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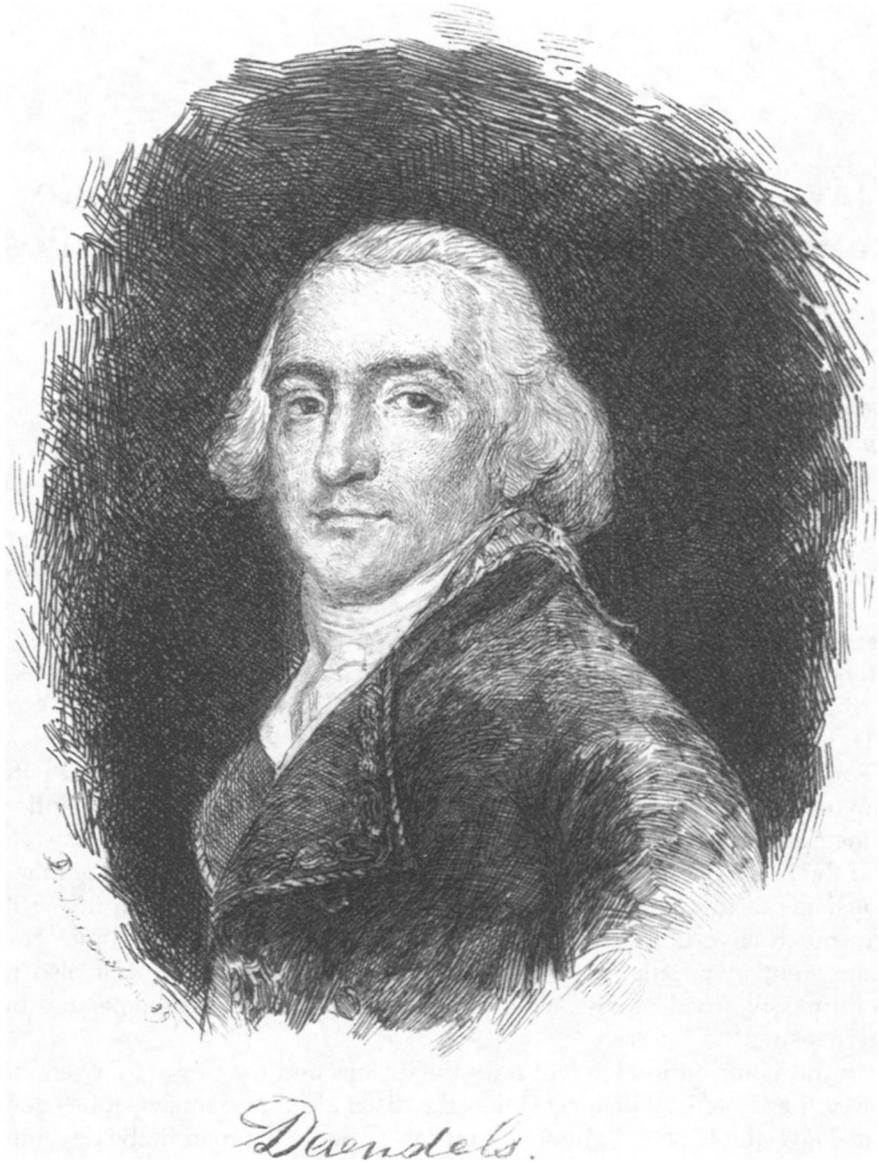
PETER J.M. NAS and PRATIWO

Java and De Groote Postweg, La Grande Route, the Great Mail Road, Jalan Raya Pos

There are several grand roads in Indonesia, for example the modern toll road connecting Jakarta and Bogor, and the impressive Trans-Sumatra Highway. However, the road in Indonesia that speaks to the imagination most is the Great Mail Road in Java, the so-called Groote Postweg or – in modern Dutch – Grote Postweg, or Jalan Raya Pos in Indonesian. This immensely long road covers the whole length of the island and while it runs mainly along the coast, in some parts it passes inland mountainous and wood-covered areas in order to avoid the marsh and swamp lands between Batavia and Cirebon. It was constructed at the command of Herman Willem Daendels,¹ during his time as Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies from 1808 to 1811. During Daendels' rule the Grote Postweg ran from Anyer in the west to Panarukan in the east (Haak 1938:35); later it came to connect Anyer with Banyuwangi. Nowadays hotels – for example in Bandung – still mention in their advertisements that they are situated on the former Grote Postweg. And the knowledge that the construction of the road cost the lives of many thousands of indigenous labourers, who were forced to work on it, is still very much alive in the minds of both Indonesian and Dutch people. This is apparent in popular and academic historical publications, but also in an impressive road movie and the road's presence in schoolbooks and on Internet sites.

