

## introduction

### CROSS CULTURAL VISION

This is a thematic exploration of the contours of Southeast Asian cultural history. Early history appears mainly as a prelude in recent surveys of the region, as most concentrate on political and social history while emphasising the modern transformation.<sup>1</sup> In contrast in this overview our concentration is on cultural and religious life and an eye is trained to the power of ancient social orientations. Early traditions are foundational not only through having shaped social life within historical societies, but also as cohesive patterns still evident in recent practices.

We must note at once that "tradition" is not only a reference to the dead cultures of ancient elites, as may be assumed. The term refers to culture in general, including its popular manifestations. Traditions are clearly dynamic and changing, not static, as they are communicated and transformed through time. Our focus is on deeply rooted cultural patterns which have shaped local beliefs and social interactions through the primary phases of regional evolution into the present.

An approach to Southeast Asia through focus on its local substratum, that is through underlying indigenous patterns, will necessarily stretch the limits of ingrained western cultural visions and mental habits. But effort to incorporate non-western indigenous perspectives is essential to generating a truly global worldview. Globalisation may characterise our time but it also remains intensely problematic. Thus this study, situated within emergent modern global culture, is integral to the processes of cultural transition we all participate in within the present.

Conventionally we imagine that history refers primarily to political events and high cultures. While no longer concentrating exclusively on dynastic lists and dating battles, the grand

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<sup>1</sup> Sakar

narratives of states still appear as the core of our narratives. Insofar as we maintain this view implicitly elites, who are at the centre of the texts they produce, are our primary subject. In these preliterate or illiterate peoples are left speechless and out of sight, along with women, workers and peasants. Yet the same voiceless peoples underwrite the struggles which are recorded; they are the cannon fodder of historical process, their invisible lives are expended as glorified princes and generals engage.

Fundamentally the project of history must touch the whole of society, taking in everyday life and ordinary people insofar as possible. Excellent recent works, not only touching Southeast Asia but in every field of history, are advancing in this direction. Here we will not concentrate on the chronology of political events, nor on transitions between dynasties, kingdoms and governments. Instead the aim is to characterize the *principal idioms* of local cultural life, identifying key structures which shape patterns of social interaction. We will deal with the evolution of these patterns of cultural meaning, as reshaped through time, rather than focussing on "what happened" in particular times and places.

Radical transformations have occurred as classical civilizations, world religions and modern media interacted with the prehistoric cultures of Southeast Asia. Each transformation has been characterized by complex interplay; early traditions have been reformed rather than eliminated in every phase. Because local cultures *framed* each process and stage of adaptation, they gave distinctive flavour and meaning to ideas and practices, which were used otherwise elsewhere. Thus historically it is crucial to register the contours of indigenous cultures as a starting point. Only by doing so can we appreciate the local perspectives which have conditioned peoples' reception of new currents of thought and organization.

As new idioms framed local understandings undercurrents of earlier sensibility have been consistently nurtured. When Indian deities, or more precisely the names for them, came into the region many registered as universal references for spirits known already by local names. While Confucianism shaped Vietnamese courts, as

Brahmanic idioms did through most of the region, villagers usually retained ancestral rituals, preserving earlier ideas of spirit and nature. Syncretism, a concept we shall explore shortly, has been a critical mechanism of local historical process. It accounts for the resilience of early cultures, which still resonate in the recesses of social life, and even especially characterises the outlook of Southeast Asians.

In focussing on the predominant cultures and broad epochs of regional evolution this text is neither balanced nor comprehensive. As an introduction it will not adequately represent the rich diversity of local histories. The wet rice producing cultures of the Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese, Khmer, Malay, Tagalog and Javanese, ethnic groups which became dominant, will be closer to the foreground than their many cousins. Focus on classical, mainly Indian inspired, traditions and on the religious institutions of Buddhism and Islam is at the expense of Catholic Filipinos, fishing and trading peoples of the archipelago or hill tribes, like the Karens, on the mainland.

When dealing with the recent past here, another conditioning influence should be borne in mind. In considering what I term "local domestication of modernity", my target is to identify "local voices". This means that primary effort is to illuminate how Southeast Asians themselves contributed to reshaping their recent cultures. This target dictates the necessity of concentrating on the direction and mechanisms of cultural change. The "trajectories" of development are more at issue than detailing of the array of political-economic forces Southeast Asians now negotiate their lives through.

Every survey is selective in precisely the same way this one is. At least implicitly, every text prioritises specific time periods, cultures, social groups or aspects of history. It may seem most natural for us to focus on the recent past, on groups who have become dominant or on economics. But if so that is because within our time and culture we are guided to view those as central and critical to understanding. Consequently those aspects of history

loom largest in our images of what is important in the environment.

Our values lead us to imagine "importance" has been constructed similarly in other times and places; this is not so. Culture appears peripheral in many recent histories, most of which focus on socio-political issues. Because religion is not imagined as central in our life, it also seems less crucial to envisioning the past. Our priorities dictate what we imagine important for understanding lives in earlier times and distant places.

Essentially "religious history" is no more narrow than "political history", yet it is only the latter that we can easily conflate with "history". Religion and politics are each a *dimension* of social life, they touch everyone in all societies notwithstanding whether they think in those terms. However the ways in which those domains are brought into consciousness vary across culture and time and such shifts in priority are in themselves a *central* aspect of the history of culture.

While establishing the broad contours of local history, conceptual tools for inquiry are essential. Quest for information on each topic we touch could fill many books, even occupy lifetimes of scholarly exploration. In this context success depends less on the quantities of "information" communicated than on whether the rich range of issues which can be explored becomes clear. The value of an introductory overview lies in whether directions for further study become sharper. This is primarily an invitation to cultivate awareness of the *structures* of local thought and practice; we do not need to be overwhelmed by a multiplicity of unfamiliar names, places and events.<sup>2</sup>

Even in overview we can open local perspectives and highlight indigenous visions as an agent within history. To grasp those we must entertain unfamiliar animistic and esoteric religious ideas and doing so will test the limits of modernist thought. This does not mean we need to overemphasise the "exotic", as though

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<sup>2</sup> H Benda (1962)

focusing on people "different" in essence from ourselves. However we must bear in mind that insofar as we learn at all in cultural terms we must question ingrained views, learning "from" rather than just "about" the subject. Comparative exploration certainly produces new visions of ourselves. Through it we not only accumulate additional knowledge of places and peoples, but come to more correct understand of the *nature* of culture even in our context.

If we start with the notion that Southeast Asia has been a remote and relatively unimportant backwater of global history, as we are likely to, we betray unconscious bias. Westerners are likely to imagine that studying Southeast Asia is "specialised" or "esoteric". These notions reflect culturally rooted prejudices even when we do not recognise them as such. Even maps, a visual key to imagination of the world in this era, distort perception. The ones we are likely to be most familiar with, such as the backdrops for television news shows, are usually Mercator projections. These grossly exaggerate the size of countries in the northern hemisphere relative to those lying along the equator and we interiorise such imbalanced images subconsciously.<sup>3</sup>

The inherited self-consciousness of every culture prioritizes the lineages it derives from. In Europe those are imagined as leading to classical Mediterranean civilisations, not to "Asia" or "Africa". "Europe" looms larger in our minds than it should, at least larger than is desirable if we seek a balanced view of *world* history. Images of the past are distorted implicitly by our location in time, space and imagination and what we take to be "neutral knowledge" is far from that.

Recent history contributes to distortions. Though Java is roughly the size of England, it has not had comparable global impact in the last three centuries. Thus we are unlikely to imagine that the duration of its history, the scale of its population and the

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<sup>3</sup> M Hodgson called the Mercator projection a 'Jim Crow projection', referring to racially discriminative legislation in the southern United States.

sophistication of its cultures make it as rich in nuance to explore as England. The same could be said for Bengal in South Asia, Szechwan in China or many other equally rich and historic cultures.

Western scholarship is a part of culture, it emerged from *specific* societies which especially validate "rational scientific" thinking. It is closely linked to a "modernism", which shapes social life increasingly everywhere. Modernism is not only a reference to economic organisation since the industrial revolution. It also denotes a complex of ideologies, social practices and contingent values, it is "cultural" as much as economic. As a cultural style it prioritises, that is directs attention toward, the "material conditions of life". Related values, guiding senses of what is important or peripheral to life, filter through to condition academic interpretations as well as popular views of the world.

Since the Enlightenment western scholarship has aimed toward "universal theories" and has been rooted in notions of "evolutionary progress" toward a presumably "superior" scientific view. Recently the self confidence of conventional modernist evolutionary thinking has been challenged. While it is still vigorous, expanding in conjunction with capitalism in many contexts, in the humanities "postmodernism" now disavows earlier "grand theorising". New theories hold that we cannot "wrap the world up", imagining that we will be able to "explain everything" within a theory. We are increasingly aware that implicit assumptions condition *all* theorising, however enlightened, as thought as such is culturally embedded.

To be more pointed, the everyday ideas we feel most deeply secure in, the assumptions we most take for granted, are precisely those which most require testing across cultures. Every comparative discipline has been challenged by cross cultural exploration. Anthropology in the United States, for instance, initially aimed to conceive "culture as such", beyond the way it

may be constructed in specific social contexts.<sup>4</sup> That effort sharpened awareness of ethnocentrism, of how implicit worldviews condition and distort every perception across culture and this "lesson" of anthropology has been assimilated as general knowledge.

Distortion also occurs whenever the producers or consumers of texts assume that societies move toward "the modern condition", as though that is the natural endpoint of history. In a variety of ways assumptions about the present influence imagination of the past. We misunderstand earlier societies if reading them through notions rooted in our context. Enlightenment notions of "equality", for example, are profoundly embedded in western societies. Yet, as Dumont has shown, through exploration of hierarchy in India, our ideas of "equality" are essentially "mythic" in the same terms that notions of "caste" appear to be for western observers.

Comparative exploration produced challenges across disciplines. For example, Freud had stressed the significance of the "Oedipus complex", referring to tensions between father and son, and believed he had arrived at an essential principle of human psychology. Malinowski questioned Freud's theorising. Through research in the Trobriand islands, in Melanesia, he observed that the comparable tension there was between sons and their mother's brother, as the latter were the prime disciplinarians in that context. He concluded that the complex Freud had identified was "culturally constructed", not a universal human pattern.<sup>5</sup>

Insights into how literature, religion, politics and economics related in early Asian societies brings deeper appreciation of the dynamic between domains which are enshrined in isolation within contemporary university disciplines. We are tacitly encouraged to trust explanations based on narrow logics, those of psychology, economics or sociology, as though each domain may be comprehended in and of itself. This approach aims to highlight the

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<sup>4</sup> qualify with refw to early Kroeber etc, its continuing relevance, diffs with British and continental theory, and recent thinking

<sup>5</sup> B Malinowski (1954)

value of multi-disciplinary, as well as comparative, study. In the end each aspect of life can only be comprehended through awareness of its interactions with the total field of existence.

Apart from curiosity about the world or whatever interest we may have in systematic academic cultivation of knowledge, there are utilitarian reasons to explore other cultures. As tourists, businessmen, diplomats or scientists we will not be able to interact harmoniously across cultures if judging others according to norms which apply in the west. Pragmatic concerns are significant, as failures on this front contribute to warfare and international misunderstandings. However ultimately the prime value of cross cultural exploration lies in what we learn of ourselves and pragmatic benefits will be by-products of an expanded, increasingly global, self-consciousness which has intrinsic value.

## chapter 1

### LOCALISING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

As history, the open ended dimension of time, does not start or stop at a particular point, the scope of our subject is immense, even equivalent to the "cultural history of Europe". Southeast Asia resembles Europe in geographical scale, in the depth of its history, in the diversity of its cultures and in the nature of its relation to classical centres. It is crucial to keep this in mind so as to maintain a reasonable perspective on what we can accomplish through this introduction. Two thousand years ago the inhabitants of both regions appeared to be "barbarian" in the eyes of "civilised" neighbours. Northern Europe was subordinated to Rome in the same era that Southeast Asian civilisations were being shaped by India and China. Literacy reached what is now "Vietnam", through China, and "Germany", through Rome, at about the same time; "Burma" became a centre of Indic states shortly after England was incorporated within the Roman empire.

Increasing integration into wider global systems is an overriding theme through Southeast Asian history. Every major transition in the region has been signalled simultaneously by increasing contact with cultures beyond the region and by the intensification of local communications, of interaction within and between localised sub-regions. "Communications", as used here, does not refer only to "technologies", though systems of transport, shipping or media are its most obvious referent. In the broader sense it refers also to patterns of kinship, authority and language, as these, along with material structures, shape and facilitate human interactions, mediate social life and thus provide keys to grasping social evolution.

Southeast Asian peoples first entered written historical records when the rise of complex states occurred in conjunction with transit trade between India and China. The earliest states appear to have emerged hand in hand with the introduction of

writing and ritual ceremonialism, each an instrument facilitating wider social discourse. Roughly a millennium later new waves of Chinese, Islamic and Christian traders increased focus on trade products from the archipelago, bringing an "age of commerce" as they did.<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously again, new religious systems extended literacy from courts into village contexts. With each shift in degree of "external" contact and interaction, regional economies, cultures and social communication changed. At the same time with each step urban life became an increasingly powerful centre of gravity. Within towns, especially on the coasts, infusions of people from beyond the region contributed to progressive cosmopolitanism.

Most periodisations of Southeast Asian emphasise three phases of the recorded past. An initial era of "stateformation" is seen as culminating in "classical kingdoms" which definitively stamped the "core areas" of the region.<sup>7</sup> The latter term refers to the lowland river valleys where wet rice cultivation and dense populations tended to concentrate from early times. Core areas included "Sinic" (that is Chinese inspired) coastal Vietnam (first only in the north) and "Indic" (or Indian derived) states, including Angkor, Pagan, Dvaravati and Mataram, in the valleys of the Mekong, Irrawaddy, Chao Praya, and Progo/Solo rivers.<sup>8</sup> The classical period ended only gradually. Vietnam became independent of China in the 10th century; the earliest Indic states declined somewhat later, between the 13th and 15th centuries.

The second phase of regional history is associated with a proliferation of "traditional" Theravada Buddhist, on the mainland, and Islamic, in the archipelago, states. Neither zone was politically integrated, but within each a cohesive and widely shared religious idiom increasingly defined the rules of everyday life for most people. During this phase Vietnamese also interacted increasingly, and not only through warfare, with neighbouring Cham and Khmer peoples. During the same phase a Spanish Catholic (thus "Hispanic") Filipino society formed in Luzon,

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<sup>6</sup> Reid, SEA in the Age of Commerce.

<sup>7</sup> problematise terms and attribute to Smal

<sup>8</sup> comment on the significance of the shift to Sinic/Indic rather than Chinese/Indian.

constituting a new "core" of literacy. Meanwhile, the ethnically *mestizo* (mixed) Portuguese mercantile empire, brought a new element into the longstanding Asian trade world, one earlier dominated by Champa and Srivijaya. As the era progressed, a new "conquest dynasty", the Dutch East India Company (VOC), incorporated existing Javanese kingdoms while also adopting significant elements of their style and organisation.<sup>9</sup>

The subsequent and more radical "modern" transformation began in the 19th century. This refers to the phase in which local societies have been integrated into a global, industrial and capitalist economy.<sup>10</sup> The successive mediations of imperial, colonial and national institutions mark distinct phases of modern history, but in this context continuities between them override distinctions. Colonialism is viewed here as a vehicle for the transmission of economic and social forms deriving from the industrial revolution. If the first era of recorded regional history brought Southeast Asians into contact with Asian wide religious idioms and systems of power, the second occurred in the context of what McNeil referred to as the "closure of Eurasia", the communicative linkage of Europe and Asia. Finally, within the modern era the region has been integrated within global networks through industrial technology.

"Syncretism" is a key to grasping both indigenous ethos and the mechanisms of cultural evolution of the region.<sup>11</sup> In the western context the term is associated with the branding of Christian heresies. Church orthodoxies self-consciously suppressed this tendency in their contexts and we inherit their view even when repudiating the orthodoxies which generated it. Notable suppressions of "syncretism" occurred in the 4th century, when Church councils denounced Neo Platonic and other

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<sup>9</sup> ref to Smail again for framing these in lectures.

<sup>10</sup> My characterisation follows Benda's influential outline. (1962); Smail's framing is incorporated in DJ Steinberg (1987)

<sup>11</sup> If recently the term comes under question (Wolters 1982 p 53) it may be because the Christian sense of it is still emphasised in our dictionaries.

"heterodox" doctrines. Later, during the Reformation, widespread witch trials, the Inquisition and wars against the Albigensians in France and Italy, essentially aimed to irradicate magical undercurrents from European folk practice. Europeans read "syncretism" as "mixing of fundamentally irreconcilable elements", a sense of the term, rooted in the exclusivist idiom of the "Semitic" religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) which is enshrined in our dictionaries.<sup>12</sup> However the jumbling of diverse elements into one image or "squaring of opposites through pseudo rationality" are not usually what syncretism refers to in the Asian context. To access the notion, as a tool to understanding Asian evolutions, we have to entertain senses of it rooted in local cultures.

Within Asian societies syncretism is facilitated by "ontologies", senses of the real, which register *all being as one*. In animism this idea remains tacit; in mystical religious philosophies it is explicit. According to this notion reality will always appear diverse in the finite "domain of forms", those which humans may mentally grasp. Nevertheless in essence, beyond the "veils" which filter our perception, all is held to be one. "Monism" in this sense underpins dominant premodern convictions throughout Southeast Asia. People have thus read diverse symbolic systems, such as the idioms of various religions, as "surface references" to an invisible and unsayable essence which is unitary. Widespread attribution of significance to this "core" of life has conditioned local cultural evolution. It produced a "syncretic receptivity" through the contingent sense that new symbols can be received as "supplements", additions which enrich by elaboration, rather than as "replacements" for what went before.

### **constructing autonomous histories**

Efforts to present local perspectives have been prominent in recent western texts on Southeast Asian history, as the significance of "external influences" within the region from early times meant

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<sup>12</sup> illustrate and give more of the relevant history

that indigenous identities and volition has often been obscured.<sup>13</sup> In early studies both European and Indian scholars, in particular, viewed Southeast Asia as dominated by external stimuli, so much so that local societies were defined by their relationship to "fertilising influences" from China and India, as is even implied in established labels for "Indochina" or "Indonesia".<sup>14</sup> This view of the region's history positioned Southeast Asians in a predominantly passive role even in relationships which predated obvious subordination of local cultures through European imperialism. Within these images indigenous peoples are presented, just as women have been within patriarchal societies, as like the moon, reflecting dynamism from elsewhere, rather than being their own source of light.

If we view Burma in terms of Indian, SriLankan and English influences, all unquestionably important, the Burmese themselves hardly appear as actors in their own history. In Vietnam locals were systematically instructed to cut their hair, dress and interact according to Chinese customs two thousand years ago. It is easier to register the power of China, as records detailed it, than the role of peasants, invisible within the texts, in the formation of Vietnamese society.<sup>15</sup> External actors usually associated with dominant elites and produced texts. The volition of ordinary actors, especially villagers, is more difficult to register.

The accounts of religious pilgrims or Chinese emissaries do combine with a few local taxation records to allow us to glean insights into everyday life in the region.<sup>16</sup> However few personalities show through the slim sources we have. Court poetry was usually modelled on Indian epics and focused on royalty; and local "histories" were guided by ritual and magical, rather than descriptive, purposes.<sup>17</sup> Courts, together with the foreign influences which had their most lasting impact within

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<sup>13</sup> Smail, Benda, Hall, etc

<sup>14</sup> find good examples

<sup>15</sup> J Holmgren (1980), A Woodside (1971)

<sup>16</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Berg & co debates

them, thus loom larger in historical memory than the peasant world.

The writing of colonial histories brought additional and related problems. The early accounts of European travellers provide substantial insight into local social life, more than we have for earlier periods of history. But colonisers generally also paid most attention to their own interactions. Works were written as though readers, also presumed to be European, "looked over the shoulders" or through the eyes of administrators, entrepreneurs and adventurers.<sup>18</sup>

Early Dutch versions of "Indonesian" history focused on the interaction between Governors and native rulers and the process which brought new groups of indigenous peoples within the colonial framework. Recently similar distortions recur. It is virtually impossible, for instance, to conceive recent Vietnamese history without reference to its consuming wars against the French and Americans. Thus books about "Vietnam" may remain narrations of political and military interaction, as though that interface has been the "whole" of recent history for Vietnamese.

For a variety of reasons it is more difficult to adopt a balanced perspective on Southeast Asian than for European, Chinese or Indian history. Thus it is also not surprising that historians of the region pioneered notions of "autonomous history" during the same period when regional nationalisms matured. In the early years of independence, especially during the 1950s, academic interpreters of the region still usually viewed Asian events through analytical tools, of politics and history especially, which developed in western contexts. Subsequent scholarly correction of early distortions has gone hand in hand with the consolidation of independent states.<sup>19</sup>

More recent scholarly "readings" have gained sociological

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<sup>18</sup> This aspect of colonial historiography was clarified in the 1930s by the Dutch scholar and administrator JC van Leur (1955), who spoke of it as 'history written from the deck of a ship'.

<sup>19</sup> This is JRW Smail's term for this

depth. Gradually it became evident that local actors were at least partly guided by distinctive local notions and could not be understood only through western understanding of political process. Surface events, such as "politics" in formal terms, are now understood as consistently embedded within local social and cultural patterns. Shifts in historical interpretation led to registration of deeply rooted forces active in the postcolonial era.

In setting out to explain why communism became the strongest strand of Vietnamese nationalism, Paul Mus drew on indigenous political culture to explain why "communism" did not "mean", in that context, the same thing western governments assumed it did. Other studies highlighted the debt of recent leaders, notably of the Indonesian President Sukarno, Cambodian Prince Sihanouk and Burmese U Nu, to local notions of power and politics.<sup>20</sup> These studies illustrated how important it can be to employ local conceptual frameworks in order to comprehend events which only ostensibly occur within western political frames.

Recently further gains have come through reassessment of early local texts. Classical Indic texts used to be read by philologists, scholars who concentrate on language in technical terms, as "classical", as of little use to understanding the times and societies which produced them. Now, through interchange between history and literary studies, we draw insights into the nature of society from such texts. Sources for historical understanding do not have to come only through texts which present "straightforward description". Everyday practices of ordinary people are increasingly subjected to the kind of detailed analysis which used to be reserved for elite texts. We are not tied, as we used to imagine we were, to using contemporaneous and descriptive written material for access to information about the past.

In exploring revolutionary transitions to independence

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<sup>20</sup> See the survey of historical interpretation in the last chapter of JD Legge's book *Indonesia* (1980) and the essays in D Marr & A Reid eds, *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia* (1979).sources

historians focus increasingly on local scenes, inquiry is not restricted to the politics and diplomacy of states.<sup>21</sup> "Micro-histories" present events within marginal societies or through previously unnoticed organisations. Social historians push the margins of vision by using interviews, oral histories and local, rather than colonial, archives. These methods arise from growing interest in total social process and open distinctive perspectives through insight into the lives of ordinary people.<sup>22</sup>

To acknowledge that there are problems in constructing history from the "inside" does not resolve them. For European readers it will always naturally be easier to grasp perspectives and values conveyed through compatriot views of events. This is inescapable no matter how conscious our efforts to counterbalance it. Nevertheless there have been significant gains. In new studies, historians certainly register that Southeast Asians cannot be seen simply as "passive recipients" of external influences borne by Chinese, Indian, Muslim, and European actors.

New interpretive problems come to the fore at present. Modernity increasingly consumes the interest of Asians and foreign interpreters alike. Recent trends subordinate "culture" to economic concerns and sheer physical survival is often at issue. Consciousness of the power of modern capitalism, the most evident victor in Southeast Asia today, makes it extremely difficult to register the local forces which are being overshadowed as industry and consumerism boom. Cross cultural knowledge will always remain problematic, in all of the ways I have alluded to, but we nevertheless need to consistently pursue wider perspectives, aiming for insight into the local rules of life insofar as possible.

### **Integrating local visions**

Envisioning a spiral provides an appropriate frame for

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<sup>21</sup> JD Smail (1964); A Kahin (1985); A Lucas (1990); R McVey ed.(1978)

<sup>22</sup> JF Warren (1981;1986)

viewing Southeast Asian cultural history. Doing so opens local perspectives we can incorporate into the linear narratives we are more accustomed to. A spiral is open rather than closed. If traced as rising in circles up a cone it simultaneously encapsulates a line, which we can see as referring to linear movement through time, and a circle, indicating recurrent return to the same point.

Indigenous histories shaped by Indian influence indeed incorporate such movements. The circularity of a "return" can be imagined as like that of the seasons, which recur annually. There is also "progression" within local visions of history, progression such as individuals experience as they mature through life. Cycles may be related to oscillation between times of cohesion, unity or integration, and their counterpoint in periods of division. Linear change is fundamental within European constructions of history, most of which are consumed by ideas of change, but notions of "return" are problematic.

Two aspects of circularity can be suggested within our idiom, they may help us lay the basis for a framework which is congenial to traditional Southeast Asian senses of history. Hegel's vision of history, as a dialectic between "thesis" and "anti-thesis", or Toynbee's reformulation of it as progressive interplay between historical "stimulus" and "response" each provide a model of cycles. Another sense of the circularity which we may imagine within history is harder to grasp. It requires imagining that time and space are relative, that they exist in relation to each other in the same way that mass and energy are conceived to in physics.

