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## The pangreh praja in Java under Japanese military rule

After occupying Java the Japanese military attempted to redirect the human and the natural resources of Java into their own war effort. In so doing, they heavily relied on the local administrative corps, the *pangreh praja* (literally: the rulers of the realm). Therefore the Japanese, the *pangreh praja* and the peasantry are arguably the most important groups that should be studied if we are to understand the impact of the Japanese occupation on Javanese society. Though there is a strong case for this, these groups are among the least scrutinized. Scholarly attention over the past fifty years has been primarily directed elsewhere: Harry Benda studied the Islamic elite; George Kanahale the nationalist intellectuals; Benedict Anderson the politicized youths; and Nugroho Notokusanto the self-defence forces.<sup>1</sup> These groups attracted scholarly attention because they either spearheaded changes along nationalistic lines or had the clear potential to do so. The Islamic and the nationalist elites were exponents of powerful ideologies, whereas the youths and the Peta soldiers contributed a great deal to the physical revolution that followed in the wake of the Japanese occupation. In contrast, the *pangreh praja* and the peasantry are usually considered conservative.

The Japanese also have not received much academic attention.<sup>2</sup> The reason would be partly attributable to the post-war trend to praise the 'Indonesia-centric' or 'autonomous' history of Indonesia. The trend itself is a result of a laudable effort, but few would contend that we could understand social change during the occupation without studying the Japanese. In the field of economy, for instance, more than one hundred private Japanese firms operated in Java under the military authorities, but there is no systematic study of their roles. The current state of our understanding of Java under the Japanese occupation is, we have to say, that certain tips of an iceberg have received some elucidating light, while the exploration into the submerged mass has just begun.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Benda 1958; Kanahale 1967; Anderson 1972; Notokusanto 1979.

<sup>2</sup> The most comprehensive study of the Japanese policies is *Indoneshia* 1959 (also published in English). This study does little more than outline the range of policies and assess their impact on Indonesian society. Although it was written by Japanese, it does not treat the Japanese as a group of people and therefore human factors in the process of policy formulation and implementation are largely lacking.

<sup>3</sup> The peasant study was initiated by Kurasawa 1991, followed by Sato 1994, and Van der Eng 1994.

What we need to study now is not so much the hitherto neglected groups, but to concentrate on the way various groups interacted with one another. This article focuses on the *pangreh praja* and its relationships with other groups. Studying the *pangreh praja* is important for a range of reasons. One is that they were by far the most important agents of the occupation authorities. The Japanese obliged the *pangreh praja* to implement most of the occupation policies. Another reason is that the *pangreh praja* worked very closely with most other groupings in Java such as the Japanese, the peasantry, the nationalists, the Chinese, and the Islamic leaders. Studying the *pangreh praja* would therefore provide a viewpoint which enables us to see the process of change in social relations in Java under the Japanese occupation.

### *The pangreh praja and social change*

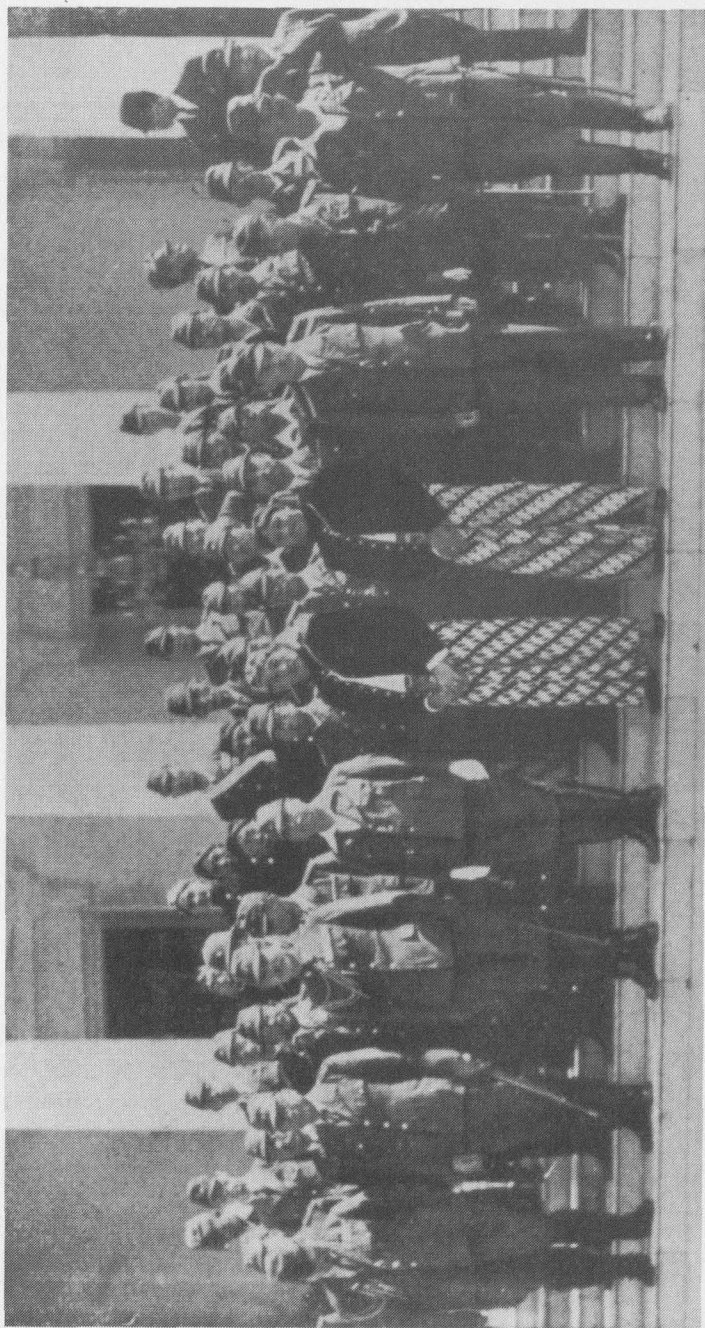
There is a widely held view that the *pangreh praja* acted as Japanese tools. The Japanese tried to utilize the nationalists and the Islamic leaders in their pursuit of ideological support, and the *pangreh praja* for exploiting the peasantry. The nationalists and the Muslims grasped opportunities and promoted their own causes, whereas the *pangreh praja* had no cause to promote. They were merely public servants whose work was to execute the government's policies unquestioningly. They are cast in the light of unprincipled bureaucrats who showed little hesitation in subjecting their people to the extreme forms of exploitation ordered by the foreign overlords. Some researchers have also pointed out that not a few *pangreh praja* capitalized on the situation and accumulated wealth for themselves, thus aggravating the consequences of the Japanese oppression.<sup>4</sup>

Recent studies, particularly with regard to forced rice delivery, have shown that the food shortages in Java were created not so much by Japanese exploitation but rather by the Japanese mishandling of the economy of Java (Sato 1994; Van der Eng 1994). These studies have demonstrated that there was no real need for the Japanese to exploit huge slices of Java's resources, that the Japanese were incompetent as rulers, and that their incompetence created widespread social and economic disarray in Java. The *pangreh praja* were drawn into this confused administration.