In this contribution we will trace the history and the present-day condition of the Grote Postweg, as well as the discussions and images it has generated. We aim to shed light on the intricate role of this road in the development of Java and the spatial configuration of its cities.

¹ Daendels was born in Hattem in 1762 and died in Elmina, Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) in 1818 (Groenewold 1989).



Herman Willem Daendels (Mendels 1890: frontispiece)

Pros and cons of a new road

Daendels did not order the construction of La Grande Route, as he called it, for reasons of 'development'. He had orders from King Lodewijk Napoleon in Holland to defend Java against the English, who, at the time, ruled the seas in the archipelago. For this reason, when moving soldiers he could not make use of transport by the easy sea route and he needed a road linking the island's important settlements. This means that in actual fact the Grote Postweg was a military road, like the Roman highroads or the roads ordered for this reason by Napoleon Bonaparte in France. Moreover, Daendels was probably influenced by two experiences. On his way to the Indies he was forced to travel over land to Africa because of the English threat at sea, passing through France, where he used the streets constructed there under Napoleon. After his arrival he also travelled through Java, which was a cumbersome and time-consuming activity at the time. Subsequently, quite shortly after his arrival Daendels ordered the construction of the Grote Postweg, which was completed within one year.

One would expect to find abundant historical material in which the planning and construction of the road are described.² Yet, despite the fact that the Grote Postweg is mentioned frequently in the general literature on colonial history and particularly on the 'Iron Marshal' Daendels, specifics on the beginnings of the road are never uncovered. The archives researched so far also lead one to the conclusion that no detailed sources on the origin of the road are available. Because of this, Th. Stevens (1991) declared Daendels' Postweg to be one big question. Was it a totally new road, or was it the integration and improvement of a number of existing roads? And why, in the presentation of the road, is the newness sometimes stressed, and at other times improvement?

As to the existing road systems, Stevens (1991:74) points out that around 1750 important connections existed linking Batavia with Semarang and Semarang with Surabaya. Moreover, north-south connections between Semarang, Surakarta, and Yogyakarta were also in use. However, the presence of these roads did not mean that they were easily passable, as heavy tropical rains frequently destroyed them. This means that most of the work on the Grote Postweg in fact consisted of the improvement of existing paths and the construction of missing connections. Though not a completely new road, this project must nevertheless be considered a great achievement.³

² The sources on Daendels are listed and described in the *Catalogus* by J.B. Kist and A.E.D.M. van der Put (1991:139-72).

³ In this context the difference between a path and a road is important. A path is an unimproved route that has come into existence by frequent use, while a road is constructed. 'Wegen [...] zijn aangelegd. [...] Paden zijn [...] door herhaaldelijk gebruik van bepaalde verbindingen, in het landschap herkenbaar geworden routes; voornamelijk hard geworden stroken grond.' (Claessen 1995:186.)

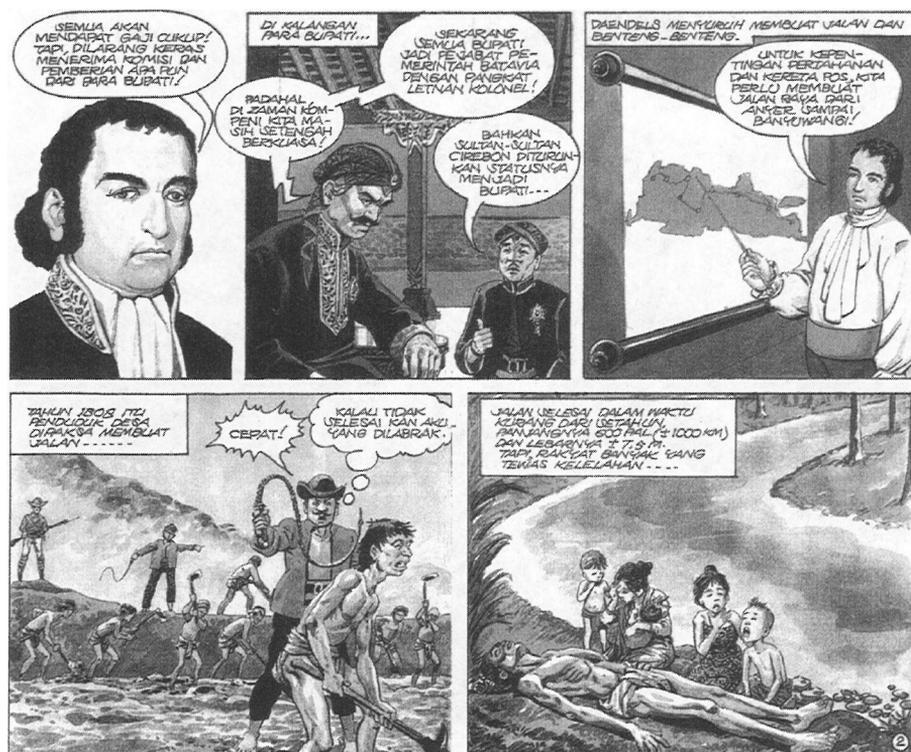
The presentation of this achievement took place in a complex political context: a tight financial regime in the colonies, the threat of the English, uprisings in Banten and Cirebon, and the presence of some of Daendels' opponents, who went out of their way to stress the negative sides of the whole enterprise. Depending on the actors and circumstances, the accomplishments were magnified or reduced while stressing, respectively, the brighter or darker sides.

