THE PATH OF THE SOUL: THE LEGITIMACY OF NATURE IN BALINESE CONCEPTIONS OF SPACE[1]

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Space is highly ordered in Balinese thought and its use is organised according to definite rules. Within this framework, ritual position and movement possess a complex significance. In the closed cycle of life, death and rebirth, for example, the location of ceremonies varies with changes in status and provides a tangible expression of the fate of the human soul. The basic dimensions are defined by reference to terrestrial and empyrean phenomena and are identified with processes in nature which are perceived as changeless: the course of the sun and the downhill flow of water. From this, there emerges a connexion between the interpretation of space and the traditional political order, founded upon a theory of caste. For the main directional axis is associated with ritual purity, which also constitutes the ideological principle underlying the system of ranking. Through the medium of the spatial grid, purity - or innate religious difference which justifies political inequality - is represented as a natural and unquestionable quality. This is strikingly reminiscent of Cohen's view of political systems that: 'the stability and continuity of the régime are made possible through a complex system of symbolism that gives it legitimacy by representing it ultimately as a "natural" part of the celestial order' (A. Cohen 1969: 221).

This argument raises two more general issues. One of the approaches to the study of Balinese society has stressed the importance of a conceptual order based on organised dual classification, in which the indigenous dimensions form fundamental pairs of complementary opposites.[2] Such a system may, however, have two aspects. The directions have often been reduced to a series of exclusive binary oppositions; whereas in some contexts it would be more exact, and useful, to adopt instead a model based on a continuum between polar extremes (P. Cohen 1975: 620-22). Applied to space in Bali, a formal analysis in terms of dualistic categories tends to be static and incomplete, as it ignores the problems of relative position and mobility.

On a different theme, the increasingly sophisticated studies, which demonstrate the ways societies classify and structure the natural world (Douglas 1957; 1966; 1970; Leach 1964; Lévi-Strauss 1962; 1966; Tambiah 1969), sometimes create the impression that anthropologists adopt a position of cultural relativism which overlooks Lévi-Strauss' point that man may desire 'objective knowledge' of the properties of the universe (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 2-3). This emphasis on the cultural bases of classification is not incompatible with the view that there is a

from the mountains. The relevance of this should become evident in due course.

As the lake:sea axis is theoretically radial, it bears little relation to the compass points, and varies from place to place around the coast-line. In the narrow belt to the north of the mountain range, *kaja* lies towards the south, so that the most propitious direction is to the south-east. It is at the lateral extremities of the island that difficulties occur. For the few villages in the remote west, the direction of the lakes and east coincide; but correspondingly, in the eastern tip they stand opposed. From a brief survey of settlements there, *kaja* seems to predominate for many purposes.[4] Thus, by inversion, reduplication or suppression, the system can be made to work.

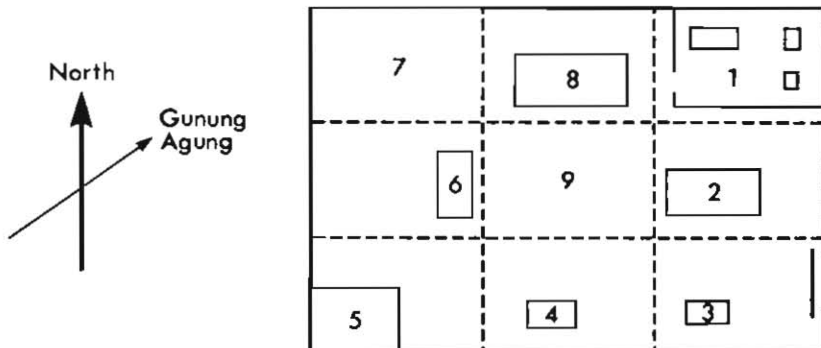
As the majority of the island's population and its historical centre are in the southern lowlands, the line connecting mountains (or lakes) and the sea runs approximately from north to south, so these terms will be used in what follows to prevent unnecessary repetition of unfamiliar words. The result is that the two axes mentioned intersect at a centre, to produce a five-part model, or classificatory scheme, which includes other sets, such as deities, colours, numbers and days (of the Balinese five-day week), known popularly as the *Panca Déwa* (five gods). Hooykaas (C. Hooykaas 1974: 2-3) gives an account of the myth in which this complex, referred to as the *Panca Kosika,* is created. This arrangement is related to a more elaborate nine-part system, the *Nawa Sanga*, in which the intermediate directions are ascribed with a prominence similar to that of the cardinal points (Pott 1966: 134-5 ; see also fig. 1).