This change of direction in our understanding will lead to a revision of the role of the *pangreh praja*. The following section outlines how Japanese management of food distribution failed and created confusion. On the basis of this foundation the remaining sections examine how the *pangreh praja* became entangled in this maladministration and how this entanglement affected the welfare of the people as well as social relations in Java. Previously the main focus of studies lay on the way the ideologies and politics which gained ground during the occupation led to the physical

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<sup>4</sup> An outstanding example is Lucas 1991.



Installation of the Mangkoenegara (left) and Pakoc-Alam (right) as Ko of their principalities  
(J. Zwaan, *Nederlands-Indië 1940-1946*, Vol. 2, 1980, p. 70)

and national revolutions from 1945 to 1949. In contrast, this article examines how politics altered the economy and social relations in the countryside. The episode of the peasant riots in Indramayu will be examined in some detail. Although riots were infrequent, those in Indramayu should not be considered exceptional. Similar situations were created in many places throughout Java. The riots in Pekalongan Residency broke out after the Japanese surrender, but already by mid-1944, in the city of Cirebon rumours were spreading that the people of Pekalongan would rebel at the drop of a hat.<sup>5</sup> The case of Indramayu will illustrate how the maladroitness of the Japanese economic administration oppressed the peasantry in Java.

*Failure of the Japanese attempt to control food distribution in Java*

The Japanese policy in Java with regard to rice needs to be examined in two phases: before and after November 1943. In the first phase the primary purpose of the Japanese policy was to rehabilitate the economy of Java, which had been disrupted during the invasion. In the second phase, the Japanese decided to intensify defence build-ups, which involved the large-scale mobilization of indigenous labourers, called *romusha* in Japanese. At the same time they pressed farmers to deliver rice to the government in order to secure a food supply for the *romusha*. The notorious forced delivery of rice and *romusha* mobilization were therefore closely connected.

When the Japanese took over the government of the Netherlands East Indies in March 1942 they had no particular policies about foodstuffs in Java. There was no need for them to exploit much of Java's rice. The Japanese population in Java fluctuated at around fifty thousand, which was 0.1 % of that of the whole island. They could therefore easily secure sufficient food for themselves without becoming too much of a burden on Javanese society.<sup>6</sup> They had no plan to ship Javanese rice to Japan. They did send certain amounts of this rice to Sumatra, Kupang (Timor) and some other areas, but extant data, although incomplete, indicate that the quantities were most probably less than the amount Java had exported in the immediate pre-war years.

Circumstances dictated otherwise and the Japanese discovered that rice distribution in Java was in urgent need of their attention. Victims of the Dutch scorched-earth strategy and looting by Indonesians, many rice transportation and milling facilities had been destroyed. Finance for the mills had also temporarily stopped. The time was inopportune, as March

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<sup>5</sup> Report of Prawoto Soemodilogo 'Menindjaoe keadaan di Indramajoe' [Inspection of the situation in Indramayu]. ARA, Algemene Secretarie Batavia I, XX 11-2. Hereafter cited as Prawoto Report.

<sup>6</sup> The Japanese Army in Central Java, for instance, could secure rice for themselves simply by requesting a couple of mills to process rice for them. See *Rijstpellerijen* 1946.

was a pre-harvest period when stocks of rice usually ran short. To make the situation worse, some rice traders refrained from selling in anticipation of a rise in prices. Supplies of foodstuffs in big cities such as Jakarta and Bandung therefore ran critically low. Complaints and petitions about the difficulty of buying rice were frequently made to the Japanese who, by dint of military power, had made themselves the political and administrative authorities.

Although large-scale harvesting commenced in April, harvested paddy often lay unsold due to the destruction of transportation and milling facilities, the standstill in government financing for the millers, and Chinese rice dealers' reluctance to buy paddy for fear of further looting. Purchase prices of paddy in the villages fell in consequence. Rehabilitation of the economy of Java was, therefore, one of the first important tasks of the Japanese military administration in Java.<sup>7</sup>

After taking some emergency measures to overcome the situation, in August the military administration created the Foodstuffs Management Office in Jakarta as the central body to coordinate food distribution in Java. This office drew up a more systematic plan for the 1943 fiscal year (April 1943-March 1944). Because their purpose was primarily to achieve a rehabilitation of the pre-war system, they modelled their plan on the system the Dutch had created after 1939, the year the war broke out in Europe. The Dutch, anticipating the imminence of war in the Indies, began establishing governmental control over rice mills. The purpose was twofold: one was to secure a stable distribution of rice throughout the period of war by preventing economic confusion such as wartime inflation and war-profiteering; the other was to enable the army or the government to alter the pattern of rice distribution if necessary under emergency circumstances. In Java there were about 550 rice mills which, in 1940, processed 21% of the estimated total paddy production in Java. Out of the federations of rice mills the Dutch authorities had created the Rijst Verkoop Centrale (Rice Sales Centre) in each of the three provinces, which they funded through the Voedingsmiddelenfonds (Foodstuffs Fund). They obliged the mills to sell processed rice exclusively to the Rice Sales Centre, which in turn sold it to wholesalers at fixed prices. Nearly 80% of the rice in Java was pounded manually and marketed locally by private traders or consumed by the producers.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> There are some primary sources on these issues, such as 'Senryo go ni okeru Jawa noringyo no jitsujō to sono taisaku' [The situation of agriculture and forestry in Java after the occupation and the policies thereon], compiled in 1942 by the Gunseikanbu Sangyōbu Norinka within the military government in Java, in Kishi Shiryo, held by The Institute of Developing Economies, and 'Jawa ni okeru saikin no beikoku josei shiryo' [Materials on the recent rice situation in Java], compiled in 1944 by Nanpo Kaihatsu Kinko Chosashitsu Chosaka, held by the National Diet Library, Tokyo.

