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Cultural anthropology, future tasks for Bijdragen, and the Indonesian Field of Anthropological study


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The Note from the Editors of Bijdragen 148-I states that the journal shall in future concentrate on Southeast Asia. This will entail a regional narrowing with respect to world-wide subjects covered in recent decades, but a broadening with respect to the original specialization in colonial times, as expressed until 1949 in the name of the journal, Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indië. According as one emphasizes one aspect or the other, this new regional demarcation may be seen in two quite different lights.¹

If we refer to the original area of interest of Bijdragen, an obvious vindication of the recent move may be found, for a journal appearing in the Netherlands, in the historical continuance of a colonial research tradition with many generations of expertise and unique archival material to its name. From an anthropological perspective, however, there is also a scientific argument to be added. For over half a century one particular methodological approach has proved extremely fruitful in Dutch anthropology, and for many years in British and Australian work as well, for the analysis of the Indonesian cultural region:² the concept of the ‘Field of Anthropological Study’.

In this concept, first formulated by J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong in 1935,³ concentration on the Indonesian region is not simply seen as a more or less coincidental framework for researchers with the same area specialization. The decisive step was the translation of a particular characteristic of this very area into a scientific research programme. The point of departure of this programme is, on the one hand, the ‘genetic’ relatedness of the member cultures, that is, their sharing of a common historical base, and, on the other hand, the great variety of local forms. It is this combination that makes it possible to regard distinct local manifestations of a phenomenon

¹ I would like to thank Jet Bakels, Nico de Jonge, Jarich Oosten, Han Vermeulen and Michael Vischer for reading and commenting on early drafts of this article, and Lachlan Mackenzie for translating the text into English.
² From the outset this region, as a western area of distribution of Austronesian languages, was intended to include not only Indonesia as a political entity but also certain neighbouring areas in Malaysia and the Philippines.
³ In his Leiden inaugural lecture (J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong 1935). See also P.E. de Josselin de Jong (1980b).
as variants that are transformationally linked to one another. A comparison of these variants may contribute to an understanding of formal peculiarities that cannot be satisfactorily explained in a given local context alone and whose motivation may be more clearly comprehensible when they are examined in related cultures ('mutual interpretation'; see P.E. de Josselin de Jong 1965:289, and the example in note 14). In the course of such comparisons, a continual process of deduction and induction gradually reveals the structure and outline of models that can serve as points of reference for the various representations of phenomena within the Field of Study and express their transformational relatedness.¹

For Southeast Asia in the broader sense, on the other hand, the very opposite seems to apply. A recent American overview (Hirschman et al. 1992:140-1 and 9) complains that 'the main difficulties facing the academic pursuit of Southeast Asian Studies [...] lie in the enormous geographic, linguistic and cultural diversity of the region' which can hardly be considered coherent. There is no single great tradition, and, even as regards demarcation, the area constitutes 'no actual geo-political reality'. Nevertheless, the most important task for scholars of Southeast Asia is defined in a manner that is surprisingly similar to that of the Indonesian Field of Study: 'we must define the core of our field by seeking to understand the essence of Southeast Asian civilization [...]. Only after we have come to understand the historical origins and transformations of ideas and symbolic forms can we see contemporary social forms and processes in their proper context.'

The opposition is thus by no means as fundamental as the first quotation might suggest. What applies to insular Southeast Asia – the comparability of various local cultural forms on the basis of ancient common roots – is in many ways also true of Southeast Asia as a whole. However, the specific constellations always turn out to be different, and from case to case it is necessary to establish which local representations are, as it were, within earshot of each other and can be systematically related to each other with their correspondences and contrasts. Important headway was made in this larger context by O.W. Wolters' (1982) attempt to identify characteristic features of an all-embracing 'cultural matrix' of traditional cultures of Southeast Asia. Remarkably, Wolters nowhere mentions the Field of Study tradition; the phenomena he focuses on are, in a sense, complementary to those that were central to the Dutch research. I will return to this point.

The tasks to be undertaken for the larger area of Southeast Asia are thus not inherently different from those of the Indonesian Field of Study. If, in considering anthropological research for which future issues of *Bijdragen* [...]

¹ The fact that 'Indonesia' as a cultural region has a greater extension than the Indonesian nation was not regarded as a special problem. On the contrary, as Jan de Wolf (1982) has suggested, J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, during the period of decolonization, consciously used his postulation of the cultural unity of the Field of Study to support the independence movement of Indonesian nationalists.
could serve as a forum, I restrict myself to the latter, my conclusions are in principle equally applicable to the larger area. The situation there is much more complex, however, and has as yet not often been addressed in the journal. It is to be hoped, above all with regard to comparative research projects, that the new regional delineation of *Bijdragen* will prove stimulating.

And this applies not only to work in the Field of Study tradition. The same could be said of the many other comparative initiatives that have borne fruit in the anthropology of Indonesia in recent decades: the new historical investigation of village communities and their relations to larger power structures, problems of cultural ecology, and gender studies (see on these matters Van den Muijzenberg 1990). To these we could readily add topics currently in vogue in other regions, such as contextual interpretations of forms of ‘invented tradition’ in connection with processes of ethnicity and with the tense relationships of these with national and supranational (‘globalization’) tendencies. Such a list of subjects, however, without any of the substantive discussion that would be necessary, seems rather pointless for the present contribution. Perhaps state-of-the-art articles in later issues may supplement thematically what I wish to examine more closely, using one specific example.