This ritual grid has wide application. Apart from furnishing the basic frame of reference, in attributing differential value to the directions, it organises the use of space in a wide range of matters, from the proper orientation while sleeping (with the head to the north or east) to the location of temples and shrines (Goris 1960*a;* 1960*b*: 106). Relative position may be relevant. Norms influence the arrangement of seating at public meetings (Grader 1937: 112-14; cf. Hobart 1975: 72-3), or the contact between castes (Belo 1970*a*: 93-4; Mead 1960). They also affect religious observances such as the mortuary pollution obligatory for neighbours, *pengapit,* of an afflicted household, so that compounds to the north recognise shorter mourning periods than those to the south. There is an interesting connexion here between ritual purity and the flow of water; for, not only is the prescribed length of pollution on death diminished the higher the caste, but also the terms used for the directions in these circumstances are *luanan*, upstream, and *tebènan*, downstream.[5]

This system also underlies the framework in terms of which social space is structured to correspond with, and reduplicate, the putative form of the cosmos (cf. Barnes 1974; Cunningham 1973,

Figure 1 Scheme of a simple compound in Tengahpadang

(Not to scale)



(The continuous line represents the wall and the broken one the theoretical internal divisions)

Direction:		God in the Nawa Sanga:	Part of Compound:	
1.	N.E.	Sambu	Sanggah	House shrines
2.	E.	Iswara	Balé dangin	Eastern pavilion
3.	S.E.	Mahèswara	Lumbung	Rice granary
4.	S.	Brahma	Paon	Kitchen
5.	S.W.	Rudra	Badan Cèlèng	Pigsty
6.	W.	Mahadéwo	Balé dauh	Western pavilion
7.	N.W.	Sangkara	—	(Variable)
8.	N.	Wisnu	Metèn	Northern pavilion
9.	Centre	Siwa	Natah	Ground

Figure 2 Outline of the Major Sites in Pisangkaja

(For simplicity, only the places mentioned in the text are shown.)

Banjar Gagah

North

Gunung Agung

Stream

Ricefields

To Banjar Tengahpadang

Stream

Ricefields

1. Pura Désa, with Pura Balé Agung to the south
2. Pura Dalem
3. Triwangsa cemetery
4. Low caste cemetery
5. Chinese cemetery
6. Palace (Puri) of local prince
7. Waringin (banyan) tree with shrine underneath

2. A priest *(pemangku)* officiating at the washing of rice by a spring for a temple festival.

and garbage, and the purificatory effects of holy water, *tirtha* and *toya penglukatan* (C. Hooykaas 1973*b*: 10-11). For ritual purposes, water is taken from a source declared to be pure and is converted ceremonially into a holy state. It may then be used in lustration, through which the various forms of impurity, including *kumel* and *sebel* referred to below,[8] are washed away symbolically towards the sea, *kelod* (C. Hooykaas 1973*b*: 6; J. Hooykaas 1961 esp. 16-18; also Belo 1953). This is so general that, as Hooykaas has pointed out, the Balinese may describe this entire system as *agama tirtha*, the religion of holy water, (C. Hooykaas 1973*b*: 11). Significantly, ritual purity, *kesucian*, is linked to the flow of water in the context of caste relations. One of the manifestations of the caste hierarchy is the acceptance of holy water only from the temples of clearly superior groups. Some high castes still refuse to join in receiving *tirtha* from the local *Pura Puseh*, on the grounds that the deities might include ancestors of inferior status. The same may apply to holy water made by a village priest, *pemangku*, of lower caste than the supplicant; for, as one man put it: water does not flow upwards.[9]

