Moslems of the same social class may appear to be stronger than the bond between Moslems who belong to different antagonistic classes.

As for nationalism he definitely rejects the possibility that national unity will permanently dominate the social contrasts. He sees nationalism as a temporary concentration in the social struggle against foreign powers and for the rest it is a highly divergent movement and one divided in itself. Wertheim can hardly find words strong enough to stress this fact. He uses the words: "completely different" and "a

¹⁰ op. cit. p. 198.

¹¹ op. cit. pages 65-66.

¹² op. cit. p. 323.

whole world of difference", in the following quotation from his book: "The nationalism professed by the younger, Westernized pryaais of the early years of this century was completely different in character from the nationalism of the strict Islamites among middle class traders. There is a whole world of difference between the nationalism of the dependent middle class employed in government functions and in the large Western business and that of the agrarian masses, of the unskilled workers in the towns".¹³

We understand now quite well why political independence does not mean very much from this point of view. The social struggle which was fought so far under the flag of nationalism has not come to an end at all, although the struggle of the poor rural masses may continue for the time being as a struggle for nationalism. "Nationalism has to a certain extent become an ideology for the fight of the impoverished peasants of Asia against all capitalists, foreigners and nationals alike, who are infringing upon their basic interest and rights".¹⁴ According to Wertheim it is understandable, therefore, that communism is rather on the side of nationalism than on the opposite side, whereas capitalism has the tendency to back up regionalism and provincialism, as it has done already for a century. The combination of nationalism and social struggle also explains why in nationalist movements of independent countries the bourgeois and the radical left wing are mortal enemies who threaten to enter upon a struggle to the death.¹⁵ About the issue of this struggle there is no doubt if at least foreign countries do not interfere on a large scale. Unlike e.g. Western Europe most of the Asiatic countries have had no time and opportunity for the development of a powerful individualistic middle class. "The Asian bourgeoisie arrived on the scene too late to realise to the full its tendencies in the direction of individualism. The Oriental bourgeois came to live in a world where trade and industry were no longer dominated by private businessmen but by ever growing monopolistic concerns".¹⁶

In the post-war period of Indonesia groups of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie came to the fore, who tried to co-operate with foreign capitalists. The fight for national independence to a large extent turned against this form of dependence, especially among the

¹³ op. cit. p. 319.

¹⁴ op. cit. p. 331.

¹⁵ op. cit. p. 328.

¹⁶ op. cit. p. 48.

groups for whom no new gates had been opened by the achievement of national sovereignty.

Wertheim is of the opinion that the power of the right wing is still present but in principle already overcome; according to him the same holds for the movement to establish an Islamic state. In the preface of his book he said: "The purpose of this book is also to demonstrate the way dynamic forces in Indonesia have throughout its history expressed themselves in various, often veiled forms. It would be a mistake for those in power to speculate that it might be possible to avert those forces from their revolutionary course". And he concludes his book by declaring that the further revolutionary course whether it will be officially communist or not will no doubt entail several developments which are generally associated with communism. As a sociologist he agrees with the following quotation from an unpublished report on Indonesia: "The storm-and-stress period, which Indonesia is passing through, is leading to social progress, notwithstanding political and economic tensions. No force on earth can repel the trend of social development".¹⁷

III

This outline of Wertheim's exposition will have shown how much his interpretation of the past is determined by what he expects from the future. For a deeper understanding of his book it is no doubt necessary to know this view of history, for only now does it become perfectly clear why, in reading his book, we get the impression that we have to do with the influence of a specific myth. I use the word myth in a wide sense, referring in general to the representation by means of language of events which human beings consider as absolutely essential for their existence and as giving meaning simultaneously to the present, the past and the future, and I leave the question of truth entirely out of consideration.¹⁸ According to this definition Romein made a choice for a specific myth when he decided on the central movement of our time towards the future by which at the same time the view of the future, present and past was determined. This also holds for Wertheim when he joins Romein in his choice and applies it in his work.

But the scientific value of his book does by no means depend on the

¹⁷ *op. cit.* p. 367.

¹⁸ Cf. G. W. Locher, "Myth in a changing world", in this periodical, Vol. 112 (1956), p. 170.

answer to the question whether the reader agrees with the choice for this specific myth. In general it may be said that no student of Indonesian culture can ignore this book. It is a most important work, that gives new views and surveys of various fields, to which so far little attention had been paid in studies on Indonesia. After reading this book one does not put it away without being affected by it. It stimulates thinking and provokes opposition so that it becomes necessary to reconsider one's own knowledge, insight and points of view. Moreover, I think that in scientific work — apart perhaps from philosophy — the students should be eclectic and incorporate the facts, interpretations and ideas which he thinks to be of value, from whatever side they may come.¹⁹

In his preface Wertheim himself accounts for the fact that not everybody will distinguish the same main lines in the history of Indonesia as he does. For this reason he has added an extensive bibliography to each chapter to enable the reader to check his interpretation. He also explains some general viewpoints which he has applied in his work. Three of them will be discussed here.