**Ethnography**

With the question of possible future tasks for *Bijdragen* in mind, I should like to make one preliminary remark that is only tangentially concerned with the concept of the Field of Study. Every comparative programme is dependent on good ethnographic sources. If in the following exposition I focus on points of criticism and on possible new lines of development for such a programme, this is in no way meant to imply that one of the traditional strengths of the journal should be renounced and no more descriptive contributions accepted. This is particularly true of material about cultures that are under extreme external pressure and whose future is endangered. It might even be argued that such cases of ‘urgent anthropology’ should be treated with a certain priority. Due to their isolated status, many of these threatened cultures represent unique traditions. Contributions on such traditions can draw attention to these cultures and stimulate further research. Moreover, they may furnish material in support of efforts to help the endangered societies towards a novel formulation of their identity. One prerequisite is that the descriptions should not get bogged down in isolated reconstructions of an ‘original’ situation, wherever that may be located in time, but involve the changing contexts and the consequences thereof. Gerard Persoon’s (1994) recent dissertation on the current status of tribal minorities in Indonesia contains excellent examples of such a contextual approach.

Ethnographic field research normally leads to monographs. A large
number of these have appeared in recent years, on both western and eastern Indonesia. Almost without exception they are based on long periods in the field. Many of them paint a surprising picture of the vitality of traditional cultural forms in changing situations. For over a hundred years the assumption has been reiterated that the end of the last traces of such forms is imminent. To date this has not proved to be the case. The ways in which cultures are capable of changing and adapting to new conditions are the subject of special research, to which I will return. At the same time, the picture of the great wealth of the ancient cultural heritage of Indonesia is becoming ever more detailed.

For many ethnic groups, however, we are dependent on the findings of one single researcher. Given the restricted stock of anthropologists, this is not surprising: each anthropologist looks for his or her own ethnographically unworked niche. Inevitably, this entails a certain danger of one-sidedness. Explicit differences in personal interest and expertise, and often implicit ones too, lead to a biased emphasis on particular aspects of culture. There is a lack of other voices to correct a researcher’s subjective vision. Language barriers unfortunately form a frequent obstacle even in cases where more documentation is at hand. Monoglot narrowness of contemporary authors often prevents an adequate consideration of available sources, leading to duplication and misinterpretation.

The second restriction takes us more directly to our subject. A large number of the more recent monographs refer more or less explicitly to the tradition of the Field of Anthropological Study. Yet what is generally focused on is the analysis of local conditions in a single society. Only rarely is there any closer application of the comparative programme that is associated with this theoretical framework. It is clear that by encouraging and publishing such comparative contributions, *Bijdragen* could play a stimulating role.

*The ‘Field of Anthropological Study’*

What is the current state of this classic Dutch approach to anthropological research in Indonesia? Is this research tradition indeed simply a ‘chestnut [...] which is still being stoutly if somewhat warily defended by Dutch scholars today’, as R. Parkin (1991:779) has claimed? In responding to such a remark, one should first consider what exactly is supposed to be ‘defended’ here. After all, the Field of Study was not launched as a dogma. Its real concern was to design an areal research programme, one that was to be continually reassessed and redefined and to prove its worth in the process. The following discussion is devoted to the question to what extent new research can still profit from that programme.

Originally the approach was concerned with the cross-cultural comparison of local manifestations of a common social type in an area of historically interrelated cultures. As regards the content of his research, J.P.B. de
Josselin de Jong (1935:6) concentrated on a set of phenomena that he termed the 'structural core of numerous ancient Indonesian cultures'. They form an 'integrated whole' and are all tied to the kinship and marriage system: 1. organization of the society in exogamous clans linked in a closed connubium of asymmetric affinal relations; 2. division of the society into two exogamous moieties; 3. recognition of both paternal and maternal lines of descent.

This at least was J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong's (1935) portrayal of the matter in his seminal introduction of the Field of Study programme. It is significant, however, that the second of these elements, division into exogamous moieties, in most of the more recent commentaries on this approach (and there are dozens of them) has been replaced, probably following P.E. de Josselin de Jong's stimulating presentations (for example, 1984:2), by a phenomenon that originally (J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong 1935:10) had a much broader status: socio-cosmic dualism. This notion refers to a vast complex of phenomena that has extended the scope of Field of Study analysis beyond questions of social organization to the totality of the cultures under study. All three core elements – and not particularly the second – are systematically connected with a specific world view in an all-embracing classification, with oppositional pairs such as male–female, inland–coast, upper world–underworld, superordinate–subordinate, in which there is frequently a third element combining the opposite functions and representing totality. It is in this holistic sense that justification can be found for the oft-cited remark by J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong's pupil F.A.E. Van Wouden (1968:1-2) in his pioneering analysis of social structural types in eastern Indonesia, that 'these social phenomena are firmly rooted in the totality of the culture [...]. Cosmos and human society are organized in the same way, and through this there emerges the essential interconnection and similarity of the human and the cosmic [...], the sacred forces of which are reflected in myth and ritual.' I will return later to the possible background of the change in the definition of one of the core elements.