In his letters to Daendels, the minister of colonial affairs in Holland emphasized the difficult financial situation and the need to reduce expenditures. The Javanese uprisings in certain areas were also a delicate matter. These circumstances were an incentive for Daendels to play down the importance of the project, which entailed substantial costs⁴ and, as most of the heavy work was done by the Javanese as unpaid forced labour,⁵ also increased the risk of violent social unrest (Daendels 1814). Daendels' opponents, of course, stressed that the construction of the road had caused the death of many Javanese labourers. Major William Thorn writes that '[a]bout twelve thousand natives are said to have perished in constructing it, chiefly owing to the unhealthiness of the forests and marshes, through which it runs' (Thorn 1815:208). Nicolaus Engelhard in particular, who was governor of the North-East Coast of Java and who had to give up his position because Daendels split the North-East Coast into smaller territorial units, became the frequently cited anti-colonial and nationalistic historical source of the Grote Postweg's negative image. He stated that five hundred labourers had died during the road's construction over the hills of the Megamendung area in Buitenzorg, and emphasized that these numbers were underestimated as they did not include the persons who left or died as the result of illnesses contracted there (Engelhard 1816:47). Further on in his criticism of Daendels, Engelhard (1816:147) even mentions thousands of casualties, when adding the death toll resulting from the works in the woods of Weleri in the Pekalongan region, to that in the hills of the Megamendung area.⁶ Although it is very likely that the construction of the Grote Postweg demanded a high toll in local human lives – for even nowadays casualties during such large works are common – no proof or exact counts are offered in the writings of Thorn, Engelhard, or others. Because of strong disagreements between the Dutch and the English as well as between Daendels and Engelhard, the English and Engelhard should be considered less than reliable sources. In

⁴ The amount of 30,000 silver *rijksdaalders* and as much in paper money is mentioned by Engelhard (1816:147).

⁵ Only on very difficult parts of the route was some payment disbursed (Groenewold 1989: 27).

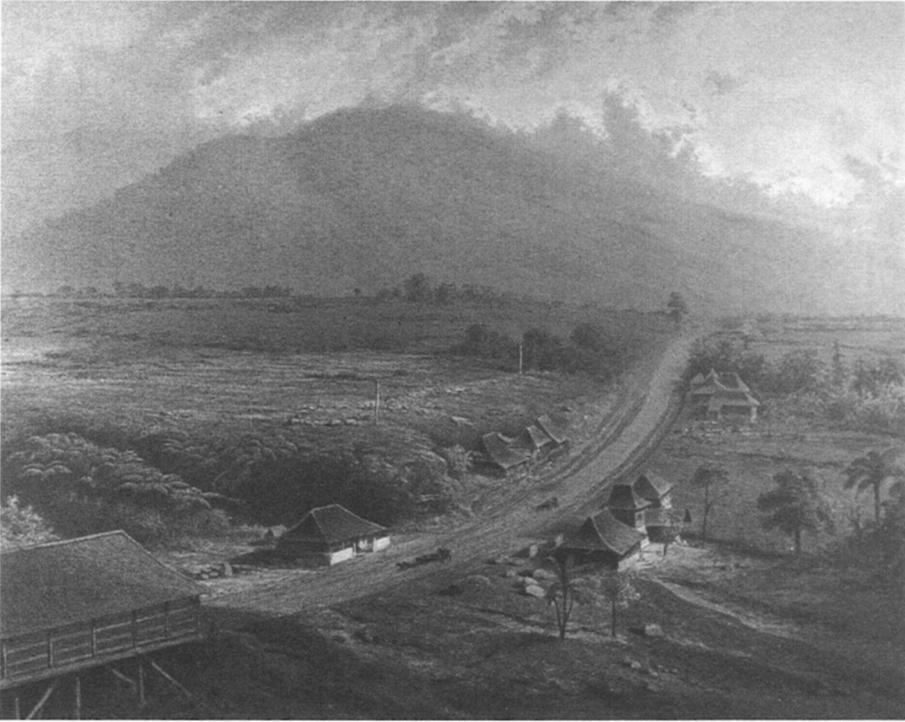
⁶ Engelhard (1816:147) in his distrust of Daendels also cast doubt on the estimated costs of 60,000 *rijksdaalders*, which would have to be put to the test.