There is some indication of the existence of a shadowy third vertical axis, overlapping in part with the previous one, which may be read as diagonal, but nonetheless analytically distinct. This may correspond to the sky and earth, or the ranked worlds, already discussed, of gods, men and inferior beings - animals like snakes and ghosts such as *tonya*, the spirits of men who have suffered bad deaths, by falling into ravines where they remain in perpetuity in separate villages. This dimension appears to be connected to the system of relative status ranking, one expression of which is the formal differentiation of head height (Mead 1960). For instance, in the consecration of a *Brahmana* high priest, the central rite, *napak*, of submission to the teacher consists in the latter placing his foot on the pupil's head (for full details, see Korn 1960: 146). In palaces, certain pavilions may be raised so that the prince can stay physically superior to lesser mortals (cf. van der Kaaden 1937). In contrast, where men sit on the same level, this may be an explicit statement of status equality. This inferred distinction is not a part of the *Panca Déwa* system, but the terms used are still interesting. Below, *betèn*, is opposed to above, *(di)duur*, which is related to *luur* and *leluur* (or *leluwur*), the high Balinese words for high and ancestor, respectively. As status and purity tend to be correlated in Bali, it is logical that the lake:sea axis may be seen as oblique.

There are grounds, then, for suggesting that the indigenous spatial grid provides a framework within which a putative relationship of particular natural phenomena to social concepts or values may be formalised and affirmed. Nor is this selection apparently arbitrary in a society which practises irrigated rice agriculture and is dependent upon water and sunshine for the successful harvests of its staple crop. The associated ideas

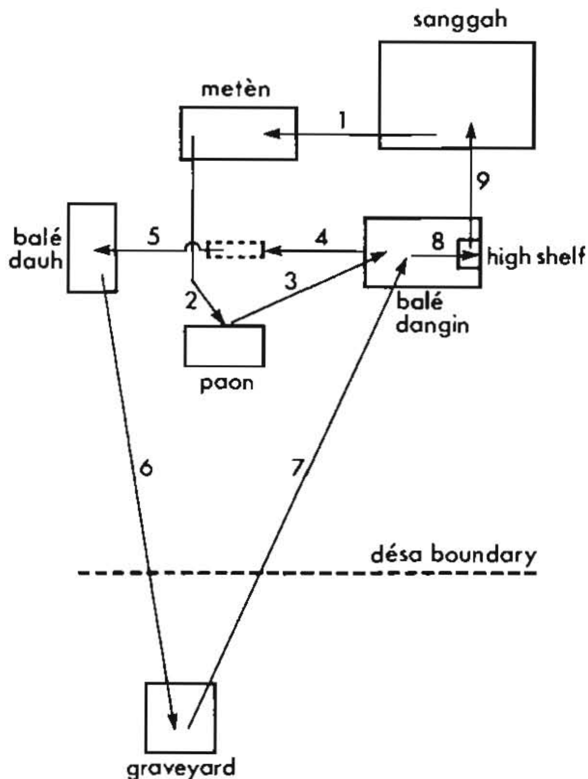
offerings said to be for the priests or the pious (Hooykaas 1975: 246-259). For the present purposes, the life-cycle and mortuary rites provide a convenient example, in which the function and symbolic significance of the spatial axes is evident. For the various stages of human spiritual development are paralleled by successive shifts of ritual site *in strict accordance* with the values implied by the directional grid. Thus, there is a congruence between the location of ceremonies and the changes in status of the person or soul, elaborated in indigenous philosophy. A detailed investigation not only confirms these statements of belief, but also suggests that there is a coherent pattern in the selection of places used in rites of passage. Within this system, the movement of the body and then the soul in religious performance serves to communicate messages about the changing qualities of men in Balinese society.

Traditional eschatology contains an involved and sometimes contradictory set of theories, perhaps partly as a consequence of differences between the various literary and folk traditions (cf. J. Hooykaas 1956). For example, the high priests of whom I enquired either denied the possibility of reincarnation, or declared its workings unknowable. In popular thought, however, there appear to be discrepant versions of the fate of the soul. On the one hand, through mortuary rites, the impure soul, *pirata*, becomes a partly purified *pitara*,[10] and eventually coalesces into a remote collective ancestral deity; but it may also become an ancestral spirit, to some degree personalised (Boon 1974), responsible for its descendants. On the other hand, the soul is thought to be judged and sentenced according to its deeds to a period in the after-world, from which it returns to be reborn, on occasions almost immediately, into its original agnatic extended family.[11] In Gianyar at least, attention is paid to this last possibility. On the birth of a child, a spirit-medium, *balian tetakson*, is consulted for its welfare may depend on the correct identification of the lineal antecedent. Thus, in common belief, which is the concern here, the path of the soul forms a closed cycle.

