

# Commemorative Lecture

Koentjaraningrat

“My nomination as a recipient of the Fukuoka Asian Cultural Prizes this year really came as a surprise to me and my family. I am very grateful for having the opportunity to enjoy this great moment at the dawn of my life. To the distinguished members of the Committee of the Fukuoka Asian Cultural Prizes I wish to express my deepest gratitude for this great honor.

I believe that I am expected to give a brief account of myself and my works.

I was born in 1923 in a Javanese family. Indonesia is an archipelago with around 150 million inhabitants. There are over one thousand ethnic collectivities in Indonesia, who not only speak different dialects or variations of one language, but speak entirely different mutually unintelligible languages.

Because of the large diversity of ethnic cultures there are many types of names. Many Javanese names are derived from Sanskrit, although original Javanese names still exist, especially among people living in the rural areas. Suharto and Sukarno are names derived from Sanskrit. But there are also longer names like mine, which was given to me by my grandmother, a daughter of one of the Central Javanese royal families. In Javanese culture a name is a strictly personal identification, and the lack of a first name often puzzles Europeans or Americans. In Europe the system of family names was in fact introduced only around two centuries ago by Napoleon.

My father was an official at one of the royal courts of Central Java early this century, but was given a Dutch education to become a civil servant. My mother belonged to the first generation Indonesian women to receive a European (Dutch) education, and later became school teacher.

The Indonesian female emancipation movement, which began early this century, was stimulated by an aristocratic lady from Central Java, Kartini. Letters that she had written to a Dutch friend showed Kartini's ideals about the rights of the Indonesian women. These letters were later published as a book *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, and has been translated and analyzed in Japanese by the late Dr. Kenji Tsuchiya of the Center for South East Asian Studies of Kyoto University.

Influenced by Kartini's ideas, my grandfather's three youngest daughters, of which my mother was the oldest, were then sent to school, whereas their older sister, who was already married, never had the privilege to go to school. However, before her marriage she did receive a traditional education, and could therefore read and write Javanese script. She was also well-versed in reciting classical Javanese books in song (macapat). My mother and her younger sister went to a Dutch school and became school teachers, but their youngest sister studied medicine and became one of the first Indonesian female pediatricians.

Listening to macapat songs always gives me an extremely peaceful feeling. I

can still remember how my grandmother used to sing macapat songs to me until I fell asleep.

When I was in high school I felt attracted to Javanese classical court dances and gamelan instruments. For several years I practiced dancing and playing gamelan, and eventually gave dance instructions to students.

There was another branch of art which I really enjoyed during my high school years, which is painting. At that time becoming a teacher in the art of drawing and painting was my ideal. This never materialized, however, as World War II changed life also in Indonesia.

In the years that followed, in Indonesia the Dutch were replaced by the Japanese, but returned under cover of the Allied Forces in 1945. Indonesia, who had already proclaimed its independence in 1945, was forced to withdraw into the interior of Java, with Yogyakarta as its center of power. To defend the area, guerilla tactics were being used, and in order to improve education, the first Indonesian university, the Gadjah Mada University, was established in Yogyakarta during that period, where I enrolled as a student at the Department of Language and Literature. When more volunteers were needed to join the guerilla, I enrolled as member of the Indonesian University Students' Corps as a volunteer fighter, and was given a brief military training.

However, I never learned to hold a gun correctly, and never fired a single shot in my life. Therefore, together with three other student soldiers, I was ordered by the commander of our bat talion to set up a mobile field school to give education to our young fighters. I want you to realize that among the fighters there were youngsters of only 17 to 18 years old. I taught them English and history, another taught mathematics and physics, and others taught subjects like geography, biology, etc.

The Indonesian-Dutch guerilla war ended when the United Nations gave pressure to the Dutch to stop the fighting and negotiate with Indonesia about the transfer of power, which was finally achieved in 1950.

Subsequently I returned to the university in Yogyakarta until I obtained my Bachelor's degree. Later I moved to Jakarta and enrolled at the University of Indonesia. I graduated in Indonesian Literature in 1952, and went to the United States to study socio-cultural anthropology at Yale University under famous professors, such as G.P.Murdock, and obtained my MA degree in 1956.