This is not the place to explore in detail the original concept of the Field of Study. Its great strength probably lay less in its theoretical elaboration

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5 P.E. de Josselin de Jong, in his numerous publications on the concept of the Indonesian Field of Anthropological Study, mentions a fourth element, namely resilience in response to certain powerful cultural influences from outside (1984:2). I have explained elsewhere (Schefold 1990a:39) why I consider this element to be out of place as a component of a structural core and why I believe that J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong himself did not in fact intend it to be so classified. Indeed, it would not be logical, since the phenomenon of resilience is not compatible with the model character of the 'integrated whole' of the core elements based on kinship; on this point see Barnes (1985:94).
than in the presentation of its subject. This presentation provided the researchers of its time, who were confronted with a confusing multiplicity of apparently unconnected phenomena, with a system of reference which rendered intraregional comparisons meaningful and constructive and was capable of shedding light on local obscurities against the background of the entire picture. ‘No other comparative programme in anthropology has continued to influence and promote as many generations of research as has this original Leiden programme’, wrote J.J. Fox (1988c:181) in antipodean contrast to Parkin as quoted above.

And yet, certain points of unclarity in the argument were evident from the outset. The model was presented as an ‘integrated system’, but the nature of the relationship between the three core elements remained an open question. Are they independent, separate phenomena – a historical coincidence – and had it been the main merit of Van Wouden to demonstrate their compatibility? Or are they intrinsically linked to one another such that the operationalization of one of the elements (but which?) possibly, but not necessarily, generates the others? This question, surprisingly, has hardly been discussed in the Leiden tradition. This is all the more remarkable since the form of social organization which would express the model as a whole represents a reconstruction that has never been observed in actual existence. The reason frequently given for this state of affairs was the defectiveness of the ethnographic sources. Above all in the early days of work in the Field of Study tradition, however, there are also ubiquitous assumptions of disintegration and of rudimentary residuals (see J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong 1935:10; P.E. de Josselin de Jong 1980a[1951]:42). In both cases this presupposes the ‘original’ situation which really should first be proved. This is especially true, of course, of the central areas of Indonesia, where the social structure in general concords so little with the hypothetical model that its earlier existence had to be one-sidedly derived, following Durkheimian social determinism, from cognitive elements as a kind of ideological residue. And similar arguments could be assumed to explain the above-mentioned replacement of the second core element, division into exogamous moieties, by socio-cosmic dualism. Despite all the dual ideologies, there is in the Field of Study not a

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6 See Pouwer (1989:29). Oddly enough, Pouwer also adopts the shift in the description of the core elements mentioned in the preceding section.


8 On this point and for the following remarks compare Barnes (1985:94).

9 Particularly explicitly in Rassers (1982). Exceptions such as the Tenggerese, on whom Barbara Lüem (1988) has recently reported, of course merit especial interest in this connection.
single society in which such moieties have been observed in practice; hence, in the later presentations of the 'original' social core, cognitive elements are called up to fill the gap.

*Idea principles*

This emphasis on cognitive phenomena can, however, also be looked at from another angle. The pivotal position of elements of social structure for the representation of the classificatory system in the original Field of Study programme betrays the fundamental influence of Durkheim and Mauss. P.E. de Josselin de Jong and Han Vermeulen (1989) have shown that this socio-deterministic approach, which can be traced to the influence of Van Ossenbruggen and Rassers, soon receded into the background in the years following the introduction of the 'Field of Study' concept, at least in the work of J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong. As a logical consequence, P.E. de Josselin de Jong has been suggesting since the 1950s that one should rather concentrate on what he later (1984:7), borrowing the term from David Moyer (1981), was to call 'idea principles': ideas inherent in the structural core which reveal the existence of notions of matrimonial asymmetry, of complementary dual oppositions and of two lines of descent ('double descent'). These notions form the actual 'core'; they need not themselves have been realized in the formation of observable social groups, but they reveal the existence of the core elements on a cognitive level.

What are the implications of this switch of emphasis from the description and comparison of socio-structural representations of the core elements to the quest for cognitive clues? In general terms, the focus shifts from the analysis and comparison of more or less intact rudiments of a reconstructible basic pattern of ancient Indonesian social organization to an approach of the kind that became more generally known in the same period through C. Lévi-Strauss and his structural analysis of the transformations of the myths of the North and South American Indians: the comparative analysis of aspects of historically related cultures that may be described as transformations of each other, rather than of a proto-system (see Platenkamp 1990:13).

P.E. de Josselin de Jong is not always equally clear about the consequences of this shift. What it unquestionably does mean is that the assumption has been abandoned that the 'original' model was ever actually realized. But how, then, is the fact of the genetic relatedness of the cultures in the Field of Study expressed? Does it consist in the joint

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10 As recently as 1980, however, in an attempt to reconstruct the social organization of the original Austronesians on the basis of a linguistic analysis, the view was defended in a rather forced manner that originally the structural core elements were representative of all Austronesian-speaking peoples outside Formosa (Blust 1980a and 1980b).
possession of sets of idea principles that indicate the cultural core, some of which are realized in certain regions and others in other regions, in parallel local processes?11 What, then, remains of the thesis of an ‘integrated whole’? To repeat, the original model was ultimately meant to refer to an actual system of social organization.