<sup>8</sup> For more details concerning the Japanese plans with regard to processing and distribution of rice in Java, see Sato 1994:115-27.

The Japanese Foodstuffs Management Office took over the work which the Foodstuffs Fund had carried out. Using the Dutch records, this office set monthly and annual purchase targets and allocated purchase quotas to each residency. Operation of this system was set in motion simultaneously throughout Java in April 1943. Although based on the Dutch scheme, it malfunctioned from the outset. One reason was price inflation. The Japanese set the official prices of rice at the same level as these had been in January 1942 but, by the time they began implementing this system, the black market prices had generally risen higher than the official ones. The government obliged the farmers to sell set quantities of rice to the mills and the mills to the government, but the farmers, rice brokers and millers often tried to circumvent government control and sold their rice through non-governmental channels. Consequently the amount the government could procure always fell far below the target. The original procurement target for the 1943 fiscal year was 1,995,000 tonnes in stalk paddy, which was marginally over 20% of the estimated total production. The amount delivered to the government by the end of November 1943, well after the main harvesting season, was no more than 1,257,000 tonnes, which was 63% of the target. Clearly the bulk of rice in Java was being distributed through non-governmental channels, which came to be called the 'black market'.

Although the governmental rice distribution system did not work satisfactorily and created some confusion in the marketing system, the changes in the first half of the occupation were, generally speaking, moderate, and no widespread radical fluctuations in the standard of living were observed. The drastic change in November 1943 took place as a result of the Japanese response to the war situation, which had clearly turned against Japan in the earlier months of the year. In March the Japanese had been compelled to retreat from Guadalcanal; in April Admiral Yamamoto's plane was shot down; and on 30 May Attu Island in the Aleutians was reoccupied by the Americans. The following day, 31 May, the Imperial Conference in Tokyo discussed the political strategies that this new situation required. The decision was made to carry out massive defence build-ups throughout the theatre of war and at the same time to try to enlist stronger cooperation from the nations of Southeast Asia by granting them broader political concessions.

In Java the occupation authorities launched a number of measures between August and November 1943. Political concessions included the large-scale promotion of Indonesian administrators, the establishment of central and local advisory councils, and the creation of the indigenous self-defence forces. In the field of defence build-ups the key resource was labour, which was deemed to be abundant in Java. From the outset of the occupation the Japanese needed workers for a range of projects, such as repairing bridges and other destroyed facilities, and for starting coal mining operations to fill the gap created by the halt in coal imports. The total



Indonesian farmers carrying the paddy yield allotted to the Japanese military administration (*Djawa Baroe* 9, 1944, p. 21)



number of workers needed for these projects was still small compared with the total population of Java. Until late 1943 or early 1944, lack of employment opportunities was a serious problem for the Javanese peasantry. To alleviate unemployment, the occupation authorities recommenced the transmigration of Javanese villagers to South Sumatra and also started a number of construction works. Although the Japanese conducted 'total mobilization' campaigns in one form or another throughout the occupation, these were little more than slogans until November 1943, after which they were transformed into real mass mobilizations (Sato 1994:60-80, 154-200).

The Japanese used the Chuo Sangiin (Central Advisory Council) to intensify their resource mobilization campaigns. The first session was held from 15 to 19 October. The Japanese prearranged this session in such a way that the Indonesian representatives were forced to propose the creation of offices specifically for recruiting labourers throughout Java. The spadework of these offices was completed within a few months and systematic labour mobilization commenced from early 1944. In the second half of the occupation the Japanese constantly employed a few million people for a diverse range of purposes, summed up in the catchphrase, 'defence and production increase'.<sup>9</sup>

How the delivery of rice to the government could be improved was another topic of discussion during the first session of the Central Advisory Council. Soon after this session, on 4 November, the Japanese authorities in Jakarta convened a meeting of heads of economy departments of each residency and requested that they make the utmost effort to fulfil the rice delivery quota set by the Foodstuffs Management Office. There were two main reasons for this request. One was that they had to secure foodstuffs for *romusha*. The other was that November to March was an off-crop season. Since rice procurement by the government had been very unsatisfactory until then, the Japanese could foresee that there would be serious shortages of rice in the government-run shops in cities unless there was substantial improvement in procurement.

Upon their return from Jakarta, the authorities in each residency ordered the *pangreh praja* to do all in their power to achieve the rice delivery quota by the end of the fiscal year. Consequently a total of 1,490,546 tonnes of rice in stalk paddy was sold to the government by the end of March 1944, which meant that farmers were pressed to sell about 234,000 tonnes of rice in the off-crop season.

The Japanese authorities set the rice procurement target for the 1944 fiscal year at 2,086,400 tonnes, a 4.6% increase on the previous year. They

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<sup>9</sup> In November 1944 there were 2,623,691 Indonesians in the employ of the occupation government. This figure includes military personnel, Peta and Heiho, skilled and non-skilled, permanent and temporary, and male and female workers. See Sato 1994:157, table 7.1, 'Romusha in Java in November 1944'.



also continued the intensified rice delivery campaigns. Despite their efforts, the quantity the government could purchase by the end of March 1945 was no more than 1,341,096 tonnes, due to a further deterioration of the transportation and milling facilities, the severe drought in mid-1944, a widening gap between the official and black market prices of rice, and avoidance of delivery by the farmers, bureaucrats, and rice dealers.

By this time the Japanese authorities had finally realized the difficulties of purchasing rice and thus lowered the target for the 1945 fiscal year to 1,732,000 tonnes. They attempted to secure 30% of this during the main harvesting season, before the end of May, but could only obtain less than 20%. From June the rainfall again lessened sharply and there were signs of another drought. It was abundantly plain to the Japanese that even this conservative target could not be reached within the 1945 fiscal year. Thus the attempt to control rice distribution in Java, both in the first and the second phases, failed.