Implicitly "time" exists only in relation to timelessness and "change" is only conceivable when implying something constant. History cannot be imagined just as a "one dimensional line through time", as though that is a "given" independent of other features of existence. Nor is stasis in space, as implied by focus on the three dimensional structures of a social system at one point, an adequate basis for grasping evolution. It should not surprise us that adequate conceptualisation of history, as a dynamic process, requires stretches of imagination just as difficult as those we accept as necessary for apt imagination of the physical universe.

Indigenous senses of history vary between cultures and with time. In prehistoric Southeast Asia it is likely that "time" essentially stood still. People must have thought primarily in terms of seasonal and life cycles, not "change".<sup>23</sup> Notions of cyclical repetition become evident with classical times. The rise and fall of dynasties brought oscillation which people noticed, recurrence of concentrated and dissipated power within memories carried across generations.<sup>24</sup>

Early Buddhist and Hindu understandings also contained images of progress. A linearity is implied in those frameworks through suggestion that human beings are moving toward spiritual realisation, not only individually, but collectively within the cycle of history we occupy. Generally linear time, the sense of history emphasised in Semitic religious traditions, including Islam and Christianity, becomes more characteristic in local imagination of history later on.

There is every reason to entertain local visions, admitting the possibility of their "theoretical validity" with the same open mind we should apply to European concepts. These comments do not imply that our constructions of history must operate within terms dictated by local religious worldviews. We do have to understand those to grasp the perspectives of significant local people, but we do not necessarily need to construct our interpretations in their terms. In practice any modification we make in our frame of reference, as we explore other worldviews, effectively comes only as an addition or "supplement" to thinking we began with. At the same time, when the way we imagine change converges with local senses of it, we may be able to incorporate the two within one frame.

Even in our standard terms, as it happens, Southeast Asians have experienced "cycles" as well as linear change. It is not difficult to begin thinking of regional history through a spiral.

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<sup>23</sup> M Eliade

<sup>24</sup> BRO'G Anderson (1972); BJO Schreike (1966); S Kartodirdjo (1972)

India began to affect the region early in the Christian era. Our scanty sources indicate that at first there was a relatively sharp gap between imported religious cultures and the indigenous ancestral spirit world, the prehistoric pattern of the region.<sup>25</sup>

The literate culture of imported civilisation, Sanskrit language and Indian art forms, initially stood quite apart from the village cultures which continued to exist at the base of states. The temples of the earliest kingdoms may have been built according to directly imported Indian architectural manuals and even the styles of their decorative artwork remained close to those evident in Indian temples of the time.<sup>26</sup> Gradually, from roughly the 5th to the 15th centuries, western cultural and art historians think, in Hegelian terms, of a fusion taking place through dialectical interplay. Contacts with India were erratic; interchanges between indigenous courts and villages were continual, so synthesis occurred through time.

The early inscriptions of Angkor in Cambodia and Mataram in Java were in Sanskrit, but by the end of the classical era the Burmese, Thai, Khmer and Javanese all employed Indian based scripts. Similarly the Vietnamese adapted Chinese to produced literature in their own "Nom" characters and language. Like the contemporaneous shifts in Europe, from the Latin of medieval Christianity to the vernacular English of King James, borrowed tools were in the end deployed to generate indigenous meanings in local styles.

In Southeast Asia the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, epic Indian myths, filtered down and mixed with indigenous myths. Over time their heroes gradually seemed less foreign, even literally merging into local landscapes by being enshrined in sacred sites as local ancestral figures. Everywhere temple constructions, like language and myths, became increasingly indigenous over time. "Domestication" is a way of talking about this process, it refers to the way local styles emerged through synthetic blending. What

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<sup>25</sup> C Holt (1967)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

came as "borrowed" culture appeared in the end to be uniquely local.<sup>27</sup>

Courtly Javanese versions of their history hold that the peak of the Indic period came five hundred years ago in Majapahit. The last of their Indic empires, in their terms and ours, it collapsed when assaulted by a coalition of Muslim coastal states. According to local *babad*, literary chronicles, Sabdopalon, a retainer of its last ruler, left the eastern Javanese court, located south of the modern city of Surabaya, and fled towards central Java, stopping at Gunung Tidar.

That hill, in the middle of the island and known as the "navel of Java", is supposed to be where early gods pounded in a nail to keep Java balanced. It is also where Semar, the chief guardian spirit of Java, planted a magical amulet. That is supposed to have subdued the wild spirits of the mountains and the forests, thereby allowing the Javanese to plant rice and thus creating the basis for their civilisation. Semar was incorporated within Indianised mythologies, as a character in Javanese versions of the *Mahabharata*. He appears there as the elder brother of the Indian high god Siva.

As a guardian spirit Semar symbolises, and for those tuned to him manifests, what Javanese take as their deepest identity. According to the same legends, Sabdopalon was an incarnation of Semar and his last task was to instruct followers that Java would be subordinated to external forces for five hundred years, until he was to be reincarnated again. The intervening subordination he is supposed to have predicted is locally read as a reference to the subsequent centuries of Islamisation and Dutch colonialism.

According to our calendar Semar was to incarnate again in 1978 and this prediction was, not surprisingly, particularly prominent in the early 1970s. In myths Semar is identified with commoners, relating to royal warriors as their servant; as ancestral spirit he remains a focal point of active cults. The belief that Semar

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<sup>27</sup> OW Wolters (1982); Q Wales (1974);leMay

was incarnated as Sabdopalon is clearly a local affirmation that in the last days of Majapahit Javanese saw the death of something which they, meaning at least later Javanists but perhaps also those of Majapahit, consider had become their own.

The story of Sabdopalon suggests that in Javanese terms, and notwithstanding the Indic idioms of Majapahit, their local "essence" was present. Their state was not "foreign" because their spirit was alive in it. These myths hold that Semar is the "elder" brother of the Indian god Siva, thus asserting that imported Indian religion had been thoroughly domesticated. Javanese stories expose their own sense of what "syncretic fusion" meant, indigenous people are seen in them as having thoroughly appropriated and transformed imported idioms.

Even today most Javanese, including many very "modern" people, identify themselves as having an "autonomous cultural essence", an identity that transcends the transitions of history. The stories of Semar's reincarnation imply that Javanists, those who come close to making a religion of their traditional culture, project toward future resurfacing of indigenous identity, that they have believed in the inevitability of a return to roots. In their terms this "return" can occur even in modern dress, as it did once in the Indic idiom of old Majapahit, and does not imply "regression" to a past condition.

The Khmer myth of origins presents their ethnic genesis through a story of the marriage of a Brahman with a Naga princess. The Brahman, as a member of the learned priest caste, obviously came from India, the Nagas, dragon like snakes of myth, represent the spirits of the land, the forces the Khmer had earlier identified themselves with. This tale is also an analysis of their own spiritual genealogy, its significance lies not in relation to an event, which may or may not have occurred as suggested, but embedded within a mythology of earth, water and sky. As a myth it states the essentials of relationships, both historical and environmental, which were primary for the living. The test of "mythic truth" lies there, as a statement of relationships rather than "facts".

In the late 1970s the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea brought a virtually incomprehensible effort to eliminate everything that had come from outside. It aimed to eliminate cities, the middle class and Buddhist religious institutions, to return the population to villages and concentrate the economy on rice cultivation. We may interpret the Khmer Rouge as ideologically Maoist and be inclined to explain their actions as a distorted consequence of pressures generated by warfare, especially through American bombing in the early 1970s.

Following the logic of local myth, and without dispensing with our interpretive frameworks, we can also read the Khmer Rouge as representing one local drive, if as warped as Hitler's, to renew the integrity of indigenous identity. In this instance resurrecting the roots of Khmer culture was unfortunately imagined as requiring elimination of every "external" structure. Myths, local versions of history, may inform even outsider understanding of wider events in their context. In the least local visions of history instruct us about the way *some* local actors have thought; they supplement conventional histories by allowing us to penetrate indigenous imagination.

One barrier to entertaining local perspectives in this sense is that we link myth to "fantasy", distinguish that from "history", and imagine the latter is "objective" and "factual". But local frameworks may guide understanding precisely in the way images from the social sciences do and neither should be taken on uncritically. Entertaining indigenous theories on the same plane as our own, does not imply violation of commitment to "testing" theories and evaluating evidence. We should approach Asian theories as carefully as we do western theories, testing rather than dismissing them.

Generally the movement toward autonomous histories has guided scholars to explore social history. Diverse classes and local processes have thus come into view. We appreciate that in each moment of history even local perspectives are multiple and in contention. But for the most part this extension has proceeded

*within* the conventions established by *western* scholarship. While the "range" of our subject has expanded, the "rules of the game" have not changed.

Exploration of political, social and economic process has not made it seem as though the fundamental rules of the scholarly game have been at issue. Focus on culture and religion, on the other hand, sharpens awareness that how we construct our thinking, in effect our culture, influences what we "see" and even "imagine" our subject to be. Constructing "autonomous" regional histories fundamentally depends on challenging the rules which underlie the way we write and imagine history. At least one tacit rule must go.

Scholars are conditioned to maintain division between "subject and object" and Asian "events" become "food" for western "theory". Autonomous models of local history may only be fully achieved when the implicit division between "European" and "Asian" systems of knowledge, implying the subordination of the latter to the former, is broken. Local theories are not just "information"; like western theories they can be relevant as *tools* of analysis. Ultimately our "ways of thinking" about Asian history are as much at issue as "what we think about" if we aim to understand "local perspectives".

### **inventions of tradition**

The notion of "tradition" is highly problematic and requires careful consideration. Related ideas of "East and West", "intuitive and rational", "passive and dynamic" and "traditional and modern" easily lead to misguided stereotyping.<sup>28</sup> Within Asian studies Edward Said's work *Orientalism* has become synonymous with acknowledgment that western scholarship on Asia, which has often maintained such oppositions, has been embedded in imperialistic power relations.<sup>29</sup>

Said showed how the knowledge Europeans cultivated of

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<sup>28</sup> John Steadman, *The Myth of Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

<sup>29</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979).

the "Orient" enshrined unequal power relations, how it was part of the colonial enterprise. He also noted that western scholarship shapes even what contemporary Asians know of themselves, through training by Europeans. Said rested his work on extremes, mainly on Victorian scholarship and almost exclusively on studies of the Islamic world, but in general terms his thesis is instructive.<sup>30</sup>

Within Southeast Asian studies the new generation of scholarship applies analytical tools, borrowed from the humanities and related to Said's work. It is worth pausing to consider the thrust of new thinking. The leading catchwords of fashion in cultural theory are semiotics, poststructuralism, postmodernism and deconstruction. If "modern" refers to industrial societies and the schools of thought associated with it, including the positivist social sciences and the ideas of progress they carry, then "postmodernism" is both "after" it and a critique of it.

The term originated as a designation for styles of architecture and art, but is applied to philosophies, since Nietzsche in the late 19th century, critically concerned with industrial society and reflected in a wide range of cultural theorising. Thus Foucault's exploration of the history of western systems of knowledge, including medical as well as educational structures, exposed their relation to the emergence of the industrial state. He showed how such institutions serve as tools to establish and police disciplines, even in spheres such as personal sexuality, which facilitate the power of increasingly pervasive regulating authorities.

Structuralism is associated in the social sciences first with the French anthropologist Levi-Strauss. His quest for universal ordering principles led to emphasis on systematic paired oppositions, such as those linguists had identified earlier. "Post-structuralism" refers both to works which use structuralist principles as a given and to those which reject this emphasis on formal oppositions. The latter argue that pluralistic everyday

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<sup>30</sup> Similar observations about Said's work are noted at greater length in George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986) p. 1-2.

practices cannot be read strictly through formal and universal rules.

Semiotics arose also through influences from linguistics and language philosophy, but approaches cultures as systems of signs and leads to the conclusion that "meaning" resides in relations between sign systems, systems which are taken as including body language and all sorts of social action along with words. For example, Geertz's anthropological version of semiotics, which has been especially influential in Southeast Asian studies, is linked to the philosophers Mead and Ryle and the position that "...all consciousness is intersubjective, mediated by public communicative forms".<sup>31</sup>

Deconstruction is used for the taking apart or contextualising of practices, a common strategy within all social analysis, and more technically, for analytical practices associated with Said and Derrida. The language of this style of discourse is demanding, as words are used without straightforward definitions. This feature of recent works is integral to new theorising and tied to a resistance to the notions of "definition" and "meaning" maintained in older theories.

New theories insist, in the way they present themselves and about cultural discourses generally, that every discourse or communicative structure rewrites rules, even if always also only through relations with other "texts", that is to say meaning is defined "intertextually". Sequences of definition would be a contradictory entry to these styles of thought, as meanings are seen as made only on the run, remade in use rather than fixed.

These movements push away from universalising generalised statements, such as those of modernism, early Marxism or structuralism, and toward recognition of "multivalenced" local perspectives. They also direct attention away from elite culture or "centrist" perspectives such as dominated earlier scholarship. Writers influenced by Foucault, Said, Derrida and others generally "theorise" "texts" and "discourses".

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<sup>31</sup> G. Marcus and M. Fischer, *Op, Cit.* p. 50.

Recognising the plurality of actors and perspectives in every context many follow them in rejecting generalised characterisations of culture. We are also now sensitive to the resonances of politics, as play of dominance in all fields extending into gender relations, and not merely as restricted to formal institutional practices of societies as a whole.<sup>32</sup>

How then can we position ourselves in speaking of "traditions", as at first we read those as reference to general ordering principles, which have been transformed through Southeast Asian history? Within the school of thought which focus on the "perennial philosophy", the timelessness of an "essential spiritual wisdom", there is a distinctive use of "Tradition", usually capitalised. Scholars, including Schuoun, Guenon, Burkhardt, Lings and Needleman have developed refined understandings of the way in which the architecture of classical and traditional civilisations housed esoteric spiritual knowledge.

Their works show how key concepts and even wider social practices were profoundly interwoven with religious, especially mystical, notions. For the most part these scholars bemoan what they see as the loss of wisdom with the collapse of civilisations which, like Tibet, they imagine as having been structured around it. Their special sense of the term is close to the romantic imagination of a Shangrila, of kingdoms which provided a context for harmonised relations between people and more perfect spiritual realisation. This usage of the term is precisely what would be most firmly repudiated in the newly dominant schools of cultural thought within our academies.

At the same time the perennial philosophers have a point and have provided a genuine service. They demonstrated how far, in the conceptualisation of earlier civilisations at least, esoteric spirituality informed centrally situated cultural complexes. They counterpointed modernity rightly with the extremely "different"

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<sup>32</sup> Their essays on the subject appear in the festschrift for Sartono Kartodirdjo. Ibrahim Alfian et. al. eds., *Dari Babad dan Hikayat Sampai Sejarah Kritis* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Madah University Press, 1987).

and surprisingly subtle insights of societies we too easily imagine as "simpler" than our own. While doing so they have not been concerned with the political-economic underside of the same societies, with how monastic establishments controlled peasant labour for example.

The term tradition need not be associated only with the synthesis which perennialists argue wedded it, in classical and medieval societies, to hierarchical spirituality. In this context, though instructed by the perennial philosophers, I do not capitalise tradition, associate it only with the pattern they focus on, identify it exclusively with elite culture, mourn its loss or read it as static and fixed. Just as "culture" no longer means only "high civilisation", as it used to, there is no reason to correlate tradition with "stasis", it can also be a reference to cultures which are transformed through time.

There have been extended debates about the role of traditional culture both within Asia and in scholarly interpretations of it.<sup>33</sup> In contemporary references to tradition, whether as advocacy of it or in critical scholarship, Asians generally refer to predispositions and practices, indeed growing out of local pasts but not only defined by them. Local theorists, excepting the minority of "fundamentalists" in their view of tradition, have not advocated a simple return to earlier cultural forms. Their aim has most often been to draw on roots while formulating contemporary cultures. In western scholarship imagined opposition between "static tradition" and "dynamic modernity" clearly no longer applies. We know culture is in all contexts changing, in contention, and differentiated in its modality

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<sup>33</sup> Recent republication of Achdiat Mihadja's *Polemik Kebudayaan* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1986) indicates continuing interest. It was published in 1948 and summarises debates rooted in the 1930's. It is noteworthy that Takdir Alisjahbana, in those debates arguing for a radical break with tradition, has reversed his position in important respects. Now he holds that the spiritual element of tradition is extremely relevant for the postmodern world. See his *Socio-Cultural Creativity in the Converging and Restructuring Process of the New Emerging World* (Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 1983) especially pp 74-80. Another major cultural figure, W.S. Rendra, a leading poet and dramatist, has collected his comments on tradition in *Mempertimbangkan Tradisi* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1983). Even in Indonesia it is understood that the opposition between "tradition and modernity" is neither simple nor static. Nor do positions on that issue correlate mechanically with the political spectrum--as many analysts imagine it does.

within different classes and communities.

In debates among historians about how to conceptualise early influences on Southeast Asia, "external forms" have been counterpointed to "indigenous uses". Early studies, as hinted already, depreciated local populations by seeing early states as part of "greater India", all inspiration as imported. This explicit disempowering and devaluation of locals was framed by colonial structures which encouraged it: it appeared to demonstrate a long history of local people *needing* dynamism from outside. Students now disavow this view, seeing it as an aspect of colonialism, and instead tend to emphasise the power of receiving cultures.

Wolters coined the term "localisation" to replace what Wales earlier called "local genius". Both aimed to foreground what anthropologists speak of as "acculturation", a reference to the power borrowers exercise over what they adopt. He employed insights from literary theory to highlight how imports were adapted by indigenous systems to local purposes. Through these strategies the creative volition of local actors reappeared in our views of history and we come much closer to local perspective.<sup>34</sup>

In the immediate post-revolutionary context liberal modernisers and radical revolutionaries alike could see "tradition" as a residual force which they expected would inevitably give way to emergent modern society. As attempted transposition of parliamentary democratic models gave way to distinctive local political systems which departed from western conventions, new interpretations of the role of tradition also developed. Works on neo-traditionalism pointed out that societies were built on engrained patterns which still dictated the logic of social interactions.

Benda spoke of the "river of history" returning to earlier deep channels. Geertz showed how the political style of Guided Democracy in Indonesia during the early 1960s resonated with

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<sup>34</sup> Continuing Indonesian interest in this way of framing their own cultural history is reflected in the recent symposium of writings by anthropologists and archaeologists. Ayatrohaedi, *Kepribadian Budaya Bangsa (Local Genius)* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1986). Oliver Wolters, *History, Culture and Region in Southeast Asian Perspective* (Singapore: ISSEAS and Singapore UP, 1982).

Indian ideas of politics and how political affiliations, the identification of different components of the Indonesian population with new political parties, corresponded with cultural variations imprinted within contemporary social groups. Anderson convincingly demonstrated the coherence of Javanese notions of power and their relevance to understanding present political leadership under Sukarno and Suharto.<sup>35</sup>

These efforts to register the persistence of indigenous traditions were related to, though distinct from, emphasis on "local perspectives" in history. They relate to notions of "autonomous history" through the fact they drew attention to the significance of indigenous *uses* of culture. These cultural interpretations thus allowed recognition that practices were not always appropriately read against the western models they ostensibly followed.

Thus we notice that modern elections are not only a transposition of parliamentary models. Asian elections cannot be properly understood if interpreted or judged only by European democratic ideals and practices. They also need to be understood as a new way of enacting rituals of unity, rituals such as were enshrined in the religious ceremonialism of earlier states.<sup>36</sup> New theories emphasise varied localised purposes and allow us to view recently independent societies as "creatively adapting", experimenting with, rather than mechanically imitating, modern models for social life.

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<sup>35</sup> Harry Benda's most relevant contribution is "Decolonization in Indonesia: The Problem of Continuity and Change", *American Historical Review* Vol. LXX N 4 (July 1965). Clifford Geertz's *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) links historical phases and contemporary cultural and social groups; in *Islam Observed* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1971) his analysis touches contemporary politics. Benedict Anderson's most widely noted contribution is "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture" in Claire Holt et. al. eds., *Culture and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1972). His lectures at Monash University in Australia in 1975 push even farther, reconfiguring the gestalt in which we interpret the relation of religion to politics, recognising that politics can be a vehicle for religious purposes rather than, as we are more likely to presume, the converse. In his: "Religion and Politics in Indonesia Since Independence" in B. Anderson, M. Nakamura, and M. Slamet, *Religion and Social Ethos in Indonesia* (Clayton, Victoria: CSEAS, Monash University, 1977).

<sup>36</sup> N.G. Schulte-Nordholt, "The Indonesian Elections: A National Ritual" in R. Shefold et. al., *Man, Meaning and History* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980).

At the same time in recent scholarship there has also been increasing weight to the view of political-economists. They have generally emphasised "universal forces" and seen local cultures as contributing only minor stylistic variation to patterns of social organisation which are understood as being dictated by other, mainly economic, forces. Political-economists may imagine that exploration of culture, especially attribution of explanatory significance to it, implies emphasis on classical texts, elite culture and conservative politics, as all of those indeed used to underlie cultural studies of Asia.

However emphasis on culture does not correspond to conservative politics or scholarship anymore. In recent literary theory there is a strong strand of Gramscian emphasis, on "culture as an instrument of domination". Postmodern readings of culture are usually conditioned by critical theory. If anything, even those who focus on culture now do so with an eye to political issues, "culture" is usually subordinated to issues of "power" and economy.<sup>37</sup>

Contemporary cultural studies even, following the line that Said developed, lead to suggestion that local senses of "tradition" are creations of western scholarship. They note that colonial European scholarship focused on "classics", consistent with emphases present in education in western contexts. Traditional European education was focussed on Greek and Roman classics and imaged a decline into the "dark ages" of the medieval world. When transplanted into Asian environments Europeans also sought the texts and high culture of earlier high societies. They counterpointed the refined insights of classical texts to the low

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Robison's most notable contribution is *Indonesia, the Rise of Capital* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986). In the work he edited with Richard Higgott, *Southeast Asia: Essays in the Political Economy of Structural Change* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985) p. 8, the editors underline their sense that "Orientalism" is "culturalist" and conservative. In comments on the disruption of Australian-Indonesian relations in 1986, Robison makes the linkage more explicit, connecting cultural analysis to an "Indonesian lobby" in Australia. See Richard Robison, "Explaining Indonesia's Response to the Jenkins Article", *Australian Outlook* Vol 40 No 3 (December 1986) pp. 132-133. Robison and his colleagues are tied to models which read culture as ideology in dualistic terms, distinguishing "ideas from material" in a fashion the new cultural analysis usually no longer does.

opinion they held about Asians of their day and concluded that there was evidence of a decline in local cultures.

The European "discoverers" of classical Angkor in Cambodia could not even imagine that the Khmer were the builders of such impressive monuments. It was common to interpret Asian "decline into stasis" in the terms Europeans applied to thinking about their own middle ages, as the "loss" of a higher status once present in the classical, a loss similar to that bemoaned by the perennial philosophers. In the imperial order these views were used to justify western intervention, as they implied that Europeans arrived to provide a stimulus which local societies lacked.

When Asian elites were exposed to modern education, early in this century through colonial systems, they acquired new notions of their own past. European ideas arrived through informal channels as well. The Theosophical Society was a powerful medium of exchange. It developed through intersection between esoteric European and Indian thought in the late 19th century. Annie Besant, an early leader, became a powerful influence within early phases of modern Indian nationalism, where her contribution extended into stimulating feminist as well as radical political activism.

Within all of the colonial systems, the Theosophical Society provided an extremely fertile channel of change. In itself it is a synthesis between European and Asian thought and it was thus especially attractive to Asians. At the same time within its spiritual context Europeans and Asians met on relatively equal terms, a rare event in colonial contexts. Certainly many leaders of nationalist movements formed images of the spirituality of their own earlier cultures which were influenced by European thinking.

Taking note of these influences, scholars now tend to devalue contemporary Asian interpretations of their own traditions as "invention". The images promoted by local elites are not seen as "genuinely" rooted in earlier local perceptions or formulations of tradition. Instead local constructions of "tradition" are interpreted mainly as convenient for essentially utilitarian political reasons, as instruments used by governments to mould

passive populations which will not resist authoritarian rule.

Such arguments can be made unobjectionably and there is little doubt that the political uses of ideology deserve the exposure recent scholarship has offered.<sup>38</sup> Interpretations of the past, by politicians as well as historians, are profoundly mediated by current political purposes and lenses and our reading of them should situate "traditionalism" politically. But we should also question the exclusivity of focus and weight of explanatory emphasis in recent works.<sup>39</sup>

Bowen, for example, has deconstructed the political uses of the term "*gotong royong*" within Indonesia under the governments guided by both Sukarno and Suharto.<sup>40</sup> The term is deployed to mobilise labour by invoking idealised views of "cooperation and self-sufficiency" in village society. Its use has been tied to suggestion that modern development may build on egalitarian villages imagined as "traditional". This ostensible meaning of the term was subverted, even in earlier states, as the idea was commonly used to justify mobilising labour for state projects, for building royal monuments as well as for maintaining village irrigation systems and roads.

Similarly Dove argued that the mythology of wet rice (*sawah*) cultivation in Java was mainly used to justify state power over populations.<sup>41</sup> Governments, from classical times to the present, have promoted the idea that wet rice is more productive as though that implies advantages for the people who produce it. But Dove has shown that there has been a misreading of the relationship between wet rice and the state. His works suggest that swidden systems, of dry field cultivation, are more labour efficient for producers and that the primary advantage of *sawah* is for states, which can extract surplus production more readily from

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<sup>38</sup> Reeve, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 5-6 makes the point properly.

