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THE EFFECT OF WESTERN INFLUENCE

*on native civilisations in
the Malay Archipelago*

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THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN CIVILISATION ON THE
INHABITANTS OF POSO (CENTRAL CELEBES)

BY

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Before we can study the influence of Western culture on the inhabitants of Poso, we must first get some idea of the life of these people as it was before they came into contact with this culture.

At that time the people of Poso lived together in communities, the only ties which kept the communities together being those of blood-relationship. The members of such a community built their houses close to each other and this formed their village. A village often consisted of one or two houses in which a large number of families had their abode. They usually chose a site for their village which was easy to defend against an enemy, for instance the top of a hill which they enclosed with a bamboo fence. These villages, however, were occupied only on the occasion of feasts in the village temple and after the crops had been harvested and the new crops were not yet ready for planting. The greater part of their time was spent in the small houses in the cultivated fields.

The head of the community was not exactly elected by the members, but one of their number assumed this function by reason of his greater sense of responsibility, and his knowledge of the adat, so that he could give advice on all matters when called upon. He was a man of words and deeds who knew how to defend the members of his community when they came in conflict with the people of another village. The people came to him with their problems in the hope that he would be able to solve them. He had to be capable of leading the men now and again when they made a raid. If in addition to this he was not grasping but hospitable and did not hesitate to contribute towards the payment of a fine which had been imposed upon one of his relatives, his influence was far reaching.

A few of the younger members of the clan also came to the fore and these were the headman's assistants, whom he sometimes used for carrying important messages to other places or to arrange matters on his behalf. As soon as the headman became too old, it was evident who was to become his successor and the transfer of authority took place gradually and without difficulty.

The headman was unable to force anybody to carry out an order; this was done by the public opinion. The headman therefore always acted in its spirit and if anyone did not wish to submit to the will of the community, the only thing left for the recalcitrant was to move to another village to which he was also related, for instance on his father's side. As the same spirit also ruled there, he was finally obliged to make the best of it, if he did not want to run the risk of being banished altogether. In the latter case he would be alone, as other communities to which he was not related, were closed to him, unless he was willing to join them as an inferior—a servant.

In this way the community maintained discipline amongst its members who were dependent on one another since they had no refuge outside the community. He who was naturally miserly was forced to give away part of his possessions to another who was in need if the latter asked it. If he refused, he would find that no assistance was forthcoming when he himself was in need. They had to respect one another's feelings as they always had the short end of the stick if they gave way to anger or wilfulness. In addition there was the fear of black magic. In this way they came to think and do as others thought and did and they had a great dislike to anything to which they had not been accustomed from time immemorial.

Economic progress was impossible. Every family in the community had its property, but the other members made claims upon it in case of a crisis in the community or a clan feast. Then the families who had had the most success with their cattle, had to supply the most animals. If a member of the community was in debt, the richest members were first requested to help him out of the clutches of his creditors. If large quantities of a certain article were stored, for instance salt, so many came and asked for it that the supply was soon exhausted. If a person had acquired a special article or implement, this was borrowed so often that he had very little opportunity to use it himself. Refusals were few and far between owing to the fear of being isolated and also out of vanity, as they liked to hear their praises sung.

Owing to the fact that in a community such as that at Poso no new needs made themselves felt, the possession of goods was of little value. What goods there were, usually consisting of pieces of white cotton, were stored in the rice shed, which was also the treasure house, and only used when a fine had to be paid or when the owner or one of his nearest relatives died, in which case a number of these pieces of cotton were buried with him. There was no money in circulation and it was not wanted as they did not know what to do with it. The silver coins which came into their possession, were used as ornaments for the children.

At that time nobody thought of starting coconut plantations. Only a few trees were planted in the immediate vicinity of the houses. Coconut plantations were not started, not only because they were not used to it, but because the times were too uncertain. They never knew when they might be attacked by other tribes in which case the first thing the enemy did, was to cut down the coconut trees.

Such a community was bound to remain at the same level. Development and progress were impossible. Everybody did as he wished, which was to please everybody else.