In my view, this question can be answered from two different angles. No one will deny the widespread distribution of notions of matrimonial asymmetry, of dualistic principles and of the alternative inheritance of certain qualities from the father or from the mother in Indonesia. It is perfectly conceivable that such ideas belonged to the original Austronesian heritage of the Indonesian peoples. As for observed forms of social organization, however, only asymmetrical marriage has a similarly widespread area of distribution. The success of this system may be explained, following Lévi-Strauss (1969:448), by its all-embracing integrative effect. Lévi-Strauss (1963:157), however, also pointed out that specifically in asymmetric marriage ‘the principle of a dualist dichotomy appears, based upon the opposition between male and female’. It is in this inherent, specific causality (and not in the sense of a general Durkheimian determinism) that the phenomenon of Indonesian dualism might turn out after all to possess the systematic basis for which no examples can be found in any concrete moiety structure.

An analogous argument could be set up for double descent. In the first instance the ideas involved – for example, inheritance of the blood via the woman, and of the bones via the man (for Indonesia see Fox 1988a:xii) – can also be regarded as being independent and autonomous notions. In a non-preferential marriage system, an in-marrying person – and hence the qualities that eventually will be passed on by her or him – may in principle stem from any other group. In a system of asymmetric marriage things are different. Here the choice of partners is bound to fixed preferences, such that elements brought in from outside and subsequently passed on, down the generations, are associated with the same kinship category. In this way the recognition of the other line – the latent line – imposes itself, as it were.12

Perhaps we could summarize as follows: from a purely cognitive point of view there is no necessary systematic connection between the three ‘idea principles’. This may change in a system of asymmetrical alliances. Dualistic notions may link up in a specific way with the opposition between

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11 The term ‘convergence’ (see Blust 1980a:220; Schefold 1986:81) as a designation of such parallel manifestations of an idea principle does not seem adequate to me nowadays, since it is a matter of developments from a generically related base.

12 Niessen (1985), for instance, describes the custom of the patrilineal Toba Batak whereby woven cloths and weaving equipment are passed on from mother to daughter. In accordance with the asymmetric marriage system of the Toba this implies from the affinal viewpoint that these items, through the generations, mark parallel ‘MBW lines’, at least in principle.
male and female. Ideas of double descent may be developed to include a recognition of the latent presence of the other line. Such notions may then diffuse autonomously and possibly lead to new forms of organization. In the reconstruction and analysis of such processes there is a broad range of tasks for future research.

However, given this new emphasis on cognitive aspects, is it still appropriate in a Field of Study analysis to take predefined elements of the social structure as one's logical point of departure? P.E. de Josselin de Jong proposes in the contribution cited above (1984:258; see also 1987:19) that we should replace the term core elements with 'basic elements for comparison' and continually supplement them with other comparative themes, for examples textiles or mythical plots. This raises new questions, however. After all, the original Field of Study programme did also encompass such matters, albeit not as separate features but as phenomena in whose cultural manifestation the core elements were expressed: rites, cosmological ideas. Niessen (1985), for example, has shown that textiles of the Toba Batak offer an ideal point of departure for mapping out manifestations of the structural core, since all the elements of the latter are expressed in various ways in the rules for weaving techniques, for the formal motifs and for their daily and ritual use. In other words, we remain with an interpretation of phenomena which is unilaterally informed by J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong’s original social model.

Participants’ models

It is, however, the very adequacy of this model as such which has been called into question by the major increase in ethnographic knowledge in the last thirty years. The range of variation of local social systems has proved much too complex to be interpreted exclusively as more or less perfect manifestations of the predefined elements of the original formal model. For this reason J.J. Fox (1980; for the following see also J. Platenkamp 1990) has proposed a fundamental shift. He advocates focusing on indigenous social categories as a guide-line in defining a structural core for the Indonesian Field of Study. These categories represent participants’ models which members of the societies employ to order and interpret aspects of their social reality. They are often conceptualized in cultural metaphors that are widely used throughout the whole region. There are major differences between the concrete manifestations of the categories in individual societies; the shared vocabulary

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13 See the situation in Kodi, on which Van Wouden (1977:216) has written: 'The structure of Kodi society is distinguished less by the fact that people are aware of the reality of both lines than by the degree to which the matrilineal line has developed into a complete and independent group with its own functional significance. In this, Kodi differs from the rest of Sumba where the reality of the female line is also acknowledged.' (emphasis mine)
within the Field of Study (often based on a single set of cognates), however, indicates that there is, after all, a close relationship between them. Among Fox's examples are the social category of 'house' as used to define and locate various kinds of descent groups; moreover, he mentions 'relative age categories [...] to structure relationships within related groups, [and] opposite-sex categories [...] to distinguish relationships between groups [...]. In contrast, the relationship between mother's brother and sister's child, which in this area is invariably marked by cognates of the Austronesian term for "trunk", "root", "base", or "origin", emphasizes the status differences involved in the continuity of alliances.' The reader from which this is drawn (Fox 1980) contains numerous examples from various eastern Indonesian societies.