<sup>39</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Culture and Social Change: The Indonesian Case", *Man*, Vol 19 No 4 (1984).

<sup>40</sup> John Bowen, "On the Political Construction of Tradition: Gotong Royong in Indonesia", *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol XLV No 3 (1986).

<sup>41</sup> Michael Dove, "The Agroecological Mythology of the Javanese and the Political Economy of Indonesia", *Indonesia* No 39 (1985).

wet rice systems.

However, if older works of European scholarship privileged classical and imperial powers at the expense of multivalent local voices, these new interpretations give power to material and discount subtle forces. In doing so these readings of contemporary culture imply a dualism which the theories they are based on would reject; they also empower European lineages of theory at the expense of indigenous voices.<sup>42</sup>

If we concentrate exclusively on exposing "mediating historical forces", "social interests" and "political purposes" we implicitly neglect and depreciate the dimensions of "shared cultural meaning" which may be crucial in the eyes of local peoples. "Inner" religious concerns are vital even in recent "cultural production" from many local vantage points. "Noticing" economic and political logics does not render registration of other planes of meaning unnecessary. If it does then our "representations" of local cultural process are guided by imposed priorities, dictated by *our* evaluation of what matters. If we "highlight" political-economic domains while "voiding", by failing to mention, realms of shared cultural meaning and spiritual purpose, then a continuing "imperialism" is carried by our way of thinking.

Establishing, as new works do, that "tradition" has been enmeshed in political process and economic interests does not mean that spirituality is not present within the same moment. To speak of the intricate web which binds *gotong royong* and Dewi Sri, the spirit of rice, to each other and to systems of power is to speak of the "exoteric", the "outer dimensions". The "esoteric", or "inner", side is not as though "in conflict" with or an "alternative to" the exoteric, it is rather "another aspect", reference to a different dimension within precisely the same transactions. Even to imagine, as modern theories encourage us to, that we can "separate" economic, political, social and spiritual realms is called

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<sup>42</sup> for a full expansion of this argument see Paul Stange, 'Deconstruction as Disempowerment: New 'Orientalisms' of Java' in *The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, (forthcoming)

"reification", it is to operate as though concepts are concrete realities.

Thus, while emphasising the "popular" and "multivalency" within indigenous cultures, recent works often appear disdainful or dismissive in reference to tradition, it is read mainly as a construct of suspect high cultures. Recent thinking positions Asians as "victims" of imperialism whenever they invoke anything "imagined" as their own and "actual" local motives are seen as "essentially political", according to our reading of that term.

However artificial "traditionalist" constructs seem to outsiders, that it is not all there is worth saying about them. If we leave our commentary at that point it is precisely equivalent to viewing early states as "creations" of Indian princes, while failing to note the processes of active "appropriation" by local peoples. Thus, though at one level new theorising has brought wonderful intimacy with locals, those we come closer to may be accepted less and less for what they profess and aim to be. While there have been gains in "theorisation of cultural process", there is every reason to question their costs and implications.

New elites have indeed been deeply shaped by colonialism and owe many ideas to western scholarship.<sup>43</sup> However it is simply incorrect to read local interpretations of mythology as fabrications of the Theosophical Society or to see references to tradition, within political philosophy, exclusively as manipulative ploys by cynical powers. The prevalence of such reading is connected to incapacity, dictated by our conventions, predispositions and epistemology, to attend to the "intuitive knowledge" and inner orientations which form the ground on which "traditional" religious culture is localised, appropriated for personal purposes.

### **philosophical imperialism**

In the context of Indianised Asian kingdoms and traditional

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<sup>43</sup> S. Supomo, "The Image of Majapahit in Later Javanese and Indonesian Writing" and other essays in Anthony Reid and David Marr eds. Op. Cit. are especially instructive.

religions, religious thinking consistently took mystical form, mystical practices played a visible role and art and etiquette implied spiritual values.<sup>44</sup> In the eyes of most local people final access to "truth" was seen as coming through gnosis, that is through intuitive as well as mental knowledge. This does not mean that a large percentage of people were active mystics; it does mean that within the dominant religions of the region the mystical dimension was given a focal place. Whether in court cities or remote villages there was awareness of a vertical dimension of spiritual depth, as scholarly interpretations have noted regularly.

At the same time now, both in society at large and in academic understanding, religion in general is increasingly defined by and hence implicitly reduced to material forms, to structures of ritual and belief. Discourses about mysticism, including our consideration of religion in this context, involve not only politics as normally understood, but also a struggle between epistemologies and ontologies. Even the study of religion is an arena in which the nature of what it means to be human is at issue.

The significance of religious convictions within Southeast Asia, all of which imply theories of knowledge, means that if our study aims to open local perspective we must reflect on the implications of gaps between "modern", "postmodern" and "spiritual" senses of "knowledge". Older academic conventions claimed objectivity, wrongly it now seems, but may be seen as agnostic, they held that issues of belief were to be suspended in scholarship.

Current fashion is atheistic, it affirms there can be no ultimate or absolute and those who hold to one are termed "essentialist", a word often used, as a dismissive dictum, to suggest that interpretations must be wrong. New approaches are tied more tightly than older fashions to conviction that "thought" is the locus of "knowledge". If local practices emphasise

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<sup>44</sup> The best introductions to the place of spirituality within traditional Javanese culture, are still Soemarsaid Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1968) and Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976 (1960)).

spirituality that is usually written out of the picture, as references to spiritual beings are reread as codes for political issues. Local perspectives, insofar as they may be religious or spiritual, are thus consistently redirected by scholarly representations.

In all scholarship we need to question the implications of "epistemology", the basic presuppositions we work with about the formation of knowledge. The dominant philosophies of western interpreters appear to ensure, perhaps more now than previously, that there is a blind spot in visions of Asian cultures. Our angle of approach runs against the grain of senses of reality maintained by "traditional" Asians. We can use an Indian theory to pinpoint this "blindness": it represents an incapacity, within dominant theories, to register "*rasa*." That term originates from Sanskrit and is connected to highly developed theories of philosophy and aesthetics. It is best known through Abinagupta's theories of aesthetics and drama in the classical text called the *Natyasastra*.

In Javanese senses of it at the primary level *rasa* means "feeling", as experienced through taste, touch and emotion. At a deeper level it refers to "intuitive feeling", to the sixth sense or "organ" which registers awareness of "inner life". *Rasa* is a key term in everyday speech, with a rich range of nuances, not an arcane notion. Ordinary people say "*saya merasa*" ("I feel") where we would habitually say "I think". *Rasa* is registered as a primary cognitive organ.

As Javanese understand the term, all people, including those who do not think consciously of it, have and employ *rasa*, it is not imagined as knowable only to an esoteric elite. At the same time *rasa* is prioritised among specialists, those who are thought to "have" or develop "higher" spiritual sensitivity. Traditional spirituality unquestionably valued cultivation of *rasa*. In their terms *rasa* is susceptible to development in the same way that "intellect" is, through academic refinement, or muscles, through athletic training.

As students of culture all of us are implicated, as postmodernism emphasises. In subtle and pervasive ways the

acquisition of knowledge involves assertion of power, it always has a hegemonic dimension. If we concentrate on the conditioning forces which shape human subjectivity, we effectively represent traditionalists as parodic imitators, by doing so disempowering them and intervening tacitly to affirm the superiority of our view of what can be real.

Across the spectrum of social life significant communities of actors are rendered speechless by their absence in our histories. It is ironic that the practices which are locally conceived as relating to tradition are discounted most firmly by precisely those scholars who are also most committed to foregrounding "everyday praxis". But traditionalists are presented through recent theories mainly as ciphers, as victims, because the dimensions within which *they* chart their struggles cannot be on the map of our "knowable" world.

Foucault's sense of politics underpins the view I am putting forward of scholarship. Our thinking is embedded within a clash of "epistemic worlds", a conflict between systems which define the limits of what is "real" or "knowable". In Foucault's terms the most powerful repression comes through the capacity to choose what to engage with and what to simply ignore, not through "fair and logical" argument. If politics is a struggle between "discursive formations", between ways of defining issues, then the central contest always has to do with what determines the "constraints" or boundaries of interaction, guiding attention to what will or will not enter into discourse, even if only as an issue of contention. In this sense "power is knowledge", and not the reverse, as the underlying issue is of who or what determines the rules of the game.

Taking his cue, academic, including postmodernist, approaches need to be seen as a component within the constellation of events. Scholars assert specific claims about the nature of knowledge and western scholars remain disproportionately privileged, even in this postcolonial era, through the freedom they have to voice and promote their views and through the status still given to them in Asian contexts. Their

preoccupations intrude vigorously, continuing, as earlier naive colonialism did, to dictate local trends. Academic representations, of whatever stripe, inevitably, as postmodernism informs us, impinge directly on the cultural politics of the people who are ostensibly subjects.

Scholarly practices remain situated within a web of cultural relations of unequal power, carrying residues of earlier overtly imperialistic relations. In the ways we admit issues into discourse we are far from open to contributions implicit in the theorising of non-western cultures. Systematic analysis by Asians is usually categorised as "belief" if their root presuppositions depart from those implicit in our thinking. The scholarly conventions of European cultures maintain limits.

Even as human beings, not necessarily as scholars, if we resist "knowing in new ways", we may tacitly maintain a form of "cultural imperialism". This "loaded" phrasing suggests what "ethnocentrism" becomes when knowledge, formed in one context, is superimposed on another. Unconscious imperialism may be inescapable and implicit in every reproduction or extension of knowledge. As academic life is based on professed commitment to increasing openness in this regard, we may choose to take that as an opening to widen horizons.

The postmodernism we cultivate, like modernism before it, extends into every sphere it touches. Like economic systems, philosophical currents grow and move. At the same time the rules governing our discourses remain parts of a configuration of industrial world culture which is increasing its power to define the nature of being. According to these rules learning from rather than about those we study may be heresy. It is usually read as "advocacy" while the concept of "critical theory" is reserved for western lineages of knowledge. The newest works which deal with the cultural realm probe more deeply than earlier works did, but with increasing fierceness of adherence to a logic which represents, translates and hence helps make Asian inner worlds something other than they have been.

We opened by questioning where Southeast Asia exists in our imagination; we proceed with the challenge to see through each stage of local social and cultural evolution to the inheritance from local ancestors. Cross cultural exploration, implied in movement across cultures in either time or space, naturally requires special sensitivity. When we focus on borrowed structures Southeast Asians appear to have been defined by them; when we attune to local adaptation and domestication and entertain local ways of seeing them we see that Southeast Asians have consistently used imports through frameworks and with purposes which remain theirs. We can even grasp modern reformulations of Southeast Asian identity and maintain awareness of indigenous voices if we view the newest appropriations within the frame of local visions.

All people notice what they imagine as apprehensible and exclude what cannot be real by the rules of discourse they are embedded within. Subjective intervention, by agencies of knowledge including ourselves, is as relevant to history as it is to ethnography or politics. These tacit, implicitly interiorised, influences are problematic in all scholarship. Confidence that desires such as greed, ambition, hunger and sex are timeless can produce failure to note the way they are modulated. As dominant discourses shift through history there are changes not only in images of reality, but also in emphasis on distinctive modes of access to awareness.

## chapter 2

### THE INDIGENOUS SUBSTRATUM

It is not obvious that Southeast Asia constitutes a "category of societies", sharing features that distinguish them from neighbouring zones. However an "infrastructure" or "substratum" does characterise the region and can be identified in two primary senses. Most obviously it refers to the widely dispersed "megalithic", stone monument cultures, of prehistory. Throughout the region people used bronze implements as the agricultural revolution, the "neolithic", began. Among remote tribal minorities, those least touched by international currents until the advent of mass tourism, traces of prehistoric practice extend into the present. Less self-evidently, the substratum is evident in underlying orientations influencing recent elites and shaping village habits.<sup>45</sup>

In highlighting these traditions we encounter pitfalls, as we may fall victim to romantic imagination, seeing through "rose coloured glasses" and projecting images of "mystical harmony" onto tribal peoples. Early *peoples* are not "magically different" from ourselves, though aspects of their traditions are distinctive, as hard to register as they are vital to understanding. As the substratum is the aspect of Southeast Asia most distant from our worldview and circumstance, bound to an animism we have suppressed or marginalised, it can be invisible even to observers with long experience in the region.

The impact of industrial capitalism on Southeast Asia cannot be underestimated and it has reshaped living environments pervasively even in remote areas. On the other hand modernising minorities are concentrated in cities and associated with economic, educational and government institutions. Outsiders are most likely to interact with "modern" urban Asians through those institutions, they are thus also easily misguided about the extent to

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<sup>45</sup> put in qualifier and ref to Benda

which remote rural people have left their traditions. Glib impressions are as dangerous as romanticism. We need to balance critical observation with openness to registering cultures qualitatively different from our own.

### **Ecologies of cores and zones**

As the concept of Southeast Asia is new it is worth reflecting on whether "Southeast Asia exists" in any meaningful sense, we need not take the region for granted. Though we may begin believing we know "nothing", we implicitly harbour images which need challenging. Preconceptions are generated routinely by maps and media exposure, as both routinely treat "countries" as "existing" self-evidently. Maps of Southeast Asia usually highlight political units which were defined only by 1960, "painting countries" with different colours and visually enforcing impression that each is distinct and cohesive. Visualising early historical process requires elimination of these colours, and with them related ideas arising from present political realities.

The national entities we know never existed in the past. Lines on our maps imply to us that within each unit people relate equally as citizens to a centre. But "states" were only generated by print technology and other communications resulting from the industrial revolution.<sup>46</sup> The identities of Indonesians, Malaysians, Lao or Filipinos are, in their current form, recent creations. Nothing like the contemporary "Philippines" existed until recently. During three centuries of Spanish influence they had effective power mainly in south and central Luzon and the Visayan islands, neither controlling mountainous northern Luzon nor incorporating the Muslim south. No government controlled the whole population and even today some currents run counter to national unity. Similarly the idea of Indonesia emerged through a Dutch colonialism which was consolidated only early in this century. A rich variety of ethnic groups related loosely, if at all, in the past.

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<sup>46</sup> BRO'G Anderson (1983)

Throughout the region most local peoples, even when bowing to distant rulers, were essentially autonomous in their social routines and cultural lives. Even the greatest classical empires, such as Majapahit six centuries ago, did not integrate peoples in the way contemporary nations do. Majapahit influenced much of the archipelago culturally, but its power was not analogous to that of modern states. Current boundaries also lead us to imagine Sumatra as connected more to Java than Malaya, but until the 19th century Sumatra and Malaya were more closely bound than either was to Java. To begin we should envision a *geophysical* rather than *political* map, one emphasising morphology rather than current boundaries.

It is necessary to suspend judgement on regional boundaries, using maps which extend beyond Southeast Asia as we know it. Southern India and south China may have belonged to Southeast Asia in prehistory.<sup>47</sup> Determination of what should be considered "Southeast Asia", indeed whether there is such a thing, depends on what basis we employ. No interpretation is definitive and judgement depends on whether we characterise cultures by their ethnic base, the source of their literate tradition or other historical and social measures.

Anthropologists often consider Taiwan, Hainan and Madagascar within the region, as aboriginals of those islands are related to Southeast Asians. Natives of Assam, part of India lying between Tibet and Burma, are kin to the hill peoples of Burma, Thailand and Yunnan.<sup>48</sup> Sri Lanka, Ceylon as it was called, is linked to Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, as those countries share Theravada Buddhism.<sup>49</sup> Others have considered the Philippines as outside of Southeast Asia, following a similar logic, as it was shaped by Spanish Catholicism along with Latin America.<sup>50</sup>

For a millennium Yunnan, in the southwest of China, was the locus of the Indian styled empire of Nanchao and integral to

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<sup>47</sup> J McAlister & P Mus (1970); G Coedes (1968)

<sup>48</sup> R Burling (1965)

<sup>49</sup> J Steadman (1969)

<sup>50</sup> DGE Hall 1st edition (1955)

the world of Indianised Southeast Asian states. Through the Tang period in China wars with Tibet and Yunnan underscored the independence of the latter and only the Mongol conquests of the 13th century brought Yunnan into China. Conversely many treat Vietnam as part of "East Asia" because its inheritance is undeniably Chinese. From the 2nd century BC until the 10th century AD the Red River delta, now "northern Vietnam", was a Chinese province.<sup>51</sup>

New Guinea was marginal to the region until recently on every count. Ethnically little connected the Melanesians of that island to the Malayo-Polynesian speakers predominant in what is now Indonesia. Historically Malayo-Polynesians visited it, to fish or trade, but in the same marginal way they also touched the north of Australia. Only Dutch colonialism and Indonesian rule since the 1960s firmly connect Irian Jaya to Southeast Asia. The region is not defined by one language family. Its hundreds of distinct ethno-linguistic groups, even ignoring New Guinea, belong to separate Malayo-Polynesian, Tai-Kadai, Tibeto-Burman and Sinic language families.

No language or "great tradition" gives it the cohesion of "East" or "South" Asia.<sup>52</sup> Chinese writing originated from the Yellow River valley, in the north, and transcended linguistic barriers. The same characters are used by diverse language groups, reinforcing the grip of an imperial tradition most regions shared over many centuries. Sanskrit, arising from the Gangetic plain, stamped all of South Asia. The peoples of that subcontinent shared mythic, philosophical and religious discourses through texts which touched most societies. Nor is Southeast Asia defined by the predominance of a world religion, as the Middle East is by Islam; it contains adherents of virtually all the world's religions.

It is hard to avoid impression that the region is a "catch-all", but Southeast Asia is not exclusively a modern fiction. Early Chinese records mention the "*Nanyang*", the "Southern Regions",

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<sup>51</sup> ref to JK Fairbank et all

<sup>52</sup> R Redfield

and referred to what we call Southeast Asia. "*Nusantara*", "the islands between", was a Sanskrit term applied to the archipelago between China and India. Definitions such as these were "regional", referring to many kingdoms and ethnicities as a category. Though suggesting that the region constituted a definable system in the eyes of early peoples, they do not coincide with postwar concepts.

Prior to World War II, "Indo-China" sometimes referred to the whole region which received influences from both China and India. But in that era Burma was associated with "South Asia" through the British empire, which connected it to India. French Indo-China included Laos, Cambodia, Tongkin, Annam and CochinChina; the Netherlands East Indies covered what is now Indonesia; and the American Philippines and independent Thailand remained separate systems. Each colony interacted with an imperial system more than with neighbours, looking "outward" to a metropole rather than to transactions with neighbours in what we now call "Southeast Asia".

It is not incidental that under the Japanese Occupation the region came closest to experiencing a single field of political and military power. "Southeast Asia" became a common term only after it was defined as a theatre of operation against the Japanese during World War II. Since then we assume the region has some cohesion and no doubt its identity will mean more in the future. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), so far taking in all but Burma (Myanmar) and former French Indochina, will facilitate cohesion in coming decades, as suggested by the growing power of blocks such as the European Economic Community elsewhere.

Insofar as there is "a foundation" underlying Southeast Asian cultures it lies in modes of subsistence, kinship organisation and shared animistic beliefs, in an aboriginal pattern extending beyond the boundaries of today's region. If there is unity to Southeast Asian history, then it lies in the syncretic power of those cultures, in the extent to which its primal substratum has been able to assimilate the diverse influences the oceans brought

without being overwhelmed.

Having "erased" the borders of current systems from our imagination, we should think of the region first in geophysical terms. Ecological patterns frame history and physical structures underpin cultural evolution. As it straddles the equator temperatures vary from night to day and with increasing altitude more than with season. Southeast Asian villagers everywhere have shared the same range of essentials underpinning everyday life. Dietary preferences, agricultural technology and domesticated animals have been shared through the region. The tropical atmosphere produces vigorous and varied vegetation, including a rich range of fruits (and bacteria!).

Bamboo was the primary building material everywhere, but teak and rainforest hardwoods were generally plentiful until this century. Pile supported and wooden floored dwellings were originally the most common through the region, only the Javanese and Vietnamese built homes on the ground from an early time. In those areas population densities peaked early, so empty land and wood must have become precious early on. Only recently have brick and tile replaced palm thatch and bamboo as primary construction materials.

Geographically the region is most distinguished by its high ratio of seacoast to landmass. Because it is the largest area of peninsulas and islands on the planet its peoples have been heavily oriented to and influenced by the sea. During the ice ages, and most recently about ten thousand years ago, the Sunda shelf, which takes in Sumatra, Java and Borneo, was joined to the Asian land mass. The earliest inhabitants of the "islands" thus moved there as on the mainland. Since then migrations into the archipelago have been by sea and that is how the ancestors of most contemporary peoples of the islands arrived.

All of Southeast Asia belongs to "monsoon Asia", like southern India, Bengal, south China and southern Japan, and is influenced by seasonal winds which bring rain mainly between October and April. Those also set the rhythm followed by early

sailors, from within or beyond the region. During the first Christian millennium traders were forced to lay over in the region for months each year, while waiting for the winds which would take them home. The winds thus combined with the constraints of early sailing technology to ensure that depths of cultural transaction accompanied even transit trade.

The earth is particularly alive. Active volcanoes generate new soil and river deltas extended significantly during the millennia we touch. Silt, from the mountains of central Asia, has extended the Irrawaddy and Mekong deltas by as much as one hundred metres a year. Mount Muria, now in north central Java, was an island a thousand years ago, before the channel filled in. Krakatoa, a volcano in the Java Straits, exploded dramatically in 1883, so the island it once was virtually disappeared. Now the landscape changes more through the depleting excesses of people than the replenishing forces of nature, but natural forces of the earth remain especially visible.

Usually the "mainland" is distinguished from the "islands". The former, refers to convoluted peninsulas of Eurasia taking in Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The latter to the archipelago, or "insular" Southeast Asia, including what are now Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Brunei. Though the Malay Peninsula is literally connected to the mainland, it is culturally and historically part of the island world. This geographical divide corresponds to the division which crystallised, by the 15th century, between a predominantly Theravada Buddhist mainland and a mainly Islamic island world.

Generally Southeast Asia has been a region of low population density until recently. The Vietnamese felt land pressure a millennium ago and the Javanese have for over a century. More commonly available space ensured that "control of people" has been historically more at issue than claims to land. When pressed by those in power farmers could often relocate and clear forest land for cultivation. Dwellings, when constructed of bamboo, were light enough to move and in any case easy to rebuild elsewhere. In the early states of the region nobles

measured their authority by the number of households they could claim services from and wars aimed to capture populations rather than claim territory.

Rice, grown in paddies or dry fields, is the staple and preferred food crop everywhere. Cassava, maize and root crops are common in dry or mountainous areas and as supplements in times of drought. Cultivation of wet rice provided incredibly settled subsistence. Southeast Asia, including prehistoric southern China, is the home of wet rice. Some elaborately terraced and irrigated paddies have been cultivated continuously for over two thousand years. Paddies, based on rich soils, constitute an almost self-replenishing micro-environment, they are highly responsive to the intensive labour input required for cultivating transplanted wet rice.<sup>53</sup>

Beyond the areas suitable for wet rice, "slash-and-burn", also known as "swidden" or "shifting" agriculture, predominates. These terms refer to variant systems involving the rotating cultivation of dry fields. In this pattern areas of forest are cleared, burned off, then planted with a rich variety of root and vegetable crops. Usually a plot could be cultivated for about seven years, until the land was worked out. Rain forest soils, in contrast with the volcanic loams of the core areas, are not rich, with the removal of forest cover soils lose quality quickly. The process was then repeated in a cycle, which would lead back to the same plot after it had regenerated.

The most socially significant ecological substructure of the region lies in the contrast between "cores" and "zones". "Core areas" have been those suitable for intensive and extensive wet rice agriculture. These sustained dense populations early on and thus facilitated concentration of political power. In contrast "zones" have been sparsely populated, dominated by shifting cultivation, fishing or trade and politically fragmented. Density of population everywhere indicated a core area. Using figures suggestively, in cores ten people per unit of land contrasted with

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<sup>53</sup> refs to Ag involution and Hanks

one person to ten units of land in a zone. The social and cultural correlates of this ecological contrast are profound, we will refer to it often. If the peoples of cores dominate both history and the texts treating it, it is because archaeological remains and written records are primarily their testament.

The cores of the mainland focused on great rivers, each rising from the Himalayas and creating expansive valleys of land which was easily irrigated. Extensive settlement produced surpluses of rice which sustained courts, facilitated warfare and fed the builders of monuments. The major riverine plains of the mainland are those of the Red River in North Vietnam, the Mekong in South Vietnam and Cambodia, the Menam in Thailand and the Irrawaddy in Burma. These are also the heartlands of dominant ethnic groups today.

The Vietnamese, Thai and Burmese each number at least fifty million, the Khmer about six million. Weaker geographical barriers set the latter off from neighbours. The decline in their relative strength has occurred not only in the past several decades, but gradually over five centuries. On average in the mainland countries over eighty per cent of the population belongs to these dominant groups. Significant valley pockets, suitable for wet rice, have housed the largest minority groups in the hills. Other, more marginal and tribal peoples, have been scattered, characteristically engaged in slash and burn agriculture and trade. The hills have been occupied by hundreds of distinct linguistic communities.