*The pangreh praja and the peasant riots in Indramayu: One view*

This abortive attempt had a serious impact on Javanese society. As a result, a series of peasant riots broke out during the main harvesting season of 1944 in Indramayu, one of the four regencies in Cirebon Residency. The riots started in April in the village of Kaplongan on the eastern border of the regency and spread to its western border within a few months. The Japanese quelled the riots by late July and dispatched some Indonesian inspectors, including Prawoto Soemodilogo, who was Sanyo (Indonesian adviser to the occupation government) to the Department of Industry. After the inspection trip Prawoto submitted a report consisting of four parts: part one, two versions of part two, and part three. The entire report was ostensibly written by the Sanyo to the Department of Industry, but it is unlikely that Prawoto wrote all the documents, because the views expressed in part one and those in the remaining parts sharply contradict each other in many respects.

Part one does seem to have been written by Prawoto himself. He was a graduate of OSVIA (Training School for Native Officials), had been at one stage vice-regent of Indramayu, and was an executive of the Pangreh Praja Federation and a member of the Volksraad (the representative body) before the war. He was, in all likelihood, a broad-minded intellectual with a deep concern for the welfare of the people. He was also a supporter of the Soetardjo petition of 1936, which called for the formation of a Dutch-Indonesian union within ten years, during which time self-government for Indonesia should be attained. The rejection of this petition by Royal Decree in 1938 disappointed him bitterly (Friend 1988:52). His train of thought can be gathered from a number of recorded speeches and discussions during the occupation in which he consistently expressed

progressive, reformist views.<sup>10</sup> Although he was trained to be a *pangreh praja*, he was consistently and explicitly critical of the *pangreh praja* tendency to corruption and indifference to the sufferings of the people.

The views expressed in part one of the report are consistent with Prawoto's views expressed elsewhere. The author of part one argues that the cause of the riots was not the government's policies, nor could the blame be laid at any door other than the arbitrary and oppressive administration pursued by the *pangreh praja* in Indramayu. The report states:

'The people regard the cause of these unusual events as no more and no less than the arbitrary rule by the *pangreh praja*, particularly the Regent of Indramayu. The former Regent of Indramayu became the target of the people's hatred because he was a man of overweening arrogance. He did not like to associate with other officials, and did not deign to lower himself to mix with the common people in order to become familiar with their grievances and complaints. He was very short-tempered and irascible (*driftig*) towards both other government officials and the people, disregarding the virtue of politeness, and therefore the people retaliated by abusing the person whom they considered to be in the wrong.'<sup>11</sup>

Part one also reports that the Regent of Indramayu had arbitrarily increased the quota of rice deliveries to around 15 quintals per hectare of rice field (approximately 70% of the average production level), while in the other regencies in the same residency the quotas were 3.5 to 4 quintals per hectare. The people in Indramayu had petitioned for the quota to be made the equivalent of those in the other regencies, but the *pangreh praja* under the Regent had responded to this request rudely and brusquely. The author ascribes the reason for the increase in the quota to the collusion between the *pangreh praja* and the Chinese rice dealers: 'the *pangreh praja* helped the Chinese rice dealers and millers because they knew that the Chinese could bribe them, and thus they set the quota for paddy deliveries extremely high'.<sup>12</sup> Prawoto also shows deep-felt compassion for those poor farmers who were victimized by the *pangreh praja*:

'Last year, when the government bought paddy in a similar manner, many children and adults starved to death because there was little food left in the villages. The villagers had to feed their children with things like banana leaves and leaves of other trees which are unsuitable as food for animals, let alone people. This was simply to fill their stomachs. Very often the parents had to go without food for two to three days. They were unable to seek employment because, afflicted by undernourishment, they had no energy to work. The upshot was that numbers of people, particularly children, died.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Prawoto's statements in Anderson 1966.

<sup>11</sup> Prawoto Report.

<sup>12</sup> It was also Prawoto who reported the collusion of the *pangreh praja* and the Chinese rice millers in Pekalongan and elsewhere to the meeting of the Sanyo. He claimed that the millers put between a quarter and a third of the milled rice on the black market. See Anderson 1966:95.

At the gathering in Kapalongan, the people therefore decided to oppose the government collection of paddy. If they were shot dead by the police, their fate would still be better than if they died of hunger, in which the suffering grows increasingly unbearable as the days pass. Moreover, if they were shot dead, they would not have to witness the sufferings of their children or their parents as they died of starvation. Because neither the *pangreh praja*, the government, nor anyone else heeded their requests, the villagers' anger reached its climax and exploded, and they were overcome with fury.<sup>13</sup>

The author continues with a description of other corrupt tactics of the *pangreh praja*, concluding that 'all of the unrest and riots came from the poor people, not from the well-off'. Clearly the writer's primary concern is the welfare of the poor villagers, whom he believed to be the victims of the oppressive *pangreh praja*.

*The pangreh praja and the peasant riots in Indramayu: Another view*

The remaining parts of the report were written from a sharply different point of view. The main concern of the writer was to defend and promote the position of the *pangreh praja*. Knowing that Prawoto was critical of the *pangreh praja*, this writer apparently faked a report to defend them. He argues that the duty of the *pangreh praja* was to implement the government policies unswervingly:

'As long as the needs of the people and the needs of the government coincide, government politics at the regency level will present no problem. But if the government's needs and the people's needs conflict, the Regent *must execute the government's orders* without question (*ambtelijke discipline*).

If the government needs to take all the paddy of the people of Indramayu for strategic purposes, then the Regent of Indramayu *must execute the government's order*, even if the *pangreh praja* are the father and the mother of the people. *When he executes the government's order, it is not his place to question whether it is good or bad. This is the discipline that must be upheld by all government officials, particularly the pangreh praja and the police.*<sup>14</sup>

From here he even goes so far as to argue that, if implementation of government policies caused a disturbance, the higher authorities, namely, the Japanese policy makers, should also be held responsible:

'Questions are being raised among the *pangreh praja* officials as to who must take responsibility for the blunder in Indramayu. Is it true that the Regent of Indramayu and the lower *pangreh praja* officials are solely responsible for it? Is it true that, if the leadership lies with the higher authorities, the Bucho [Japanese word for 'department head'] is to take sole responsibility and to be transferred, while those at the higher levels are exempt from responsibility?

<sup>13</sup> Prawoto Report.

<sup>14</sup> Prawoto Report. Italics in original.

