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Rosita Dellios

Bond University, rosita_dellios@bond.edu.au

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Sino-Indonesian Relations: Lessons from the Past

by Rosita Dellios

Associate Professor of International Relations
Bond University
Gold Coast, Queensland 4229, Australia
Telephone +61 7-55-952514
Fax +61 7-55-95 2672
Email rosita_dellios@bond.edu.au

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ABSTRACT

In terms of both population and territory, Indonesia and China are the largest nations in their respective regions of Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. They share a long history of relations, with a 'golden age' of understanding dating back to the 7th century. This was when learned Buddhists from China would travel via Borobodur in Java in their pilgrimages to India. Later, from the 14th century, diplomatic and trade interactions were fostered by 'cultural brokers' on both sides. Chronicles show Javanese envoys of Chinese origin, such as Chen Yen-xiang, conducting diplomacy with China. Muslim Chinese, such as the celebrated Ming Admiral Zheng He, enhanced China's diplomatic presence in the Archipelago in the 15th century. On occasion, relations became conflictual. China under the Mongols attacked Java in 1293, but ultimately lost to an ambitious and manipulative Javanese, Raden Vijaya. More recently, Marxist-inspired China found common anti-imperialist cause with independent Indonesia. Yet this axis of understanding also served the machinations of Javanese politics and the rise to power of a Javanese general, Suharto. Ironically, China - not Indonesia - is celebrated as a strategic culture of deception, a view popularised by the writings attributed to the classical military strategist, Sun Tzu or Master Sun. Yet in early Sino-Javanese relations China's Mongol phase of military aggression was countered by a Javanese master of deception. As to General Suharto eight centuries later, his anti-Communist (and hence anti-China) cause lent legitimacy to a regime of reward and punishment. It was one which mirrored both its authoritarian opponent in Peking, as well as China's legalists and militarists of an earlier age. While culturally different, Indonesia and China appear to have more in common than meets popular perception. They are large multi-ethnic nations attempting to maintain their unity in the face of centrifugal forces. Globalisation in the present era has also made regional relations even more imperative for maintaining national strength. Internal stability appears to be best served by regional integration on the basis of common cultural, commercial and national interests. It is also more ably expressed in an ethic of respect that prevailed in past periods, not only between nations but also between peoples. Thus the *dharmā* of the present diplomatic age would require an internal respect for

difference within the national entity. Sino-Indonesians are a case in point. Unless internal divisions are healed, or at least better managed, external relations are unlikely to escape the manipulative forces of domestic politics. In an age which has seen the rise of militant Islam, and along with it, an increasingly imperialistic USA, the two largest polities in eastern Asia would do well to heed their history.

A Strategic Overview

In terms of both population and territory, Indonesia and China are the largest nations in their respective regions of Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia. With a population of 214 million, 90 percent of whom are Muslim, Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim nation. Its territory of 1.8 million square kilometres extends some 5,000 kilometres from east to west, from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, and incorporates 13,677 islands. This makes Indonesia the world's largest archipelago. In terms of natural resources, Indonesia has large natural gas reserves, it is Asia's biggest oil exporter, and some of the world's largest mining operations are to be found in Indonesia (McCawley 2003: 51). It controls or shares control of strategic shipping routes - the Sunda and Melaka straits. More than 40 percent the world's shipping passes through the Melaka Strait (Snow 2003: 157).

In China's case its population of 1.28 billion renders it the most populous nation on earth, while at over 9.56 million square kilometres it is the third largest country after Russia and Canada. Its 2.25 million troops form not only the region's, but the world's, largest armed force. China's reputation as a major military power is crowned by the possession of nuclear weapons that are capable of all ranges and delivery modes (for details, see IISS 2003: 152-155). Economically, it is the world's fourth largest trading nation, and has earned the reputation of 'workshop' of the world. China, the oldest continuous civilisation of some 5,000 years, is also the world's fastest developing economy in the present age.

The enormous material and human potential of these two giants of eastern Asia is accompanied by potential instability in their natural and political environments. Indonesia's forest degradation and China's creeping desertification are only two of the more obvious physical losses suffered by these countries. Politically they are both centralised republics that fear fragmentation. As multi-ethnic polities, they incorporate difference on condition that it is an attribute of, and not a challenge to, state unity. The long-held Indonesian motto of 'unity in diversity' implies the existence of another possibility, that of 'disunity in diversity' - particularly under current conditions of democratic freedoms. This is not as yet a problem for the Chinese state. China lacks Indonesia's democracy, just as Indonesia lacks China's cohesion. There is an underlying fragility to their enormity. The uncertainties of a regional future influenced by the actions of Indonesian and China are the concern of this paper, but not its investigative arena. Rather, it is their past relations with each other that provide the setting within which lessons for the future may be drawn.

I Sino-Indonesian Contact in a Buddhist Age: The Wheel of Dharma Sets in Motion

Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE) historical records indicate China made maritime contact with the 'Nanyang' or 'Southern Ocean' (meaning Southeast Asia) some 2000 years ago. This marked also the start of the Christian era in Europe and the spread of Buddhism from India to China and other parts of Asia. Sino-Indonesian relations were

thus conceived in a new age of Buddhist international relations whose source went back six centuries to the teachings of the Buddha in northern India.