The balance between core and zone differs in island Southeast Asia.<sup>54</sup> Through the first millennium central and eastern Java was the only core area. Complex states developed there by the 4th century of the Christian calendar and their peasant populations, like those of the mainland, built monuments which remain as tourist attractions. Even at the core of early states, populations are unlikely to have exceeded a million, but in context that was relatively dense.

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<sup>54</sup> In the island context Legge has spoken of a dichotomy between 'trade based' and 'rice based' states, one related to tensions between Java and the rest of the archipelago.

Only much later in history did central Luzon come to constitute a core, following the establishment of Spanish Manila, and the Tagalog speakers occupying it remain less proportionately dominant in their context than Javanese speakers in Indonesia. Roughly half, about eighty million, Indonesians are Javanese; about a third, or twelve million, Filipinos are Tagalog. Elsewhere a dozen significant communities and hundreds of small ethnic groups on other islands, have been predominantly engaged in shifting agriculture, as in the hills of the mainland, or oriented toward seagoing trade and fishing.

In both zones there have been significant pockets of wet rice cultivation. The distinction between cores and zones is not black and white, especially in the island world. Nevertheless major core areas stand out through their scale. In addition to practices of slash and burn or dry rice cultivation the societies of both zones were particularly oriented toward transit trade connecting China to Indian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean regions.

In early history portage routes were prominent and rivers were major arteries. Long distance trade moved at times as actively through the hills of the mainland as through the archipelago. Almost every part of Southeast Asia was a separate site of transit between the early cultures of China and India and there is no doubt that location between those early civilisations profoundly shaped all of its peoples' histories.

### **The substratum as a gestalt**

If emphasis on the substratum or infrastructure of Southeast Asia has been commonplace it has also been conceived in various ways and often in dispute. History, archaeology, anthropology politics, religion and psychology each offer different avenues for its theorisation. Historians invoke the substratum most often to facilitate definition of the region and affirm that it contains "generic" characteristics. However historical studies which emphasise cultural and social dimensions are much more likely to give this theme prominence than those which focus on politics or

economics.<sup>55</sup>

At the same time the distinct but related commitment to produce locally centred histories constitutes an orthodoxy few would challenge. Conceptualisations of autonomous histories and of the substratum emerged in tandem with movements of independence and both shift focus from outside influences to indigenous forces. Somewhat later new movements in the social sciences began to converge with historical research and directed attention to everyday life and broadened senses of culture.

In many cases students of Southeast Asia pioneered these lines before they became prominent elsewhere. For them the substratum counterpoints the ostensibly dependent nature of regional civilisations and attending to indigenous structures allowed historians to show how they shaped changes.<sup>56</sup> In reviewing efforts to formulate autonomous histories Day noted that the concept suggests "...that indigenous traditions... are powerful enough to modify the shape of historical developments, even as they are themselves modified and reinvented by influences impinging upon them."<sup>57</sup> Similar notions have been stressed by anthropologists, who noted early in this century that "receiving" societies "condition" cultural borrowing, that it is always a "two-way process" conditioned by local interests and patterns.<sup>58</sup>

Emphasis on the continuity of village animism as a substratum has roots reaching the Enlightenment in European thought. Marx's theory of the "Asiatic mode of production" maintains that peasant communities are unchanging and Asian

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<sup>55</sup> A different dimension of movement toward local perspective is evident in Anderson's (1972) exposition which illustrated shaping of practices guided by local constructions of purpose. Emmerson (1980 pp 57-9) noted that interpretations tend to move toward local emphasis to the extent that culture is at issue, conversely to shift away from it when economy is prioritised.

<sup>56</sup> Associated with the works of van Leur (1967) Smail (1961) Benda (1962), Hall (1968), Coedes (1968), Wales (1974), Mus (1975), Wolters (1982), O'Connor (1983), Reid (1988), and Jumsai (1988). In Emmerson's (1980) review of approaches to Southeast Asian history his term for this line of approach is "microdynamism".

<sup>57</sup> (1986 p 27)

<sup>58</sup> OW Wolters (1982)

"feudalism" especially static. Wittfogel's closely related notion of "hydraulic societies" implied that the irrigation networks underpinning wet rice agriculture produced particularly "despotic" and centralised rule in Asian states.<sup>59</sup>

Theorisation of the substratum is not tied to ideas of unchanging stasis nor to readings of Asian systems of power through European feudalism.<sup>60</sup> Current works emphasise the varied and fragmentary composition of early Southeast Asian states. Wolters even suggested that we call them "*mandala*" instead of "states" to side step presumptions we have about the latter. He emphasised that power relations within *mandala* were personalised, based on kinship and charisma, each substate was effectively autonomous even when culturally within the ambit of greater powers.<sup>61</sup> Some scholars now invert the Wittfogel thesis, arguing that centralising states create wet rice agriculture rather than the converse; others note that control of irrigation may not be tied to centralised authority at all.<sup>62</sup>

Conceptualising the substratum is not tied to linear and evolutionary views of history. As my invocation of spiralling images already implies, this presentation aims beyond those constraints. Historical interplay, between a multiplicity of culturally embedded realities, becomes increasingly complex with time. Each ethnic group or social category of actors, in every time, carries and embodies distinctive perspectives.<sup>63</sup> Here we are referring continually to both "historical" and "sociological" realities. Separate rhythms and visions intersect in every moment of time and space.

The worlds of agriculture, trade and empire each contain distinct senses of time itself. The regional substratum, which

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<sup>59</sup> A Vickers (1989 p 22)

<sup>60</sup> As noted by Steadman (1969) and lampooned by Said (1978)

<sup>61</sup> OW Wolters (1982); D Marr & AC Milner (1986)

<sup>62</sup> M Dove (1985); C Geertz (1980)

<sup>63</sup> Smail's (1961) treatment of Acehnese perspectives on Sumatran history showed a multiplicity of perspectives through emphasis on the structures of local process.

relates most to the agricultural sphere, is only one of those.<sup>64</sup> Even if it was formed most definitively in prehistory, the village world which carries it toward the present has obviously also been transformed repeatedly, both internally and by the "gestalt", the frame, which holds it. History is not just a series of "eras" replacing each other in sequence, as though in each the old is eliminated. Within each new phase elements of older epochs are both reconstellated and maintained.<sup>65</sup>

We need to subsume linear and cyclical images and imagine that the modalities of "time" and "timelessness" coexistent. According to Eliade, primitive or peasant rituals "regenerate time". As they have been rooted in agricultural cycles and rites of passage, life cycle rituals of birth, puberty, marriage and death, their related mythic cosmologies were cyclical and essentially repetitive.<sup>66</sup> Insofar as villages still maintain regenerative cosmologies, such as are likely to have characterised prehistoric societies more generally, we can think of them as "maintaining a timeless reality" even within Southeast Asia's present.

In this vein McKinlay has made an intriguing suggestion. He has noted that for today's Malays distinct time zones, "*zaman*" and "*masa*" are related to indigenous, Islamic, colonial and modern realities. Even in lower class urban contexts in the 1970s he found that people envisioned these as overlapping, as coexistent "epistemic eras", or accessible "ways of knowing". In his image these layers of history, each carrying a different notion of time itself, exist simultaneously. Along the same lines Becker has suggested that in the Javanese shadow puppet theatre, the *wayang*, shifts in language, performance mode and character bring distinctive times and spaces into one dramatic moment, different epistemologies converge.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> This image is convergent with F Braudel's (1974 pp xi-xv) attention to the differing, but continuing rhythms of agriculture, trade and empire in the Mediterranean.

<sup>65</sup> R Iletto's (1988) drive toward non-linear constructions of Filipino history is convergent. Smail provided a frame which already resolved the problem Day (1986 pp 2-6), drawing from White, identifies of implicit commitment to singular narrative and moral constraints in historical writing.

<sup>66</sup> M Eliade (1959)

<sup>67</sup> R McKinlay (1979) & AL Becker (1979 p 232)

Living peoples may be imagined as experiencing "timelessness" to the extent they do not engage coexistent but "subsequent" historical realities, those within which the linear aspect of time gains progressively greater prominence. Notions of change omnivorously consume attention in our historical imagination, our "narratives" of the past take it for granted. Self-consciousness of the frameworks and strategies we habitually deploy, when "constructing" historical imagination or texts, has been sharpened recently. Through Hayden White's work historians generally have become aware that their texts build on specific "tropes", modes of discourse which dictate how we imagine events and process. The enrichment of a "deconstructive inversion" will admit "non linear realities", worlds not obsessed with time, into our narratives.

Even if extension of our imagination allows the possibility of a "timeless substratum", as a shifting background within historical process, it is hard to maintain awareness of it. Inevitably focus on the rise of new social structures through history brings other rhythms of time into view. Though the relevance of transformations demands such focus, it inevitably also deflects our attention to the "foreground". Thus attending, as we also must, to processes of change, to unquestionably important, "new" developments implicitly undermines our "notice" of the, simultaneously present, spheres of life which preserve ongoing cultural realities, including experiences of time itself.

The substratum refers in the first instance to animistic and wet rice village cultures throughout monsoon Asia, extending beyond what is now Southeast Asia into Bengal, Assam, Yunnan and southern parts of India and China generally. Waves of population, primarily from the north, succeeded each other in the region, as the overly static resonances of geological terms like "substratum" and "layer" imply.

The resulting patterns of ethnic overlay have been complex, but we can imagine each wave as displacing, absorbing or

marginalising earlier peoples, leaving residues in some areas and melding through synthesis in others.<sup>68</sup> Displacement and melding very likely characterised process near active channels of trade and in centres conducive to population density; remnants have always been dispersed in remote island, forest or mountain habitats. At the same time, even if Southeast Asia has been a low pressure zone, populations moved through as well as into it and its maritime orientation has been profound.

The dispersion of Malayo-Polynesians, across the Indian and Pacific oceans, testifies that in prehistory they were the pre-eminent sailors of those seas. Polynesians probably passed through the northern archipelago in the first millennium BC and related natives of Madagascar settled there in the same early centuries which brought Indian and Chinese influences to the region. Southeast Asians were very likely the most active sailors even within wider early Asian trading networks and the seaward face of indigenous societies is still reflected in the ramifications of water symbolism embedded within myth, architecture and social organisation.

Even the Thai, whose relatives are in mountainous southwest China, nurture pervasive symbolism centring on water and boats. Upland Sumatran social structures resonate with shipboard relationships and domestic architecture is suggestive of ships. Reid, among others, identifies the receptive and maritime orientation of the region as an element of its substratum.<sup>69</sup> Orientation to the sea and a contingent openness helps explain why the region can be defined partly by the prominence of exchanges within it.

The earliest layers of human habitation in the region are evident through Javanese fossil sequences. They rank among the oldest recognised forms of *Homo Erectus*, as Java man goes back almost a million years and Solo man several hundred thousand. Those people may be ancestral to the scattered Negrito groups of

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<sup>68</sup> As C MacKnight (1986) warns.

<sup>69</sup> S Jumsai (1988); P Manguin (1986), A Reid (1988 pp 3-10)

the region, remnants of a previously dominant population. Negritos are also likely to be related to the Melanesian and Australian populations, as the ancestors of those peoples migrated into their current habitats up to fifty thousand years ago through the region.<sup>70</sup> The Australoid layer can be considered the earliest human substratum of the region and in the eastern archipelago there is still a visible cline of admixture between Australoid and later Mongoloid populations. As the Australoid remnant of Southeast Asian is small and has been marginal for several millennia, in this overview it is not particularly relevant.

The more meaningful archaeologically accessible substratum is in reference to the megalithic and bronze ages. The "Dongson" culture complex, a bronze age culture, was identified first in Vietnamese sites but then widely through the region. Proto-Malay populations, dispersed through the archipelago, are very likely its residues. Among others they include the peoples of the Mentawi islands, the Batak of Sumatra, the Toraja of Sulawesi and the Dayak of Borneo, suggesting that up to the first millennium BC closely related peoples dominated the region.

Wales holds that some contemporary Proto-Malay peoples still preserve bronze age religion.<sup>71</sup> The ancestors of today's dominant peoples, relatives of these bronze age peoples, began to move into the region about three thousand years ago. While the remnants we have noted remained, cultural and genetic exchange led to merging in lowland areas. Archaeologists now encourage us to emphasise continuities between these local neolithic and bronze cultures, an already mature base, and subsequent historical states.<sup>72</sup>

Anthropologically the substratum refers us first to relatively isolated hunting and gathering, swidden and fishing communities. Some maintained the lifestyles of their ancestors until recently, as have many Proto-Malays. Glib images of waves of settlement

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<sup>70</sup> As Bellwood allows (1985 pp 49, 70)

<sup>71</sup> According to Q Wales, "The religion of the East Torajas of Celebes and many of the peoples of Borneo preserves ... practices brought to this region by Dongson influences ... of the Bronze Age." (1957 p 65).

<sup>72</sup> RB Smith & W Watson (1979 p vi)

imply that the Punan, forest gatherers of Kalimantan, and the Semang, shifting cultivators of the Malay Peninsula, are residues of early populations, as their subsistence modes suggest. However ecological constraints or the stimulus of trade could have generated both groups recently, as adaptations arising from proximate peoples.<sup>73</sup>

Ethnicities sometimes arise or change easily, as in the fluid ethnogenesis of the Sulu archipelago, and this also underlines our need for caution.<sup>74</sup> No society is a "static time capsule", as Benda warned in noting that we could not see the pre-Hispanic Philippines as an image of prehistory or recent Bali as a replica of Indic Majapahit.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless there are pockets of people, maintaining modes of subsistence which predominated in early times, whose lifestyles hint at prehistory. Some, such as the Sakkudei of Siberut, represent it directly, as they were positioned beyond the range of wider communications until very recently.

The most critical sense of the substratum for our understanding of historical process is sociological, related to the foundation layer of peasant wet rice cultivators in the core areas occupied by dominant ethnic groups. Until very recently the vast majority of Southeast Asian peoples lived in extended kinship groups within village communities which were partially self-sufficient. The anthropologist Redfield noted, through studies of India and Mexico, that the "great traditions" of early states have always interacted with a "lesser tradition", of agricultural villages.

The latter have maintained autonomous cultures even while interaction with cities defined them as peasant cultures. The literate traditions of cities never eliminated older oral modes of performance in villages, though the frameworks brought by literacy did merge into local myths. In most ancient civilisations, as in Southeast Asia, the two traditions remained separately cohesive notwithstanding constant interplay between them.

This sense of the substratum underpinned Mus's stress on

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<sup>73</sup> C Hoffman (1988) & T Rambo (1988)

<sup>74</sup> JF Warren (1981)

<sup>75</sup> H Benda (1962 p 110)

continuities in Vietnamese village society. He presented villages as symbolically autonomous, by virtue of bamboo hedges bounding them, and socially insulated, by the mediation of councils of notables protecting them from intrusive bureaucracies.<sup>76</sup> Similarly it is tied to van Leur's earlier notion that "The sheen of the world religions and foreign cultural forms is a thin and flaking glaze; underneath it the whole of the old indigenous forms has continued to exist..". His observation went hand in hand with the view that early external influences mainly affected cities.

Similarly Schrieke argued that the infrastructure of Java between 700 and 1700 AD had not changed, as the communications networks of village life and rural economy were virtually unaffected by currents from the trading world through states.<sup>77</sup> Without prejudging the extent of continuities we can observe that they have been facilitated in wet rice cores by the sheer mass and nature of village societies.

Some recent studies of politics converge with conceptualisation of the substratum. Scott explored the politics of rural Malays and has emphasised "tacit and everyday mode of resistance" to impositions of power from beyond and within villages.<sup>78</sup> He refers, as this text does, to ordinary practices which remain significant even when they are made to seem non-existent, irrelevant or invisible by repressive regimes, or "discursive hegemonies". Drawing on Bahktin, Bourdieu, Foucault and Gramsci, he noted power relationships, constraining action and thought, within everyday "sites". He demonstrated that resistance may be maintained by "non-compliance" or indirection rather than depending on active confrontation, through uprisings. Here the significance of his argument comes through its suggestion of how people maintain their own orientations even within frameworks of subservience.

The apparent gap, between highlighting of such power

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<sup>76</sup> D McAlister & P Mus (1970)

<sup>77</sup> H Benda (1962 p 118) identified this as "an excessive fascination with the longevity of the Southeast Asian infrastructure" in the works of van Leur (1957 p 95) Schrieke (1957 p 4)

<sup>78</sup> J Scott (1985) and elaborate extensively on his sources

relations and focus here on indigenous spirituality, rests on an imaginary spectrum embedded in our culture. We tend to see "spiritual" and "political-economic" domains as opposite poles, the former more imaginary, the latter more real. This framing is deeply rooted in western discourses, it is another of the internalised constraints which warp our readings of Asia. Southeast Asian indigenous, classical and traditional cultures all consistently read spirituality and power as two faces of one coin. To entertain local perspectives we need to dispense with polarised constructions of them and imagine domains of spirituality and political power as two aspects of one complex reality.<sup>79</sup>

The substratum of indigenous village animism continues autonomously in remote pockets of culture and is maintained through syncretism within dominant populations. It provides a gestalt which is crucial for framing the region's past and present on its own terms. In expanding the concept and affirming its relevance my aim is especially to emphasise insights through "cultural archaeology", an approach which can supplement textual evidence. The past remains embedded within the present; its traces include not only literary texts, stone monuments, and pottery or bronze artefacts but also everyday practices. Insofar as a living cultural substratum remains cohesive it provides clues to earlier process; when patterns rooted in prehistory persist they must have conditioned intervening transitions.

Ongoing community rituals, systems of divination, sexual magic, and quest for powers at sacred sites are all related at once to historical cultures and contemporary contests. Many historical interfaces, those between animistic, Tantric, Buddhist and Islamic styles of spirituality for example, still constitute foci of contention between living practitioners. As the context has changed issues are pervasively reformed. But the point is that within the dynamics of dispute between living Muslims and animists, we can locate principles which have relevance to grasping their interplay in the

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<sup>79</sup> BRO'G Anderson (1972) makes this point well.

past. Ethnographic exposure of living practices can go deeper, in probing such dynamics, than archival and textual research.<sup>80</sup>

Zoetmulder employed this line of reasoning to use knowledge of recent Tantrism as a key to decoding fragmentary evidence about the politics of Majapahit. He showed that marriage alliances within the kingdom could be interpreted as effort to establish magical links which related to initiation ceremonies.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, current esoteric theories and meditation practices provide a basis for understanding the design and uses of ancient temples, as some living systems of practice preserve teachings which those temples also illustrated.<sup>82</sup> But my target in introducing the notion of "cultural archaeology" is not only "exegesis", the explication of indigenous meanings, as though to contribute a footnote on ancient esoteric religion.

A strategy of cultural archaeology may inform history by the same logic linguists or anthropologists employ: to the extent that early structures remain pervasive and basic they must be original. Extrapolation from recent practices to projected pasts must be treated as hypotheses, but at times the ground for conclusions is firm. For example when Fox noted that the kinship terms of Javanese Indic royalty remained Austronesian, consistent with earlier ethnic structures, he saw this as evidence of continuity, revealing the power of local culture and limits of Indianisation.<sup>83</sup>

After exploring premodern legal texts, of Indian, Chinese and Islamic derivation, Hooker stressed the extent of their adaptation and suggested that in the end local cultures, "determine the definition of law" and that "deeper structural features ...may be a clue, and no more as yet, to a common sub-structure."<sup>84</sup> Customary law, along with the predominance of bilateral kinship or dispersion of Austronesian languages, can

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<sup>80</sup> As noted in collaborative exploration of Taiwanese religion (Jordan & Overmyer 1986)

<sup>81</sup> Zoetmulder (1965)

<sup>82</sup> As is demonstrated repeatedly in works on early architecture (Snodgrass 1985; Gomez & Woodward 1981)

<sup>83</sup> J Fox (1986 p 325)

<sup>84</sup> MB Hooker (1986)(extract in *The Indian Ocean Review*, V 2 N 2, June 1989 p 17)

reveal continuities from prehistory.

The underlying structures of village Southeast Asian spirituality remain so pervasively animistic, however reworked, that they cannot but be local and must represent continuity from early times. The essentials of animism became clear to me through research in Java, where I learned that it can be read as a system of intuitive discourses.<sup>85</sup> Transmissions across generations rework and preserve intuitive, tacit or unspoken knowledges along with more readily identifiable worldviews and practices. Though beyond the domains historians customarily deal with, these spheres are pertinent if exploration of cultural history extends, as here, toward the history of consciousness. Once registered in one context patterns open insight into other related transactions. Anthropologists use case studies to form wider theories; here I extend from knowledge of Java to characterise the wider Southeast Asian substratum.

The substratum is not singular, as though "a culture" unique to this region. Some features may characterise Southeast Asia's substratum in particular, but it is also part of a wider ancestral spirit culture extending through Asia, into Siberia, and across the Pacific to the Americas. This approach applies elsewhere. In Mexico undercurrents of Aztec and Mayan life, long pronounced dead by dominant Hispanic (Spanish derived) discourses, remain. Resonances of Shinto spirituality help us understand the Japanese present, as well as imagine its past.<sup>86</sup> Even in the British Isles long Christian Anglo-Saxon dominance, suppression of magic and industrial culture has not submerged Celtic identities, entirely expunged early beliefs nor obscured the traces of sacred landscapes relating to them.

As my aim is to highlight a gestalt, a framework which allows the present to cast light on the past, "perspective" is the key issue. Unspoken transactions, as evident as life itself, pass

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<sup>85</sup> P Stange (1984)

<sup>86</sup> As Random's (1987) suggestive approach shows

unnoticed because we take them so entirely for granted. Obvious and self-evident realities remain obscure to us even when significant. The reconfiguring implied by a "gestalt shift" means that the *components* we see are stable, "information" does not change and is not centrally at issue. However when the perceptual pattern we hold our view of it in changes, new meanings emerge from what was already "obvious". While the information I rely on is common knowledge, my target is to reframe it so as to highlight its significance in a new way.

### **Theorising primal religion**

Though animism is referred to often it is worth pausing to reflect on it without lingering on problems of terminology. The main elements of animistic belief are well known, but local examples of it are so often presented with emphasis on details of elaborate symbolism that the integrity of the relationships which generate meaning is obscured. In the end descriptive details make sense only when the pattern they partake of is visible and, as in animism conceptions seep through practice without being mentally articulated, their identification is especially problematic. To grasp the nature of these beliefs we must consider that they frame and interpret the same physical realities we also know but note that they arise from practices which prioritise intuitive rather than mental approach to transactions.

Early 19th century theorists used words such as "primitive" and "savage" as counterpoints to "civilised", but also conceded the reality of spirits or souls with a readiness we may not. In his enduring theory of religion Tylor, in *Primitive Culture* (1873), argued that the origins of religion lay in belief in the "soul" and "spirit beings", and termed this complex "animism". He suggested that beliefs in spirit beings originated in dream experiences, as those could be evidence of souls existing, independently of the body and life force. Tylor's adherents, "intellectualist" interpreters of religion stress that people construct beliefs to explain the world around them.

Later Marett suggested there was a more basic stage of

"aminatism", involving belief in "*mana*", a term for "power" or energy he derived from Polynesia. Marett argued that rather than believing in spirits, or hierarchies of subtle beings, in the first instance primitive humans held merely that there was a charge of life energy in all being, even in inanimate objects such as rocks and earth.<sup>87</sup> Of early anthropological works on religion Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1911-1915) is the most famous.<sup>88</sup> He surveyed myths, magic and religion to distinguish between the latter, arguing that magic was simpler and historically prior to true religion within an evolutionary sequence leading to science. He drew on mythologies and magical beliefs from around the world to note parallels and one of his enduring contributions was to establish how widespread early belief in divine kingship were.

Later Malinowski argued that magical beliefs existed within cultures which were practical and pragmatic, that they were "functionally" related to practices of agriculture and trade. He held that like mythology, magic was structurally related to social and economic spheres. While Tylor saw early religion as a form of primitive philosophy and Frazer assessed it as a pre-scientific pseudo-science, Malinowski held that within the context of primitive societies magical practices and mythological beliefs had a pragmatic rationale.<sup>89</sup>

Anthropological studies of language have highlighted the depths of conditioning. Sapir and Whorf clarified that every language provides an "implicit cognitive map". As Whorf put it:

...every language is a vast pattern-system... in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality...analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomenon, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of consciousness.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> For a recent review of the concept see R Keesing, "Rethinking Mana" *Journal of Anthropological Research* V 40 N 1

<sup>88</sup> J Frazer

<sup>89</sup> B Malinowski (1954)

<sup>90</sup> B Whorf (1969)

Understanding any system of thought requires learning its language and every religion, including animism and the world religions we will touch on, contains meanings which dissolve when translated. Ethnoscience, the new ethnography, responded to this recognition by presenting cultures through categories which are central within them, an "emic" approach which contrasts with "etic" or comparative explanations.<sup>91</sup>

Levi-Strauss borrowed from linguistics in a different fashion, his structuralism aimed to uncover categories of thought hidden within the diversity of mythology and he concluded:

The thought we call primitive is founded on this demand for order. This is equally true of all thought but it is through the properties common to all thought that we can most easily begin to understand forms of thought which seem very strange to us.<sup>92</sup>

His work clarified that scientific and magical thought resemble each other and he highlighted the universality of distinction between "nature and culture". Structuralism over-intellectualises, it construes "meaning" too much within the terms of "thought in itself". Recent symbolic anthropology moves toward focus on "praxis", on understanding of religion through interactive relations between symbolic beliefs and the experiences people have within the psychological and social domains.