The *pangreh praja* officials are of the opinion that the highest local government should also share responsibility for the blunder. How good it would be if, for the time being, an Indonesian selected from among the *pangreh praja* officials with broad experience, knowledge, and a firm stance, as well as the ability to mix with the people and so forth, were to be appointed Resident of Cirebon.<sup>15</sup>

The writer laments that the *pangreh praja* in Indramayu were assaulted by the villagers simply because they tried faithfully and loyally to implement the policies formulated by the occupation government, and that after the riots broke out the Japanese dismissed or demoted them, thrusting the responsibility for the disturbance onto them. In the writer's view this was doing the *pangreh praja* a gross injustice:

'In this kind of situation the *pangreh praja* officials feel hemmed in. Their life is threatened by the people when they execute government orders to which the people take exception, and they are neither protected nor appreciated by the government that issues the orders. On the contrary, they have been sacrificed to please the people who rebelled. Is it therefore surprising that the *pangreh praja* feel that they lack the energy to carry out their duties?'<sup>16</sup>

The main message in the faked parts of the document is that the *pangreh praja* were the representatives of the occupation government and therefore should be respected and protected as such by the occupation government.

*Who, in fact, was responsible?*

The most commonly presented analyses of the forced rice deliveries in Java and their impact on society are: first, the Japanese demanded rice for their own consumption; second, the Japanese banned interresidency rice trade for military reasons; and third, the *pangreh praja* often increased the delivery quotas set by the higher authorities. A careful investigation will reveal that none of these was the intrinsic reason for the riots in Indramayu. The basic cause was the overall maladministration by the Japanese.

A drastic increase in the pressure on farmers in Indramayu, as elsewhere in Java, began in November 1943. On 15 November the Resident of Cirebon, Ichibangase, issued a decree in which he ordered farmers to sell all their stocks of rice to the government, with the exception of the portion needed for seed and domestic consumption.<sup>17</sup> In mid-February 1944, Ichibangase was transferred and the new Resident, Fujimura, arrived. On 27 March the Regent of Indramayu reported to Fujimura that there were

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<sup>15</sup> Prawoto Report.

<sup>16</sup> Prawoto Report.

<sup>17</sup> Report on 'keadaan di Soebang' [the situation in Subang]. RIOD, Indische Collectie, no. 031592.

signs of famine in various places in Indramayu Regency.<sup>18</sup> Unperturbed, Fujimura was more concerned about the procurement target than about the welfare of the people under his jurisdiction. Aware that the previous year's delivery had been unsatisfactory, Fujimura gave the warning of the Regent of Indramayu short shrift, choosing instead to emphasize that the delivery quota must be achieved.

The reason for the exceptionally high delivery quota for Indramayu was simple: it was an exceptional regency. The Cirebon Residency consisted of four regencies: Cirebon, Indramayu, Majalengka, and Kuningan. Although the Cirebon Residency as a whole was a rice surplus residency, Majalengka and Kuningan were mountainous and had to import rice from other areas. The Cirebon Regency was also a deficit area, except for the northern part bordering on Indramayu. Indramayu was, in contrast, one of the major rice-producing areas in Java, comparable to Besuki and Karawang. The rice mills were moreover concentrated in this regency. The system of land tenure in Indramayu was also unique. Whereas in the other three regencies communal tenure predominated, in Indramayu all the agricultural land was privately owned. Consequently there was a high concentration of land ownership, and much of the land was owned by absentee landlords. These landlords generally sold the entire crop to dealers, and the paddy was usually machine milled. It is therefore not surprising that the delivery quota for Indramayu was exceptionally high.

Why then did the farmers in Indramayu riot? One reason was clearly that the official price for rice was lower than the black market prices. Kurasawa Aiko's research has shown that the first riot started in the village of Kaplongan when the subdistrict head came and ordered the villagers to carry off the paddy of a wealthy villager who owned some twenty hectares of rice fields (Kurasawa 1983:60-2). There were many poor farmers who were economically dependent on the rich farmers, so they also joined the riots, but essentially the riots assumed the character of a struggle between government representatives who tried to enforce the delivery system and wealthy farmers who resisted.

By 28 July, when the riots had subsided, the amount of rice the government could buy from Indramayu was 30% of the original delivery quota, and in the whole of Cirebon Residency, 52% of the original quota, or 12% of the production level in 1940. The quantity actually delivered to the government was therefore only a small fraction of the quantity marketed through non-government channels. Nevertheless, the Japanese interference which began in November 1943 resulted in a famine, and many

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<sup>18</sup> Report on 'kesan perjalanannya keliling didaerah Tjirebon, Indramajoe dan Pemanoean pada tanggal 23-31 Agoestoes 2604' [impressions during a tour through Cirebon, Indramayu and Pemanukan, 23-31 August 1944]. RIOD, Indische Collectie, no. 031666-031670.

starved to death in the middle of this major rice-producing area. Why did this happen?

The main reason was that the Japanese policy disturbed the pattern of rice distribution in the countryside. If the official prices and the black market prices of rice had been the same, the Japanese policy would not have made much difference to farmers. The Foodstuffs Management Office made a slight increase in the official purchase price of rice every year and that for 1944 was approximately 20% higher than the pre-war level. As we have seen, the non-official purchase price dropped below the official one in 1942, but by early 1944 had risen substantially higher in many parts of Java. When the administrative authorities in Indramayu announced that the farmers must sell large portions of their paddy to the government, many farmers, large and small, tried to smuggle their crop out of the regency as quickly as possible, before the government representatives arrived. Outside the regency there were still free markets and the rice fetched higher prices. The more the *pangreh praja* increased the pressure, the more the farmers and rice dealers smuggled or hoarded their rice. Consequently rice became very scarce in village markets in Indramayu and prices rose to the same level as in the cities.<sup>19</sup> This situation directly endangered the survival of the village poor who were dependent on the local market for their daily food requirements.

Ichibangase's order in November 1943, demanding that farmers surrender all their paddy except the portion for seed and domestic consumption, might seem harmless, but it was based on his ignorance of the local economy. Throughout Java, including major rice-producing villages, there were people who owned few or no rice fields. In areas where land ownership was concentrated among the wealthy few, the landless often constituted the majority of the village population. These people worked for well-to-do farmers as wage labourers or engaged in petty trade or cottage industry. They had to buy most of their daily food requirements from the local market with their meagre earnings. The surveys conducted in rice-growing villages in Java in 1943 showed that even before the Japanese rice policy disturbed the local economy, landless peasants and smallholders could afford only one meal a day after spending most of their income on food (Sato 1994:83-114). Market disturbances, such as price inflation, dislodged many villagers from this precarious economic balance.