Upon my return in Jakarta I was appointed Junior Lecturer at the University of Indonesia, where I was the only indigenous anthropologist at that time, the others being senior Dutchmen. Beside teaching socio-cultural anthropology I still had to study for my Ph.D., which I obtained in 1958.

For 31 years I had quite a busy academic career, because I also had the task to develop a department with a sufficiently strong indigenous teaching staff. I was left to carry out this task single-handed when the Dutch staff left Indonesia in 1958.

In the years that followed, other universities arose in various provinces in Indonesia, and the limited number of anthropologists whom we had produced had

for two decades been given the task to develop as many as eight anthropology departments throughout the country.

During that time I have also been asked to give consultations on various socio-cultural problems of development, and had also been appointed Deputy Chairman in Social Sciences at the Indonesian Institute for Sciences. I have been invited as guest or research professor at a number of American universities, such as Columbia University, the University of Illinois, Ohio University, and the University of Wisconsin, at the Dutch University of Utrecht, and at Kyoto University. The relationship and discussions held with friends and colleagues during my stay at those universities has deepened and extended my experiences in matters not only in social-anthropology as a scientific discipline, but also my understanding of universal human values, strengthened my belief in the existence of universal human values, and convinced me that based on those universal values mutual understanding and peace in Asia can be promoted.

With that important belief and conviction in mind I retired as professor in socio-cultural anthropology in 1988 at the age of 65. I have since then more time for my old hobby, drawing and painting, which due to my academic work, had to be abandoned by me for more than 40 years. I thus started to practice again in various media, particularly crayon and water color. Today I feel quite confident in those media, and have already held about 7 exhibitions, among other in Paris and Taichung. In the display of the recipients' publications and works, I have also included some examples of my drawing and painting.

I am, however, not a professional painter, in the sense that I do not paint for a living. The reason is that although I actually intended to quit anthropology I am often still asked to give consultations on socio-cultural problems of development to people in the government as well as to private enterprises, which stimulated me to write lucrative semi-popular articles on those problems for newspapers and magazines.

Recently, I am working on socio-cultural problems of the development of traditional food industries in Indonesia. This huge project of the Indonesian government, carried out in close cooperation with the private sector, mainly involves food scientists, biotechnologists, agronomists, but in a more restricted sense also nutritionists, and specialists in the medical field.

This project was initiated almost a decade ago as an economic project. The Indonesian government was concerned about the increasing amount of rice it had to import annually due to the population growth. Therefore self-sufficiency of rice had to be achieved. Another aspect of the economic studies to achieve this goal was the improvement of the nutritional quality of the food of the Indonesian people.

In order to achieve those goals not only economic research and research on food sciences, nutrition, etc., have to be carried out, but also anthropological research, to study the cultural diversity of the Indonesian people, as different ethnic cultures also have many different food habits and eat different staples. The majority of Indonesians naturally eat rice as their staple food, but peoples of many

areas eat maize, cassava, sweet potatoes, or sagu as their staple food.

Another important problem to be studied by socio-cultural anthropologists and sociologists is why is it so difficult to have Indonesians learn to eat other indigenous traditional ethnic foods other than their own, are so easily influenced by American fast food, such as fried chicken, pizza, etc? Is it because this imported fast food is practical and easy to consume, because it is more fashionable and prestigious to enter fast food restaurants, or because it really tastes so good, despite the fact that it is so much more expensive?

Not long ago I was sent to Japan to study how the Japanese people have been able to maintain their traditional culture, and in particular their traditional food and food habits, and I have come to several conclusions.

Firstly, unlike the Indonesian peoples, the Japanese have never been colonized by a European country and are proud of their traditional culture. Secondly, especially traditional food forms a cultural element, which has apparently strengthened the self identity and national personality of the Japanese people, whereas traditional local food has strengthened the local identity of the area concerned. Thirdly, large sums have been spent to the study and research of traditional food, and finally, Japan has invested a large part of their national income in the developments of their traditional food industry, including a very effective system to advertise the products of their food industry.

Having learned these facts from the Japanese, Indonesia should learn particularly items number 3 and 4 mentioned above, to develop a strong traditional food industry.

Finally, I would like to end my commemorative lecture by once again expressing my gratitude to the Fukuoka Asian Cultural Prize Committee for giving me the opportunity to deliver this speech, and hope herewith to increase our mutual understanding and friendship.

I thank you for your attention.”