Though our dominant theories now repudiate linear evolutionism, similar schemes tacitly underlie the conviction of most researchers. Modern interpretations build on presumption that the ontological status of spirits is nil, that our scientific views are more real. Spiro spoke for many, as most researchers are less open in this respect, in stating his "assumption that supernatural beings have no objective existence" and as "spirits do not exist" his task was to explain "why people continue to believe in them".<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> M Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*; M Rosaldo (1980) Rosaldo organised description of Ilongot society on the basis of conceptions which are central within it.

<sup>92</sup> C Levi-Strauss (1962 p 10)

<sup>93</sup> M Spiro (1967 p 64)

Spiro is certainly not alone in finding it self-evident that he could discount indigenous Burmese beliefs.

Most social scientists in effect take the same view, as their engrained tendency is to explain spirit beliefs as psychological or social projections. Geertz was able to profess "non belief" without jeopardising his standing as a scientist, as converse claims might have. Nor in fact did non belief detract from his marvellous explication of the more "mentally articulated" Indic and Islamic domains of Javanese religion, as those variants have been sharply formed intellectually even in their own terms. However his ethnography did not come close to opening up the internal coherence of animistic beliefs in spirits, traditions woven into the Javanist substratum.<sup>94</sup>

Within the milieu of evolutionary theorising, of ideas which sanctioned slavery and rationalised imperialism, it was possible to argue that "races" had different capacities. Anthropology has produced general conviction, though marginal debates continue, that cultural differences are consequences of conditioning rather than genetics. This lesson is so well established it usually remains as an unstated premise. Eliade read the related notion of the "psychic unity of humanity", in his exploration of the history of religions, as implying that all people, in any culture or time, have access to the same *range* of spiritual experiences. In the same vein, Geertz has commented that debates between Levy-Bruhl and Malinowski essentially concerned contrasts between "mystical" and "pragmatic" views, as *everyone* experiences them, not whether the primitive is "different" from the modern.<sup>95</sup>

These lessons of ethnography constitute a crucial ground for assessing the nature of southeast Asian beliefs. The people we are learning about are referring to the same ranges of "realities" we inhabit. Contrasting experiences relate to "valencies", the range of messages we choose to prioritise amongst those we all receive. All people implicitly engage both pragmatic issues of survival and

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<sup>94</sup> C Geertz (1971 p 99; 1976), the same applies in works by J Siegel (1986) and W Keeler (1987) more recently.

<sup>95</sup> Levy-Bruhl

spiritual issues of meaning. Other peoples' beliefs are not "weird" to them, they carry the same flavour of "everyday" normalcy our assumptions have for us.

"Shamanism" refers to the spirit specialists within animistic religion. The term originated in Siberia, referring to spirit healers there, but is used generally for healers whose spirit familiars mediate between the living and the spirit realms. Eliade argued that shamanism is "mystical", that shaman are neither just "believers" in a cosmology nor merely "manipulators" of keys to magic and the occult. He stressed their experiential and practical orientation toward the sacred. In his terms ordinary people in shamanic societies participate in the divine via "belief", in the three cosmic worlds of earth, sky and underworld. However the shaman "knows the mystery of the breakthrough in plane" and moves freely between the worlds.<sup>96</sup>

Shamanic healers have had technical skills, such as those relating to herbal medication or massage, as well as ritual performance. They also personally venture beyond "culturally conditioned consciousness" to engage realms of chaos, psychosis, and deity, thus participating most literally and thoroughly in initiatory cycles. Eliade held that they experienced "liminal transition", to use Turner's term, in its complete sense. Through ecstatic trances they "ascended" through the seven (or nine) abodes of the gods in heaven and descending into the subterranean regions inhabited by "the cosmic snake which in the end will destroy the world".<sup>97</sup> Having "healed themselves", through their initiation process, they become the masters of normative belief systems, those which prop up ordinary awareness and social identity within their communities.

Every Asian society contains healers and spirit specialists who could be called shaman in loose terms. In Java these are *dukun*, in Malaya *bomoh*, in Thailand *mau*. These spirit specialists

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<sup>96</sup> M Eliade (1964 pp 2,59).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* (p 268)

are associated with underlying ancestral spirit cults.<sup>98</sup> The terms cover anything from specialists in herbal medicine and healing to trance mediums and mystics. World religions have arisen in Asian contexts from the ground created by these ancestral and guardian spirit cultures and both spirits and magical knowledges have a clear place within later local religions.<sup>99</sup>

Systems such as Taoism and Hinduism are in origin essentially formalisations growing from the "perennial philosophy", the timeless wisdom, of this substratum. Within this complex engagement with spiritual knowledge does not depend on revelation, as Semitic traditions conceive it.<sup>100</sup> Asian religions have been animistic and shamanic both in their historical origin and at their base, in the continuing practices of village peoples.

Within traditional Asia folk religion has everywhere been characterised by a multiplicity of cults and practices, a tapestry within which people shared key concepts even when practices diverged. Disputes about doctrine or method have existed, but within most practices the process of spiritual balancing and realisation contained similar elements. Emphasis on this starting point balances the tendency to imagine that each system we engage should be considered first as though distinct. Our approach should emphasise overriding common concern with spiritual balance and healing. In shamanic cultures acquisition of magical powers through initiation and apprenticeship, was linked to fertility cults, to rituals ensuring regeneration of human and plant life.

Within each context shamanic religion has been interwoven deeply with subsequent developments. In Japan Buddhism is built

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<sup>98</sup> For Java see C Geertz (1976); for Malay society see R Windstedt (1951) for Thailand see SJ Tambiah (1970); for a more recent study L Golomb (1985); for the Philippines R Lieban (1967); for China D Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors* (Berkeley, U California P, 1975); for Japan, R Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (Stanford, Stanford UP, 1974).

<sup>99</sup> The modern Indian saint Sri Aurobindo commented on the continuity within his own tradition in *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1959)

<sup>100</sup> The term "Perennial Philosophy" was made current by Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1947).

on a Shinto base of rituals and folk magic.<sup>101</sup> In the Chinese context Taoism has not referred principally to the philosophies of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, but to wide ranging magic, geomancy and alchemy, traditions which bubble through the Chinese substratum since time immemorial.<sup>102</sup> In Tibet Bon shamanism interweaves with Vajrayana Tantric Buddhism. Hinduism cannot be understood historically or in practice through Shankara's 9th century formalisation of it, still less from the standpoint of the 19th century "Hindu renaissance". Those make it comprehensible as intellectual doctrine, but at root it has been a family of cultic and ritual practices, widely varied despite orthodox Sanskrit literary interaction with folk traditions.

These key lessons of anthropology and the history of religions are worth bearing in mind as we treat animism and magic within Southeast Asia. We should approach them with awareness that, though beliefs take shape through languages we have to learn, they are interwoven with social practices, refer to experiences and work with the same types of logic we employ to make sense of physical realities. The most difficult lesson for us is epistemological, relating to implicit convictions about the cognitive roots of knowledge.

Within animism the substratum has a psychological face, related to awareness which comes through the body, mediated by feelings which in refined form we call intuition. Marrett's concept of *mana* and Levy-Bruhl's participation mystique both suggest that they noticed this priority within it. Animists actively deploy awareness within "feelings", registered in the body; later religions construct and relate to spirituality more through "thoughts".<sup>103</sup>

Animism should be treated first as an expression of experiential realities, as shamanic practices refer explicitly to psychic and psychological domains. Communal rituals and

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<sup>101</sup> One modern cult deriving from this underlayer in Japan has been Mahikari. See Winston Davis, *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan* (Stanford, Stanford UP, 1980).

<sup>102</sup> One recent study of Taoist magic is Michael Saso, *The Teachings of Taoist Master Chuang* (New Haven, Yale UP, 1978)

<sup>103</sup> relate this to 'intuitive East' etc and guard comment

healers have therapeutic purposes which have been mediated by rituals myths relate to spirits. Spirits are embodied through possession cults, trance dancing and healing practices. Spirit presence explains observed capacities and events to local peoples. If our interpretive focus is primarily on abstract or implicit mental cosmologies, remote from the psychic sphere at issue, these beliefs make little sense. In speaking of "ancestors" animists refer to influences from the past, the same influences we imagine are maintained through "conditioning". Each view represents admission into the present of forces from the past.

Awareness of this cohesion within animism is essential to registering its relation to later historical developments.<sup>104</sup> By reading ancestral beliefs as "local analytical languages" we notice their logic and the ways they may be transformed and replaced. If hoax, vagrant imaginings, and falsity are pervasive, that *is* significant and comment is called for, but *only* in the same way as it would be in relation to obfuscation and false logic in academia. The "rules" of intellect are not discounted when we notice they are often abused. In shamanism the same applies: principles should be distinguished from their corruption and remain essential to understanding. Identifying the "grammar" or structures of the game is essential if we aim to expose ongoing practices.

### **Animism as a template**

Underlying Southeast Asian animistic cosmologies is conviction that all nature is alive. The mineral realms, of soils, rains, springs, mountains and seas, have gradations of power. These are recognised in power objects such as banyan trees, gemstones or the *kris*, the sacred wavy daggers of the archipelago. Nature spirits are a way of talking about the life giving forces of mineral and plant kingdoms, and forest demons equate to wild animals, neither have been human. A catalogue of spirit beliefs is less revealing than notice that they systematise knowledge of nature and establish a basis for human relations with it.

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<sup>104</sup> As L Golomb's (1985) grasp of Thai and Malay healing practices shows

Related spirits, called "*deva*" in India or "gods" in the ancient Mediterranean, of every plant species or natural feature are references to the living energy of those material realities. The rice goddess, "Nang Phrakosib" in Northeast Thailand or "Dewi Sri" in Java and Bali, is the generic spirit of that plant. The intensity of people's contact with rice is as important as it is easy to ignore. Knowing hunger, they are sensitive because life depends on the crops and the year is woven into cycles of labour intensive cultivation.

Apart from attending to irrigation and weeding, each stalk of rice is transplanted. It is grown first in small plots near houses then transplanted to mature in irrigated paddies. There water levels are closely regulated and the crop is monitored against pests, which especially encroach as it ripens. Ducks are brought in to eat insects and people stand guard to scare away birds when the harvest nears. The aging of rice is described as is the aging of people; it bends down in old age as people do. Until recently it has been harvested with respect, in Java with the *ani-ani*, a curved knife fitting the palm of the hand, to minimize offense to the goddess.

The lifestyle dictated by peasant rice agriculture generates sensitivity to natural rhythms and a social emphasis on harmony and consensus. That in turn is linked to beliefs and rituals, centring on spirits, which we consider animistic. Rice growing villagers have consistently emphasise intuitive spirituality, harmony and consensus and work to effect those through rituals which have centred on their relation to natural, guardian, and ancestral spirits.

Natural and human realms are linked through complex hierarchies. According to myths the guardian spirits, "tutelary" spirits of founding ancestors, interacted with the natural deities to establish human community. They facilitated the cutting of forests and cultivation of land through compacts with nature spirits articulated in myth and maintained through ritual. Propitiation of these spirits aimed to maintain peaceful relations as a basis for continuing cultivation and the idiom of spirits is thus linked in

principle to ecological consciousness, fostering sensitivity to the vitality of forces in the ecosystem, or physical environment.

The Burmese speak of guardian spirits as *nats*, the Thai as *tapubaan*, and Javanists as *danhyang*.<sup>105</sup> These spirits are conceived of as having been human and they continue to have thoughts, desires, and feelings even while lacking a physical body with its five senses. In Indic terms people become spirits through dying incompletely, because they still have *karma*, attachment to the world, at the moment of death. Important spirits are believed to be powerfully charged, but not all are imagined as superior beings. Spirits embody the same spectrum of qualities evident in living people, calling for attitudes ranging from fear to respect on a similar basis. Ancestral spirits remain interested in the living on two counts: unfinished *karma* means they have needs which can be gratified vicariously and, like living parents, they care for their descendants.

Living people can form contracts with them as a by product and communities maintain contact through ritual flower and incense offerings. Individual alliances, to facilitate power, wealth, status or sex, are reached through shamanic intercession or directly, through retreat, fasting and prayer at graves or other sacred sites. But such magical contracts come at a cost, as those who enter them are bonded to occupy spirit realms upon death. Compacts with deities or ancestors are the basic relationship rooted in aboriginal spirituality and they condition later transactions.

Differing capacities, degrees of sensitivity or power are recognised in shaman, village heads or rulers. Shaman, in the strict sense meaning only some of the *dukun* in Java or *mao tham* in Thailand, have power through "familiar spirits", who move between planes. "Contacting of spirits" can be read as "attunement", registration of vibrational traces remaining after physical life stops. "Vibrations", would be a literal translation of "*getaran*" as used by Javanese. Neither colloquialism nor

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<sup>105</sup> (Aung 1962 pp 83-109) (Tambiah 1970 p 280)

obfuscation, it is technical in the sense that reference to "radio waves" is. This analogy also aptly suggests the "feeling of reality" animists hold. The idea that people are "differentially empowered" was amplified later through Indian caste ideology, within which theories of reincarnation and asceticism tied differential power to past lives and current statuses.

Belief that the human and the spirit realms interact and mirror each other is basic. The components of individuals, the social collective and the natural cosmos are seen as being the same, the elements of earth, air, fire and water; realities at each level are parallel and similarly ordered. "Domains" refer to different planes within the same instant; speaking of the "natural", "ancestral" and "human" realms is like reference to the "physical", "cultural", and "social" domains. Local statement that ancestral kingdoms interact with living people are not hypothetical, they are a way of talking about the same realities our discourses address. Resistance to suggestion that animism relates to "experiential domains" reveals more of how our "imagined realities" are insulated from psychic experience than of what animists believe.

The substratum has been a "template" underlying regional evolution. Yet we do not have access to early beliefs in pristine form and even in outlining its logic above recourse to syncretic versions, spiced with later ideas, has been unavoidable. With kingdoms, new populations inhabited local spirit realms. Where there had been village guardian spirits, kings, queens, princes and armies contended. Contemporary notions of the spirits certainly reflect the idiom of kingdoms. Burmese *nat* beliefs, Thai *phi* and Vietnam sects like the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hoa all combine ancestral spirit worship with elements of Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Christianity. Javanists may see themselves as "rooted in primal culture", but they employ Islamic and Hindu idiom. Malays use Sufi terminology within shamanism. Current movements extensively rework imported ideas. Nevertheless local

systems hold ancestral spirits at their heart.<sup>106</sup>

Contemporary studies of local religion, whether in Java, Thailand or Burma, consistently note the persistence of spirit beliefs, rituals and healing practices linked to earlier animistic religion.<sup>107</sup> If imported myths and rituals, emanating mainly from India and the Middle East, reshaped expression and penetrated religious life, at the same time traditional mystical religions converged with animism more than early students thought. Even ostensibly animistic rituals, such as the Javanese *selametan*, have been shaped profoundly by Islam.<sup>108</sup> Traditional Islam sanctioned propitiation of the spirits and gave new dress to the rituals which framed it, but that does not imply that communal sharing of food and offerings to spirits originated with later formal religion. Patterns of communal feasting predate historical religions, belonging to a substratum they also drew from in other contexts.

That animism characterises underlying belief among the rice producing majority in Southeast Asia remains a truism. Recent studies link animistic and Indic senses of power in Java; highlight spiritual senses of power in Sulawesi; and draw attention to region-wide preoccupation with "men of prowess".<sup>109</sup> All of these suggest, even when this is not their aim, that local senses of an animistic power charged universe remain strong. It defines the grammar, or ground rules, of transactions in directing attention to sacred sites, it underpins shamanic healing practices and it is embodied within rituals and trances of both cores and zones.

As with the subconscious or the submerged portion of an iceberg surface evidence, which strikes our eye and enters routine discourse, depends implicitly on what does not appear. For instance we may not recall the first years of our life, but we know

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<sup>106</sup> The title of Winstead's early study, *The Malay Magician: being Shaman Saiva and Sufi*, is suggestive. He highlights both syncretism and links between functions. 'Shaman' is a term for the spiritual specialists in purely animistic cultures; 'shivaite' refers to one form of Hinduism; 'sufis' are Muslim mystics.

<sup>107</sup> Landon (1949 pp 11-31); Geertz (1976); Tambiah (1970); Spiro, Golomb (1985); Wolters (1982); Keeler (1987)

<sup>108</sup> Woodward (1988)

<sup>109</sup> BRO'G Anderson (1972 p 7); M Rosaldo (1980); OW Wolters (1982) extended Kirsch's comments; S Errington (1983).

that the patterns they imprint inform our subsequent paths. If a spiritual substratum is especially hard for us to "see" it may be because we have lost our analogues to it, as we cannot see elsewhere what we do not imagine as existing in ourselves. Pursuing analogies, my aim is not to "expose the subconscious", but to reinterpret the history of consciousness in relation to it. Internal, or cognitive, frontiers constrain our vision and post-industrial norms condition us, especially in scholarship. These limits deserve respect, but only in the same "relative" terms as the boundaries of nations or religions. Boundaries in every instance require periodic renegotiation.

### chapter 3

## COSMOLOGIES OF STATEFORMATION

The classical period of Southeast Asian states lasted from roughly the 5th to the 15th centuries of the Christian calendar. In that period profound Indian and Chinese influences facilitated the construction of temple cities and the development of court literates and arts. Through this process the ethnic identities of the Mon, Cham, Burmese, Khmer, Vietnamese and Javanese, were consolidated. The existence of those groups as we know them resulted from local interaction with classical traditions. The Thai and Tagalog peoples only became prominent in later history; the Malays, Acehnese and Minangkabau, though influenced by Indic culture, were later more strongly stamped by Islam; the Mon and Cham peoples, powerful in early mainland history, were later marginalised.

With the emergence of states a new sense of time enters our field of vision. The rhythm of dynastic periodicity joined the seasonal and life cycles of the substratum. In broad strokes we can say the peoples of core areas came of age during the classical era through Chinese and Indian models. If animism and peasant cultivation underpins the cores, the classical era especially gave rise to their court elites, to bureaucratic and charismatic systems of authority. Courts and peasants interacted while remaining relatively distinct. In our time those owing the most to the classical period are still associated with bureaucracies, the residue of courts which ever since early on maintain elements of the traditions which generated them. Local identities were likely already articulated through small states prior to outside influence so the adaptation of religions, literacy and systems of government was never a matter of uncomplicated imposition.

Two themes keynote the classical: stateformation and ethnogenesis. The notion of stateformation shifts attention from

outside influences to general social process; ethnogenesis turns attention from static opposition, between indigenous and external elements, to dynamic process. As has already been suggested, the classical cycle began with a gap which closed as states matured and systems were domesticated. Eventually Indic and Sinic patterns belonged as much to Southeast Asians as to their places of origin. Trade, migration, conquest and religious pilgrimage all contributed to external impact; Chinese and Indian systems contrasted in their nature and the extent of their impact, but both were influential almost everywhere.

### **Maritime networks and ethnogenesis**

Contact with extra-regional cultures came through trade along sea routes which cut through the region from before the time of Christ. Coincidence of power and wealth at the poles of Asia stimulated trade, when Han China, from 200 BC to 200 AD, and imperial Rome were at a height. The scale of each turned the earlier trickle of transit trade across Eurasia into a regular flow. New routes opened up. One, passing through Persia, Afghanistan and central Asia to North China, was known as the "silk route", as Romans paid in gold coin for Chinese silk and porcelain. The sea route, through Southeast Asia, had origins in earlier coasting trade, from port to port along the Arabian Gulf, the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea. Trade passed up the Irrawaddy River, the only extensively navigable river apart from the Mekong, to connect with Chinese river systems across the short but mountainous interior of the mainland. Portage routes, especially across the narrow neck of the Malay peninsula, were more popular than the Straits of Malacca, as that was a haven for pirates.

Proximity to the boundaries of contemporary India and China does not necessarily correlate with the penetration of influences. Whether along the Malay Peninsula, in north Sumatra or in the Mekong delta trading towns were lay over points. Transit traders from the west and north waited, exchanging goods while they did, for seasonal winds which carried them to and from home

ports. Early technology bound sailors to the winds and intermittent stops were more common than cutting across open oceans. Among the earliest island states we must count Kutei, on the east coast of Kalimantan, and Taruma, in western Java. The impact of borrowed cultures correlates most clearly with trade routes and the early states of the Mekong Delta, Thailand, Burma, the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and other islands each become separate centres of exchange between China and India. In the Burmese hills people are related to and borrowed most from China; their valley neighbours were more indebted to India. Farther east the lowland Vietnamese accepted Chinese models while their neighbours in the hills learned more from India.<sup>110</sup>

That influences came via trade does not explain the degree to which Southeast Asians became familiar with the intricacies of Indian culture. Traders did not possess the technical and religious knowledge which became the basis of classical civilisations.<sup>111</sup> It must be assumed that Brahman priests, the only Indians with access to texts and the technicalities of ritual magic, were the carriers of high culture. Though it is possible some came in the service of Indian princes who migrated, it is much more likely they came on the invitation of local chiefs. Local rulers would have heard of their skills, as much through their own sailors as through foreign traders. We know that early temples conformed closely to Indian design and therefore that their specifications must have come through direct transmission, through the importing of experts including Brahmans and probably also a range of skilled artisans. We have concrete evidence that religious specialists travelled with traders on the early sea routes.

Among the earliest records of the trade routes are the diaries of religious pilgrims. Chinese quest for original Buddhist knowledge led many pilgrims, like those imaged in the well known Chinese fable *Monkey*, to travel both overland and by sea.

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<sup>110</sup> ref to Leach for Burma and Condominias for VN

<sup>111</sup> ref to van Leur Bosch and Hall

Chinese Buddhists, including Fa Hsien in the 4th century and I Tsing in the 7th century, passed through the archipelago on their way to India. I Tsing studied at Srivijaya, in south Sumatra, and described it as a centre of Buddhist learning in its own right. Later, in the 11th century, the Bengali monk Atisa spent seven years at Srivijaya as the disciple of a princely teacher. He subsequently founded one of the three main lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. At the ruins of Nalanda in India, the key Buddhist monastic university of the first millennium, inscriptions record that several *asrama*, "dormitories", were built by rulers of Srivijaya to house students and pilgrims from the archipelago. Like Chinese, Southeast Asians sought religious knowledge in India directly and we can say they were thoroughly integrated into and active travellers within the wider world of early Buddhist and Hindu cults.

Generally the stimulus of contact with traders created a cosmopolitan environment and thus the imperative to conceptualise in more universal terms. At the same time cities grew through trade and their scale gave local people an incentive to borrow. Ritual process may illustrate why. Annual harvest festivals were focal in prehistoric maintenance of balance with spirits realms. They were coordinated by village elders in a context where everyone would have been kin, where proximate populations scarcely exceeded a thousand.<sup>112</sup> We can speculate that as populations grew to approach a million, specialisation was needed to orchestrate wider social energies. Indian and Chinese literate cultures offered instruments for this purpose, to focus wider collective energies. Both provided classes of specialists with access to texts, cohesive ceremonial magic and technical skills which facilitated social organisation on a large scale. The principles which were at work in early rituals remained present at the village level; in the courts the same logic was amplified through literacy to have wider effect.

Syncretism clearly defined this process, as we can see that

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<sup>112</sup> JC van Leur (1955)

local beliefs found new voice within rather than being replaced by the new spiritual vocabularies. The spirits of local volcanoes were given new names and related to deities, Siva in particular, which other peoples of Asia could also recognise. Conceptualisation in increasingly universalised terms implied reframing and supplement, not static discourse between past and present. McKinlay suggests that there were significant shifts in the process, as sacral powers which had been located primarily in nature were refocussed through courts and temples at the centres of kingdoms.<sup>113</sup> However sacred banyan trees and ancestral shrines of the megalithic also often sit in the centre of settlements and as people incorporated new ideas, in the first instance, these came into existing frameworks, providing new ways of relating to the same energies of spirits, shrines, caves and ancestors they already knew. In the new order spirit hierarchies paralleled social structures, as had village guardian spirits; but, with kingdoms, kings, queens, princes and armies fought in the spirit as well as social realms.

Ethnicities emerged through fusion in the period we are referring to as tribal groups of iron and bronze age peoples merged with each other and a trickle of migrants. Perhaps because Chinese records provide direct information, this process is clearer in the Vietnamese case than it is for others. Mixing of early Yueh peoples, aboriginal to the region between Hanoi and Guanchao in prehistory, and Chinese migrants produced the modern Vietnamese. Just as we have to remind ourselves that contemporary territories are products of later history, peoples emerged historically. Population movements occurred, but for the most part ethnicities were forged and created, growing in number and into prominence as the societies which produced them proved successful through time. Most of the currently dominant peoples of the region were not prominent two thousand years ago, ethnicities, like nations, are products of history.

In dealing with the substratum of peasant culture and spirit

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<sup>113</sup> (1979 p 307-8)

beliefs we touched an essentially timeless world characterised by mythic regeneration. This time sense, different from our rhythms of urban industry, was and is rooted in cycles of seasonal agricultural. As those still exist within Southeast Asia, this time sense also continues among some of those still living. At the same time, with the origins of states, a new rhythm of cycles and with that a new sense of time enters into our field of vision. States bring fluctuations of dynastic emergence and decline and complement our starting point with cycles. Within them the continuing village sphere was redefined. Peasantry technically only exist through reciprocal relationship with cities, through interaction with the court cultures of writing and elaborated hierarchy they implicitly sustain.