The Founding of Buddhism in India, 6th Century BCE

Founded in the 6th century BCE by the Sakyamuni ('Sage of the Sakyas'), a prince in the state of Magadha on the present-day India-Nepalese border, Buddhism grew out of Hinduism, but discarded its ascetic extremities in favour of a doctrine of the Middle Way. Not only did it avoid the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, but Buddhism abandoned the caste system, replacing it with a teaching of compassion for all living beings and the equality of human beings. Like Hinduism, however, Buddhism taught the illusory nature of the sensory world and warned of entrapment into that world. This was expressed through the Four Noble Truths. Simply expressed, these hold that "worldly existence is a form of suffering, that the causes of suffering can be determined, that therefore suffering can be eliminated, and that, finally, there is a Path leading to that end" (De Casparis and Mabbett 1992: 317; see also Ruhala 1978 for elaboration and source materials).

Sakyamuni became the Buddha (the 'Enlightened One' or 'Awakened One') by meditating on this problem of suffering in the world. When he understood, and became 'awakened', he taught others how to achieve this also. His first sermon was at the Deer Park at Sarnath, near Varanasi. This sermon was called 'Setting into Motion the Wheel of Dharma' (Ruhala 1978: 92). Buddhism spread throughout India under Emperor Asoka's patronage in the 3rd century BCE, and over time was propagated by other sympathetic rulers, missionaries, merchants, and travellers to South, Southeast, East and Central Asia, including the old Greek kingdoms of Alexander to the Northwest.

Buddhism became the dominant spiritual philosophy of the Chinese from the mid-4th to the 8th centuries - that is, during the Six Dynasties period (222 - 581), the Sui (581-618) and the early Tang (618-906 CE) dynasties. In Java, its high point came during the Sailendra dynasty (c.750-850) and the Singhasari-Majapahit period (especially c.1250-1400) (De Casparis and Mabbett 1992: 318).

The Spread of Buddhism to China, 1st Century CE, and its Sinicisation

China had become a powerful sponsor of Buddhism and second only to India as a Buddhist centre of teachings. China had not only received Buddhism into its culture as early as the first century CE, but sinicised it (that is, gave it Chinese characteristics). This was necessary in view of the 'this-worldly' orientation of Confucian China, compared to the 'other-worldly' disposition of Indian religious thought. The Chinese, typically being attached to family and wealth creation, at first found the Buddhist teaching of non-attachment difficult to follow. Yet they did find a place for it in their culture for it 'balanced' the preoccupations of the other two key spiritual traditions of China. In terms of their leanings, Confucianism tends to the ethical and the political, with a strong humanistic element; Daoism to the artistic and pragmatic with a sense of spontaneity; and Buddhism to the introspective and 'religious', with a tolerant outlook. None of these three traditions recognised a God of the Judeo-Christian type. They are better described as spiritual philosophies.

Buddhism's interaction with Daoism gave rise to Chan Buddhism ('Zen' in Japanese). In this way Buddhism found an indigenous expression in China.

From the 2nd century, China contributed to Buddhism's international age by opening to the outside world. It had embarked at circa 100 CE on a concert-of-power arrangement across Central Asia with the powerful Buddhist Kushan (Kusana) kingdom, primarily in order to protect trade along the Silk Road (Aron 1999; see also Cotterell 1993: 260). Aron (1999) observes that trade flourished across Rome, Persia, Kushan and China in this period of peace spanning "approximately 90 A.D to at least 166 A.D - the year in which Antonius Pius sent an envoy to China".

By the first century BCE, the oral tradition of Buddhism became a written one and developed into the Buddhist canon, Tripitaka. Buddhism facilitated internationalisation in that, unlike Christianity, it was a top-down rather than bottom-up social phenomenon, having been adopted by the ruling classes and wealthy merchants first and the common people later (Reischauer and Fairbank 1970: 147). With a common Buddhist orientation, regionalism developed among the trading nations of Asia.

The Period of the Pilgrimages, 5th - 8th centuries CE

Buddhism had become sufficiently incorporated into Chinese culture that its prestige was linked to that of the Chinese state. 'Lai hua', meaning 'come and be transformed', was the promise of a higher culture and consciousness for those who came to pay tribute at the Chinese capital. In the 8th century this was the Tang capital of Changan, on the site of modern-day Xi'an. It was one of the great cosmopolitan cities in the world - like Baghdad and Constantinople - and the terminus of the Silk Road. This first international age of China celebrated difference and even elevated to the heights of its artistic accomplishments 'foreigners' such as the poet Li Bai (Li Po), who was born in Central Asia. So intermingled had the Chinese aristocracy become in the previous centuries - through diplomatic intermarriage and usurpations of the imperial throne among rival states that "the distinction between the various 'barbarian' groups and the Chinese in North China had become highly theoretical" (Reischauer and Fairbank 1970: 153).

With the Chinese having absorbed Buddhism as their main religion, and it having gained imperial patronage, this 'foreign' spiritual philosophy flowed out again as a common bond abroad. This was the period when the celebrated monk Xuan Zhuang (Hsuan Tsang), one of some 200,¹ went to India to bring back Buddhist texts. Southeast Asia, too, was part of the Buddhist networked world that prevailed during the age of pilgrimages. The desire on the part of Chinese monks "to refresh and purify their scriptural tradition" (De Casparis and Mabbett 1992: 292) through travel provided a chronicle of places visited and cultures experienced. The first such account of a traveller visiting archipelagic Southeast Asia came at the beginning of the 5th century, when the Chinese monk Fa Xian (Fa Hsien) journeyed to India, via Central Asia, and then down through Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia in the sea voyage back to China. This he called *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms* (Fa Hsien, 1986), now known as *Travels of Fa Xian*.² Fa Xian sailed to Sumatra or Java (it is not clear which of the

¹ Reischauer and Fairbank (1970: 146) note that nine were actually Koreans.