Another cause of the famine was the problem of timing the obligatory rice delivery. In Indramayu, as elsewhere in Java, the main harvest took place in and around May, while milling continued for a while thereafter because drying, transporting, storing, and milling all took some time. The Japanese set monthly procurement quotas based on the pre-war record.

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<sup>19</sup> Report on 'kesan perjalanen keliling didaerah Tjirebon, Indramajoe dan Pemanoean pada tanggal 23-31 Agoestoes 2604'. RIOD, Indische Collectie, no. 031666-031670.

The lower *pangreh praja* went to the villages in June and July and ordered the villagers to deliver rice to the government. By this time large farmers had already smuggled out or hidden large proportions of their paddy. The burden of the delivery was then laid on small farmers. But small farmers usually had no rice to sell because they had to sell most of their crop immediately after the harvest to pay off their debts. They were often chronically in debt because they had to buy food during the off-crop season.

If the purchase of paddy was carried out in June or July, some of these farmers were pressed to sell the portion which they had kept for seed, or even buy paddy on the black market at the price of 20 guilders per quintal, just to sell it to the government at the official price, which was about 4.5 guilders per quintal.<sup>20</sup> Ichibangase's order in November 1943 created a similar situation. In both cases shortages of rice became much more serious in rice-growing villages than in cities. Farmers, with smouldering anger banked up, were waiting for someone who could lead a rebellion against the authorities, and for the special police to leave the city so that they could go and loot the rice barns and the houses of the rich.<sup>21</sup>

#### *The Japanese relationship with the pangreh praja*

The Japanese ideology of 'total mobilization' was essentially exploitative. However, the Japanese who were in charge of the rice procurement and distribution did not necessarily perceive it as such. The initial purpose of the Japanese policy was to secure a stable distribution of rice among the local people. Even after November 1943, the bulk of the rice produced was to be redistributed to the Indonesians. Some of the mobilized *romusha* were employed to construct forts and other war-related projects, but the overwhelming number was employed in projects associated with campaigns to increase agricultural production. The Japanese attempted, mainly for ideological reasons, to make Java a major rice surplus area within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, an attempt called the 'Construction of a New Java'. The Japanese were aware that their rice delivery system was malfunctioning, thereby producing a negative effect in the villages. Although they were aware of it, Japanese administrators, by and large, did not attribute this to the exploitative nature of the policy. They ascribed the cause to a lack of understanding and cooperation on the part of the Indonesians.

The Japanese were heavily dependent on the *pangreh praja* for policy implementation, but there was a serious communication problem between them. Competent interpreters were few in number. Most Japanese were hampered by inadequate communication skills and a lack of patience.

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<sup>20</sup> Prawoto Report.

<sup>21</sup> Prawoto Report.



Referring to this problem, the Japanese head of the Rice Wholesalers' Association in Priangan Residency expressed his views as follows:

'When all is said and done, the rice bought by the government is used by the government to win the hearts of the people, but before this can be done, the rice delivery to the government makes the majority of the people feel heavy at heart. It is difficult to make the farmers understand our intentions and wishes. No matter how many times you may explain them, they will not understand. In this case the best and the only way is to tell them that it is their duty to deliver the prescribed amounts of paddy to the government.'<sup>22</sup>

The *pangreh praja* were ordered to implement the policies, but they were often not informed of their purposes. Left in ignorance, they therefore either became remiss in their work or else discharged it unquestioningly, in an unreasonably autocratic manner.

*The pangreh praja relationship with the villagers*

The relationship between the *pangreh praja* and the villagers had never been amicable, but the Japanese occupation exacerbated it. Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to argue that most *pangreh praja* were autocratic and completely ignored the welfare of the people. Some *pangreh praja* evidently helped the villagers evade the government's levies and encouraged them to lay in as much food as possible for the off-crop season (Gunseiki Jawa Sangyo Soran 1944, I:3; Iwatake 1981:510). Even in cases where the *pangreh praja* were in direct conflict with the villagers, it falls far short of the mark to say that they intentionally oppressed the villagers. Ordering large farmers to sell their crop to the government is, for instance, not the same as oppressing villagers. The Japanese policies often affected the village poor in very indirect and unforeseen ways, and therefore the *pangreh praja*, as the policy implementers, cannot be held totally responsible for the consequences.

It is nonetheless undeniable that the relationship between the *pangreh praja* and the villagers in many cases deteriorated conspicuously because of the Japanese demands on the villagers and the lack of communication between the ruler and the ruled. If the *pangreh praja* were poorly informed of the Japanese intentions, the villagers were even more so. Referring to the situation in late 1943 and early 1944, Charles van der Plas reported: 'the natives are convinced that the Japanese are shipping large quantities of rice from Java for military purposes; they think (evidently erroneously) to Tokyo'.<sup>23</sup> In the villagers' view, the Japanese intention was

<sup>22</sup> *Jawa Shinbun*, 3 June 1945.

<sup>23</sup> Ch. van der Plas, 'The situation in the Netherlands Indies: Recent data up to January 4th 1944 for Java and of the end of January for some parts in the East', Melbourne, 19 February 1944. ARA, Algemene Secretarie 1940-1950, no. 2207. This is an interrogation report on the Javanese *romusha* who were rescued by the Allies and

to squeeze them as much as possible, using the *pangreh praja* as agents.

The writer of the faked report is highly defensive of the position of the *pangreh praja*. Ironically enough, he amply substantiates Prawoto's criticism that the *pangreh praja* were arrogant and harsh, and were not particularly concerned about the welfare of the villagers. As the previous quotations have demonstrated, some *pangreh praja* did try to implement deleterious policies unquestioningly and ruthlessly. Their attitude towards the villagers was expressed straightforwardly in his criticism of the new Regent of Indramayu, appointed after the riots. The new Regent was a medical doctor called Moerjani, who was involved in the *pergerakan*, or the non-cooperative nationalist movement of the Dutch period. Moerjani's style of administration was different from that of traditional *pangreh praja*. He addressed himself to the villagers using the egalitarian term *saudara* (comrades) and made himself more approachable for the people. The writer of the faked document states:

'It is inappropriate for the Regent of Indramayu to address himself to the people using the term "saudara" because the use of this term is generally considered to debase the position of a Representative of the Government (Oriental Feelings). The leaders of the people from the *pergerakan* are indeed the same as those who gathered at the meetings.