### **Images of polity in classical cores**

If contrasting the degree of Indian and Chinese influence on the region we risk pursuing non-questions which arise from false images of prehistory. Questioning will not make sense if constructed in terms of contemporary boundaries. Initially our image should be of a generalised substratum of cultures, ethnically extremely diverse, but characterised by similar patterns, distributed over most of the land mass we know as Asia. Within this broad frame two kernels of civilisation emerged beginning about four thousand years ago. One began around the Indus Valley in Northern India, in what know as Kashmir and Pakistan, and spread over the northern Gangetic Plain, then only gradually diffusing through other regions of the Indian sub-continent. The other began in a bend of the Yellow River in north China and spread to incorporate the area north of the Yangtze and later southern China. Both dynamic, fluid and expanding centres, cores of civilisation, interacted with Southeast Asia.

Sinic influence in Vietnam came through military conquest in the 2nd century BC and can be read easily as a southward extension of the Chinese core. Some local legends refer to migrant Indian princes founding local kingdoms, and Indian migration

must have taken place on a small scale. It would be surprising if elite marriage alliances did not occur as local states emerged. But we have no solid evidence of Indian conquests, of royalty establishing courts and dynasties. The Chinese maintained records we register as historical, so we trust what we know through them, while Indians elaborated mythologies and genealogies instead. In any case the scrappy sources we do have, mainly through archaeology or Chinese records, lead us to emphasise the significance of traders and religious pilgrims in the transmission of Indian culture to Southeast Asia.

Chinese emphasis on territorial control meant that parts of prehistoric Southeast Asia were swallowed into China. From this perspective India's influence on the region may have been less. However if thinking in terms of political and religious patterns within today's boundaries, we would say that classical states adopted Indian more than Chinese patterns. That judgement obscures other influences even within those areas: Chinese traders influenced economic life widely and we know that Indic kingdoms sent embassies and traders to Chinese courts, expressing deference in the process. Questions of relative influence are complicated further by the fact that China itself absorbed Indian Buddhism during the same centuries in which Indic states were forming in Southeast Asia. We can conclude that India contributed most to pan Asian religious discourse in the first millennium, but must balance that by observation that China's economic and political power touched all of the same peoples.

Increasing contact with a multitude of cultures explains local interest in adapting the available Indic and Sinic models. Indic influences resulted in a pattern of society which focused on the *devaraja* or "godking"; Sinic influences centred on notions of the "mandate of heaven". Those systems had different implications for political life, social organisation and cosmology. To keynote contrast we can follow Leach, characterising the Chinese or Sinic system as "bureaucratic" and the Indian or Indic system as

"charismatic".<sup>114</sup> As *devaraja* Indianised rulers were considered god kings, incarnations of cosmic principles identified with Siva, Vishnu or the Buddha. Southeast Asians may have extended this notion even farther than the Indians. Rather than being mediators, as in China, they were meant to be embodiments in the flesh of the divine. In both systems rulers, as the linchpin of states, were meant to cosmologically link social and political orders to the cosmos and nature.

The Chinese system defined territories of bureaucratic and rationalised court control. The kingdom was seen as the centre of the world, the "middle kingdom" around which peripheral states were oriented. Emperors were "sons of Heaven", power rested on alignment to cosmic forces through consulting astrologers to maintain rites which geared agricultural cycles and court life to harmony with nature. Rulers depended on a proper relationship with nature, they needed "the mandate of heaven" to justify their rule. If rulers had this mandate it was supposed to be demonstrated through actions, through manifest harmony within society and with natural forces. Floods, famine, pestilence or social conflict were taken as signs that an emperor was not attuned to nature, because they indicated there was something wrong in the connection between cosmos, nature and society.

Ancestral precedent was crucial as in the golden era, at the shadowy origins of Chinese civilisation, rulers were imagined to have been proper intermediaries, balancing points between tradition, nature and society. The political structure of the kingdom centred on a mandarin class of scholarly administrators who attained rank in theory by merit. Achievement was measured through performance within a rigorous examination system which centred on literary classics rather than bureaucratic or accounting procedures. In practice only the wealthy could afford to support children during the long study necessary to undertake imperial exams, so gauging of merit was never strictly egalitarian. Through preparation students engaged the social philosophy of

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<sup>114</sup> ref to Leach

Confucianism, a system of ethics and philosophy rooted in reference to ancestral precedent. The education of Confucian scholars, though humanistic rather than technocratic, resulted in relatively rationalised bureaucracies, with historical and tax records, and stressed ritual precedent as a basis for harmony with *li*, the principle of order embedded in the cosmos.

Indic conceptualisation differed, presenting spiritually based status as based on powers arising from reincarnation or ascetic achievement. Indianised rulers theoretically become so by birth, as incarnations of deity, and usurpers justified claims by constructing genealogies to link them to past royalty. Kings, often termed *ratu*, were supposed to demonstrate higher consciousness and power by their very being and its reflection in the state of the kingdom which depended on them. This is an ascetic or charismatic model, as it is based on directly spiritual ideas of kingship. Indic styled rulers did themselves spend time in spiritual retreat, at hermitages or monasteries before, after and even during their rule. Their hold on populations was based in theory, not on armies or bureaucracies, but on intuitive and mystical attunement with subtle energies operating in the collective. In practice the consensual complicity of widespread elite endorsement of their position was the most crucial measure of the power of rulers.

Chinese administration of Vietnam brought legislation to impose their norms and customs. During the 1st century AD Vietnamese were systematically instructed to cut their hair, dress and behave as Chinese did. Efforts to change inheritance systems, by abolishing the property rights of women, helped generate the most famous early Vietnamese revolt against China, that of the Trung sisters. Women were prominent within the earlier framework of Vietnamese society, as generally through Southeast Asia. The guerrilla war the sisters led disrupted administration and made them heroines, recalled up to the present in Vietnamese folk imagination. Forceful imposition of patriarchal culture reflected Chinese conquest. Nevertheless mixing in genetic as well as cultural terms meant a two way exchange through subsequent history, as the Chinese administrators and traders who

periodically fed into the Vietnamese system often married locals to form alliances with the elite.

When Vietnam broke from China in the early 10th century it began to expand in much the same way as China had, through a series of conquests over several hundred years. The "*nam tien*" or "drive south" is a major theme of Vietnamese history. Once they were autonomous the wars Vietnam had already waged against Chams assumed new character and by the 15th century Champa had been essentially eliminated. It was the Indic kingdom, a once great trading state in what is now central Vietnam, most exposed to a Sinic polity. After Vietnamese expansion swallowed the Chams interaction increased with the Khmers. The Khmer empire of Angkor had dominated the Mekong delta along with most of what is now Thailand and Laos. Vietnamese expansion reflected the contrast between charismatic Indian and bureaucratic Chinese frameworks. The relatively rationalised infrastructure of Vietnam meant that dynasties could fall but the exam system and much of the elite remained stable.

Within the Indianised Cham and Khmer frameworks dynasties rose and fell as autonomous entities, as worlds to themselves. The system implied inbuilt instability, as whenever a dynasty crumbled little was left. Indic rulers had to evoke, summon or generate charisma and they depended most on relatives for support. Because the ruler was identified with deity the closer nobles were to the ruler in social and genetic terms, the more power and right to it they had. The prominence of marriage alliance, to consolidate wider power, was a corollary. But when dynasties collapsed within the Indic framework the system virtually fell apart. Thus instability within the Cham and Khmer kingdoms meant that new regions fell subject to the Vietnamese with every dynastic transition. This process subordinated the Chams, who have been reduced to a minority of a few hundred thousand within modern Vietnam. Vietnamese encroachment on Khmer territory continued over several hundred years. Expanding Vietnamese and Thai powers would likely have eliminated the Cambodian state in the 19th century, but for the intervention of

French imperialism. Even the most recent conflicts, among Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmers and Thai, echo classical themes.

### **Hierarchies of spiritual power**

An extended exploration of the Indian spirituality which was imported into Southeast Asia would be an incredible catalogue. In India the *Vedas*, the earliest Scriptures, contained the ageless wisdom of sages and fire ceremonials of purification were critical. Castes, *varnas*, differentiated communities of people conceived of as having status related to degrees of purity relating to previous incarnations. The concept of *karma*, governing incarnation in physical form, implies that people are in precisely the position they need to learn the lessons of life. *Yoga* refers to the sciences of union or liberation, to disciplines exercised by individual seekers. On the path to realisation of the essence of spiritual life seekers are guided by *guru*, teachers, who have themselves achieved mastery. Each *guru* expressed, sometimes in radically divergent ways, vision of and techniques for the path to liberation. Teaching and practice took place within an apprenticeship pattern, paralleling the nature of learning in early arts and crafts, as disciples modelled themselves spiritually on their mentors.

Fundamental philosophical notions including *karma*, *dharma*, *moksa*, and *maya*, are found everywhere in Indian thought. *Karma*, the law of cause and effect binds subtle spiritual life forms to the physical planet. It is the ordering principle by which cycles of life and events within it are regulated. *Dharma* refers to "truth", as embedded within the teachings of religion, and in its own terms Hinduism is perhaps best called *sanhata dharma*, or universal truth. *Moksa*, the goal of spiritual life, means absolute dissolution, releasing the soul from otherwise endless cycles of reincarnation. If liberation is achieved it implies essentially nothing is left, even in the subtle realms of the spirit, when death occurs. Every aspect of being then returns to the universe, not just the body. *Maya* is often translated as statement that we live in a world of illusion, but means philosophical recognition that domains of phenomena,

which we experience through the limitations implied by our senses as real, are transitory rather than absolute.

In early statecraft we can identify classical patterns which influence present practices. My focus here is on power, on how people have influenced and related to each other. Though treating social relations, as distinct from cosmologies identified in myth, we can still move from formulations of the ideals to exploration of concrete practices. At the most general level we are concerned with the interplay between images and practices, ideals and realities. Understanding mystically conceived notions of power will help us grasp why Asian actors perform as they have, but does not imply we can explain politics entirely in these terms. Concentration on ideals, as here, does not mean that ideology is held to be more critical than economic or social factors in interpreting political practices. On the other hand we need to register the practical implications of the central logic which Indic notions of kingship brought to the region.

We can begin with conceptions of power. Anderson noted that the English word power is not an adequate translation of the Javanese term *kesakten*. That derives from the Sanskrit *sakti*, which refers to spiritual power. In the west we view power as unlimited, as coming from diverse sources which people accumulate and manipulate, ranging from control over economies, people, armies, machinery and guns. We see power as heterogeneous, unlimited and abstract, as a concept about relations we identify socially. According to Javanese notions *kesakten* is held to be concrete, to have substance in itself as a force suffusing everything and related to divine, cosmic or life energies as those are conceived in primordial animism. In this sense, power is homogeneous, even if it has many expressions, in itself it is singular and constant in quantity. In the traditional sense to attribute power to a person meant noting a quality they possessed, like hair colour, not comment on their social position.

Classical Indic notions of the *devaraja* and Sinic notions of the "mandate of heaven" were linked to a sense of the ruler as a bridge, a stabilising force responsible for aligning social rituals

with the actual state of the cosmos. To serve as the lynch pin or "nail of the universe" as some were termed, kings had to embody cosmic principles or in the least, in the Sinic model, possess *jen*, "superior" qualities. Even later traditional cultures, of the Islamic and Theravada worlds, maintained closely related notions of power, distinction between Indic *devaraja* and later Buddhist *dhammaraja* or Islamic *sultans* is muted. According to Wales Thai rulers in the 18th and 19th centuries may have had more absolute power than the rulers of Angkor. Within Thailand a Brahmanic priesthood, centred on the court and responsible for courtly rituals, remained influential even as the centralising powers of states grew. The most cohesive recent example of this pattern directly linked to the Southeast Asian Indianised kingdoms of the classical era, has been Tibet, where the Dalai Lama, as in incarnation of a Bodhisattva, is still construed as an incarnate deity.

Although strictly speaking Indian notions of caste were not generally transplanted to the region, spiritual consciousness was supposed to correlate with social status in the way caste notions imply it should. As Dumont has suggested, through his study of hierarchy in India, in the post Enlightenment world our primary myth may be that all people are equal; in the Indic world the underlying interpretation of society is that people are differentially endowed with power. At their peak Indian models implied rulers were incarnations of deities such as Vishnu or Siva, at the apex of a spiritual pyramid, epitomising spiritual ideals and sitting at the top of the cosmic mountain as the centre around which the universe turns..<sup>115</sup> Ruler theoretically held the highest social, political, economic and spiritual status simultaneously. Personal bonding, like relationships to spiritual *guru*, forged the links through which power channelled. As direct contact decreases with distance, the power of kings also faded as relationships became distant. Those closest to rulers had the greatest access to the power which flowed out.

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<sup>115</sup> Dumont ref

Turning from general ideals to exploration of practices, we can identify a number of social patterns which are interwoven with conception of divine kingship. In the first place conception of the divinity of the ruler is linked to the cultic structure of religious organisation. The royal cult is mirrored also in a pattern of local spiritual *guru*, the structure of local spiritual movements mirrored the conception of the kingdom. Within classical states court ritual, orchestrated by Brahmans, was geared to bring about the realisation of royal divinity; the states as a whole may be conceived of as cults focusing on the personality of the ruler.<sup>116</sup> In Angkor the capital of the state was conceived as a microcosm of the kingdom; the king as the centre piece within the city. Rituals and power relations existed through a cult pattern which focused on the ruler.

Identification of the King with the capital could make the palace a prison, if someone physically assumed the throne he could claim the kingdom. At its extreme this principle kept some 19th century Burmese kings tied to their palaces; one was afraid to attend his coronation, fearing a brother would sit on the throne. In this system instability was related to recognition that the ruler might not be what he was supposed to be. According to ideals as an incarnation the ruler is necessarily attuned to the cosmos and at once to apparent currents in the world of power. If kings appear frivolous or careless, if they fail to attend to the population's welfare, then people justifiably conclude that they do not have the true power which is meant to sanction their rule. Any imbalance in society could be taken as evidence to undermine rulers. As the ruler's claim rested on what was meant to be a uniquely attuned consciousness of the cosmos, those who were spiritually attuned independently, including mystics in remote hermitages, could also be a threat.

For this reason rebellion was usually cosmologically framed. Even villagers could mount competing claims to being more fully

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<sup>116</sup> Kulke, Heine-Geldern etc

in tune with the true nature of the times. Claimants usually cited mystical powers to affirm they held a cosmic mission. Kings become vulnerable and villagers explicit actors if, when another claimant emerged, popular consensus did not appear firm. Thus, while in the ideal everything focuses on the ruler, in practice this worked only if the ruler brought actual prosperity. The notion that authority rested on superior consciousness implied that leaders were meant to be attuned to the subconscious of the collective. Oneness with the state was supposed to be reflected in a capacity to articulate what was collectively felt. A true ruler's had to sense what was implicit in the whole, articulating it in a fashion followings could affirm by their feeling that he spoke for them. As the focus of a ritualised cult the ruler was responsible for generating a unifying vision of the world as part of his balancing function. Thus rulers were especially concerned with symbolic synthesis.

A ruler's claim to legitimacy had to be witnessed by the populace, power never went only one way. Rulers could claim ownership of land by their identity in being with the state as a whole, thus having right to claim part of it's produce. At the same time rulers had to be the central points from which wealth and power flowed downward and outward to the populace. The system worked only when there was a two-way flow. If power came to rulers from the cosmos; demonstration of its reality had to be manifest through patronage. No king could be one unless dispensing wealth, building temples and irrigation works and passing out favours and titles. Rulers had to maintain courts and sponsor massive rituals to cement the consensus underlying authority. If a substantial portion of nobility, each with control over peoples of their own, no longer felt the king had power, then he lost it. In times of chaos the nobility would fight among themselves or coalesce in support of a new claimant.

Maintenance of power depended on patronage, on what royalty actually dispensed and not only on what they claimed to be. Patronage built on kinship models of relationship linked to practices we still see. Officials were identified with roles just as

kings were, it is as easy for either to view state resources as rights, as in this view there is little separation between state taxes and personal possession. Official responsibility for timber resources might be interpreted as the right to parcel out concessions to extract it, a percentage of profits becoming the official's right. Thai officials were said to "eat the villages" they had authority over. There is still a notion of corruption within this system, though it does not arise from the same premises ours do. A percentage had to be passed upward in homage to rulers and downward in favours to subordinates. When reciprocity broke down, if wealth stopped flowing as it reached those in power, that indicated authorities failed to identify with the collective, showing absence of the attributes of consciousness theoretically required for their position.

### **Domestication of imported myths**

Mythology offers a gateway to the process through which foreign notions became domesticated and insight into the way many local peoples still think. Historically myths were a prime channel taking imported ideas into village contexts; within that domain these ideas remain influential. Local myths are rooted in animism but became woven into epics which originated in India. Southeast Asians came to feel that even legends which had originated elsewhere were statements of events in their area, of their origins. Mythology has been articulated in villages as a supplement to communal agricultural rites and life cycle initiations. Court elites also domesticated myths through their sponsorship of drama, literature and monumental architecture. We can identify local thought structures in mythology because folk cosmology is expressed coherently through it. At the same time Southeast Asians present clear interpretations of their own mythologies. According to their framework mythical meanings become clear when set within conviction that the microcosm and macrocosm correspond, that the structures of inner experience, society and cosmos mirror each other.

Myths originate as oral tradition, as tales by story tellers

within tribal or village communities. Verbally linking generations, they do embody effort to understand the origins and nature of existence, but colloquial views of myth, as fairy tales of imagined origins, are not helpful. We experience myths as vestiges; living myths have profound dimensionality. As central complexes within traditional cultures they provide systematic entry to underlying structures of thought. "Cosmology", used as anthropologists use worldview, is not just reference to images of the physical universe. It refers to organising structures which shape perceptions of the world in all its dimensions. Myths reveal images of the nature of reality by simultaneously uncovering, extracting and injecting meaning into the world. When myths work they guide responses to living issues and crystallise pervasive thought patterns. As a gateway to the worldview of those who hold and are animated by them, mythology leads toward the inside of traditional imagery.

Prehistoric Southeast Asians believed in spirit worlds they interacted with through rituals, shamanic trance or involuntary possession. In primitive belief three major domains and many gradations were already distinguished. Nature spirits were later identified with Indian *deva*. Guardian ancestral spirits were those of honourable ancestors. Most were supposed to have been historical characters, like the *nats* of the Burmese, who effected links to the power of mountains, rivers, swamps and lakes. In northeast Thailand the *tapuban* and in Java the *danhyang*, including Semar, are related to sacred sites of prehistory. A host of wild, brutish or demonic spirits, some of them less honoured ancestors, populated the lower realms. Even in purely animistic terms the world is multilayered, human routines consciously inhabit only one plane, and that is understood as simultaneously and tacitly interacting with others. This sense of spiritual dimensions intermeshed easily and profoundly with imported myths because the new idioms appeared to be further statement on old issues.

Indian epics influenced the whole of what are now the Theravada and Islamic regions. The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are not so much sacred books, as diverse cycles which appear in

numerous variants. Originally neither were written texts. Like epics such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* they are codifications of oral traditions which include a huge inventory of stories, most of which have never been written down. Even as recorded in writing they are immense, but for most people they were primarily, and in many areas remain, essentially oral and performance traditions. They originate as ancient stories of war between the various clans which settled northern India. Though characters and events are thus identified with specific places in India, at the grass roots level they have been treated as local wherever the epics have taken root. Localisation has been reflected in the way characters have been favoured or viewed and extended through a proliferation of branch stories which are unique to each local area.

The *Ramayana* is supposed to have taken place earlier and is a story of war between Rama, an incarnation of the god Vishnu, and Rahwana. Rahwana's kingdom is called Lanka and identified with Sri Lanka. Prince Rama was disinherited and forced into exile in the forest with his wife Sita and brother Laksmana. Meanwhile Rahwana exercised incredible spiritual powers to accumulate evil power in one place. As Vishnu, Rama is tacitly a high god and thus the epic can be read easily as a black and white interaction. Rama's war, with the help of the white monkey Hanoman, can be viewed as a straightforward victory of the "good". However there are noble characters on all sides. Kumbakarna, for instance, fought with his brother Rahwana, out of loyalty to family and despite disagreeing with him, and is generally viewed as a noble character. Though there is a struggle within the epics between forces of light and forces of darkness, the epics do not present a simple picture of good and evil.

The *Mahabharata* is a story of a war between cousins. On the one hand the Pandawa, five brothers; on the other hand the Kurawa, ninety-nine brothers. In this case the Pandawa are wrongly disinherited from their kingdom and, like Rama, spent long periods in exile. Eventually, only in the last of the eighteen books of the epic, final war, the "Bhatayuddha", breaks out between the factions. The Kurawa are annihilated and the children

of the Pandawa die in battle, but the Pandawa are victorious and the result is tranquillity and a new order in the world. The essential framework of the epics is not complex, they read like any tale of medieval encounter between kingdoms. They are analogous not only to the Greek myths, but also to Arthurian legends in England and many of the same symbolic codes also apply within all of these myths.

Both epics are extensive repositories for Indian spiritual lore and *guru* of every school draw from them to illustrate points. One book of the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavadgita*, is particularly well known and often used. It treats the point when Arjuna, the third of the Pandawas, is about to enter battle. Knowing he will face cousins and his half brother Karna, he pauses to ask his charioteer Krishna, like Rama an incarnation of the god Vishnu, why he must fight. Through dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna spiritual teachings are particularly explicit. It is explained that notwithstanding love for his cousins he must fight because it was preordained, *karma*, as his *dharma*, life work. Most episodes and exchanges are not so explicitly spiritual, but the epics are interpreted symbolically.

At the first level of interpretation characters represent individuals from an imagined past. Beyond that each simultaneously represents a specific aspect of the inner human psyche. For example, Krishna, or Vishnu, may represents the spiritual heart and the Pandawa can be related to the five senses. Because each character exists as an element of the microcosm, each story becomes a statement which details spiritual conflict, whether of an internal/ individual or external/ social nature. This coding of the epics is esoteric, a secret knowledge associated with the epics; it was articulated in ancient textual versions of the epics themselves, but noticed only by those whose spiritual practices went beyond conventional moralism. As cultic practices of initiation were fundamental within India and the early Indic cultures of Southeast Asia, precisely this esoteric knowledge constituted a key code within local readings of myth. Epic themes were not only deployed as moral models, but also used within

early esoteric and mystical cults. The interpretive framework of microcosm/ macrocosm correspondence was central within classical religious knowledge.

In addition to the Hindu epics the *Jatakas*, stories which detail the prior incarnations of the Buddha, are multiplied by Buddhists on the mainland. Hundreds of tales describe his earlier lives, narrating the progress of the being who was to become the historical Buddha. Represented in local poetic literatures, they have also been used by monks as teaching stories and provide themes depicted through religious architecture and painting. Other stories emerged in association with Alexander the Great whose conquests bridged the Mediterranean and Indian worlds. In Sumatra and Malaya Muslim *sultans* have claimed Iskandar, as he is known, as an ancestor through lengthy *silsilah*, or genealogies. The *babad*, mythic histories of Islamic Javanese rulers, later constructed genealogies which subsumed local ancestors, Indic figures and the Semitic prophets going back to Adam. In claiming those lineages to sanction their authority they were obviously establishing spiritual lineages rather than prioritising genetic inheritance. These mythic genealogies constitute another form of localisation, affirming direct connection between local rulers and sanctioned powers from other contexts. All of these stories continued to have significance past the classical era within the societies in which they had taken root.

Having identified a few of the most influential frameworks of classical thought, it is worth examining how they interacted with earlier tradition and were expressed through use in architecture, drama and literature. Art and architecture has drew deeply on myths. In Bali, where Hinduism as such remains the dominant religious frame, Indian myths are pervasive in the arts. Traditional paintings from Klungkung still represent episodes of Indian epics, such as "the churning of the ocean of milk" from the *Adiparwa*, the first of the eighteen books of the *Mahabharata*. In them humanity is represented by tortured animal-like souls, inhabiting the sides of the cosmic mountain. Seared by the heat of

fires, which result from the friction of conflict between gods and demons, people escape their purgatory by jumping into the ocean, representing death and transition to further reincarnation. Humanity is depicted as living in intermediate realms, almost as spectators within a cosmos of forces which work against each other through nature.

The carvings on the walls of the great temples of Angkor, Ayutthia, Prambanan or Borobudur, universally depict epic themes. But the impact of myths on those constructions is more profound and subtle than is suggested by relief sculptures. In every respect their construction embodied the myths as a model of the universe and pattern for human activity and thought. Angkor Thom, the most coherent complex in the field of remains we call Angkor, is a stone rendition of the *Adiparwa*, the "churning of the ocean of milk". It presents an image of the relationship between water, land, royalty, spirits and the teachings of the epics. The complex is as though floating, moats and reservoirs surrounded it to set buildings in relief against water. Within a large square four causeways move toward the central temple-mountain, built around a small natural hill, as a representation in microcosm of the cosmic mountain, of the world.

According to the *Adiparwa* the world, as the cosmic mountain, floats on a turtle, an incarnation of Vishnu, preventing it from sinking into the ocean. Along the causeways leading to the central temple is a great snake, Sanghyang Anantaboka, with a series of figures pulling at it. According to the story the complex depicted, the snake coiled around the mountain so that the gods and demons could pull on either end. As the mountain floats on a turtle, the pulling results in churning, creating a whirlpool in the ocean of milk. The whirlpool brings up the *tirta amrta*, the essence or water of life and elixir of immortality, from the bottom of the ocean. As the elixir comes up, the gods and demons compete for it. First Siva's son Kala, symbolising time, starts to swallow it, but as he does, Vishnu, in his primary form as the deity, cuts off his head. As his body disintegrates Kala's head is left, at once immortal and angry, as an image of time. The water of eternal life

is then taken by the demons until a pretty girl, related to Siva, distracts them so that eventually the gods win.