In the further development of this new approach, increasing expression has been given to the view that the starting-point of such comparative analyses should be freed from the emphasis on social organization. Instead, there should be a general search for the 'distinguishing features of an Austronesian heritage' (Fox 1993:5); for each of these, comparison in the Field of Study may investigate a variety of resemblances but also significant differences.

In a recent introduction Fox (1988a:xii) mentions nine such features. It should be said, however, that these nine elements are not all at the same level. We find general characteristics of social organization and of classification ('a reliance on marriage alliance as a means of linking houses through the intermediation of the clan system'; 'a register of dual symbolic categories'); furthermore, cognitive principles on which the legitimation of social categories is based ('a concern - indeed an obsession - with the specific knowledge of origins, which establish [...] personal and social identity'); and, finally, typical participants' models ('an analogic identification of life processes in a botanic idiom', 'symbolic diarchy', or, probably in connection with double descent (see above), 'a conception of the person as composed of opposing elements').

The diversity of the status of the elements necessarily affects the usefulness of such a list for comparison. It may perhaps contribute, in the presentation of the results of local fieldwork, to bringing out more clearly the general and the specific of the situations described. In keeping with the developments in the tradition of the Field of Study approach just discussed, however, I shall focus here on participants' models.

The widespread distribution of these indigenous categories, not only in eastern but also in western Indonesia, points to their shared roots within the Field of Study. The examples mentioned hitherto -- the 'house', the symbolism of relative age, of gender or of double descent, the 'botanic idiom', the symbolic diarchy -- could be supplemented by many more.

14 For an example see Vischer (1992).
Platenkamp (1990), for instance, in his stimulating publication mentioned above, drew attention to the image of the 'boat', which often provides the model of the socio-political structure of a village society, and the 'human body', which appears to be the pre-eminent model to express hierarchically ordered relations between a whole and its constituent parts.

What I would add are religious features. Let me mention only two, to which I shall return in the next section. In many Indonesian societies we encounter the concept of a twofold ritual dependence upon supernatural blessings, one stemming from the realm of the genealogical ancestors, the other from the uncultivated regions surrounding the world of the living, which conceal the hidden domain of autochthonous spirits. A further important model seems to be the idea that after death there is a separation between the individual 'soul' of the deceased, which joins the ancestors, and potencies associated with the decaying body, which combine both the notions of danger and of fertility.

'Total' configurations

Comparative research in the Field of Study will continue to reveal such basic features. The cumulative identification of these is not an aim in itself, however. The original objective of the Field of Study approach was to present the 'totality of the culture' as an integrated system. Influenced as it was by the Durkheimian paradigm of social determinism, the early Leiden tradition assumed that this integration could be taken for granted once the systematic character of the social 'core' had been identified. By abandoning this paradigm, however, and focusing on a listing of recurrent features, researchers run the risk of ending up with the atomistic construction of a culture area with indiscriminate traits, whose interrelationship remains open. To avoid such an outcome we should concentrate on the implications of the more recent view of the Field of Study as a region of transformational variation. We should focus – intraculturally – on the ways participants continually seek to integrate their categories as partial representations of a holistic configuration; in doing so we should pay due attention to alternative voices and differences in perspective. Interculturally, on the other hand, we should investigate whether these configurations recur within the Field of Study in systematic transformational relationships.

I shall illustrate this by drawing on some of the examples of participants' models mentioned at the end of the previous section. Features like the asymmetric relationship between superordinate wife-givers and subordinate wife-takers, the phenomenon of diarchy, the mythical division between an original (or in any case earlier) population and later immigrants, the image of a matrimonial bond between a king and his land, and the ritual supplementation of ancestral blessings with autochthonous powers from the uncultivated domains – all these are notions that can be found in many
different cultures around the world. What makes these categories constituents of a configuration, however, is that they are conceived of by the participants as being components of an integrated system. In many cultures of Indonesia this appears (see Schefold, forthcoming), for instance, in the linking of political authority to the mythical position of an immigrant who is said to have married one of the daughters of the land and who, although thereby subordinate to his autochthonous wife-givers in certain spiritual matters and, by way of his descendants, to this day acknowledging ritual dependence on the original forces of the land, transformed his active role as a wife-taker into ruling status for his 'house'. In such a pattern of all-embracing complementarity we can recognize a model which, although not necessarily 'complete' in every culture within the Field of Study, nonetheless transcends the mere enumeration of traits in a way which relates each constituent part to each other part, in line with the idea of the 'integrated' structural core of the original Field of Study programme.

Within such a configuration, any element can serve as a starting-point for comparison and mutual interpretation. In the process, certain manifestations may prove to be stable, whereas in other cases a relationship may be expressed by various different representations. To go back to our example: in some cultures, the ritual dependence on autochthonous forces of the land is simply expressed in beliefs related to ceremonial hunting, while in others it is connected with a lasting diarchy in social terms whereby the political leader is complemented by a ritual 'Lord of the Land'.