This was as it should be, because those who made speeches and those who listened were at the same level in the meeting. *The [traditional] Regent's relationship to the people is different.* The Regent is the father and the mother of the people and the Representative of the Government. This means that the Regent *rules the people* as the representative of the State. Herein lies the difference between the people's leaders from *pergerakan* circles and the people's leaders from the Government (*pangreh praja*).'<sup>24</sup>

Adopting this highly authoritarian point of view, the writer compares the relationship between the *pangreh praja* and the villagers to that between a father and his child:

'The *pangreh praja* carried out the order to purchase paddy, people rebelled and their demand was granted, the purchase was called off, many government officials were transferred, and the subdistrict heads dismissed. This situation is certainly wrong [...]. This is like the case of a child who wants something from his parents and is denied it, but when he cries gets it. This child will use the stratagem of crying repeatedly. Inevitably his requests will become increasingly exorbitant and one day his father will be forced to refuse a request, taking strong measures if necessary. The best policy is for the father to reject the first demand of the tearful child because at that stage the child's discontent is not deeply rooted in its heart.'<sup>25</sup>

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taken to Australia.

<sup>24</sup> Prawoto Report. Italics in original.

<sup>25</sup> Prawoto Report.

The writer argues that the sense of discipline among the common people, which was the fruit of hundreds of years of effort by the government, had been ruined in a short period of time. His recommendation was to restore the sense of discipline among the villagers: discipline to obey orders, pay taxes, and submit to being recruited as labourers and so forth. This discipline could, he believed, be restored by the *pangreh praja*, who could coerce people. Therefore he suggests that a section of the special police be put under the command of the *pangreh praja*, so that people could see with their own eyes that it was the *pangreh praja* and the *pangreh praja* alone who constituted the backbone of the military government of Dai Nippon, who could still win the one hundred per cent trust and respect of the people.<sup>26</sup>

From the early stages of the occupation, the *pangreh praja* often forced the villagers to obey their orders. When the Triple A Movement was introduced in the first six months following the arrival of the Japanese, for instance, they coerced the villagers to join the movement using the threat of imprisonment or of being reported to the Japanese. Such abuses of power by the *pangreh praja* were often reported to the Japanese authorities, who grew to fear that such behaviour on the part of the 'representatives of the government' would tarnish the reputation of the occupation authorities. This led them to make a formal request to the *pangreh praja* not to inflict corporal punishment on the people. This request was, the writer argues, illegal because the Inlandsche Reglement (Dutch law), which entitled the *pangreh praja* to take part in police work, had not been officially amended. Thus the writer reports:

'The *pangreh praja* were scared out of their wits to hear the words of His Highness the Resident of Cirebon spoken in the meeting with the Regents and the head of the police at the residency office, stating that the *pangreh praja*, from the village head to the Regent, were not policemen and therefore not allowed to arrest people or carry out the work which pertained to the authority of the police'.<sup>27</sup>

The writer's argument that the Resident of Cirebon's request to the *pangreh praja* not to carry out police work was illegal is incorrect. The Commander-in-Chief of the occupation army had issued an administrative order on 29 April 1943 in which he restricted the Regents' judicial power to the drawing up of ordinances and the imposition of fines according to these ordinances (Benda et al. 1965:84). The *pangreh praja* were therefore not legally entitled to impose physical punishments on the villagers. Nonetheless, abuse of power by the *pangreh praja* continued throughout the occupation. Many of them also accepted or demanded bribes from the villagers who wished to evade the Japanese policies. Various forms of extortion practised on the villagers by the *pangreh praja*

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<sup>26</sup> Prawoto Report.

<sup>27</sup> Prawoto Report.

were also reported to the authorities. The autocratic attitude adopted by the *pangreh praja* towards the villagers was perhaps deeply rooted in the colonial and pre-colonial past, but was greatly aggravated under Japanese rule.

### *The pangreh praja and the nationalists*

The activities of the nationalists during the occupation have been studied mainly in relation to the question of their contributions to the achievement of independence. In contrast, this section examines their involvement in the formulation and implementation of the occupation policies and the way in which this involvement affected their relationship with the *pangreh praja* and the villagers.

The nationalists, particularly those called 'non-cooperating' nationalists during the Dutch era, never enjoyed cordial relations with the *pangreh praja*, because the former often regarded the latter as mere tools of the Dutch colonial regime.<sup>28</sup> This relationship worsened during the Japanese occupation, as the Japanese tried to involve both the *pangreh praja* and the nationalist intellectuals in their mass mobilization campaigns. The nationalists attempted to utilize the mass organizations to extend their influence into the countryside. The *pangreh praja* considered this attempt an interference with their traditional jurisdiction. In the third mass organization, the Djawa Hokokai (Java Public Service Association), the rivalry between the two groups became particularly bitter.

The Djawa Hokokai was an all-encompassing social organization. The Japanese military administrator and the head of the General Affairs Department assumed the presidency and the vice-presidency at the centre. Under them were the Hokokai headquarters headed by Soekarno and dominated by other nationalists. Local offices were established at the residency, regency, district, subdistrict, and village levels. At the lowest level was the network of the *tonarigumi* (neighbourhood associations). At the regency level and below, Djawa Hokokai functions were created within government councils, and it was mostly the *pangreh praja* who were assigned to the posts. The nationalists were able to secure some posts at these levels, but they were effectively prevented from assuming strong leadership outside the central headquarters due to the overwhelming strength of the *pangreh praja* in the local administration.