² On the various translations, see Percell 1965: 13, footnote 15.

two), and stayed there some five months awaiting the Southeast monsoon to enable the sea voyage back to China (FitzGerald 1993: 6-8). In his description of the ship passengers and the apparent regularity of these voyages, it appears that Chinese merchants were familiar with the region (see *ibid.*; Wolters 1967: 139-59; Slamet-Velsink 1995: 91; Hall 1981: 39; Hall 1992: 194). Indeed, the all-sea route between Indian and China via the Straits of Melaka has been dated from 350 CE (Hall 1992: 194).

By the end of the 7th century, another famous Chinese pilgrim, I-Ching visited Palembang, the centre of the maritime empire of Srivijaya which was also on record as presenting tribute to the Chinese emperor. Palembang conducted a high volume of trade in Chinese, Middle Eastern, and Indian goods, as well as spices and scented woods from Maluku (the Spice Islands) and Sumatra (SarDesai 1994: 42). That which concerned I-Ching, however, was Palembang's attraction as a Buddhist centre of learning with over a thousand monks. I-Ching spent four years there translating Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit to Chinese (Hall 1981: 48). Chinese pilgrims-cum-scholars also often stopped at Borobodur close to Yogyakarta, in central Java, whether on the journey to or from India, or as a destination in its own right. Besides Borobodur, two other great Buddhist monuments in Central Java attracted pilgrims - the temple complexes of Candi Sewu at Prambanan and the nearby Candi Plaosan.

Clearly this was a time of strong people-to-people and not only ruler-to-ruler diplomacy. The temper of the times recognised the legitimacy of the pursuit of spiritual treasures alongside material ones. Wealth accrued on both counts. Political patrons, too, gained at various levels (religious merit, commercial expansion, enhanced legitimacy, compatible alliances) from propagation of the system. What did the dharma of this era signify?

Wang (1992: 12) describes the period of the pilgrimages as "a time when Chinese shared a way of life with some of the people of the Nanyang and when a stronger bond existed between them than was possible before or ever after." De Casparis and Mabbett (1992), too, note, "a cosmopolitan oecumene of Buddhist culture disseminated across Asia by travelling monks". Borthwick (1992: 33) also remarks upon this religiously networked regionalism:

Perhaps no single cultural phenomenon has unified the entire Asian continent to the extent that Buddhism did in the fourth through the ninth centuries . . . , for even though it was to be supplanted in later centuries by the vicissitudes of political change and rival religious movements, it alone during this period was able to culturally unite much of Asia within the apolitical embrace of belief and discipline.

Reischauer and Fairbank (1970: 147) state, "probably half the world's population were believers in the Indian religion [of Buddhism] at this time". They go on to say that (pp. 147-8): "It blanketed the whole of the Asian continent, except for Siberia and the Near East, giving to this vast area a degree of cultural unity that has never been matched since then."

II Sino-Javanese Relations During the Mongol Phase

Regular voyaging of Chinese to Southeast Asia occurred during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) and increased in the late 13th century under the subsequent foreign rule of the Mongols (Reid 1996: 17). This increased interaction also included military intervention, an unusual development in China's traditional relations with the region. It is to be remembered, however, that under the Mongols' Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), China was led by a martial culture. Its emperor, Khubilai Khan, was the grandson of one of history's 'world-conquerors', Chinggis (Ghengis) Khan, who had created through wars of conquest an empire across the Eurasian expanse linking Asia, the Middle East and Europe up to the Danube. It was the largest the world had seen and provided secure passage for merchants across a Mongol confederation of khanates, with the Great Khan as nominal ruler over all. Khubilai Khan himself had been elected Great Khan in 1260, though by this generation rivalry and dissension began to emerge among the Mongol nobility. His cousin Khaidu staged a revolt in 1268 and took over control of the Central Asian Khanate of Changhadai. However, he was unable to secure the Mongolian homeland that was part of this khanate (Cohen 2000: 146-7; Reischauer and Fairbank 1970: 273). Khubilai would not let go of Mongolia, the source and centre of the Mongol empire. Moreover, he sought further conquests in Asia to reinvigorate his empire, and sought religious affirmation of his imperial prowess. In this regard, Hall (1981: 86) records that Khubilai underwent two dedication ceremonies as a Jina-Buddha, one in 1264 and another in 1269, which he suggests "signalized his adoption of a programme of further Mongol conquests" (ibid.). Reischauer and Fairbank (1970: 278) note that he was also declared by the Buddhist clergy a cakravartin - a universal emperor under the Buddhist ideal. It was only two years after the second consecration that he commenced the Yuan dynasty of China, even though it was still some years hence, in 1276, before he took the Southern Song capital of Hangzhou. Having done so, it was not long before a number of archipelagic tributary states, including Pelambang in 1277, Jambu-Malaya in 1281, and Samudra-Pasai in 1282 (Hall 1992: 217) sent envoys to the new emperor to continue trading privileges with China.