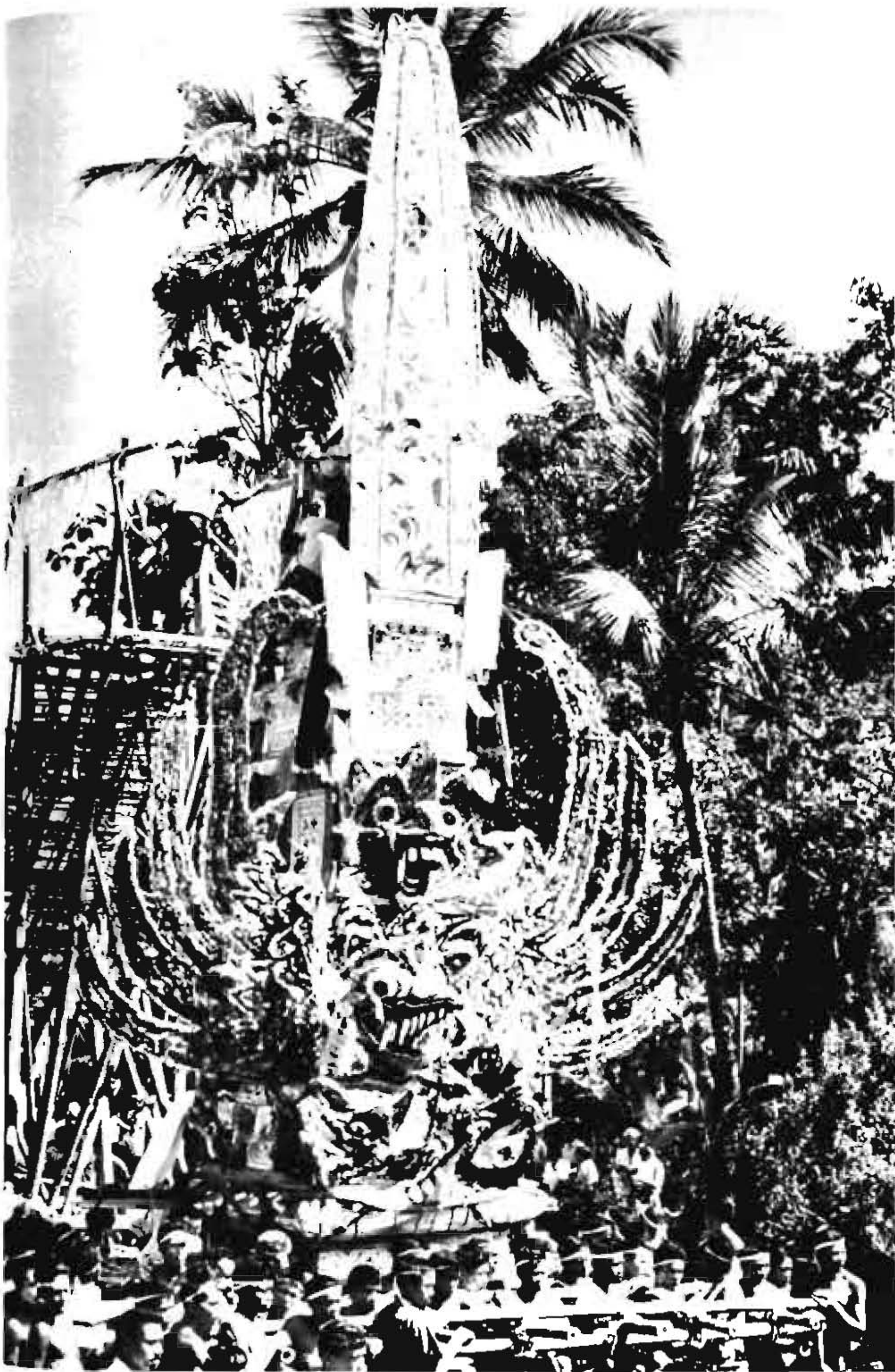
In Tengahpadang, it is widely held that, prior to birth, the embryo's soul is still pure, as it retains vestiges of ancestral qualities. This carries over, in ever-decreasing degrees, into the first months, or even years (up till puberty), of life, but is largely masked by the pollution, *kumel*, of parturition. It is progressively diminished through rites, culminating effectively in the ceremony of *nelubulanin*, performed on the 105th day, upon which the child attains a normal state and may enter temples for the first time. Apart from incidental impurity of various sorts, a more or less constant religious condition is maintained until about the time of female menopause, or grandparenthood (Mead 1960: 198; cf. C.Geertz 1966*a*: 25), when the person is thought slowly to become pure again. This trend is abruptly reversed on death, which marks the onset of intense