In the first place, he says that his interpretation does not follow at all the present trend among sociologists and cultural anthropologists to see various societies as separate units, each with a cultural pattern of its own. According to him this view is too static; it lacks the historical perspective which is indispensable for a better insight into the real meaning of the separate facts.

It is a little strange that, even in the second edition of his book published in 1959, Wertheim has paid no attention to the viewpoint of cultural anthropologists and sociologists who are in favour of the synchronic as well as the diachronic approach and apply both of them in their studies. I think of a scholar like Linton, whose article "Present world conditions in cultural perspective" (in *The science of man in the world crisis*, quoted by Wertheim many times for other articles of this book) has influenced my own contributions to a more dynamic view of Indonesia. I also refer to the introduction of de Josselin de Jong's book on Minangkabau and Negri Sembilan in which he emphatically explains the combined use of the two methods in anthropology. I would stress here in particular the socio-historical method applied by Van Lier in his large publication *Samenleving in een grensgebied* (*Society in a marginal area*) which in the Netherlands is by far the nearest approach to Wertheim's book as a socio-historical and sociological study of an

¹⁹ Cf. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Soziale Klassen und Klassenkonflikt in der industriellen Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart 1957, p. 122.

area in the non-western world. I am sure that Van Lier would not deny the connection between his socio-historical method and his training in cultural anthropology.²⁰

It may be said in general that Wertheim's approach to the phenomena as a historical approach is just as inadequate as the approach rejected by him. Both are necessary for an all-round historical understanding. One can and usually does apply one of the two as the main method but history as a discipline comprises both the diachronic and the synchronic method. To consider the phenomena in their own period and context, independent of the question of their profit for our problems of the present and the future, was rightly put forward by Allard Pierson as an historical view. The same holds for the study of the changes throughout the past and going on in the present.

The well-known German sociologist Dahrendorf thinks on the same line when he remarks that for the study of society it is just as necessary to look at the functional relations from the point of view of integration as to ascertain from the viewpoint of coercion the interaction of social forces which are creating tensions and may result in explosions. "Dieselbe Sozialstruktur, die vom Standpunkt der Integrationstheorie als reibungslos funktionierendes System erscheint, ist für die Herrschaftstheorie ein durch Zwang zusammengehaltenes, explosives Gebilde".²¹

By taking into consideration both historical and both sociological viewpoints we may combine in one study the opposite statements on the same phenomenon by Wertheim and an anthropologist like Cora Du Bois, without adulterating these statements.

By way of example I take the question which has been put forward again in a recent discussion on Multatuli and the attitude of Douwes Dekker towards the regent of Lebak, namely the relation between the chiefs and the common people in traditional Javanese culture and related cultures in Southeast Asia.²²

²⁰ R. Linton, (ed.), *The science of man in the world crisis*, New York 1945, pages 201-222; P. E. de Josselin de Jong, *Minangkabau and Negri Sembilan, Socio-political structure in Indonesia*, Leyden, 1951; R. A. J. van Lier, *Samenleving in een grensgebied, Een sociaal-historische studie van de maatschappij in Suriname*, 's-Gravenhage 1949 (*Society in a marginal area, a socio-historical study of the society in Surinam*, The Hague 1949).

²¹ R. Dahrendorf, op. cit. p. 161.

²² R. Nieuwenhuys, *Tussen twee werelden (Between two worlds)*, Amsterdam 1959 pages 159-197; Max Havelaar - number of *De Nieuwe Stem (The New voice)*, Vol. 15, Nr. 6-7, 1960.

In her *Social Forces in Southeast Asia*, Cora Du Bois says: "The lords seem to have been less the masters of serfs and more an expression of the peasantry's greatness. . . . There was no conflict between classes in the old cultures of Southeast Asia. Rather, the contrary situation appears to have existed: the complete mutual acceptance of respective roles. Remember that Marxian philosophy and the obsessional European preoccupation with a pair of opposites which are by definition irreconcilable had not yet entered the scene".²³

For Wertheim the sharp contrast and separation of chiefs and common people dominates the connecting relations within a common cultural pattern, so that he comes to the statement: "Within a period peasants might suffer more than usual from feudal or military suppression or they might sometimes starve as the result of calamities such as flood, war or crop failure; but their general way of life did not change greatly. The imperial or feudal superstructure remained only a loosely built edifice on a solid base of peasant life".²⁴

It is, however, not possible to fit such opposite views into one study when the synchronic approach gets the character of a structural-functional analysis of the total society as a complete independent organism, and when the diachronic approach isolates certain parts of the society as separate organisms with their own course of development. Then the idea of organism has to be eliminated first as a necessary "demythologisation".