However, not all the old tributaries of imperial China chose to recognise "the Mongol upstarts" (SarDesai 1994:48). Those that refused were to be coerced into submission, a situation that would entail "a Mongol governor, taxes, and military corvee" (Reid 1996: 17). Khubilai Khan's forces were ultimately unable to achieve these ends but his disruptions did cause a redrawing of the geostrategic map, with populations fleeing from the independent kingdom of Nanzhou (today's Yunnan in southwestern China) to the upper Mekong, establishing a capital at Chiengmai. Ayutthaya grew at the expense of Angkor. Pagan lost its unity. The Malay peninsula came under Thai influence. Nonetheless, at the time, the new Chinese emperor was determined to gain the allegiance of rebel Southeast Asian states, particularly the strategically vital region of the Melaka Straits. To this end, a punitive expedition of 20,000 attacked Java in 1293. But despite their military credentials, the Mongols ultimately lost to an ambitious and manipulative Javanese, Raden Vijaya. How could this occur?

Java's Strategic Defeat of the Mongols.

On the part of the Mongols, internal rivalries and external resistance, eroded Khubilai Khan's reputation. He encountered repeated resistance from the Japanese, who were assisted by storms that destroyed the approaching Mongol ships. Tropical Southeast

Asia, too, confronted the Mongols with determined resistance - often in the form of guerilla warfare (which was employed to good effect in more recent times) - and an alien climate in which the Mongol troops fared badly (Cohen 2000: 145). Domestic politics, be it his own or that of his intended vassal state, ultimately proved more treacherous than the menace of armies or nature.

The domestic politics of Java concerns two key characters, the last King of Singosari, Kertanagara, and his son-in-law, Raden Vijaya, the first king of Majapahit. Kertanagara, who came to the throne in 1268, was a trantic practitioner of the Siva-Buddha cult, who sought spiritual unification of his kingdom. He did this through enhancing his divinity via a consecration ceremony (as had Khubilai Khan, see above) in 1275 to make him a Buddha-Bhairava (Hall 1981: 84). Why, one may ask, did his kingdom need spiritual unification? There appear to be two reasons: divisions of the past and an impending danger in the future. As to the first, it concerned a perceived "curse of division". As Hall (1981: 83-84) explains:

Kertanagara believed that in order to defeat the centrifugal tendencies in Java he must combat the curse of division and strife laid upon the country by the action of the ascetic Bharada, who was believed to have carried out the partition of Airlangga's kingdom [Airlangga, reigned 1019-42, Java, son of a Balinese king and a Javanese princess]. Hence he erected his own statue in the guise of Aksobhya, a meditative Buddha on the spot where Bharada lived.

The second reason to seek Java's spiritual unification was the need to prepare to resist an impending war with an expansionist China. Emperor Khubilai Khan's forces had fought Nanchao, Pagan, Champa and Annam, though with little success in the case of Champa and Annam. Kertanagara's unification policy also entailed expansion. A large and unified kingdom was probably viewed necessary to meet the advancing Mongol threat. This meant the inclusion of, at least, Madura and Bali, and possibly the west coast of Borneo and the Malay peninsula (Hall 1981: 89). How this was done - by winning them over with his spiritual prowess into a 'holy alliance' or by military means - is not clear from the sources (see FitzGerald 1993: 84; Hall 1981: 86-88). Kertanegara's preparations and knowledge of the Mongol defeats (via his contacts with the ruler of Champa) must have emboldened him sufficiently to refuse the Mongol request for Java's submission. Moreover, he sent the Mongol delegation back to the Emperor of China (Khubilai Khan) with either a literal or a figurative 'loss of face' (Hall 1981: 88; FitzGerald 1993: 84). According to the Yuan dynasty records, Khubilai Khan told his military commanders (Groeneveldt 1960:22):

When you arrive at Java you must clearly proclaim to the army and the people of that country, that the imperial Government has formerly had intercourse with Java by envoys from both sides and has been in good harmony with it, but that they have lately cut the face of the imperial envoy Meng Ch'i [and a number of subordinate officers who are named] and that you have come to punish them for that.

Khubilai Khan sent a reprisal force of a thousand ships and 20,000 men to Java in 1293. However, in the previous year rebellious vassals, under the leadership of Prince Jayakatwang of Kadiri, took advantage of Kertanegara's spiritual unification mission abroad to topple the Singasari dynasty. Kertanegara was killed in his capital in 1292 by Jayakatwang. Kertanegara's son-in-law, Crown Prince Raden Vijara, who began construction of a new capital (and what was to be a new dynasty), which he called

Majapahit, persuaded the Mongol expedition to support him as the new king by helping him to defeat Jayakatwang. In return he promised to submit to Khubilai Khan. When he succeeded in his objective, with the help of the Mongols, he turned upon them and forced them to retreat from Java. After defeating the Mongols, the new king, Vijaya, made peace with them and resumed trade with China.