In 1892 the missionaries started work among these people but all attempts to convert them to things which were different to what they had been used to, ran counter to their conservative ideas. If they listened to the sermons, it was purely out of politeness towards the missionary who was kind to them, and whom they were therefore quite willing to do a favour.

Even after many years the preaching resulted in few conversions to Christianity. Conversion meant isolation from the community, in which they not only felt themselves united with the living but also with the dead, who, before them, had done as they now did. They were of opinion that if the worship of their gods and their ancestors was not maintained, they were doomed to destruction. The God of the Dutch interfered just as little with the people of Poso as the gods of Poso did with the Dutch.

The same idea applied to the schools. For years nobody thought of sending their children to be instructed. Finally a few small schools with from 2 to 8 pupils were started in various places, but their existence was due to the friendship which the people of Poso felt for the missionaries whom they did not like to disappoint any longer. These schools, however, had had no influence whatsoever on the social life of Poso.

Attempts to persuade the inhabitants to plant coconut and coffee trees were unsuccessful. The only one who allowed himself to be

persuaded, was Talasa, the present administrator, who is now a rich man. In all other cases the new ideas were checked by a wall of conservatism.

In 1905 the Netherlands Indian Government abandoned its policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Central Celebes. The Poso tribes came under Dutch rule and at first this took place without any resistance on the part of the inhabitants. It was thought that the Government would act in just the same way as the native rulers to whom the people of Poso paid tribute. These rulers did not interfere with the internal affairs and allowed the people to carry on in their own way. When it was found that the Government had other ideas and that it required the people to work, then came resistance. This was however quickly broken after two defended places had been captured by the soldiers. The people then resigned themselves to the new conditions. The collision with the West was violent. They soon became accustomed to paying head tax but the making of roads was a heavy burden to them.

The greatest difficulties in connection with this meeting of East and West were experienced by the chiefs. The European administrative officials took them for men who could order their people to do anything they wanted. We have already seen that this was not the case and that they exercised only adat rights. If the chief gave an order which fell outside his ordinary jurisdiction, the people refused to follow it. They did this now when the headmen, at the instigation of the officials, ordered them to make roads and carry burdens for the military patrols. Time and again the headmen were held responsible for the inhabitants failure to carry out orders, although the headmen themselves were unable to demand obedience.

The chiefs were also held responsible for permitting conditions which were quite natural to them but which ran counter to the ideas of the Dutch administrative officers. It was impossible for the Poso people to regard slaves and freemen in the same light and to give them equal treatment; it was impossible for them to pass judgement on people who had killed a witch or a werewolf, individuals who were placed in the same category as mad dogs. The headmen found themselves in a strange world. They did not know what they had to do and usually preferred to withdraw, but there were few who had any ambition to take their places.

It was necessary for the development of the country to build the houses in more accessible spots, situated on the roads which had been constructed. A general move was the result and this had considerable influence on the people. They did not feel at home in the val-

leys where they could not look out over the surrounding country as they had been accustomed to when they lived on the hills. This move caused many to lose all interest in life, as instead of being able to do what they wanted, they had now to follow instructions. This frame of mind reduced their vitality and must be looked upon as one of the reasons why the death rate amongst the people of Poso was so high during the first period of the Government occupation.

For their own good the people were persuaded to make irrigated rice fields, as up till this time they had been used to growing this crop on dry fields. This order was obeyed with considerable reluctance and the fact that the rice crops which were planted on these fields, were a failure the first few years, was undoubtedly largely due to the lack of interest shown by the people in this new form of agriculture.

Another factor which caused an upheaval in the Poso economy was the payment of taxes. These were fixed for each individual according to the extent of his possessions. The property of many families such as herds of buffaloes and sago trees were not divided up between the members. The total possessions of the whole village were declared and the people requested that the amount of the tax should be calculated after which the community would see that it was paid. The officials, however, would not allow this whereupon the people could not understand why a man was not allowed to bear the burden imposed upon one of his relations. In this way the old community was torn asunder and the people were forced to act as individuals.