The second point of Wertheim's preface to be discussed here, concerns the concept of culture. He objects to the way in which outstanding cultural anthropologists and sociologists use it as a separate concept without relating it sufficiently to the technical and economic foundations of society.

Wertheim was right in stressing the aspect of conflicting social forces and in bringing the position of the common people to the fore as a correction to a hitherto onesided approach. He is also right in saying that in many analyses of cultural phenomena too little attention is paid to the technical and economic foundations of society. But as far as cultural anthropologists are concerned, I would definitely not say that this is characteristic of present cultural anthropology. At the time I even characterized Linton's view of culture as leaning

²³ Cora Du Bois, *Social forces in Southeast Asia*, 2nd. ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1959, pages 31-32.

²⁴ Wertheim, op. cit. p. 6.

towards technological determinism,²⁵ and I could mention various names of prominent anthropologists, such as Leslie White and Julian Steward, who are preoccupied with these foundations, especially in connection with the revived study of the evolution of mankind.

Both in cultural anthropology and in sociology more and more attention is also being paid to the influence of the spiritual factor in culture. I think that the vast majority of anthropologists will not assign a decisive part to any of the main factors in culture and cultural change, and that they will agree with E. Z. Vogt when he writes: "The problem, as I see it, is not a debate between technological-environmental determinism on the one hand, and value determinism on the other. Rather, the issue is: under what conditions; to what extent, and at what point in the processes of cultural change do technological-environmental, social structural and value-system variables have their effect".²⁶

By formulating the problem in this way, the one-sided determinism of one of the main factors, or bundles of factors, is rejected, though it is by no means denied that the main factors interact on each other. Wertheim's position in this question is, however, not only one of criticism of neglect of the technical and economic factors. In his view of history the economic-social factor plays an ultimately decisive role, as was clearly stated by Romein: "As long as the struggle for the emancipation of labourers and peasants goes on, dialectical materialism is the appropriate form of critical knowledge for me".

Together with Wertheim one can acknowledge that social protest and social struggle can and did express themselves in forms of religious movements and expectations and that this also happened in Indonesian Islam. But it is quite a different thing to adopt without the necessary elaborate evidence his statement that for very large parts of Indonesian society Islam was in recent times in the first place and mainly of importance as a symbol of class solidarity in the social struggle for a better existence.

Wertheim conceives the religions preponderantly in a synchronic way as functions of certain social groups in certain times. Liberal Moslems and liberal Christians do not differ very much from each other for they belong to a similar social group in the early part of the 20th

²⁵ G. W. Locher, „Inleidende beschouwingen over de ontmoeting van Oost en West in Indonesië" (Introductory views of the meeting of East and West in Indonesia), *Indonesië* 2nd vol. (1948-1949), pages 540-541.

²⁶ E. Z. Vogt, "On the Concept of Structure and Process in Cultural Anthropology," *American Anthropologist*, 1960, p. 26.

century. He remarks that modern times needed a new Islam and a new Prophet just as every new era creates a new Christianity and a new Christ.²⁷

For Wertheim there is a strong continuity throughout the ages of the social unit of the common man, the category of peasants and labourers which he regards as of central significance. This continuity does not hold, however, for the units of religion. According to him they are still present to-day but in principle they belong already to the past.

This belonging to a phase which is in principle already overcome, also applies to the category of the nation which in the history of the nationalistic historians plays the same mythical role as the masses of labourers and peasants do in the works of Wertheim and Romein.

As we saw, in Wertheim's exposition the nation is only of positive significance in so far as in Indonesian society it is the temporary form in which the social struggle finds its expression. It is an element from outside that has a temporary function in an immanent process.

It is remarkable that Romein, who in 1954 still wrote on the same lines, and spoke of nationalism as something indispensable for Asia's liberation but apart from that in other respects already overcome, appeared to have changed this view in his book *De eeuw van Azië* (*The age of Asia*) of 1956. He pointed out that the partial replacement of religion by nationalism has been generally called a European phenomenon, and that nationalism in Asia, where it emerges about 1900, was regarded as a product of European import. However, he is no longer quite sure of this interpretation. "It might also be" he says "that in a certain age of its historical growth every people starts developing national tendencies on its own accord". He continues: "If this is true, it may, just as it happened in Europe about 1600, have arisen spontaneously in Asia about 1900 at the moment when not only the rulers but also wider strata of the population attained such a level of development that they got interested in matters of their state and society".²⁸

Romein gives here an independent place to the people as a nation, which does not fit in with Wertheim's line of argument. With Wertheim there is a close connection between the idea of the independent nation

²⁷ Wertheim, op. cit. pages 212-213.