It may be concluded that while Vijaya outsmarted the Mongols and removed them from Java's political scene, their intervention did rescue much of Kertanagara's unification work, and allowed the new empire of Majapahit (1293- 1528) to rule over the archipelago. Hall (1992: 179) attributes to Kertanagara the first evidence of "the idea of a great archipelagic empire ruled by Javanese, which came to be expressed in the term *nusantara*". SarDesai (1994: 46) regards 1290 as a crucial year for the realisation of this idea as this was when Kertanagara absorbed the rival kingdom of Srivijaya and thus controlled both the Melaka and Sunda Straits. Raden Vijaya, who became known as Kertarajasa, thereby rescued through strategic cunning the nusantara project, so that for the next century, Majapahit formed a huge 'mandala'³ state over most of island and peninsular Southeast Asia. The maintenance of the empire fell to yet another player in Java's historical ascent, the Chief Minister Gaja Mada. It was only after his death in 1364 that Majapahit began to decline, especially under the pressure of a Javanese Muslim coalition controlling the northern ports (Barwise and White 2002: 70;). Majapahit finally succumbing in 1528 when the royal family fled to Bali, the last enclave of Hinduism in Indonesia.

The Mongols, as representatives of China, not only inadvertently fostered a vast Javanese empire by their intervention on the Crown Prince's behalf, but also left behind three significant advantages for the great trading kingdom: shipbuiding technology that produced the large 500-600 tonne 'junks' (from the Javanese 'jong') cargo vessels; Chinese coinage that became the unified currency of trade in the archipelago (see Lach and Van Kley 1993: 1350); and a population of Chinese who intermarried and hence produced Sino-Indonesian communities (see Reid 1996: 17-21). These engaged in commerce and proved to be suitable as envoys to the Chinese capital.

III The 'Cultural Brokers' from the 14th Century Onwards

Thus from the 14th century, diplomatic and trade interactions were fostered by what Reid (1996: 28; 2000: 65) terms 'cultural brokers' to refer to those Chinese who had settled in Southeast Asia and then become the local envoys to the Middle kingdom, much as they still do today, especially in trade and investment. Reid (1996: 27) cites a study of Chinese imperial records that indicates half of Java's envoys to China in the 15th century bore Chinese names. That many of the emissaries with Chinese names also had "Southeast Asian personal names and titles" indicates, as Reid (ibid.) puts it, "a process of localisation was underway".

It may be added here that the cultural brokers operated from both sides. Just as notable Javanese envoys of Chinese origin, such as Chen Yen-xiang and Ma Yong-

³ This is the Sanskrit word that was used in Hindu-Buddhist Indonesia to refer to kingdoms. It connotes the idea of an exemplary centre and a periphery loyal vassal states. (See Miksic 1996: 57; Dellios 2003.)

liang (Reid 1996: 29; 2000: 65-66), conducted diplomacy with China, Muslim Chinese, such as the celebrated Ming Admiral Zheng He (Cheng Ho) and Ma Huan (Reid 2000: 66), enhanced China's diplomatic presence in the Archipelago in the 15th century. Between 1405 and 1433, Zheng He led seven imperial expeditions into Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, visited 40 states and enrolled 35 of them as tributaries (see Pan 1990: 3-4; Suarez 1999: 48; and Menzies 2002). He came to Semarang, Central Java in 1406 with a fleet of 62 vessels and 28,000 sailors. A temple, Gedung Batu, has been built on the site where he is said to have meditated for the night after stepping ashore. According to an article in *Tempo* (2003), Zheng He is revered not only by the Chinese, but by the wider community:

Since Cheng Ho helped carry Islam to Java, and the construction of Gedung Batu commemorates the faith's arrival here, this temple has become a rare 'double sanctuary' that incorporates Javanese mysticism, social mores as well as interfaith belief system.

This makes the premises sacred to Taoists [Daoists], Buddhists and Muslims alike. The sight of Indonesians wearing the *peci* (traditional cap) in the temple's interior, carrying incense sticks, praying in a Chinese *klenteng* (temple) to a Chinese admiral, gives one hope that these two races will one day live in harmony.

Islam, like Buddhism, had established itself in the trading ports of both Southeast Asia and China via Middle Eastern traders, most notably Yemeni, who even before their conversion to Islam, traded with India, Southeast Asia, and thence to China where evidence of a Muslim presence dates from the early 8th century.

Cultural brokerage would therefore benefit from familiarity with the two world religions, Buddhism and Islam, that helped to expand local horizons to a vast network of trading ports and pilgrimage sites. Muslims also travelled overland to China, as had the Buddhists before them, thereby adding a continental depth to the maritime reach of the region which coloured Sino-Indonesia relations. To be a cultural broker in the relatively cosmopolitan period of 'classical'⁴ Southeast Asia would have been a well suited occupation of the times, as it is also in the present era when economic globalisation has created a demand for transcultural competencies. Such was the transformative role of political and trade relations within eastern Asia that notions of identity were highly contingent. As Reid (1996: 21) notes of the first half of the 15th century: "The categories 'Chinese', 'Javanese', and 'Muslim' should not be seen as mutually exclusive at a time when links with the Chinese and Islamic heartlands were tenuous in the extreme." Moreover, ". . . the label 'Chinese' was no more clear-cut than