The shock which the Poso religion received was none the less violent. To the Western Government it seemed only natural that head-hunting must be stopped immediately, but it was not realised what a deep impression this would make on the people's religion. Head hunting was thought to be necessary to insure good health and successful crops. The temple in every village was erected in connection with the head hunting activities, and feasts were held to celebrate the capture of a new head. The village gods who were supposed to live in the temple, were appeased thereby and brought prosperity. The old people were so thoroughly convinced of this that they firmly believed that if this ritual was discontinued, a heavy death rate and failure of the crops would result.

The people of Poso used to take the bodies of their dead out of their coffins several months after burial, clean the bones and replace them. For reasons of health the authorities decided that this must cease. They were allowed to celebrate the Feast of the Dead which accompanied the cleaning of the bones, but they were not allowed to remove the bodies from the coffins. The authorities did not realize

that in doing this they were banning the essential feature of the Feast of the Dead and the ancestral worship. The people believed that as long as the dead stank, they were not allowed to enter the Death City. This was why the bones were cleaned after which the pure soul was carried to the Death City to the accompaniment of the chants of the priests. What was the use of all these ceremonies, if the soul was to remain "unclean", because they were not allowed to clean the bones.

The contact with the West made the people of Poso feel uncertain of themselves and confused them. They understood little or nothing of the new rule nor its objective. Again and again they unconsciously did things for which they were punished. Spiritually they became uncertain, because the religious rites which for generations they had performed to invoke strength and success in their conflict with nature, had been taken away from them.

In their uncertainty the people turned to the missionaries, whom they knew were kindly disposed towards them and who spoke their language and knew their adat.

From all sides came the requests for teachers and schools. This was not a result of a desire for instruction, but of a desire to be freed from the uncertain feeling as soon as possible. The teachers would tell them what they had to do in order not to come in conflict with the new administration and that the instruction of their children would serve to make them fit for the new conditions. On Sundays a large number of people came to hear the missionaries preach, not because they had any particular desire to hear them, but because they thought that this was part and parcel of the new situation. As the missionaries realized that it was a feeling of helplessness which sent the people to them and not religion, they did not take advantage of the situation to persuade them to adopt Christianity. During the first few years after the arrival of the Government no converts were made.

The uncertain situation in social and religious matters has slowly righted itself. The people had to become accustomed to the Administration and the administrative officials had to learn not to deprive the people of autonomy altogether. This was often done for fear the headmen would take advantage of their power. The task of the missionaries was, therefore, to explain why these orders were given which for the people were incomprehensible. The authority which was taken away from the headmen during the first few years, has now been replaced in their hands. The "court cases" are now again followed with interest by the people as they can now discuss matters with

their headmen and they are tried according to their old adat for as far as this does not come in conflict with the western human feeling.

New interests have been created. After the making of irrigated rice fields had saved the people on several occasions from famine, and when the rice on the dry fields failed while that on the irrigated fields was successful, the people began to realize the importance of this system. Rice culture has therefore developed rapidly and by the sale of this produce economic progress has been made. Further the sawahs (rice fields) have been instrumental in causing the people to seek a fixed abode and as a result the village now forms the centre of the social world.

By encouraging the planting of coconut and coffee trees, numerous small plantations of coconut trees have been made on the seashore, while in the hill districts every village has its coffee gardens. Due to this prosperity the everyday needs have also increased. At night the houses are illuminated by oil lamps; sewing machines are used in many homes and the prosperity is shown in better clothing.

Living conditions in the properly equipped houses are much more hygienic and general health conditions have been improved by the use of neo-salversan. In the capital, Poso, there is a hospital in charge of a military surgeon and at Tentena there is an auxiliary hospital run by the Mission. The improvement in the public health is accompanied by many difficulties. In the first place the scattered nature of the settlement is a great drawback: little can be accomplished with a hospital and the doctor would have to make long trips. In the second place the inhabitants themselves are not yet accustomed to the hygiene but in this respect the schools are doing good work since instruction is given in hygienics.