In actual analysis, participants' models of their society will be recognizable by the way they come to the fore within the particular research theme under study. This means that in each concrete analysis certain features will remain in the background, while when focusing on another theme other configurations will emerge – an image of overlapping clusters, as it were. The general goal, however, remains a holistic one, demanding that each partial analysis should always refer to society as a whole.

In intercultural comparison the question of a 'core' can be asked anew for each research theme: what representations appear to be characteristic of it? This question brings us back to the original objectives of the Field of Study: what insights can be gained from mutual interpretation, and what

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15 This example may serve, at the same time, to illustrate, with an example from my own experience, what is meant by 'mutual interpretation'. The big periodic rituals of the Mentawaians are divided into two parts. The first takes place in the longhouse and is devoted to securing the blessings of the ancestor spirits; the second is spent in the forest in ritual hunting, the kill being regarded as another beneficial gift from the spirits. On both occasions, the spirits are called 'ancestors' (ukkui). The apparently obvious conclusion, that there is a double appeal to the same category of protective forces, which I still thought to be justified in my 1988 monograph, became questionable when confronted with the comparative evidence as sketched in the main text above. Subsequently, closer inspection in Mentawai revealed that the term 'ancestor' for the spirits in the forest represents indeed but a contextual euphemism for an autochthonous category of supernatural beings.
formal structures ('anthropological models') can be derived from the comparison of the local configurations? An example of such a thematic procedure is given by Barraud and Platenkamp (1990) in their chapter concluding a special issue of *Bijdragen* edited by them on ritual in eastern Indonesia.

Such detailed comparisons may then, as a next step, lead us back to the local cultures. After all, one question remains to be answered, one that, remarkably enough, has generally been avoided in previous research: how did the local variants develop? This question can be posed in two ways: with respect to the historical processes of the genesis of the variants and, on the other hand, with respect to the contextual factors that may have prompted the genesis.

The first matter entails considering the diachronic aspect which, in the classical Field of Study analyses with their structuralist/synchronic orientation, has always been pushed to the background. It achieves contemporary significance when examining the question of the fate of such local variants under modern conditions. An interpretation of current phenomena as historical transformations of older representations would certainly be an important supplement to the synchronic comparison of local manifestations. Both for intercultural comparison of characteristic features of different stages of local lines of development and for their interpretation in the light of world-wide phenomena such as ethnicity or globalization, the common background of the Field of Study forms an ideal point of departure. Among the many examples are certain recent changes in form and content of material group symbols.¹⁶

The second matter concerns the specific contexts of the various local representations. Can a study of prevailing material conditions yield an explanation for the processes that have led to the actual variants? In the Field of Study tradition this is another question that has received nowhere near the attention it deserves. Every form is influenced by its environment. To recognize the significance of such environmental factors one need not fall prey to determinism. The wide range of potential solutions means that any hypotheses about causal relationships can only be substantiated where historical evidence is available. But even the demonstration of a 'plausibilistic' relationship is a step towards a better understanding of local cultural solutions. In this sense such an attempt can be seen as complementing the insights into the meaning of local peculiarities that were provided by mutual interpretation in the traditional Field of Study approach.¹⁷

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¹⁶ See Schefold (1988b) for cases of an 'ethnic' reinterpretation and formal transformation of traditional house constructions and statues among the Sa'dan Toraja and the Toba Batak.

¹⁷ A case in point is the striking difference in focus between certain comparable group rituals in western and eastern Indonesia. In both cases, group solidarity is
Study might even yield arguments that go beyond the regional framework and can be deployed in typologically oriented discussions about universal tendencies under comparable contextual influences.

**Principles of order and modelling concepts**

Alongside the quest for the processes that give rise to local transformations of common features, the very existence of such features leads to a still more general question. The earlier Durkheinian premise of the social determination of cultural representations is no longer adhered to in the Field of Study tradition. Nevertheless, Van Wouden's conclusion that 'cosmos and society are organized in the same way' (see above) retains its validity for many ancient Indonesian societies. Apparently, this matter must be considered in a new light: can general ordering principles be identified for the various features, principles that together underlie the indigenous categories and hence connect the manifest transformations in the different aspects of culture within the Field of Study?

This classic structuralist query moves the quest for the shared cultural heritage of the Field of Study – the oft-mentioned 'family likeness' – to a more abstract plane, from the level of explicit participants' models to common subliminal orientations. The following provisional remarks, which in many ways have been stimulated by J.J. Fox's 'Comparative Austronesian Programme', and to which I shall return at length in a later paper (Schefold, forthcoming), are designed to illustrate a first move in this direction.