Modern comic book presentation of the Groot Postweg (Tokoh Bersejarah 1999:20-1)

addition, as mentioned by Stevens (1991:76), most of the construction work was organized by local Javanese rulers on the basis of traditional conditions of forced labour. The effects of this discussion on the present-day image of Daendels with regard to the Grote Postweg is evident in the popular educational comic series on historical figures, in which Daendels is portrayed as Tuan Besar Guntur (Mister Thunder) and the Javanese are depicted as beaten off and dying (Tokoh bersejarah 1999).

The positive effects of the Grote Postweg mentioned in the literature are manifold. In his letter of 24 July 1809 to Daendels, the minister of colonial affairs formulates the heart of the matter. He thinks that the improvement of the roads is very useful, as it will inevitably lead to a greater prosperity of the interior as a consequence of regular communications (Stevens 1991: 72). Daendels also stressed that the Grote Postweg would lead to an increase in profits for the local population through expanding trade and industry. Niemeijer (1989:127) refers to the Belgian author Collet, who in his idolizing portrait of Daendels points more specifically at the Grote Postweg as an



Drawing of the Groot Postweg near Gadok, at the foot of the Puncak
(Heijboer 1977:55)

instrument to improve food transport and the accessibility of hunger areas. The military importance of the Postweg has been mentioned earlier and, considering the circumstances as far as Daendels was concerned, this had first priority at the time. It is interesting that, despite these important economic effects and its military purpose, the road ended up being named the Grote Postweg (Great Mail Road), as its direct effect, besides shorter travel times in general, was the speeding up of postal delivery. Daendels organized the postal services with about two hundred horses and a series of post stations to change horses. He also established a police force for security. The result was that the time required for the delivery of mail from Batavia to Semarang was reduced from about 10-14 days to 3-4 days (Groenewold 1989).

As important as these ideas of Daendels' opponents and observers are the opinions of the local population. However, these are difficult to trace, although it is known that the Javanese called Daendels 'Tuan Besar Guntur', or 'Mister Thunder', referring to his authoritarian attitude and brusque behaviour. According to Van der Linden (1937:116-27) in the *Hikayat Mareskalek*

(The story of the Marshal) – written by a Malay author of Egyptian descent from Palembang⁷ – Daendels is portrayed as a *raja*, a courageous and wise king, who was also burdened with vanity and haughtiness. Daendels was in pursuit of his own profit, which he considered to be based on and congruent with the welfare of Java. He also looked down on the indigenous people and their leaders a great deal. The *hikayat*'s author agrees with Daendels that the purpose of the Grote Postweg was to stimulate trade and other activities in the region, as a basis for increased prosperity. As the author was from Sumatra, this cannot be seen as a proper Javanese evaluation of the situation. Yet we may conclude that Daendels was described as a real king, with strong and weak character traits, the latter leading to his downfall. The motives for building the Grote Postweg were basically approved of in this Malay point of view.

From this short historical analysis of the Grote Postweg, we can conclude that, because of the authoritarian character of Daendels and the complex colonial conditions of that time, this undoubtedly impressive achievement became a fruitful topic of controversy between the Marshal's adversaries and proponents. Engelhard's criticism in particular, that the construction of the road took thousands of lives, has shaped collective memory. Through this image, whether partially false or true, both Daendels and the Grote Postweg became famous and have been scratched firmly in the annals of history. The positive effects the road had on development, as mentioned in the literature and listed above, often dropped out of sight as the result of a strongly biased image.

A few pictures and a road movie

When looking at a number of old drawings, paintings, photographs, and postcards, the first impression one gets of the Grote Postweg is that of a narrow but impressively long country road, which is occasionally almost straight; it traverses vast plains but sometimes winds through hilly territory.⁸ The pictures cover different parts of the Grote Postweg, such as Meester Cornelis, the Puncak, Cianjur, Bandung, Mojokerto, and Pasuruan, as well as Kraksaan, Lélés, and Sindanglaya. Their dates range from 1875 to 1940. Both rural and urban conditions are shown: the road passes by hills, woods,

⁷ Abdullah Bin Muhammad Al-Misri (Van der Linden 1937:116; Houben 1996:13).