²⁸ Jan Romein, *In de ban van Prambanan* (*Under the spell of Prambanan*), Amsterdam 1954, p. 176;

Jan Romein, *De eeuw van Azië* (*The age of Asia*), Leyden 1956, pages 18-19.

and the position taken by the Third Estate in society. And this is just the difference with Western Europe. "Whereas the Third Estate in Western Europe had ample time to consolidate its position before a Fourth Estate raised its claims, in Asia the latter closely follows the former".²⁹

That brings us to the third point, namely the question to what extent in the history of countries like Indonesia we can use the same concepts as in Western history and to what extent we have to take account of other processes than those in the Western world, both in the period before and in the period after the intensive contact with the West.

In his preface Wertheim points out *inter alia* that economic and sociological theories which are based in a one-sided manner on the capitalistic West will not enable us to understand the agrarian base of Eastern society, and moreover involve the risk of giving us too static a view of conditions in Asia. If we try to reduce Asian developments to regularities and causal processes which are observed elsewhere, we shall overlook the novel element in this development.

He applies this point of view in his line of argument, that the development of Asia need not necessarily follow a capitalistic route but will proceed from a mainly pre-capitalistic to a post-capitalistic phase. This development does not allow of bourgeois and capitalistic guidance. Independent of the fact whether Indonesia will become "communist" or not, it will develop mainly in that direction. If it should become communist, then communism will in any case have to adapt itself to the typical Indonesian background to keep a firm footing, just as it was forced to do in China.

In an otherwise highly appreciative review of Wertheim's book Clifford Geertz has rightly remarked: "Indonesian society just doesn't yield very well to a feudal-aristocrat, bourgeois-capitalist, proletarian-collectivist sort of analysis. We would do better to describe the status groups, social organizations and current ideologies clearly — as Wertheim does — and to work out new categories to describe and analyze them — as Wertheim does not — rather than to force them into a rigid prefabricated scheme".³⁰

To this Wertheim might reply that he has used terms as feudal with a certain reserve, and as regards the categories has introduced at least one new one (in any case new in this connection) viz. the concept of

²⁹ Wertheim, *op. cit.* p. 217.

³⁰ Clifford Geertz, discussion of W. F. Wertheim's book *Indonesian Society in Transition*, 1956, in *Indonesië* Vol. 10 (1957), p. 87.

acculturation. For recent times he has applied this category to the entire contact between Indonesia and the West, which has shaken the early society to its base.

In the process of acculturation he distinguishes three phases. The first phase showed particularly escape-reactions. This phase was followed by an imitation of Western models in order to combat the West with its own weapons. In the third phase Indonesia will find out that the only effective reply to the challenge from the West will consist in the assimilation of Western cultural factors in a manner adapted to the structure of Asian society. In practice this means a short cut from pre-capitalistic to post-capitalistic forms. "In this process of reform" he says "factors of economic cooperation and collective action will play a far larger part than nineteenth century Western individualism".³¹

I fully agree with Wertheim that the category of acculturation is a very important one for the understanding of the present situation. In the various countries in the world the radical form of cultural change, which may be called transculturation, is not effected in the same way. This depends on the cultural background, the manner in which the country has been in close contact with the West, and the new formative cultural process which has resulted from it and is constantly proceeding.

As for this process, Wertheim is definitely wrong when he gives it only the possibility to select between a mainly nineteenth century western capitalism, which has little concern for the welfare of the society as a whole, and a communist or almost communist system, which may be adapted to the specific type of non-western society.

Wertheim himself remarks that in the thirties the ideas and the practice of the colonial government underwent an appreciable change, though the resultant activities were only small in comparison with the magnitude of the total economic problem.³² Since that time Western ideas have not remained static and great changes in economic theory and practice, and in social planning have set in, so that big crises are no longer undergone as a kind of natural events. The recent Western world knows the phenomenon of economic planning, control and leadership of the state in various fields of life: in the combat against the consequences of the great economic crisis in the thirties, in the organization of the society during World War II, as well as in the

³¹ Wertheim, *op cit.* p. 337.

³² Wertheim, *op cit.* i.a. p. 104.

post-war reconstruction of many countries. The term post-capitalistic society is also used for this type of society.

Quite a number of modern sociologists and economists will agree with a large part of Wertheim's actual analysis and with his opinion that the theories of economic development must take account of the specific structure of the relevant society in their application, without, however, accepting at all that a development according to Wertheim's expectation of the future must be regarded as an unescapable process.

His analysis is not only an answer to a scientific question; it leads up to one specific solution. But one can make the analysis in a manner which keeps various possibilities of future development open. In contrast to the finalistic approach, this possibilistic approach seems to me to be methodically the correct one for the sociological as well as the historical analysis of the present.³³

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³³ On the possibilistic views in history, cf. Boogman, *op. cit.* p. 4.