Thus the overall layout of the temple is structured in terms of a cosmogenic story, a story of creation which explains the position of humanity in relationship to heaven and earth. The temple architecture, perhaps more clearly at Angkor than elsewhere, is beautifully integrated not only with mythology but also with the political and economic orders. The central deity, whether Vishnu or Buddha, was meant to be fused with the *devaraja*, the godking, as the apex of society. State rituals, carried out at the temple, aimed to effect embodiment of deity in the ruler and the cosmic mountain was simultaneously his "stone body", the body which would remain after his physical body disintegrated.<sup>117</sup> Thus each ruler constructed his own monument and the remains of many are with us still. At the same time the vast reservoirs, which framed the temple, were linked to the irrigation process which sustained rice cultivation and thus central to the economy of the kingdom.

Borobudur the famous Buddhist stupa in Central Java holds reliefs around its lower walls which depict *Jataka* stories. They represent both prior incarnations of the historical Buddha and the condition of humanity generally, the realms of physical form, of souls entrapped or snared by worldly desires. The structure of Borobudur progresses through nine levels divided into three categories, the three *lokas* or main planes of being. The lowest stage was covered in earth, even though the walls were sculptured, because they represented the underworld of lower desires. The middle stages represent progression through animal and human states, also meaning levels of consciousness, all in the realms of form, of life as we usually know it. At the highest *loka* forms are increasingly abstract and geometric, though Buddha images remain at its lower levels. At that point there is not the substance of physical life, but movement toward a spiritual consciousness, one fading at the pinnacle, the spire of the

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<sup>117</sup> Coedes

monument, into nothingness. Borobudur is an image of levels of consciousness, a depiction of spiritual quest modelled on the path of the Buddha and an image of the place of humanity within the universe. We need not doubt that originally rituals also made it a context for initiating disciples into the higher truth of Buddhism.

In written works local versions of the epics were usually panegyrics, poetic tributes identifying rulers with epic characters and glorifying their reign. As early literature existed only in courts and monasteries it aimed to generate atmospheres of power by associating rulers, who commissioned works, with deity. These forms of literature were also meant to be historical, but prioritised the tracing or construction of spiritual genealogies. If courts drew directly on imported myths and reinscribed them as local, folk traditions built out of ancestral stories and then incorporated myths from high culture. Everywhere dance and puppet drama, painting and popular performances, still shade from highly refined court versions into rough village renditions. In drama stories were always communicated principally as oral traditions, just as earlier styles of mythic knowledge had been, and it is only recently that systematic compilation of written versions has been attempted.

Javanese *wayang*, referring to the shadow theatre but also to dance and other puppet performances, remains common and popular. It is still familiar to most Javanese speakers and thus one of the most powerful mechanisms carrying classical influences into present popular idiom. Though it is framed by the *Mahabharata*, local variations are rich, as in the similar shadow theatres in Thailand and Malaysia. The drama is best known as a shadow play, performed from nine in the evening until sunrise. The story-teller, the *dalang*, directs the *gamelan* orchestra, tells the story and manipulates flat leather puppets which cast shadows, originally from an oil-burning lamp, onto a white cloth screen set in front of him. Each performance is of one small fragment of the *Mahabharata*. While the overall framework and most characters are straight from Indian mythology, many stories and some characters

are local creations. Stories are well known at once as entertainment, as ritual and as carrying the central philosophy of the culture.

In philosophical debates, within court literatures, poets used the *wayang* as a stock of images for making points; at a simpler level it provided models for social etiquette and morality. In the mystical terms I have already alluded to, each character represents an element of the psyche and each story simultaneously represents experience of meditation, spiritual discovery through a lifetime and the contending forces of nature and society. Each performance is a ritual which begins with invocation of the spirits and those who participated are meant to be blessed by experience of the atmosphere summoned through the power of the *dalang*. When the ritual works, then performance become practice and people feel at peace. Beyond that social level of meaning, the *dalang's* power to bring the episode to life can connect it to the experience of individuals. Inner meanings are clearest if stories are connected to psychological forces, as maps of consciousness linking the microcosm and macrocosm. In that framework the sun, seas, winds and world are the also the primal elements of each being, fire, water, air and earth and the internal elements of will, emotion, thoughts and flesh. A Javanese story, favoured by local mystics, illustrates this coding.

The *Dewaruci* story begins in the court in exile headed by Yudistira, the eldest of the five Pandawa brothers. The Pandawas, dispossessed of their kingdom by their cousins the Kurawas, knew that a great war between the factions was approaching. Bima, the second of the brothers, debated with his brothers and Krishna, an incarnation of the god Vishnu and a close confidant to the Pandawa. Durno had instructed Bima to go on a quest for the water of eternal life and debate centred on whether he should follow the instructions. Though Durno was mentor to both the Pandawas and Kurawas it was known that ultimately he sided with the latter. Krishna pointed out that Durno was an enemy and thus likely sending Bima on a fool's errand to get him killed. In

fact Durno's instruction had been on the urging of Suyudana, the king of the Kurawas. Suyudana and his advisers had decided to attempt to eliminate Bima, the strongest of the Pandawas, to increase their chance of winning the war and thus retaining the kingdom.

Bima's attitude was that he had sworn an oath which bound him even if it meant death, that it was his duty to follow regardless of Durno's motive. Bima set off as instructed toward the top of a mountain called Candramuka in the middle of a forest to search in a cave near its peak. As he began he felt the thrill of the quest, the atmosphere was hopeful and positive, birds were singing, the sun was shining and there was a gentle breeze in the air. As he neared the mountain the sky darkened and winds rose, but he strode on. As he neared the cave he was attacked by twin giants, *buta* as they are called. Bima was able to kill them, but each time he threw one to the ground he was attacked by the other until, realising that they would return to life as long as one lived, he grabbed one in each hand to smash their heads together. At this they disappeared, their bodies dissolved and he was momentarily confused.

He did not pause long, but rummaged through the cave looking for signs of the water of eternal life. Finding nothing, he sat outside the cave and then heard voices, as though from nowhere. These were voices of the gods, Indra and Bayu, who explained they were grateful to Bima. In killing the giants, their incarnations as demons, Bima had released them from punishment for misdeed in the heavens. Bima had returned them to their divine status so Indra and Bayu told him not to be concerned that the water of eternal life was not there, he should go back to his teacher Durno and ask further instruction. Angry, Bima stormed back to confront Durno, who responded coolly that this episode had been a necessary test. He explained that the water of eternal life could be found, but at the bottom of the ocean. He instructed Bima to go there.

Once again Bima returned to the court of the Pandawa, where his family were joyful, first pleased that he had survived

the ordeal, then distressed to discover that Durno was sending him on another quest. The women beat their breasts and they all begged him to stay, but Bima would hear none of it. This time as he left the court the atmosphere was not so pleasant, there was a mood of doom and foreboding. As he went through the forest vines clung to him and his footsteps seemed heavy, but he persevered. Reaching the edge of the ocean he paused and it occurred to him he might have difficulty breathing under water. But he strode into the waves and was beaten by the surf as it reached his chest until he remembered a magical *mantra*, a sacred syllable which gave him the power to enter the ocean, yet move and breathe as if in fresh air.

As he proceeded at first there was the roughness of the ocean waves, then an abundance of marine life. As he went further the life around him decreased, it became quieter until it seemed there was nothing around him. Quite suddenly, out of nowhere and at terrific speed, he was attacked by a huge dragon snake. Coiling itself around him, it began to squeeze the life out of him until he remembered another magic weapon, his thumb nail. After an earlier quest the gods had given him powerful nails, called *pancanaka*. With them he ripped the *naga* apart, escaping just as he was about to die. After the blood of the battle cleared he was left, near the centre of the ocean in a very quiet space.

At that point, not knowing what he was looking for, he encountered a dwarfish figure, the size of his thumb, who seemed quite nonchalant. Bima was at first affronted and he addressed the dwarf in rough language, his conversational habit in all contexts. Unperturbed, the dwarf responded that he knew who Bima was and what he was after. Taken aback, realising there was something special about the dwarf, Bima used respectful language for the first time in his life and requested help in searching for the water of eternal life. Dewaruci, the dwarf, responded that all he had to do was enter his left ear. Bima protested at the impossibility of the request, but when Dewaruci persisted, telling Bima that the whole universe was inside, he let go of his doubts.

He was able to go through Dewaruci's left ear and entered a

space where there was no longer any up or down, east or west; it was void until Dewaruci appeared in front of him again. Then Dewaruci explained that he was the true teacher, that in fact he was Bima's true inner self. He proceeded to explain the nature of the world, colours, forces, and winds, that finally, beyond even the essential life force, the water of eternal life or essence of existence was everywhere and in everything. Bima was reluctant to leave this realm, which was so pleasant, complete and full, and wanted to remain forever. But Dewaruci explained that Bima had tasks, *karma*, within the world and could not remain. So Bima returned to the Pandawa and was met with joy and celebration, as the success of his quest meant he had been fully initiated into knowledge of the three realms of being.

This story is a favourite of Javanese mystics and there are many interpretations, but elements of symbolic coding are standard. According to one interpretation, the cave represents the "third eye", the *Ajana cakra*, in the centre of the forehead; the mountain the nose; and the giants are the eyes. The eyes can be transformed, their normal sensory function becoming clairvoyance, by being put together at the top of the nose, which is to say the yoga practice of concentration on the third eye. Having accomplished that meditative task Bima realised the essence of life was not there; he found some insight but that is all. He had to then go back to his teacher and to be told to enter the ocean.

The ocean is the *sanubari*, the sphere of feelings and the spiritual heart associated with the chest. In other words, Bima had to leave the head, the region of mind, and enter the heart to find the true meaning of life. On entering the chest he experienced doubt as to whether he could still function, the same doubt meditators experience when attention leaves the thoughts and enter into the heart of intuitive experience. When he, meaning his attention, entered his chest he experienced a battering of waves, meaning the turmoil of suppressed emotions. Emotions are buried in the subconscious and surface people begin to experience their inner life from within. These disturbances dissipated gradually as

he became centred in his heart, as he neared the centre of the ocean.

As they decreased he was attacked by a dragon snake, a *naga*, representing the *kundalini*, occult powers and perhaps also the essential powers of life within the earth. This test, one people on all spiritual paths experience, is of whether will and determination is sufficient so individuals will proceed toward the true object of spiritual life--realisation and consciousness itself. The snake represents the attractions of power and those who succumb to it focus on magical powers, accumulation of wealth or capacity to influence others. *Pancanaka* symbolises the unity, the one-pointedness, of the five senses, which Bima had achieved through earlier trials. That focus allowed him to kill the snake, giving him the opening to true spiritual knowledge.

Only then did he encounter Dewaruci, the true teacher. Dewaruci symbolises recognition that the true guide within spiritual life, after the external *guru* who may guide us through preliminary lessons, is our own inner self. His final lessons, by implication the final esoteric lessons all people may learn through spiritual practice, came directly, that is mystically, within the realms of his own consciousness, not through external teachings or teachers. This view of the nature of spiritual knowledge, and of how we access it, is central within the highest teachings of all the classical cults. The three worlds Bima had mastered are the trinity or *trimurti*, in Javanese terms a grouping of the seven major *cakra*, the occult centres of perception. The *cakras*, as the inner framework of spiritual consciousness, are conceptually central within the *Tantric* schools of thought shaping early cult practices. In simplified form, as the three centres, these are the head/intellect, heart/intuition and genitals/will and are associated respectively with the deities Siva, Vishnu and Brahma.

This myth provides insight into Javanese views of spiritual life which were formed by Indic religion. Beyond that my purpose has been to suggest how symbolism, embedded within myths, connects to religious ideologies and refers to experiential realisation. All of the classical myths which inform monumental

arts and drama, including the Chinese tale of *Monkey*, are coded by the principle illustrated through the *Dewaruci* story. Other stories are not so explicit and some cultures may be less articulate, but there can be no doubt that the resonance of Indic myths rests on similar esoteric knowledge throughout the region. This reading of symbols explicitly underpinned cultic practices, it also pervaded the vast nexus of classical philosophy, political theory, literature and the arts. Implicitly it shaped wider cultural patterns in the same way that Christian idioms frame European consciousness. The same Indic cosmologies are alive in Southeast Asia and even today esoteric teachers draw from these myths to illuminate their sense of the path of spiritual life.

If the substratum of underlying cultures was re-expressed through melding with literate culture it filters into the present through the political cultures and mythologies conveyed through the classes associated with the village and court spheres of early societies. Mythology and drama were gateways, channels through which new ideas reached ordinary villagers and have been maintained into the present. Epics which had originated in India were adopted as local myths of origins and woven into local ceremonies in drama, through literature, and in monumental architecture. These explicitly articulate conviction, present also in medieval Europe, that the microcosm and macrocosm correspond, that the structures of inner, social, and cosmic powers mirror each other.

## chapter 4

### TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS WORLDS

Within the multiplicity of substratum cultures there had been emphasis on local ancestral cults and relative isolation was moderated by a slow percolation of influences through trade. Later complex Sinic and Indic traditions brought writing, courts and conceptions of the *devaraja* to the cores areas. Islamic, Theravada and Christian societies filled in the zones, as their literate traditions extended to reach most peoples of Southeast Asia. Between the 13th and 15th centuries the major temple building states of the classical era declined, partly through the impact of increasing Muslim trade and Mongol conquests. Classical idioms remained influential in modified form, but Theravada Buddhism became predominant on the mainland and Islam in the islands, dividing most of Southeast Asia into two broad spheres. In the same period Sinicised Vietnam became increasingly part of the region and the Hispanisation of the Philippines resulted in a Catholic variant of local tradition.

These traditions remained culturally dominant until this century as frameworks for the cultural life of local peoples. The new religious patterns overlaid previously developed Indic and Sinic cores and extended farther into the zones, so that literate traditions took root in a multiplicity of more widely scattered states. In this context existing states could no longer so easily conceive of themselves as encapsulated or autonomous worlds. The classical cult of the *devaraja*, which had been underpinned by Brahmanic ceremonial magic, was modified through Theravada and Islamic conceptions of polity. The position of rulers remained central and their function was still cosmological, to facilitate alignment of society with nature. But in this middle period of history rulers were no longer presented as incarnations of deity and states were framed by religious cosmologies rather than defined by ethnicity or their own unique centres.

Increasing communication between Southeast Asians and the rest of Eurasia and intensified interactions among local peoples were keys to the rise of Theravada and Islam. Socially Buddhist monks and Islamic teachers assumed great significance. Earlier priests and monks had also been teachers, but for the most part attached to courts, now religious teachers spoke to villagers. Virtually every village came to have its own Buddhist temple or Islamic mosque and this added a critical new element to internal social communications. Theravada Buddhism did not extend to all tribal peoples, but reached valleys suitable for wet rice throughout the Shan plateau and those became centres of small kingdoms. Similarly the scattered river mouths of the archipelago became sites for sultanates which were characterised by a culture of Islam, trade and Malay language. The extension of both these religious patterns meant the initiation of a process which has been continuing into the present and not, as we may imagine in thinking of religious conversion, a sudden, overall or pervasive transition.

### **Mercantile closure of Eurasia**

While it is impossible to understand classical Southeast Asia without reference to China and India, the traditional period requires thinking in terms of events which spanned the whole Eurasian land mass. Other theories, apart from trade and increasing communication, are brought to bear to explain the decline of classical states. One has been that empires such as Angkor declined through internal over elaboration. According to this argument so much labour was required, to construct temples and irrigation works, that people were driven away. Internal contradictions, a combination of stresses including wars between Khmer, Chams and Thai, overbuilding and disease may all help account for the disappearance of these great kingdoms. But changes in the context of local life were clearly critical and it was increasing trade above all which brought locals into the sphere of world religions.

During the early centuries of this millennium two powerful

and expansive forces, Islam and the Mongols, changed the landscape of Eurasia. Both the Mongols and Arabs had been marginal to deeply rooted classical civilisations, they were primarily trading and pastoral peoples. Each had a nomadic base and moved rapidly by horseback to extend their empires with remarkable speed. Their centralised control collapsed almost as rapidly, but some of the patterns they generated became absorbed into the older cultures they had conquered. More critically, the context for all local cultures was changed, because the extremities of Eurasian were connected as they never had been. In the 11th century Mongol expansions penetration Russia and eastern Europe, creating a bridge for inner Asia just as Islam created it along the sea routes.

Until then the major centres of civilisation in China, India, the Middle East and the Mediterranean were relatively autonomous. Haphazard contacts were significant, but did not so pervasively frame local interactions. Through Mongol conquests, Islamic expansion, Christian crusades and European explorations societies everywhere became parts of a wider world. At the western extreme of Eurasia the Hanseatic ports of the Baltic and North Seas, with guild based crafts, challenged earlier feudal states; in the Middle East the end of the Caliphate saw the rise of Sufi orders and a new wave of Islamic extension into Africa and Asia, through trade rather than conquest; in the east Japan opened itself to a wave of Zen Buddhism hand in hand with the rise of the samurai class. The expansion of Islam, the consolidation of a Theravada Buddhism and the arrival of Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch traders must all be considered within a unified framework related to those wider trends.

The Mongol Yuan dynasty in China looked for a new relationship with local kingdoms. Earlier Chinese dynasties had expected Southeast Asian states to bow before them. Local kingdoms periodically sent tribute missions to China, but these were diplomatic and trading missions as much as acknowledgment that the court in Beijing was the greatest.

Typically sending emissaries did not require loss of face for Southeast Asian rulers and all parties gained through the exchanges these missions facilitated. The Yuan dynasty demanded direct influence and power rather than just ritual or ceremonial acknowledgment. They required some states to send members of their royal family to reside in Beijing, effectively as bonds or hostages, and other rulers were asked to present themselves humbly at court. Wars between the Yuan dynasty and Southeast Asian states were precipitated by this shift in attitude.

No *devaraja* could present at the court in Beijing and bow and local rulers sent hostile responses to Yuan requests. Resistance led to wars between the Mongols and Nanchao, Vietnam, Pagan, Champa, Angkor and Java. They conquered Nanchao, previously a Southeast Asian kingdom, making it part of China in 1253. This conquest was part of the Mongol attempt to encircle and subjugate the southern Sung, who remained independent for forty years after the Mongol conquest of north China. They also struck into Burma and in 1283 sacked Pagan, certainly contributing to the elimination of that classical state. They invaded Vietnam, having temporary impact, but were harassed by guerrilla warfare and unable to cement control. They withdrew because events elsewhere required the forces they had engaged in Vietnam and did not penetrate to Angkor, which was already weak by that time in any case.

In 1293, the year after Marco Polo visited Sumatra, a Chinese army landed in Java. They arrived during a dynastic transition and the king the Chinese fleet had been sent to punish had already been killed by a usurper. When the Chinese armies arrived it was no longer clear who they were supposed to defeat. A wily Javanese prince, son of the ruler who had insulted the Chinese, convinced them to wage war on the usurper. They joined him in defeating the usurper, but were subsequently drawn into guerrilla warfare by the prince, who was to become the founder of Majapahit. Mongol invasion of Java ironically thus assisted the founder of what became the greatest classical Javanese kingdom. In any event Yuan interest in pragmatic domination marked a

change in the times. A Chola fleet from south India had attacked Srivijaya in the 11th century and the Chinese had long before conquered Vietnam, however external invasions had not been the norm, now armies from the north intervened in local politics, as Europeans began to several centuries later.

The Mongol interventions were followed, and also well before European traders entered the region, by massive Ming fleets under Cheng Ho in the 14th century. These fleets cruised the whole Indian Ocean and visited the archipelago repeatedly. Though focused on trade, less militant an invasion than those of the Mongols, the fleets heightened local consciousness of Chinese wealth and power. The Ming assisted the rise of Malacca, which was to become the gateway for Islamisation of the archipelago, by sanctioning its autonomy from Thai rulers. In Semarang, on the north coast of Java, one of the oldest Javanese mosques was established through these visits. Resembling a Chinese temple, it is testimony to the fact that Chinese Muslims, including the admiral Cheng Ho himself, facilitated Islamisation as a prominent part of the then already predominantly Islamic Asian trading world.

The Chinese fleets set a stage for increasing presence of Chinese traders, along with Arabs and Gujarati's, within the multi-ethnic trading ports of the region. If the winds of change were growing strong, they came first through an influx of newly vigorous Chinese and Muslim traders. Within a few years after its origins, in the mid 7th century of the Christian era, Islam expanded dramatically. It dominated the Middle East, North Africa and Spain while the Indian Ocean became a "Muslim Sea". Islam powers came to dominate the Persian Gulf and Bay of Bengal, including India under the Moguls, and until the 13th century, when the Mongols also sacked Baghdad, a degree of political unity centred on the Caliphate there. Islamic extension combined with European crusades to generate awareness of Asia among Europeans. Following on the crusades, Marco Polo's journey, in the late 13th century, took him overland, using the bridge controlled by the Mongols, to reach the China of Khublai Khan. He returned, by the sea route through Southeast Asia, and

gave one of our earliest reports on the presence of Islam in the region.

Through the crusades, which took Europeans to the Levant, they became familiar with Asian spices. Their subsequent explorations sought routes which would "break the Islamic monopoly" implied by its domination of the Indian Ocean. Not incidentally, new demand for spices helped make Southeast Asia an object of rather than just a route for international trade. Cloves, nutmeg, sandalwood and pepper had long been items of trade, but the increase in demand for them changed archipelago trading life. Earlier trade had mainly been transit trade and the power of earlier Funan, prominent from the 4th century in the Mekong delta, Champa and of Srivijaya, which dominated the Straits of Malacca from the 9th to the 11th centuries, rested not so much on products as on control of the route through which they passed. Demand for pepper from Sumatra, Malaya, and west Java and cloves and nutmeg from the Moluccas, made those regions a prime object of international trade and with that both the centre of gravity and quality of the trading routes changed.

There was an increase in the simple volume of trade, as products were bulkier than the luxury goods which had been shipped through in earlier periods. At the same time because the number of traders increased the cosmopolitanism of the trading cities increased. Like Chinese, Gujarati's, Bengalis and Arabs, Europeans became significant actors within Southeast Asia by the 16th century. Although they brought distinct beliefs and forms of organisation, on the whole until the 19th century their presence did not fundamentally alter the rules of local transaction. Early European presence was significant, but should not be confused with modernity. That, arising from the industrial revolution, is expressed in capitalism and liberal notions of ownership and rights. Preindustrial patterns dominated until the end of the 19th century, even economically and politically. If our focus rests on cultural patterns then it is especially clear that the traditional era extended through the early centuries of European presence.

The Portuguese were the earliest Europeans to have

influence on Southeast Asia. They established "forts", essentially trading posts, in Macau, Malacca, Timor, Formosa, Nagasaki and Goa, the centre of its network. The Portuguese system did differ from earlier Asian systems, they aspired to monopoly and possessed an effective chain of command which linked disparate trading posts relatively tightly. However the projected Portuguese monopoly never came close to eventuating, they were not able to eliminate Asian competitors. Early European visitors had noted that the emporium port of Malacca, in the Straits, was the key to archipelago trade. When the Portuguese captured control of it in 1511 they expected to dominate the system. However in the wake of their victory remnants of the Malaccan sultanate re-established at Johore, on the peninsula facing what is now Singapore, and the sultanate of Aceh, at the northern tip of Sumatra, rose to prominence. Those competed with Portuguese Malacca as favoured ports for traders and replaced it as centres for the dissemination of Islam. Islam, not Iberian Catholicism, was the most dynamic transformative force in the archipelago at the time.

Though European in origin the Portuguese operated as part of an ongoing Asian system. During the same period Chinese, Gujarati, Arabs, Javanese and Buginese also migrated widely to establish cohesive communities within the dispersed trading centres of the archipelago. Regardless of which ethnic group controlled it, each port contained semi-autonomous districts housing diverse ethnicities, each having a degree of internal self-governance. The bulk of Portuguese trade was private pedlar trade, like that of their competitors and at the expense of royal claims to cargoes. Ultimately the richest earnings of the Portuguese system came through their function as intermediaries between China and Japan, not as we imagine from the spices they carried to Europe. On scrutiny, even the composition of their cities, ships' crews and armies was multi-racial and mestizo. Asian and mestizo Catholics "became Portuguese" in very much the way others "became Malay", so the empire was Asianised in the flesh as well as in its mode of operation. European traders initially appeared as just another element within a pre-existing pattern,

their arrival did not bring transformation in the nature of trade or the cities it took place within.

The Spanish did have profound impact in the Philippines, the central areas of which became Catholic in the 17th century. But however profound that influence was it was not modern; it was traditional in the same way that contemporaneous Islam and Theravada Buddhism were. Initially Manila was essentially a trading post, a stopover point for the romantic Spanish galleon, the one English pirates pursued as it crossed the Pacific. Each year one galleon travelled between Acapulco in Mexico and Manila. There it met Chinese traders from Canton, many of whom settled there along with some Spaniards, and exchanged new world gold and silver for Chinese porcelains and silks. Initially this trade was the sole basis of Manila's existence. Rice growing developed around it to feed the growing migrant, mainly mestizo, or mixed population of Chinese, Tagalog and Spaniards. Outside Manila there were periodic raids by Spanish military bands but the prime agencies of influence were the monastic structures of the Catholic church. The Philippines was carved up into spheres of influence, especially by the Dominican and Franciscan orders.