⁴ There is no standard periodisation and terminology to designate pre-colonial Southeast Asia. However, many have designated it 'classical'. Osborne (2000: 16) employs 'classical' as "a useful but highly qualified historical metaphor" suggestive of the "greatness of Greece and Rome". The term 'classical' thus employed highlights the existence of a high culture in Southeast Asia, and not only in the better known civilisational centres of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, China and India. Gesick (1983: 7) justifies the use of 'classical' as a term of convenience "to denote a recognizable genus of Southeast Asian polities". Barwise and White (2002) regard 'early' Southeast Asia as covering the period of prehistory to c. 500 CE; its 'classical' phase as 500-1500; 'early modern' occurs 1500-1800; and 'colonial' from 1800 to 1941. Miksic (1996) provides a chronological chart which periodises Southeast Asian history according to the following periods and approximate dates: early prehistory, 2,000,000 - 10,000 BCE; late prehistory, 10,000 BCE - 200 CE; protohistory, 200 - 600 CE; early classic, 600 - 900 CE; middle classic, 900 - 1250 CE; late classic, 1250-1500 CE; and early Islam, 1500-1600 CE. Some scholars prefer to call the classical period 'early' Southeast Asia (Tarling 2001), 'earlier' Southeast Asia (Wolters 1999), and 'early modern' (Reid 2000).

the label 'Javanese', as indicated in the use of 'Tartar' or 'Mongol' in the earliest Javanese references to them" (Reid 2000: 68-69). Just how unclear the label 'Javanese' was may be gleaned from its application to "people of the *pasisir* [trading] ports - Muslim, commercially oriented, and multi-ethnic in origin" (Reid 2000: 72).

A sense of difference may be found between the merchant class and nobility, rather than being Chinese or Javanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim. Indeed, the Javanese nobility claimed Chinese ancestry (as reported by Portuguese and Spanish writers of the time, see Lach and Van Kley 1993: 1301; Reid 2000: 73); and both the Chinese and Indonesians appeared, at one time, to link themselves to Alexander the Great, thereby broadening the scope of their ancestral prestige. The following excerpt from *The Malay Annals* (Leyden 2001: 173-4) is illustrative:

This letter is dispatched from beneath the sandals of the feet of the King of Heaven [the Chinese emperor], to be placed above the diadem of the Raja of Malaca [sic]. "Verily we have heard that the Raja of Malaca is a great raja, for which reason we have desired his friendship and attachment, because we are also descended from Raja Secander [Iskandar] Zulkarneini, and of the same extraction as the Raja of Malaca. There is no raja in the universal world greater than me . . .

One Acehnese ruler of the early 17th century was known as Iskandar Muda (1607-36). Also in Sumatra, the Minangkabau royal family claimed descent from Iskandar. Their official letters, Drakard (1999:154) observes, "sometimes carried three seals, representing the rulers of Minangkabau, China and Rum [Ottoman empire], all three of whom were said to be descended from Iskandar Zulkarnain".⁵ These letters were regarded as part of Sumatran domestic politics in that they glorified the ruler and provided "grants of authority" to local officials (ibid.: 155).

Such universalism, premised on the view of the sacred origins of kingship and the political prestige this entailed, came apart under the racially divisive policies of the European colonial powers. There is an instance of a court case in Cirebon, Java, in the late 17th century, which held two forms of identification of an accused murderer. One was the local Cirebonese identification of him by his title, Ki Aria Marta Ningrat (no personal name was given), indicating he was a high official. The Dutch (VOC), by comparison, identified him in their records as 'Chinees' (Chinese). According to Anderson (1991: 167), who draws attention to this court case: "It is clear that the Cirebonese court classified people by rank and status, while the Company [VOC] did so by something like race." Reid (2000: 81) regards such distinctions as an indication of "a new separation of functions. Commerce became identified as the sphere of culturally distinct Chinese . . . making it easier for Javanese and Dutch rulers jointly to suppress the 'Javanese' commercial dynamism of the *pasisir*". In this new period, marked by colonial rule, Sino-Indonesian 'cultural brokers' could no longer represent the Javanese court to the Chinese emperor. Rather, they became the intermediaries between the Europeans and the local communities in many respects - including the unpopular occupation of tax collecting (Fernando and Bulbeck 1992: 2) This transition from the respectable profession of diplomacy, in which localised Chinese carried the honoured titles of 'patih' and 'arya' as representatives of the Javanese tribute

⁵ Iskandar Zulkarnain means 'Alexander the two-horned one'. This refers to the story of his deification through the Egyptian god Ammon, whose temple Alexander visited for oracular advice. Alexander is depicted with two horns on coins which were widely used as currency for trade in the Middle East and Asia, as were the Chinese coins noted above.

missions to Ming China (see Reid 2000: 65, 82; 1996: 27-28), to intra-regional traders during Ming isolationism,⁶ to one of reviled colonial intermediary, set the scene for anti-Chinese sentiment in modern Indonesia.

Under the structure of colonial rule, the Chinese become a source of envy and hostility, not only in Indonesia but throughout Southeast Asia. As Hsien Rin (1982: 145) elaborates:

The colonial societies of Southeast Asia were characterized by ethnic pluralism. An overseas Chinese society was an economic and social layer between the dominant imperialist white society and the native societies. The Chinese became mediators between the two other cultural groups which co-existed, but lacked any real communication. In this way the status of the Chinese as an intermediate group of traders became firmly established, and they soon controlled national economies. Such gains greatly encouraged the Chinese to maintain their own cultural identity. In doing so, however, they could not avoid racial and economic conflicts with native societies with which they, too, lacked communication. These conflicts did not become overt until the period before World War II, when the white strata put more emphasis on the three-tiered social structure for their own purposes of control.