The Djawa Hokokai was designed to give support to the government and facilitate a thorough implementation of the occupation policies. Its activities were therefore directly related to the rice delivery and *romusha* recruitment. The Djawa Hokokai activities were formally decided at its headquarters, and instructions were sent to the local offices. In this way the *pangreh praja* had to implement policies which the nationalists had

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<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Hatta 1971:64.

decided, but the villagers regarded the Djawa Hokokai as a part of the government bureaucracy, whose work it was to squeeze people.<sup>29</sup> The *pangreh praja* grew increasingly aware that they were becoming the target of the villagers' hatred and anger. In contrast, nationalists at headquarters held the view that Djawa Hokokai activities were being frustrated by the villagers' fear of the *pangreh praja* and therefore argued that the Djawa Hokokai offices should be separated from the *pangreh praja* offices. For this reason, they created an independent, quasi-military body, Barisan Pelopor (Pioneer Corps), which consisted of young Djawa Hokokai members and had local corps at the subdistrict level. Thus the rivalry between the nationalists and the *pangreh praja* spread into the countryside.

As we have seen, the new nationalist Regent of Indramayu tried to make the local administration less intimidating to the villagers. He allowed villagers to approach him directly without going through the administrative hierarchy. The nationalists' attempts in this field were, however, not very successful. When the riots broke out in Indramayu, the central headquarters of the Djawa Hokokai dispatched representatives who attempted to assuage the villagers' feelings by talking to them. The writer of the faked document was highly critical of, even sarcastic about, the activities of these Djawa Hokokai representatives.

'I was dumbfounded to hear from my assistants that some of Djawa Hokokai's staff are working in Indramayu. Their main activity is to deliver speeches to the people. When I asked my assistants if the people understand these speeches, I was told that they have no comprehension of them at all because the speeches are not delivered in the language of the Indramayu region, and the people understand only the local language. They are different from the people in the city of Indramayu, of whom most understand Indonesian. When my assistant asked the people why they had flocked to the meeting despite the fact that they do not understand the speeches, he was answered that the village head had ordered them to go to the meeting, and if they did not obey him the special police would force them to do so. It is saddening that in this critical period there are still these kinds of incidents, which will simply fuel the anger of the people and also waste the government's money spent to cover the travel expenses of the above-mentioned staff.'<sup>30</sup>

This is a statement made by someone who was highly antagonistic towards the nationalists. As far as its assessment of the nationalists' influence over the villagers is concerned, however, there is plenty of corroborating evidence. The nationalists' contact with the villagers was very limited.

The nationalists played more significant roles in the process of formulation than implementation of policy. They had lengthy discussions

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<sup>29</sup> Report on 'kesan perjalanan keliling didaerah Tjirebon, Indramajoe dan Pemanoean'. RIOD, Indische Collectie, no. 031666-031670.

<sup>30</sup> Prawoto Report.

about mass mobilization policies and had to make concrete proposals in their capacity as members of the central and local advisory councils, as well as Sanyo. Although they worked with the Japanese, their main concern, as well as expertise, was with the future political status of Indonesia rather than the current local administration. The stenographic record of their discussions concerning rice procurement by the government reveals that communication between them and the Japanese authorities was poor. They were well aware that the policy was causing very serious problems in the villages and that some measures must be taken to alleviate the situation. But they did not have a clear understanding of the cause. Therefore, all they proposed was to strengthen governmental control of the rice distribution. It is clear, in hindsight, that their proposals, which were based on lack of expertise and experience in local administration, were impracticable and if implemented would have aggravated the situation.

### Conclusion

This article has attempted to examine the position and role of the *pangreh praja* in Japanese-occupied Java. It has moreover tried to analyse their relationships with other major groupings, such as the Japanese, the nationalists, and the peasants, from the *pangreh praja* point of view using documents produced by the *pangreh praja* themselves.

Our understanding of the issue is essentially limited due to our lack of understanding of the other groups, particularly the Japanese and the peasantry. With regard to the Japanese, only the broad outlines of their policies have been studied and many aspects remain hazy. The peasantry has been studied mainly in relation to the Japanese policy of forced delivery of rice to the government. Another aspect that is vitally important is the issue of labour. In the second half of the occupation, the Japanese constantly employed a few million people within Java under the banner of the 'New Java'. We must investigate what exactly this 'New Java' was and for what purposes the Japanese employed the mobilized labourers.

One of the major projects which absorbed much of the forced labour was the campaign to increase the production of food, particularly rice. The Japanese employed much labour for improving the agricultural infrastructure, such as irrigation channels, but food production declined rapidly during the occupation. In order to assess the impact of this campaign on the peasantry and the *pangreh praja*, more case studies must be carried out.<sup>31</sup>

From the present study, we would be able to draw the following tentative conclusion. The widely held view that the *pangreh praja* oppressed the villagers as the agents of an exploitative government seems

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<sup>31</sup> Research into this issue by the present writer is currently in progress. The results will be published soon.

simplistic and biased. Part one of Prawoto's report censures the Regent of Indramayu for his arrogance and for his arbitrarily increasing the quota of the rice delivery. However, the exceptionally heavy levy on Indramayu was, as we have seen, imposed by the Japanese. The Regent of Indramayu showed concern about the effect the levy would have on the villagers under his jurisdiction, and reported to the Japanese that the government rice procurement, which was intensified from November 1943, had created famine in Indramayu. The Japanese paid little attention to his report, and instead requested him to do his utmost to achieve the procurement target.

The *pangreh praja* were often obliged to implement impracticable and harmful policies formulated by the Japanese and the nationalists. The ultimate victims of these policies, the villagers, turned their hatred against the government agents, the *pangreh praja*. The *pangreh praja* were, in this sense, victims caught between unreasonable policy-makers and angry villagers.

Under the unreasonable occupation authorities, the *pangreh praja* reactions seem to have fallen into three types. The first was to implement the policies, regardless of their effects. The second was to try to protect the people by deliberately shirking their duties. The third was to capitalize on the situation and accumulate wealth for themselves, by all kinds of corrupt means, to the detriment of starving villagers.

The villagers' reactions to the first and the third type of *pangreh praja* actions were manifested in sporadic outbursts of rioting during the occupation and eventually constituted the driving force behind the widespread *revolusi sosial*, which broke out after the Japanese surrender. The *pangreh praja* (rulers of the realm) then quickly decided collectively to change their title to *pamong praja* (tutors of the realm).

This would be an indication that the Japanese occupation affected not only the welfare of the people, but also the power relations in the countryside of Java. It may also indicate that the realization dawned on the *pangreh praja* that their relationship with the villagers had been damaged almost irrevocably, and that some fundamental changes had to be made to rectify this. The *pangreh praja* collectively underwent an identity crisis. The Japanese occupation was a turning point not only in political history, but also in the history of local administration.

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