It has been explained above how, as a result of the action of the administrative officials, the people came to attend the meetings where the gospel was preached. With the majority of them there was no question of any religious desires and yet this custom resulted in their becoming acquainted with the Christian teachings. After a few years small groups presented themselves for baptism. This movement continued so that at the present day the greater part of the people of Poso are Christians.

From the very start the Mission adopted a policy of leaving the people to the old ways and customs as much as possible so that they felt at ease. All customs which did not actually come into conflict with the principles of Christianity, were not interfered with. Their national dances which form practically the only recreation of these people, were not forbidden in the conviction that as soon as the spirit of

Christianity has penetrated more deeply into their minds, the sinful features which often accompany national amusements will, also disappear. Marriage, which in the old community was a civil affair, was also left unaltered. The Mission exercises a certain amount of influence on the moral side of the marriage by consecrating it and this can be refused in cases of couples who, owing to immorality, do not come into consideration. However, this refusal has nothing to do with the actual legal marriage ceremony performed by the headman.

Important ceremonies to which the people of Poso were greatly attached and which could be vested with a Christian mantle were allowed to remain. The harvest festival is still celebrated and has assumed the character of a Thanksgiving Day. As the most treasured possession of these people is their cattle. No objection was made to the annual celebrations in honour of these beasts. The heathen character of this ceremony, which consists of magic acts to promote the welfare of these animals, is slowly receding into the background and will eventually disappear altogether, while the essence of the ceremony is faith in the Lord of heaven and earth.

As regards the Death Feasts, the pious regard for the dead had to be preserved and cultivated while the conviction which the heathen cherished at these feasts that the dead would help them in their work in the field had to be removed. This conviction was the reason why the Death Feast was held, in the old community, in October or November, as then the fields were cleared ready for planting. The Christian feast has now been fixed for Easter Monday, at a time when the crops are full grown and almost bearing fruit, so that the assistance of the dead is no longer necessary. In this way it was possible to consecrate the feast to the dead without any side-purpose and the strongly developed feeling of piety of the Toradjas was satisfied. A new feast for these people is Christmas which has become a national celebration and which also includes the non-Christians.

A feeling of responsibility is fostered among the people by allowing them to decide on municipal matters. The nationalisation of Christianity is promoted to a great extent by the training of young natives as teachers, so that fewer strangers are required for these positions. The latter can never be one with their flock and therefore they can never hope to accomplish for the people of Poso what their countrymen can. The influence of the Christian community on its members is far reaching. In the heathen times the community was the disciplinarian of its members. Misdeeds were kept within limits by the fear of being expelled from the community without any hope of finding a haven elsewhere. The power of the older generation over

the younger was great. Owing to the contact with Western culture the old community has been dissolved into individuals, and if there are still any traces of its influence on the members, they are the results of custom and tradition. The members of the old communities are no longer dependent on each other; they can go where they like. They can now follow their own inclinations and desires and therefore the good qualities of the people are much more evident than they were under the old conditions. The Gospel exercises little influence, personally, on the majority of the Christians for the simple reason that the fact of being a Christian is in their eyes more a renunciation of paganism than the possession of a new belief. But the congregation, which is supported by a few who know more of the gospel, is now the new community, which exercises its influence both morally and religiously on its members. The members have to fall in line with the Christian opinion ruling in the community, if they do not wish to be ignored.

Christianity has also exercised considerable influence on the national development. Although there is no order to that effect, it is the rule that every child of Christian parents shall visit the school. This instruction must be of a strictly national type with the intention of developing the mind. It must not be led in the direction of instruction in certain subjects with a view to obtaining a position later on. This would be fatal for a country such as Central Celebes. The sparse population, and the small opportunities which trade, industry, mining and cultures offer, will always limit the number of official and other positions available. The result will be that many young men will seek their fortune in other countries and there are already signs of this movement.

If we regard the situation in the right light, it can be said that a basis has been laid down both by the Administration and the Mission, for a healthy development of the inhabitants of Poso, both socially and spiritually. This basis is to allow the people to remain in their old atmosphere as much as possible and to let them develop in it. In this way it is possible that the development will take place from within and that the people will be saved from an artificial development which only touches the surface.