Today ethnic Chinese form the merchant class in Southeast Asian countries, creating a network of Asian (and often global) business. Many are investing directly back into the Chinese economy, thereby contributing to an economic Greater China. Most of China's direct foreign investment comes from overseas Chinese. Such a vast and wealthy network might even be regarded as an echo of former times of Chinese grandeur when the tribute-trade system prevailed. That the Chinese diaspora are still treated, in some parts of Southeast Asia, as a 'scapegoat' in times of economic trouble was demonstrated during the Indonesian crisis which culminated in May 1998 with rioting and destruction of Sino-Chinese lives and property. Ethnic Chinese have also served as the meat in the proverbial sandwich at a time of major political transition in modern Indonesia. This occurred in 1965 when the New Order regime of President Suharto was launched after an abortive coup.

IV Suharto's Ancestral Habits

Indonesia's experience of European colonialism was protracted (from the 17th century) and indirect, as the Dutch preferred to use local rulers to implement their policies. This meant that Indonesia reached independence in 1949 as modern state with traditional power structures still in place. The result was that after 17 governments in 12 years, efforts at constitutional democracy were abandoned in favour of what became known as 'Guided Democracy' - in effect, the charismatic leadership politics of Sukarno. As he became increasingly embroiled in political faction-fighting, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) steadily grew in power, and the Army - which saw itself as the guardian of Indonesia's hard-won independence - became alarmed (see Osborne 2000: 190-1; Sukma 1999: 45-46). Thus three key political forces were in triangular play (Elsen 2001: 88-89; Sukma 1999: 29): Sukarno

⁶ With the passing of China's naval supremacy and the onset of Ming isolationism in the latter 15th and 16th centuries, private traders increasingly took over Chinese commercial expansion into Southeast Asia. This was often a dangerous task for the state did not support such private enterprise. Indeed it had outlawed all private overseas trade until 1567 when a system of licensed private trade was introduced.

himself at the apex of the triangle, with the Army and the PKI as oppositional forces which he sought to control. In reality, one (the PKI) gained more from his radicalism than the other (the Army) which felt increasingly threatened by it. The parliament and the cabinet were by now, under 'Guided Democracy', marginalised from the political contest (Elson 2001: 89).

All three players were well armed with their charismatic power. Sukarno was a traditional 'man of prowess',⁷ who was seen have a surfeit of spiritual power enabling him to command the masses. To this end, he engaged in theatrical politics, communicating by slogans and symbols, and presenting himself as a heroic ruler in a world of deceit. However, this also revealed a problem he had, one which went against Indonesian political culture. To quote Pye (1985: 114):

Sukarno repeatedly set impossible goals for Indonesia and then found that he had been confounded by conspiracies. His behavior would have been more consistent with Javanese norms if he had set modest objectives and then been lavish in extolling his good fortune in achieving them.

The Army's charismatic power came from its heroic struggle against the Dutch, eulogised in the subsequent nation-building effort of such a vast and diverse country. Indeed, the Army's cohesion was seen as a fortifying element in a fragile political construct, as well as its power to enforce politics. One potential weakness of the Army was its ideological disposition (as guardians of the revolutionary struggle for independence), and hence its capacity to not only enforce, but define politics. In other words, as Mao Zedong famously said in his *Little Red Book*, "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun". Less well known is his subsequent statement: "The Party must control the gun, and the gun must not be allowed to control the Party." Like China's dual purpose civil-military armed forces, Indonesia's 'dwifungsi' armed forces functioned in this expanded manner of political guardian. It is a potential weakness in that it can militarise politics, so that the gun controls the party and the people. The Army's drive to be involved in politics was accompanied by a second weakness, an increasing desire by those in its upper echelons to engage in business.

The Indonesian Communist Party exploited this weakness with its criticisms of 'bureaucratic capitalists', which was directed at the Army (Elson 2001: 95). The PKI thus also benefited from the charisma of a radical ideology by championing left-wing causes. Moreover, it tapped into Sukarno's anti-Western rhetoric, even though he was a major political force to contend with. However, the PKI's appeal to "revolutionary fervour", as if it hoped to come to power "by acclamation", was counteracted by the reality of its minimal representation in cabinet and the Army's coercive power (ibid.: 89). Despite its lack of a firm political and military support base, the PKI was thought to have instigated, along with China's support (which Sukarno cultivated), the infamous coup d'état of 1965. This caused the Army - as 'guardians' - to step in.

From the middle of October 1965 throughout the first half of 1966, a series of acts of 'popular revenge' against the communists were launched by local army commanders, Muslim and other youth groups, and by village 'volunteer guards'. (Sukma 1999: 48-49)

⁷ On the use of this term, see Wolters 1999; Dellios 2003.

By conservative estimates, 250,000 people were killed. Many were ethnic Chinese. President Sukarno empowered General Suharto to restore order; the PKI was declared illegal. In 1967, Sukarno's Old Order was replaced by Suharto's New Order bureaucratic politics. The military propped up Suharto's system, and the whole enterprise was run according to the traditional patron-client relationships well known to Indonesians. He also competed with Sukarno as a 'man of prowess', ignoring his predecessor as the proclaimer of independence and formulator of the national ideology of Pancasila (Schreiner 2002: 200). Suharto even chose different national heroes to those of Sukarno: Suharto's were more representative of the regional diversity of Indonesia, compared to Sukarno's stronger Java bias (Schreiner 2002: 186-7). Sukarno's place in Indonesian history was left ambivalent. Suharto, by comparison, strode upon the stage of stability and development. Everything that Sukarno was, Suharto was not. If anything, Suharto's avoidance of emotionalism played to Javanese notions of spiritual power. Again quoting Pye (1985: 114-5):

[Sukarno's] sense of drama did help unite the country, but his excessive display of emotion violated the Javanese notion that true power is a subtle matter, and that the real leader should be one who can maintain a balance between his inner emotions and his formalistic and almost ritual-like moves.