On the most abstract level we encounter such a principle of order in a notion of asymmetry in the representation of complementary opposites. This notion appears firstly in the difference in relative status between the partners in affinal alliances; as we have seen, the prescriptive system that is derived from this difference can lead both to a linear view of the double descent of every human being and to a form of socio-cosmic dualism which is informed by gender categories. A second manifestation is expressed in the order of precedence within a descent group, which determines the superior rank of the 'older' segments, being nearer the first ancestors, as compared with the 'younger' segments. And thirdly, this notion shows up in the above-mentioned value of origins, which is, for example, expressed in the opposition between the 'wilderness' (autoch-
thonous groups) and the cultivated domain (allochthonous immigrants), motivating in some instances the hereditary diarchies between a spiritual 'Lord of the Land' and a political leader.¹⁹

In religious practice this notion of asymmetry is combined with the idea of a spiritual essence that flows irreversibly from the contextually superordinate pole to its subordinate counterpart (see Barnes 1974:307). We encounter this combination in each of the three manifestations just mentioned. It leads to a general model of the ritual processes. In this generative sense, such an organizing complex of ideas and notions could best be labelled a 'modelling concept'.

This modelling concept appears in the idea that an influx of religious power has three sources. Common to all three is the notion that the relationship implies a harmonious bond, although the receiver can offer only insufficient reciprocation for the influx. In other words, it is a matter of three different forms of admitted dependence. Borrowing a phrase from Bloch (1986), I refer to this influx as a 'stream of blessings'. The first source concerns the unilateral stream of blessings in matrimonial alliances; this can best be characterized using the well-known expression from Timor, the 'flow of life'. The second relates to blessings and the protection from one's own ancestors which down the generations stream towards the members of a 'house'. The third source is associated with the non-human, uncultivated domains and pertains to both the favours and the adat-preserving sanctions which the original powers, resident there since time immemorial, bestow upon the descendants of the genealogical forebears who immigrated later.

In some societies in the Field of Study there are metaphorical designations for these notions. Thus, for the first case, we frequently encounter the image of the watercourse. From an analytical perspective it seems to me important, however, to draw a distinction between, on the one hand, the indigenous metaphors for existing social categories such as 'house', 'trunk/top', 'boat' mentioned in the previous section, and, on the other, the images for cognitive orientations which underlie such categories and at least in theory may have brought them into being (on this matter, compare the difference in status of the Austronesian features mentioned in Fox 1988a, as indicated above).

A long neglected aspect: rivalry

Despite all these developments and new initiatives in the tradition of the Field of Study programme, one aspect has generally remained in the background: the question of social rivalry and of individual aspiration for

¹⁹ In contrast to the Southeast Asian concept of a single ruler in the centre of a mandala-like structure, which historically came to Indonesia only at a later date; see Tambiah (1977).
power and leadership. In recent years, however, a few publications have appeared as a result of which the image of a modelling concept in this context, too, is beginning to emerge more clearly. Instead of accepted dependence on superordinates we see here achieved supremacy over equals.

At the outset of this contribution I mentioned O.W. Wolters' (1982) attempt to elaborate characteristics of a 'cultural matrix' of traditional cultures in Southeast Asia. Although Wolters nowhere mentions the Field of Study tradition, he does show in his search for common patterns for particular cultural features a clear affinity with that programme. As far as social organization in Indonesia is concerned, he concentrates with remarkable one-sidedness on cognatic developments. More interesting in our connection are his remarks on achieved leadership.20

Wolters points out that influential individuals in the traditional cultures did not simply owe their status to extraordinary performances. What really counted was the religious roots of their achievements. The performances were regarded as the consequence of an unusual endowment with personal and innate 'soul stuff'. Proximity to such a leader meant for his followers not only that they could expect to enjoy material rewards. At least as important was the fact that they could also expect to gain supernatural benefits.

Wolters (1982:6) himself points to the heterogeneous ways the expression 'soul stuff' is used in the anthropological literature. Since Kruyt (1906), it has haunted the ethnographies of the Field of Study in evoking a kind of vital principle, mixing up diverse concepts which, in the eyes of the participants, need not be related to one another in any direct way. Thus the difference becomes blurred between an individual being's personal soul (which in the Kruyt tradition is degraded into 'personified soul stuff') and the notion of a morally neutral and impersonal religious potency that can attach in varying intensity to everything that has a soul, including things.21 Foreign lexical borrowings – particularly frequent in this domain (for example, deata, roh) – as well as local meaning shifts in the names have doubtless contributed to this confusion.22

20 Wolters (1982:31, but see also p. 49) claims that he can establish a causal link between cognatic systems and the significance attached to personal achievement. However, the examples of such patrilineal societies as Mentawai and Nias (see below) make it clear that this claim is based on an underestimation of the room for achievement in traditional societies with lineage descent. The case of Nias is described by Beatty (1992:277) as follows: 'although chiefs are regarded as superior beings, their superiority derives from achievement more than from birth'.

21 See Leertouwer (1977:91) on the terminological confusion surrounding the native concept of the personal soul (tondi) of the Toba Batak, or more generally the misleading formulations that betray the lasting influence of Kruyt's views, even in recent authors such as Reid (1988:6): 'the concept of spirit or "soul-stuff" animating living things' (my emphasis).

22 To give two examples of such meaning shifts, the Malay word semangat, with which Kruyt, following Skeat, linked his ideas of an impersonal soul stuff (the
Regardless of such muddles, however, the particular merit of Wolters’ argument is to be found in his recognition of the religious foundation of the qualification of special personalities as leaders – Wolters refers to them as ‘men of prowess’. This represents a broadening of Anderson’s (1972) seminal remarks on Javanese concepts of power, the relevance of which for an understanding of political processes up to the present time has been amply demonstrated.