⁸ This concerns about twenty pictorial items referring to the Grote Postweg in several publications, but mainly in the photograph archive of the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV), Leiden.

lakes, fields, sugar plantations, and cities. It is often lined with trees, sometimes enormous *waringin* trees, and also with clusters of indigenous houses. Generally the pictures present a tranquil situation with a lone small horse carriage, or one or two people posing for the photograph: standing in the middle of the road, sitting by the road side, or passing by carrying a load on their shoulder. An exception to this is the painting with two large carriages pulled by four or more horses. In more recent photographs an automobile and the tram at Meester Cornelis are depicted. On a 1940 photograph of the Postweg between Cirebon and Bandung one can observe the Djatiwangi sugar plantation's small rail track. There are also electricity or telephone poles. Several drawings of the Singaraya area show the lake that resulted from the dam constructed for the Grote Postweg. The drawings also display a few wooden bridges: one example is the covered wooden structure over the Cisokan River near Cianjur, pictured by Woodbury and Page before 1880. Very important are the coach stages where horses were changed. In those years Woodbury and Page also made a nice picture of a coach stage near Cianjur. Steven Wachlin recently wrote the following text to accompany a reprint of the Woodbury and Page picture:

Changing horses in a *pendopo* in Cisokan, on the Groote Postweg near Cianjur. In order to facilitate traffic, *pendopo* were built every nine kilometres along the Groote Postweg, the Great Postroad stretching from west to east along the whole length of Java. Travellers rode in special carriages drawn by four to six horses, which were operated by entrepreneurs who obtained concessions from the government. A journey from Batavia to Surabaya lasted about nine days. (Wachlin 1994:81.)

In a pictorial presentation of the Indies published in 1911, the Dutch Tourist Union included a photograph made by J. Demmeni of the Grote Postweg on the plain of Lèlès near Mount Kalédong. It shows a small country road surrounded by woods and lined on both sides by small drains covered with grass. On the road one sees a carriage with two horses and in the background two mountains, one small and one large. The tourist description reads as follows:

This peaceful place, surrounded by mountains covered to the summit with vegetation, is one of the most pleasant regions of the Indies. Here, in this delightful beautiful plain, everything laughs of abundance, of fertility. [... The plate] shows the lovely, spacious Postweg, winding along the Kalédong.⁹

⁹ ANWB Toeristenbond voor Nederland 1911:11, see also plate 35. 'Dit vreedzame oord, omringd door tot den nok begroeide bergen, is een der mooiste streken van Java. Hier, in deze verrukkelijk schoone vlakke, lacht alles van weelde, van vruchtbaarheid.'



The Grootte Postweg near Cianjur photographed by Woodbury and Page before 1880 (Wachlin 1994:81)

The two photographs of the Grote Postweg in Bandung, offered to Mayor B. Coops in an album on changing views in the city, show the dramatic difference between the old situation in 1917 and the new one in 1920. In the first picture one sees a small, straight country road lined with small trees. A simple stone building stands to the left and the background is dominated by hills. In 1920 the trees had vanished as the road had been widened and solidified. To both the left and the right side of the road stand new, large colonial buildings. The road is lined with poles and electric wires. To the right of the road is a footpath with a man carrying a load. The comparison shows the tremendous changes in the road, which had apparently become a focus of urban development; only the hills in the background remained the same.

The modern impact of the former Grote Postweg is also revealed in Bernie IJdis' road movie.¹⁰ This movie can probably be best characterized

¹⁰ *Jalan Raya Pos - De Grootte Postweg*, Bernie IJdis, Contact Film Cinematheek, Arnhem, The Netherlands, 1996 (colour, 155 minutes).



The Grootte Postweg Bandung 1917: old situation (KITLV Photographs no. 11830)



The Grootte Postweg Bandung 1920: new situation (KITLV Photographs no. 11831)

as a historical document on the New Order period. Its structure consists of the associations the author Pramoedya Ananta Toer has with the different trajectories of and buildings along the road, while comparing the conditions during the construction of the Postweg with those of the Soeharto era. He stresses the oppression and exploitation through hard forced labour Daendels used to complete the Grote Postweg rapidly, as well as the large number of victims and the depopulation of certain areas resulting from this. He also points out the ridiculously low sum of money spent on the works, particularly on labour. Suppression is also encountered during the Soeharto regime, when communists and so-called communists were banned to Buru, and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's books were forbidden, while the president, his family, and their entourage were enriching themselves to the extreme (IJdis 1997). So, the movie is a powerful documentation of present-day views of the old Postweg and the political context in which the resulting road functions nowadays.