4. The preparatory cleansing of the corpse with holy water (from head to foot)

Figure 3 The Movement between Sites in Rites of Passage



1. On rebirth
2. For lepas aon (about three days after birth)
3. For nelubulanin (105th day)
4. Following death
5. After preparation for burial
6. For mepasah
7. After ngurugin
8. After ngabèn
9. Following ngerorasin among low castes



6. A minor prince's bier, emphasising his elevation above the low caste bearers

to suppose that the tri-axial system provides a basic framework for the conception, evaluation and use of space in Balinese thought, which may be applicable to other realms of ritual activity.[12]

Up to this point, the discussion has been concerned largely with the internal logic and expression of religious ideas, rather than with the analysis of the covariation of social elements (A. Cohen 1969: 216-8). There is another side to the issue, however, which refers to the relationship between spatial conceptions and Balinese social structure; although, in the absence of detailed historical data, the results must remain partly speculative.[13] The problem arises from the fact that one of the main directional axes is associated with ritual purity, which also happens to be a value important to beliefs about rank in Bali.

In what sense the Balinese may be said to have a caste system is a definitional question (see the debate in de Reuck & Knight 1967), which cannot be dealt with here. Various different views have been advanced;[14] but relatively little attention has been devoted, however, in the published literature to the ideology of relations between the constituent title, or descent, groups which are classified with some dispute into the ranked categories of *Brahmana*, *(K)satriya*, *Wèsya* and *Sudra*, or commoners (cf. Geertz & Geertz 1975). For instance, marriage and sexual relations between members of different castes (except sometimes unions between commoners) are subject to formal regulations which prohibit hypogamy, *nyerod bangsa*, traditionally punishable by death (Lekkerkerker 1926: 70). Similarly, food offered to ancestors or descent group deities might be given away to lower castes, but not the reverse. Breach of these rules constitutes an offence which results in the permanent pollution of the higher ranking caste member and demotion to the level of the party responsible. In another interesting example, the Balinese language contains vocabularies of respect, the proper level, or at the least the key terms, being obligatory in communication between castes. Infringement requires the payment of purificatory offerings, *perascita*, to neutralise the pollution so caused. Underlying these institutions is the fundamental principle that castes are graded by differences in innate purity, so that contact between them must be regulated accordingly.

These ideas of religious grading also underpin the distribution of political power in the traditional system. The classification of castes into four *wangsa*, or *warna*, is linked to an ideal division of labour which is almost identical, in some versions, to the Indian theory of *varna* (Dumont 1970: 67-9). In others, the duty, *darma*, of the *Wèsya* resembles that of the *Satriya*, perhaps because a number of princes are commonly assigned

8. The dispensation of holy water *(tirtha)* during a temple ceremony

death, with a legitimacy conferred by appearing as natural. In the generation of complex conceptual schemes, such as the *Panca Déwa* and *Nawa Sanga*, emphasis is shifted from the heterogeneous components to the form itself, which has the appearance of being an integrated and consistent system. By concentrating attention on the order inherent in the manufactured model and by investing it with special significance, the discrepancies are hidden. Through this formalisation, a synthesis is produced which is effectively beyond dispute and controversion. There may be a parallel here with Bloch's arguments about the implications of formalisation in language (1974; and 1975*b*).