Unfortunately Wolters somewhat dilutes his own characterization by using in the same connection the term ‘big man’, developed through the study of Melanesian societies. The essential difference between the Indonesian and the Melanesian forms of achieved status and leadership seems to me to reside in the very fact that Melanesian big men may owe their influence directly to their adroit economic and social transactions, whereas in Indonesia it is the religious component of success that is decisive.23

I also have a more complex view than Wolters of the way a person comes to possess this religious component. Various descriptions in recent years indicate that extraordinary performances are not just seen as proof of unusual innate spiritual potency – as Wolters assumes – but also that, conversely, this power itself can be heightened by such performances. Thus Schouten (1993) writes that the Minahasans ascribed to their prominent personalities (wa’ilan), who distinguished themselves by holding great feasts of merit and by organizing and undertaking head-hunting expeditions, a high degree of keter – spiritual force and the manifestation of supernatural power – and that this keter could be repeatedly enhanced by further successes. In Mentawai every man is in principle free to achieve the status of a medicine man (kerei) by holding a great feast; the strong religious power (bajou, see note 21) which is attributed to such personalities, however, becomes theirs only as a consequence of such a feast (Schefold 1988a:209-10). Beatty (1992), too, discussing Nias, emphasizes that lakhomi, i.e. prestige and spiritual potency, is not an innate attribute. Here again it is feasts of merit and the glorious result of the associated performances for wife-givers, agnatic relatives and friends, to which the host owes his increase in rank and concomitant spiritual virtue.

characterization of which is strongly reminiscent of the sumange’ of the Buginese, which according to Errington’s (1989:61) explicit remark is ‘not anthropomorphized’) means, in its Mentawaian cognate simagere, the individual soul of a living being, in opposition to ketsat, used for the soul of a person who has died, and to bajou as the designation of superpersonal religious potency. In the Toba Batak language the equivalent of the last-named concept is sahala; the cognate sumangot (in contrast to tondi, see note above) here designates the soul of an eminent person who has died.

23 See also Schefold (1990b:29) and Schouten (1993:30-1).
Conclusion

This article has presented some developments in an academic tradition which from an anthropological viewpoint links the regional focus of *Bijdragen* to a research programme. The point of departure of this tradition is the concept of Indonesia as a Field of Anthropological Study: an area with various local cultures linked by common historical roots. Early in the article some questions were discussed regarding the status and the systematic interrelationships of the original social ‘core elements’ and the corresponding cognitive patterns. Attention was then given to certain recent developments in which we discern an increasing concentration on configurations of indigenous cultural categories that highlight the common Austronesian heritage. By comparing the local representations of such ‘participants’ models’, we can allow them to cast light on each other in ‘mutual interpretation’, and we can formulate anthropological models that express the transformational relatedness of the configurations, leading to the induction of fundamental ‘modelling concepts’. And there is also, we might add, the question of what historical developments and contextual factors prompted the specific local manifestations.

Such a programme should not be regarded as an antithesis of universally oriented comparisons which are based on anthropological typologies and which, by considering particular variables, seek to demonstrate general tendencies in the development of institutions. I would argue, however, that this approach may lead to a more specific understanding of cultural processes – quite apart from the fact that it is in keeping with the particular character of a journal with a regional specialization. The demarcation of the boundaries of this region originally had, as we saw, a historical – colonial – background. Let us close with a few remarks on how these boundaries may be reformulated in the framework of the developments sketched here.

In many commentaries on the Field of Anthropological Study a decisive significance was attributed to the demonstration of linguistic relatedness. This was regarded as an indication of the common historical roots and hence of the comparability of the phenomena under study in transformational terms. But what is the situation at the edges of the Indonesian Field of Study, in the cultures with non-Austronesian languages in the Moluccas (Papuan languages) and in continental Southeast Asia (Austroasiatic languages)? Here we find so many systematic correspondences with and variations on the neighbouring Austronesian societies that it would be absurd not to incorporate these areas in the research. Apparently, long and intensive contacts have resulted in common structural patterns that go well beyond isolated cultural traits spread at random from one people to the next. Only the results of actual comparative analyses can demonstrate which phenomena in such ‘heterogeneous’ situations should be considered from a transformational point of view within the framework.
of the Indonesian Field of Study, and which belong to another regional context.

Examples such as these show that one should continually redraw the boundaries of one’s Field of Study. It is perfectly possible that for one specific topic it will prove more sensible to adopt a framework smaller than the totality of insular Southeast Asia. Conversely, it is also entirely conceivable to take as one’s basis common social patterns that have arisen historically in a region larger than Indonesia and to expand the range of one’s Field of Study. Relevant areas are both the eastern Austronesian cultures of the South Pacific and the non-Austronesian areas in continental Southeast Asia. Possibilities like these show that any delimitation of a Field of Study ultimately boils down to taking a particular historical position. In this respect, too, the current regional focus of Bijdragen offers a new challenge.

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