Above all, Sukarno's radical Chinese connections in the form of a Jakarta-Peking axis and his domestic revolutionary rhetoric that fuelled the PKI, became the brunt of Suharto's policies. Sukma (1999: Ch. 3) regards the China-PKI-ethnic Chinese linkage as the threat base upon which Suharto was able to justify - and hence maintain - his New Order. Without China his regime was virtually baseless. In this, China-Indonesia relations appear to be both symbiotic and reflective of the past. China under the Mongols attacked Java in 1293, but ultimately lost to an ambitious and manipulative Javanese, Raden Vijaya. More recently, Marxist-inspired China found common anti-imperialist cause with independent Indonesia. It was also when the Middle Kingdom came under the sway of a foreign ideology, Soviet-inspired Communism, that relations with Jakarta found a common anti-imperialist cause. Yet this axis of understanding also served the machinations of Javanese politics and the rise to power of a Javanese general, Suharto.

Ironically, China - not Indonesia - is celebrated today as a strategic culture of deception, as popularised by the writings attributed to the classical military strategist, Sun Tzu or Master Sun. Yet in early Sino-'Indonesian' relations it met Java as an invader who was defeated through another master *dalang* (puppeteer) of deception (Raden Vijaya), and in more recent history as an ideologue of struggle, a posture at odds with the traditional Chinese emphasis on Confucian and Daoist harmony. As to the modern-day *dalang*, former president Suharto, his anti-Communist (and hence anti-China) cause lent legitimacy to a regime of reward and punishment. It was one which mirrored both its Maoist opponent in Peking, as well as China's legalists and militarists of an earlier age. In both these historical illustrations of Sino-Indonesian encounters, China is represented by a foreign dynasty or ideology, and Indonesia is played out by a master manipulator and, ultimately, usurper.

Conclusion

A perennial geopolitical concern of large nations is that of fragmentation and integration. A safeguard may well be found in the yet larger unit of the region within which creative and productive energies may be deployed. In the past this was demonstrated during the period of the pilgrimages, 5th - 8th centuries, when religious values, a free flow of trade, and committed leaders appeared to be the three characteristics of worth. It remains to be seen whether the current nascent regionalism of eastern Asia - especially between the two giants, China and Indonesia - produce a similar harmony of intent despite an absence of a unified religious community. The secular state system is unlikely to yield readily to such a concept, though it is becoming accustomed to an emerging international civil society of government and non-government organisations.

Interestingly, a Muslim community or 'ummah' has been identified as the aspiration of Islamic militants for Southeast Asia. Thus while religion may be regarded positively as a belief system that unites populations and that has universalist appeal, it also has its territorial counterpart that lends itself to exclusionary claims. As political geographer Muir (1997: 23) points out, the ummah is "the place where Muslims live" running from "Morocco and Mauretania to Malaysia and Indonesia". In Islam there are also the related notions of a zone of peace, 'Dar al Islam', and its counterpart, 'Dar al Hub', a zone of potential violence populated by non-believers (see Sivan 1998). This suggests that despite the Qu'ran supporting democratic ideas, human rights and equality,⁸ like other religiously-based communities, its ideological misuse is conceivable. This has happened in the Middle East, South Asia and Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland and the Balkans. It may happen in eastern Asia, though the two countries with the largest Muslim populations, Indonesia and China, do not exhibit the political culture within which it can become imbedded. Moreover, both countries reflect a syncretic capacity culturally and a statist centralism politically.⁹ It is unlikely they would share power with any competing religious interest, as China's outlawing of Falun Gong has demonstrated.

While culturally different, Indonesia and China appear to have more in common than meets popular perception. They are large multi-ethnic nations attempting to maintain their unity in the face of centrifugal forces. Globalisation in the present era has also made regional relations even more imperative for maintaining national strength. Internal stability appears to be best served by regional integration on the basis of common cultural, commercial and national interests. It is also more ably expressed in an ethic of respect that prevailed in past periods, not only between nations but also between peoples. Unless internal divisions are healed, or at least better managed, external relations are unlikely to escape the manipulative forces of domestic politics. In an age which has seen the rise of militant Islam, and along with it, an increasingly

⁸ As Carey (2003: 15) points out, the precepts of democracy are supported by concepts of community (*ummah*), consultation (*shura*) and consensus (*ijma*); human rights by the right to life (Qu'ran 6: 151), right to a basic living standard (15: 19), the right to freedom (9: 60), and the right to justice (4: 135); and equality through the Qu'ran's assertion (4: 1; 49: 13) that all human beings are equal.

⁹ In the post-Suharto period there has been a new decentralisation to district/local levels. This does not, however, detract from a unitary Indonesian state as the overriding reality.

imperialistic USA, the two largest polities in eastern Asia would do well to heed their history.

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