The movie represents life along the Grote Postweg. The road has become Java's main artery, for the poor and the rich, for those who bathe in a river or canal along the road and for those who drive on it to a luxury hotel, heading for a delicious meal. The former Postweg is small, cosy, and traditional at some points, where the oxcart is still used for transport and pedestrians use it to go home. In Jakarta, it is hypermodern, where the cars, buses, and trucks form long lines or are stuck in many rows. Sometimes the route goes past tea or sugar plantations, cutting through hilly territory and traversing rivers over long and narrow bridges. The former Postweg has become Java's life artery, day and night. As the movie makes clear, it also requires permanent care and maintenance, while at the same time it is a great killer because of the numerous traffic accidents. Travelling from Anyer to Panarukan and passing by cities like Jakarta, Bogor, Bandung, Cirebon, Semarang, Rembang, Lasem, and Surabaya, a great variety of the facets of daily life pass the spectator's eyes: military barracks and a five-star hotel, a mosque and a Chinese temple, a prison and a morgue, a sugar factory and a harbour, the festive reception of visitors returning from Mecca, and a marriage procession. All sorts of vehicles can be seen, ranging from oxcarts to trucks, *becak* to motorcycles, private cars to buses for mass transport. But aside from the richness and multi-faceted make-up of Javanese society, the most conspicuous element in the movie is the hard work that common people generally have to do in order to earn a living. They drive enormous trucks for long hours, wiping their sweating faces; they work, perspiring heavily, in front of hot factory ovens; they labour for seven days in the open air along the road, trying to repair a bus's broken-down engine. Cutting sugarcane and picking tea leaves also constitute very harsh labour. It is in the nature of this former post road to be the focus of a multitude of activities. And this is why one of the people in the movie

expresses the opinion that Daendels rendered Java a great service: although immense works like this one always entail human suffering, the result was worthwhile and of great benefit to Java, even, or particularly, nowadays.

Shifting orthogonality

The Grote Postweg had a great impact, not only on the development of Java as a whole, but also on the cities it traversed. One example is Bandung, where the road was built eleven miles north of the existing capital. Daendels ordered the city to be resettled near the Grote Postweg, and Bupati Wiranatakusumah II chose a site near the holy wells on the western banks of the Cikapundung River, which were protected by the goddess Nyi Kentring Manik. He had his palace and the city square constructed there. The grand mosque was situated on the west side and the market on the east side of the square. The palace, on the south side, faced Mount Tangkuban Perahu. All of these spatial arrangements corresponded with traditional views on the layout of palaces and surrounding settlements.¹¹

The cities and towns on Java's north coast were also affected. Before the existence of the Grote Postweg, the rivers were crucial to these settlements. They were used to transport goods from the interior to the sea. The navigable parts of these rivers were normally not very long. The distance that could be explored by boat was often not more than a few kilometres from the seashore. To bring their crops to market, farmers walked over dirt roads from the interior to the river. Hence the river and road, running in north-south direction, formed the orthogonality of a town. Transportation among the cities on the coast took place by sea, as land transportation connecting them was limited. So the urban areas developed in a north-south direction, according to the direction of the river.

Semarang is a good example. Its nucleus was the Semarang River, which connected the settlements in the interior with the sea. This river, which could be navigated as far as four kilometres from the seashore, bending into the interior, formed the transportation infrastructure for several ethnic groups: the Chinese, Dutch, Javanese, Malays, and Arabs. Besides the river, there was also a dirt road connecting the port town and the interior, where the Mataram kingdom was located. The road was, and still is, called Mataram Road. At the end of the seventeenth century the Dutch built a fortress at the estuary, which developed into the Dutch town. The first Chinese who came to the region settled upstream. After a rebellion against the Dutch they were moved downstream, near the Dutch fortress and the palace of the indigenous

¹¹ See *Extreme brief history* (2001).

bupati (regent). All political and economic power was located at the riverside. The Dutch even built a harbour at the river's estuary, so that boats could explore the Semarang River from the Chinese ward, passing the market and the regent's palace, up to the harbour. All Semarang's urban activities were concentrated along the river, while the regions situated far from the river were rural villages. When the Dutch enlarged their locale, which had been concentrated inside the fortress, they first built up the area east of the fortress and then surrounded the whole town with a wall. They saw the area outside the wall as dangerous, and the orientation of the town was towards the river and the harbour.

This mode of transportation and the resulting spatial configuration was changed totally when Daendels constructed the Grote Postweg. Not only were junks gradually deserted and horse carts adopted for transportation between cities and towns on Java's north coast, the orthogonality of urban settlements was no longer determined by the river but by the Grote Postweg. Even the rivers' function as a transportation channel declined and so they often became shallow. Later on, the Dutch completed a wide road into the interior, connecting the coastal and interior cities. From a wider perspective, the road changed the transportation pattern on the island from north-south to east-west, while the north-south direction became a secondary route connecting the coastal cities and the interior.