The discussion above suggests that, in certain circumstances, water may be more or less identified with ritual purity in Balinese thought. The ethnography lends some support to this view. First, water is the most general and perhaps the most important agent of ritual purification (C. Hooykaas 1973*b*; J. Hooykaas 1961) and, to the best of my knowledge, is required in all ceremonies for the removal of pollution. It may range in sort from ordinary collected rainwater, *yèh ening*, to the different forms of *tirtha*, prepared with special additives and formulae (Belo 1953: 23-6). This is generally conceived of as flowing downwards from the relatively pure to the impure and is exemplified in the holy water known as *banyun cokor*, water of (i.e. used to wash) the feet (of the gods), drunk by the congregation during temple festivals. The quality of *tirtha* also varies, as was noted earlier, according to the purity of the deity invoked, and even of the ritual officiant. There is a further connexion between water and caste. For, in some contexts, the differences between humans are represented as substantive, although, in contrast to India (David 1973), these may be expressed in terms of water rather than blood.[15] It will be remembered that sexual relations with a woman of higher caste are forbidden. The correct relationship of sexual, or marital, partners is of a man with a woman who is his junior by age, genealogical position or caste. In miscaste liaisons, the woman is thought to be polluted by the male's sexual emission. Now, in traditional Balinese theories of physiology, *semen is regarded as water* (Weck 1937: 45). Just as water flowing uphill is unnatural, so is semen ascending from a lower to a higher caste.

It may be worth touching for a moment on the wider problem, in symbolism, of the place of nature. Anthropological theories of religion have tended to stress the ways in which it is socialised. So, it often seems to be regarded as unordered matter upon which structure is imposed exclusively by society. Some of the data from Bali suggest otherwise. Nature may provide convenient objects by which to represent social values, or society itself (Douglas, 1970), but its symbolic significance may stem also from the fact that certain aspects are in no way dependent on society. Water, after all, does not flow downhill because some collective representation states that it must. Particular

Culik and Kubu in the extreme east, the main temples face Gunung Agung lying to the due west. Within these, however, difficulties arise over the position of the *padmasana* which commonly appears to be sited in the corner indicated by the most propitious combination of directions (Covarrubias 1937: 268), but as these are directly opposed here, there is an apparent confusion. In Culik, for example in the Pura Pandé the *padmasana* lies on the east side, but in the nearby Pura Banjar Datah it is to the west.

5. For each caste category (see below), the appropriate periods in Tengahpadang were given as:

Brahmana	9 days
Satriya (Dalem)	11 "
Wèsya	15 "
Sudra	42 "

Of the two types of consecrated *Brahmana* (see C. Hooykaas 1973*b* and 1973*c*), the *Siwa* priest follows the standard nine days, but the *Buddha* priest only five. Among low castes, both the courtyard of death and its neighbour downstream are polluted for forty-two days, in contrast to upstream where it is thirty days. If high caste compounds are affected by lower in this manner, they just observe the time laid down for their own caste which is shorter.

6. Apart from the works already cited, there are references in Belo 1953; Covarrubias 1937; J. Hooykaas 1961.

7. There is some disagreement over the precise character and significance of the *désa (adat)*, roughly the local religious community (but see C. Geertz 1959; 1961; 1967).

8. Several different categories of pollution appear to be recognized; not just *sebel* (Geertz & Geertz 1975: 10-11).

9. Colloquially: *yèh jeg sing menèk*. Some of the more philosophically inclined villagers pointed out that the sea is ambivalent. While it is the direction towards which pollution flows, by virtue of this, it can be argued to be capable of absorbing all the impurities of the world.

10. On the relation between these terms, see Goris (1960*a*: 377, n.11).

11. There is an equally complicated set of beliefs concerning the effects of *d(h)arma*, duty defined either according to caste position or general moral obligation, and *karma(pala)*, the consequences of previous actions.

12. Howe (1976) has reanalysed the ceremonies accompanying the birth of twins of opposite sex in Bali, *manak salah*, using this interpretation with suggestive results.

13. Reliable sources on pre-colonial Balinese history are thin. More recently, although the island has been incorporated into the Republic of Indonesia, political institutions and

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