The Grote Postweg greatly changed Java's spatial configuration, which before had been oriented on the axis between the kingdoms in the interior and the trading towns on the north coast. Since the Grote Postweg enhanced the possibility of the rise of new settlements, new markets and trading places emerged. All the towns along the road were trading towns inhabited by multiethnic groups. The distance between two larger neighboring towns was about thirty kilometres, with a smaller town in between. Due to this distance, people travelling by horse needed places to change their horses every thirty kilometres. Hence, all along the Grote Postweg, and also along other roads in the interior of Java, the distances between towns and cities are fifteen to thirty kilometres, creating a spider-web-like road network.

Not only did the Grote Postweg facilitate the emergence of new towns, it also became a new critical element in the urban area, modifying the urban pattern. In Pati and Demak, for instance, the road divided the *alun-alun* in the middle and became a new economic domain of shophouses, reducing the cosmic power of the regent's palace as the centre of the political domain. In Semarang, in addition to the construction of the Postweg, Daendels destroyed the city wall and the Dutch quarter was enlarged to the west along the present Jalan Pemuda. Jalan Pemuda, part of the Grote Postweg and called Bojong Street in the colonial era, was famous for being Java's finest street, with large mansions and beautiful trees. The governor of Central Java

had his palace situated at the end of the street. This construction is currently used as the official residence of the present governor. Mid-nineteenth century the street acquired a tramline for urban transportation. Adjacent to the governor's house a building, called *Lawang Sewu*, functioned as the headquarters of the Netherlands Indies railway.

Near the big cities, land use along the *Postweg* underwent rapid transformation from fields to shopping streets. Take for example the outskirts of Semarang. The *Grote Postweg* stretching from Kalibanteng to Bojong Street had two different appearances. Bojong Street used to be a residential area for rich people and high-ranking officers. The street was known for the gentlemen who rode their horses slowly along the road, with its large mansions and nice yards. However, from Siliwangi Street to Kalibanteng, rice fields flanked the road. In 1970 Pemuda Street – a place where inhabitants could take a nice walk – already accommodated large shops; it was a wide shopping street with a regional market at the end. At that time the road ran through rice fields from Siliwangi Street to Kalibanteng, where the airport was located. In the 1980s houses started replacing the rice fields, and today shops flank Siliwangi Street in the same way as they do Pemuda Street.

Nowadays, although there are new urban centres – such as *Simpang Lima* – in Semarang, the *Grote Postweg*, called *Jalan Pemuda*, is still the city's most prestigious road. The street has a market, a town hall, government buildings, a modern and luxurious mall, hotels, and banks. It is bustling 24 hours a day. However, the part of the *Grote Postweg* that passes through the former Dutch town is in decline. The main street of the old town has been elevated several times in order to avoid flooding at high tide.

Batavia was also built along a river, the *Ciliwung*, and was sea-oriented. During Daendels' period, as part of the *Postweg* construction, he moved the VOC offices south to the present-day area of the National Monument (*Monas*). The *Grote Postweg* passed north of *Monas*, heading south via *Meester Cornelis* (present-day *Jatinegara*) to *Buitenzorg* (*Bogor*). Currently, this busy street crosses *Pasar Senen*, a large market in the centre of Jakarta. Traffic jams are a daily reality. After 1900 large plots along the street were used to build a hospital, university buildings, a market, and other public facilities. Before the city was extended in the direction of *Jalan Thamrin* and *Jalan Sudirman*, the *Grote Postweg* was Jakarta's main street, passing *Harmonie* and heading westwards via *Grogol* to *Tangerang*. Meanwhile Jakarta's east side, which borders on *Bekasi*, was not developed until the toll road to *Cikampek* was constructed at the end of the 1980s.

The ribbon city

The Grote Postweg has become one prolonged, urbanized area. From Batang to Ceribon, a distance of over one hundred kilometres, shops flank the route and leave only scarce space for rice fields. The tendency to ribbon development along exit roads and main arteries, which are flanked by one- and two-story housing, lies at the root of this development. Weak law enforcement in urban development has allowed this horizontal urban development, as it is easy to convert rice fields into housing areas. One could call Java the longest city in the world, with the Grote Postweg as its main transport and economic artery.

The role of the road as the main transportation artery on the island can be seen during Idul Fitri, the Muslim holiday when people travel from urban areas to their place of birth all over Java and other parts of Indonesia. Although at some places the former Postweg has been widened to thirty metres, traffic jams are frequent. And though trucks are not allowed to operate during Idul Fitri, crowded cars and buses take more than twenty hours to drive between Jakarta and Semarang, ten hours more than usual.

While cities and towns were rapidly developing new housing areas in the 1990s, local authorities constructed new ring roads. These roads were meant to reduce traffic inside the city, especially that caused by buses and trucks. Hence, nowadays, inside most cities and towns the Grote Postweg has lost its regional transportation function and tends to have become a shopping street with markets and shops. To strengthen regional transportation and the ring roads' function as the new highways, local authorities have also constructed new bus terminals on these ring roads. However, as the former Grote Postweg generally still performs as the heart of the cities, at night only trucks pass the ring roads, while buses still enter the cities through the Grote Postweg to pick up passengers. The Grote Postweg – mostly called Jalan Raya – at Demak, Kudus, Pati, Juana, Rembang, and Lasem forms the urban centre of the east-west urban ribbon.

Changing cosmology

The cosmology of traditional Javanese life is expressed in urban form by its orientation towards the mountain and the river. The Majapahit kingdom in East Java was built in the Berantas River basin and was secured by a mountainous area. Foreigners mainly inhabited the kingdom's harbour, Tuban. The authorities of this harbour town had to pay tribute per subject. Hence the morphology of the region was strongly related to the transportation axis in north-south direction, the line between the seashore and the interior.

Along with the river as the main transportation route connecting the market on Java's north coast with the interior, most of the kingdom was situated in the interior, taking the balance of the mountain and the sea as its cosmological references. After Majapahit's decline, the important town of Demak was also located in the interior of the island. The Mataram kingdom, located deeper in the interior, succeeded Demak. Mataram left many old towns and cemeteries in the interior of Central Java. The orientation of the palace was towards a mountain in the same way as the palace of present-day Yogyakarta faces Mount Merapi.

The Chinese towns along Java's north coast were also built along a river, towards which their temple was oriented. Hence the oldest temples faced east or west, the location of the river, the main transportation channel. The small kingdoms along Java's north coast were always located on the riverside, but the palace's orientation was to the sea.

After the Grote Postweg was constructed and it became the island's main economic artery, cosmological notions changed drastically. Indonesian Chinese did not build their new temples at the riverside anymore, but on the Postweg. They perceived the Postweg to be the new 'breath of life'. The temple in Lasem, built in the twentieth century, was not oriented towards the Lasem River as was the case with the old temple, but faced the Grote Postweg. A similar change occurred regarding the new palaces the regents built in the mid-nineteenth century. The road also changed the existing orientation of the oldest Chinese temple of Tuban, which faced the sea. The road that passed behind the temple attracted the Dutch government, who built their offices and an *alun-alun* there. Consequently, the orientation of the temple was changed. It used to face the sea; at present the sea is at the rear. Due to this change in orientation, the present architectural arrangement of the temple has become a bit odd.

Conclusion

To a certain extent, modern Java was started by Daendels when he ordered the construction of the Grote Postweg. The road functioned as a catalyst in changing feudal traditions. Adjusting the indigenous orientation towards trading activities, the Postweg made possible and even stimulated the rise of new markets in the interior and, in the early twentieth century, new industrial activities too.

If Daendels were alive today, he might be surprised to see the present state of the Grote Postweg, which has become the main transport and economic artery of the island where big cities are located. The road has also become the main street in many of Java's cities. Buses, mini-buses, and trucks

transport goods along this road day and night. Along the Grote Postweg – which is called Jalan Raya nowadays – new shops, housing, and industrial estates have emerged. Especially during the New Order, when the island was booming economically, the plots of land along Jalan Raya became an investors' target.

Historically the origin of the road is scarcely accounted for. Although it became the main artery on the island, those who died during its construction have been largely forgotten. No monument reminds us of the tragedy now covered over by modern developments. Although it was Daendels who ordered the construction of the Postweg, no part of the road has been named after him: a Daendels Street does not exist on Java. Since the New Order, several parts of the street have been named after generals, or events related to the Indonesian War of Independence. In Semarang, for instance, part of the former Grote Postweg is called Jalan Siliwangi, referring to the regional military command (Kodam) in West Java that fought for independence and after the communist coup of 1965 supported Soeharto's rise to ascendancy. Even the part that was called Jalan Bojong (Colonization Street) is now named Jalan Pemuda (Youth Street), as are so many other streets in Indonesian cities. Under present conditions, despite the historical accounts of Daendels' Grote Postweg, gradually the memory of the road's origins will be forgotten by the common Indonesian people. Perhaps the rehabilitation of Jalan Raya Pos as a street name or even the introduction of a Jalan Daendels might strengthen Javanese historical memory, incorporating both the bright and the dark sides of its exciting past.

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