Though the Spanish were European the nature of their impact closely resembled that of earlier Indianisation. The organisation of the resulting local state, though based on a royalty located in Spain, drew from spiritual senses of court mission. Syncretism merged popular Tagalog and Visayan with Catholic beliefs, paralleling the process which occurred in other areas through the Buddhist *sangha* or Sufi brotherhoods, which also came through trade and spread into rural areas through monastic institutions. In each case the result was a royal state characterised by mercantile, patrimonial and hierarchical religious organisation. In the Philippines, as in Sinic Vietnam or Indianised Java, the process involved synthesis which resulted a new society; it was forged from multiple sources and peopled by an urban elite which itself represented fusion of ethnicities. Thus in Smail's terms Hispanisation, as the Spanish impact has been called, is best viewed as resulting in the "formation of a new core". The area

around Manila, in the Tagalog region of central Luzon, was the last truly extensive area suitable for intensive wet rice cultivation to become a state through the impact of an imported culture.

The Dutch became territorial rulers on Java well before the 19th century and after 1830 controlled all of it. Like the Portuguese they arrived aiming primarily to establish trading posts and monopolies, their interest was not initially territorial. Nor were the Protestant Dutch religious crusaders. The Iberian Catholics saw their encounter with Asian Muslims as a continuation of their wars against the "Moors", the Muslims of their home peninsula. The Dutch operated until the end of the 18th century as a mercantile trading company, the Dutch East India company or VOC, the Dutch East India Company, which had power until the end of the 18th century, at which point the Dutch crown took control. In the beginning of the 17th century the VOC located its base port at Batavia, present day Jakarta, but was not interested in Java as such. The Dutch chose that site mainly to avoid Portuguese influence in the Straits of Malacca, as the passage between Java and Sumatra was an alternative for ships arriving from the Dutch post at the Cape of Good Hope.

As the Dutch established Batavia, Sultan Agung was in the process of consolidating a new Mataram empire. He came closer to fully integrating Java within one political framework than any previous state, as even at the time of Majapahit the kingdom of Pajajaran controlled the west of Java. Agung's armies nearly eliminated the small Dutch outpost. Subsequently the VOC became involved in Javanese politics whenever dynastic disruptions occurred. When Trunajaya, based near Surabaya, rebelled against Mataram in the late 17th century, the Dutch allied themselves with Mataram. In exchange for helping put down the rebellion they took concessions in land, coming to control the interior of west Java, and gained ground at the expense of trading states along the north coast, the *pasisir*. This recurrent process paralleled progressive Khmer losses, during the same period, in the face of Vietnamese expansion. The stability of the Dutch system, like that of the Vietnamese, preserved it against dynastic

transitions, as it was an outpost of a trading system based in Holland. When military conflicts, which had been a normal dynamic of transition, broke out within the Javanese state the new element of Dutch stability resulted in concessions of increasing territory.

By the 18th century the Dutch supervised plantation production of coffee in west Java, in the upland Priangan; in the 19th century a cane sugar industry extended through central and east Java. They thus introduced new crops, even means of production. However these plantation systems accommodated to pre-existing systems of production. Coffee was collected through tribute payments, mediated by Javanese regents who maintained traditional systems of local authority. The Dutch required coffee from regents as an enforced tax in kind, but Javanese rulers had always demanded such levies, if previously in rice. Within their regions of power Dutch regents for their part clearly adopted local practices, becoming Javanised more than establishing their bureaucratic culture. They readily traded bourgeois practicality for elaborate ceremonialism and took shares of produce and trade as Javanese rulers did, rather than operating as rationalised bureaucrats. In fact the rulers of Mataram viewed the VOC as a successors to the kingdom of Pajajaran, they constructed genealogies to establish the link. From the Javanese perspective the Dutch were viewed as having established a conquest dynasty. Even beyond that, Ricklefs noted that the fundamental logic of local power and diplomacy remained Javanese until the late 18th century; the Dutch became part of a Javanese framework.

The period up to 1870 should be viewed as traditional: the Portuguese established yet another trading post empire, Spaniards created a new core in the Philippines and the Dutch consolidated a conquest dynasty, organised mainly on Javanese lines. The ideas of emergent modern capitalism did have brief impact in the early 19th century. Governors like Dandaels and Raffles, at the time of the Napoleonic wars, were men of the Enlightenment and thought in terms of market incentives and private ownership. But their

tenure was followed by a "culture system" in Java, a reversion with vengeance to extractive production based on political authority rather than private capital. In the middle of the 19th century plantation production was based on forced levies, on mercantilism rather than capitalism. In the same period the Iberian systems stagnated. The Portuguese never mastered extensive territories, their power waned in the 17th century and their outposts remained as minor eddies within a world of more dynamic forces. Hispanic Filipino society was stimulated by Visayan sugar plantations in the 18th century. When Spain lost its American colonies in the 19th century the Philippines remained as a residue of more interest to Catholic orders, who with the local *illustrado* elite held semi-feudal control of its land, than to the crown.

The Dutch gradually dominated island trade, in the 19th century their competition was English, and their control of the sea did insulate Java and end Mataram's dynamism. This represented a new victory, like that of Srivijaya over the early Mataram, of trading over rice power. Though the Dutch consolidated control of Java early in the 19th century and by then dominated trade, their power through most of the archipelago remained nominal, as had been the claims of Majapahit. Until the turn of this century indigenous societies, were governed by their own rulers and patterns of everyday social life remained autonomous. Even where colonial political and economic power touched large populations, notably among the Javanese and Tagalog, local authorities and the textures of cultural life were not shaped by that domination; the cultural domain remained responsive to separate rhythms. At the same time, the Dutch conquest dynasty was not the only expanding force, nor were its competitors only English in this period. Until the late 19th century Burmese kings were preoccupied more with the Thais than with Europeans on their periphery. Under Ayutthia in the 16th and 17th centuries and Chakri rulers in the 19th century Thailand was an expanding and increasingly powerful state. Vietnam was an expanding power well into the 19th century.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries Europeans did gain power relative to local states. However the system within which that balance of power shifted remained premodern. The structure of local societies began to be altered radically after 1870, the watershed which marked the general entry of private capital. At the end of the 19th century the British consolidated hold over Burma and extended from trading posts in Penang, Malacca and Singapore to control within the Malay sultanates. In the 1870s the French moved from a foothold in Saigon toward control of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and at the close of the century American dynamism displaced the Spanish in the Philippines. Those changes mark entry to the modern. An overview perspective on the premodern period suggests that the most dynamic and widespread transformations, in the everyday practices of the majority of Southeast Asians, were taking place through the expanding grip of Theravada Buddhist and Islamic patterns. Whatever our judgement of shifting balances in the political and economic realms, within the cultural and social domains of ordinary peoples practices lives were being most affected by reorganisations contingent on religious change.

### **The emergence of regional zones**

Indianised states had slid back and forth between being Hindu and Buddhist and most fused elements of what we imagine as two systems. Theravada was present from an early period, notably in the 7th century Mon state of Dvaravati, in what is now Thailand. The establishment of Theravada Buddhism did not represent an obvious break with the past. If we are predisposed to expect that Islam represented a more radical break in the island world, then we must unseat contemporary senses of what constitute religions. Classical states were neither "Buddhist" nor "Hindu" as we imagine those, but cults, focused on rulers, in which priests had ceremonial functions. Tambiah called early states "galactic polities", universes within which the ruler was central and each state was conceived as hermetically sealed. It became less feasible to sustain notions of

*devaraja*, employing a sense of the ruler as the turning point of the cosmos, as neighbouring kingdoms interacted with increasing frequency.

Establishment of Theravada and Islam coincided with a shift leading people to see themselves as belonging to wider world religious patterns rather than primarily to a local state. It is at this point that a sense of world religions enters the scene. With the dominance of Theravada, starting in the 12th century on the mainland, and with the shift to Islam in the islands, people started to think of themselves as being part of a religious world that reached far beyond the boundaries of the political systems they inhabited. With this shift identification was no longer restricted to an imperial system, usually dominated by one ethnic group, and people placed their state within a larger world of Islamic or Buddhist states they knew existed elsewhere. World religions suited the more pluralistic times, and as the cosmopolitanism of local societies increased it became imperative for local people to find universalising ideologies, cultural and religious idioms which facilitated conversation across boundaries of state and ethnicity.

The emergence of new religions was reflected in political patterns, the dominance of new language groups and changes in the structure of religious institutions. The Theravada pattern differed from classical patterns on a number of counts. The political situation of the classical era provides an image of several great kingdoms standing out against a background of political fragmentation. The Mongols helped eliminate Angkor and Pagan, the greatest of the temple building states on the mainland, and annexed Nanchao. On the other hand Pagan's decline allowed a florescence of Mon culture in the south. The Mons had maintained Theravada Buddhism and with their rise established fresh connections with the roots of their religion in Sri Lanka. Theravada may have been growing through several channels, but a brief resurgence of Mon power contributed to its wider spread among the Tai, Burmese and Khmer. Ethnic groups which had been relatively disadvantaged became more prominent as the times changed. The hills or zone area of mainland Southeast Asia

began to fill in politically with a large number of smaller states.

Chinese defeat of Nanchao has been seen as the background to modern Tai expansion. Although dominant in present day Thailand, the Tai ethnic family had not been significant politically in that vicinity prior to the Mongols. On the other hand Nanchao had been an ethnic Tai state. Contact between the Mongols and Tai led to exchanges, in military technology and patterns of alliance, which gave the Tai a comparative advantage over other states in the mainland and lay the basis for the rise of Ayutthia, the ancestor of present day Thailand. The Tai speaking people, already dispersed through the upland valleys of the hills, became more prominent at the expense of the Khmer and the Mons, who previously dominated the Menam valley, now central Thailand. The Tai came into view initially within small states on the periphery of Angkor. Through the fact that these were able to form effective alliances with each other they were able to achieve parity and then supremacy over Angkor. Rather than seeing rising Tai prominence as southward migration, it is more accurate to see it as reflecting the growth of their states, within contexts where they already existed as marginal peoples, at the expense of previously the dominant Khmer and Mon.

Theravada, which brought less stress on centralised kingship, was ideologically more suitable for groupings of states than earlier royal cults. In Theravada rulers were no longer *chakravartin*, centres around which the wheel of the universe turns. Instead they become *dhammaraja*, guardians of the *vinaya*, custodians of the rules guiding monastic life and rooted theoretically in the *dhamma*, the truth as taught by the Buddha. This did represent a significant shift in gestalt, in the way people related to their kingdom within the wider world context, as it situated local states within the frame of an Asia wide and comprehensive Buddhist history. But earlier Indic ideals also continued to have strength within the Burmese, Thai and Khmer polities. Continuing belief in the divine powers of the king was reflected in 19th century Thai prohibitions: commoners were not

even allowed to look directly at the ruler, as they were thought to lack the purity which would be a prerequisite to even perceiving that degree of spiritual power without damage to themselves.

In classical states religion focused on courts, rulers and the capital. The main social vehicle of formalised religion was a Brahmanic priesthood with access to Scriptures; villagers for their part tended to remain almost exclusively involved in the animistic religion which had characterised pre-historic cultures. In contrast to hereditary Brahmanism, Theravada reached villages through monks, the *bhikkhu*, who originated from any class and theoretically served all classes. Village temples became a key feature of mainland societies and the rise to prominence of these village based institutions may even have been associated with the late stages of Angkor's demise. Through them the doctrines of Buddhism reached villagers and interacted directly with spirit cults, local rituals and healing practices. Through them literacy extended to people away from cities and royal temples, so the gap between court philosophy and cosmology and village ritual was reduced. A middle rung, rural religious specialists, linked the great traditions of the court with the little tradition of the peasant.

The *ummat*, or brotherhood of Islam spanned the Eurasian ecumene, eventually reaching from Indonesia to Morocco. Within that a religious framework also rose above political authority in every locality. Within the island zone Islam also overlaid an Indic framework, similar to that of early mainland states. Muslim Southeast Asian rulers became custodians of Islamic law and belief in a context of related states. They adopted titles, including *sunan*, *sultan* and *kallipatullah*, indicating Islamic conception of themselves and resembling the Theravada notion of the *dhammaraja*. Islamic conceptions of the ruler suggest that the ruler is a representative of God's revelation through the *Koran*. As in the case of the Buddhist *dhammaraja*, the ruler became responsible for guiding people and maintaining the purity of religious practice, in this case Islamic. The law is conceived as an embodiment of revealed truth, thus in the Islamic conceptualisation the ruler has legitimate claim to power by virtue of access to, awareness of and

attunement to an absolute. As that attunement now came through a religious medium, it meant that authority did not rest on incarnation, on the very being of the ruler as a centre of the state cult, but on a law recognised as being above the personhood of kings.

Syncretism, clearly relevant everywhere, had most pertinence in the Islamisation of Java. There Indic culture had taken deep root within a peasant society which thus had the sheer mass to sustain it strongly. Earlier patterns thus obviously shaped the way Islamic states emerged. Because Indic ideals continued to be relevant within Mataram, from the 16th century, some argue that its conversion was nominal, a profession which did not reach its heart. However few argue that the same might degree of syncretism characterised the formation of other Islamic states in the Malayo-Muslim zone. Our general image is that the Islam which took root in Sumatra, Malaya, Kalimantan, Borneo, Celebes and Sulu drew more exclusively on traditions of the prophet, as populations were generally less dense and thus the continuity of earlier traditions less assured. However even within 17th century Aceh, a pinnacle of Islam and centre for its expansion, the court and its rituals were informed by Indic notions. Attending the *sultan*, whose title came from Mecca, there were four harbour officials representing the cardinal points and the layout of the palace presents the court as a cosmic mountain, consistent with the Indic imagery we have considered.<sup>118</sup>

Both Islam and Theravada were amenable to syncretism and it is not safe to interpret either through modern understandings of what constitute religion. We are also likely to exaggerate the contrast between early Islam and Indic religions, so we must note that the Islam which arrived in the islands contrasted sharply with the characteristics we identify with Islam today. Sufism, Islam conveyed through mystical brotherhoods, had been established in India for several centuries before the religion spread widely in

Southeast Asia. Membership in brotherhoods was perhaps more essential, as an indicator of affiliation in those days, than regular presence in a mosque and ritual prayer. From the Indonesian and Malay point of view Islam appeared as a new family of sects or cults among many which were already known, not as a total departure from the known.

As we know Islam was established in Southeast Asia before the 13th century it is significant that it did not gain momentum until the 15th century. Islam was marginally present throughout the Majapahit period, but only had wide impact in the 15th century. Its rise coincided with both the rising power to trade ports and the arrival of Sufism. Sufism dominated Islam from the end of the Baghdad Caliphate until the 18th century. It is mystical, so it harmonised with the Indic worlds it filtered into, thus arriving not as something radically foreign but as another esoteric teaching brought, like earlier ones, by holy men coming from India. Establishing dominance first in the small north Sumatran ports of Pasai and Pedir, which Marco Polo noted were Muslim in the late 13th century, Islam diffused through the trading world in the 15th century on the strength of florescence in its rising Malaccan centre. Through early texts, from 17th century Aceh and Java in particular, we know that Arab and Indian Muslims were prominent and that in these early stages local Muslims already drank deeply from currents of international Islam. In 17th century Aceh the debates between Hamzah Fansuri and Raniri indicate that sophisticated probing, of implications of the shift from Indic to Islamic philosophies, was in process.

Economic and social changes set the stage for Islam to take. When the multiplicity of trading states expanded a new society and culture emerged within them and that became Islamic as it grew. Malay became a lingua franca, a common trading language. Originating in the Straits of Malacca, and native only for people in them, it borrowed from Arabic, Portuguese, Dutch and Javanese, but remained distinct. The coastal trading culture which emerged took in the north coast of Java, Aceh, Johore and Malacca in the straits and Sulawesi, the Moluccas and the coasts of Borneo and

the people who joined it originated from diverse backgrounds but united in speaking Malay, adopting Islam and taking on trading lifestyles. This pattern, still termed "*masuk Melayu*", or becoming Malay, refers to the formation of Malayo-Muslim ethnicity out of a conglomerate of elements, not to simple religious conversion. Religious change was not so much, in this context a deliberated choice of ideology as a product of convergence between social and economic changes which generated a new society within which Malay language and Islam were both foundational to identity.

Within the archipelago there remained a fundamental contrast between the trade based polities of the zone and the rice based polities of a Javan core. The fertile soil and extensive irrigation of Java resulted in population densities far exceeding those of the maritime kingdoms. In classical times early Mataram dominated the inward looking rice economy of Java; Srivijaya became the focus of emporium trade centring on the Straits of Malacca. Majapahit bridged that gap, for a time dominating the trade routes as well as interior Java. Tension between these rice and trade based societies converged with other factors to close the Indic era and usher in an Islamic pattern. When new port societies grew powerful along Java's north coast, in association with the rising trade pattern we have referred to, the balance of archipelago power shifted toward the trading world and their dynamism became less and less congruent with the ethos of rice and ritual which characterised Majapahit.

Islam entered Java via Malacca, gaining roots in the trading principalities of Java's north coast: Bantam, Cirebon, Demak, Jepara, Tuban, Gresik, and Surabaya. Toward the end of the 15th century a coalition of these *pasisir* ports joined under Demak leadership and brought the downfall of Majapahit. For about fifty years inland Java was dominated by Demak. Fragments of Majapahit, in Ponorogo and south central Java, clung to Tantric practices; remnants of royalty fled to Bali; regions like Tengger, in mountainous east Java, still maintain Hindu traditions. But gradually and generally both inland elites and hermitage communities were coerced or converted. Javanese legends

emphasise the role of the *walisanga*, nine saints, within this transition. With origins reflecting the mestizo culture of their ports, they were at once political rulers, warriors, and religious pioneers. They led the armies which brought Majapahit's downfall and held council to forge the basis of an Islam within which currents of orthodoxy and heterodoxy were both strong. Collectively they are credited with a range of innovations, including even the reinvention of *wayang*, to bridge the gap between Indic traditions and Islamic practices.

Conversion of courts, priests and peasants redirected the flow of spiritual evolution toward Islamic moulds. Practical encounter centred not just on efforts to recast court ritual, but also to win monasteries, village burial customs, and isolated hermits to Islam. The Sufism of the *wali* facilitated entry into mystical Javanese tradition, as interaction between spiritual adept's typically took place within a framework of testing powers (*kasekten*). According to longstanding patterns, cults spread and replaced each other if adherents demonstrated superior occult power. Tantric adept's deferred to Sufi saints, *wali*, if swayed by wisdom reflected in demonstrated power. Village *dukun* and Indic styled hermits no doubt continued practising as Sufi brotherhoods filtered among them, as Indic influences have persisted to the present in village habit and sacred mountain retreats, but change was substantial.

The introduction of Islamic burial rites can be seen as a great unsung transformation. Earlier magicians had used corpses, so the practices of some magical technicians were contained implicitly. Impact is reflected in the simple lines and sterility of the mosque when contrasted with the baroque statuary of Indic temples. But Sufis did not have the exclusive attitude of modernists, they did not deny the existence of nor precluded interaction with the devic and spirit forces which preceded them. Islam did bring new senses of time and space. In the brotherhood of believers (*ummat*) the prime space is the sphere of submission to Allah (*dar al-Islam*), a space which is meant to expand through time into areas of unbelief (*kafir*) and culminate in union of believers through

submission. These new priorities shifted temporal emphasis toward the linear axis and spatial orientation towards social structures of community ritual and law. Cyclical repetition of a golden era and focus on the ruler still resonated in local idiom, but combined with the new Islamic tradition of the Mahdi.

After the brief period of *pasisir* dominance the Javanese interior reasserted itself through the Mataram dynasty. Emerging towards the end of the 16th century, the kingdom rose from the same heartland that had housed the earliest states. The significance of the peasantry is evident from the fact that as soon as Demak asserted itself over the rice growing interior its expansion was countered. The manpower of peasant society became the basis upon which the interior launched its bloody campaigns against *pasisir* states and Mataram thus subjugated most of Java. In the early 17th century Sultan Agung sought legitimacy in Islamic as well as Javanese terms. He introduced a syncretic version of the Islamic calendar, solicited the title of *sultan* from Mecca, and adopted the title *susuhunan* to set himself both with and above the *walisanga*, who carried the title *sunan*. His son and successor Amangkurat I was less powerful and less Islamic by inclination. He launched an extravagant destruction of the *pasisir*, slaughtering thousands of Islamic religious teachers (*kyai*) those carrying the torch of the *wali*.

His demolition of the trading states converged with Dutch interest in trading world. Mataram's wars combined with rising Dutch power over trade to cut the kingdom off from both trade wealth and the wider Islamic culture of the islands. Through the 18th century Mataram lived increasingly in its own world. Dutch presence led to division of the kingdom in 1755, when Batavia's intervention transformed dynastic transition into stalemate. The Surakarta court was matched by a new *kraton* in Yogyakarta, both of which were subsequently fractured by the same process later. The final blow to Mataram's power came with the Java War of 1825-1830. Diponegoro led the last military stand against Dutch domination. With his defeat the *kraton* submitted to the Dutch empire centring in Batavia.

Divisions and reduction of the courts to political symbols resulted paradoxically in extreme cultural refinement. Competition within the elite was rechannelled into embellishment of traditional culture. With less opportunity to assert primacy through military and political channels, courts vied for prestige and power through their patronage of ritual and the arts. Although it gave way to foreign control in economic and political spheres, Mataram remained the focal point of ethnic Javanese social and cultural life up to World War II. Courts turned inward toward refinement of dramatic, literary, and spiritual arts. Within their world the social ethos and cosmological images maintained many Indic notions of traditional quest within a Sufi Islamic frame. Mataram and its successors revival Indic styles, albeit strongly tinged by Islam, and an ethos rooted in both peasant and court society.

In the religious pattern which emerged in Java, mosques became gateways to the graveyard. Like temples of the Indic era, mosques were erected on a landscape infused with sacred lore. At the same time mosques mark entry to ancestral shrines, graves of saints or rulers which became the object of pilgrimage. The graves of the *walisanga* became centres of pilgrimage, in a pattern consistent with both earlier ancestral cults as well as Sufism. Animistic logic and Indic frames still defined these transactions. Mosques provided a safeguard against paying *karmic* debts. Villagers approach spirits not only to honour them, but also to solicit assistance toward accomplishment of worldly goals. Acceptance of aid results in bonding, the living commit themselves to suspension in the spirit realms on their death. Some Javanese have felt they could use Islam as a buffer, to save paying the price of spirit relations. For those viewing Islam in these terms, acceptance of the faith did not so much alter ancient practices as provide an accomplice to their fulfilment.

Islam brought an emphasis on God which contrasts with Theravada atheism, but also social changes not unlike those associated with Theravada on the mainland. As within Buddhism, within Islam religious teachers became an intermediating class

who were no longer so easily subordinated to rulers. The *ulama* conveyed Islamic teachings and Arabic literacy to the folk level. In the islands as well, predominance of "galactic polities" was replaced by a pattern of states interacting. Throughout Southeast Asia new traditions brought the rise of a middle classes, both traders and religious brokers; politically it involved levelling, city states characteristic; world religions reached the zones and villages. One important divergence, important to later development and apparent in the origins of this era, is rooted in contrast between Islam and Theravada. The mainland remained in an Indic mould, albeit in a new Theravada version of it, and its societies have remained amenable to syncretism. With the transition to an Islamic and Semitic path on the islands, the seed for tension between the substratum and civic religions was sown. Semitic religions are doctrinally less amenable to synthesis than Indic religions. This meant that later, as the nature of religion as such shifted to prioritise ideologies, religion became a source of conflict in the island world.

### **The idioms of world religions**

If we assume that the issues and the patterns which characterise Christianity are essential to religion our reflexes are natural and such reflexes also clearly operate with the same limiting implications in Muslim or Buddhist cultures. Even early academic definitions of religion in general terms reflect limits we have to question. Thus Durkheim defined religion as:

... a unified system of beliefs and practices, relative to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

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<sup>119</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York, Free Press, 1965) p. 62.

He stressed not only the significance of distinction between secular and sacred, but the social basis of religious thought, as a projection into the realm of culture of forces rooted in interaction between groups in society. Durkheim's theory lends itself to analysis of the ways in which religion can be used as a system of social control. But at the same time both his conception of division between secular and sacred and his notion of "church" are problematic.

Either explicitly or implicitly each religion defines its own sense of the term. Thus within the Semitic family of religions generally the only "true religions" come through prophetic revelation from the one God and are enshrined in holy books, making truth and law accessible to demarcated communities of believers. Durkheim's definition implied Semitic notions. On the other hand within Indic religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism the boundaries of religious community are not highlighted in the same way, fundamentally within those frames truth is beyond symbolic representation and individual spiritual liberation is achieved through self realisation within a communal context in which all people are tacitly implicated. Even if not overtly, each religious system is not just a variation on an easily identifiable set of forms, of either thought or organisation, but a distinct way of shaping what "is" religious.

Nevertheless most of us will intuitively remain convinced that something characterises religion. In attempting to identify it we may look first, as Tylor did, for a common or underlying element of belief. However in technical philosophical terms systems such as Theravada Buddhism are "a-theistic", they deny the ultimate existence of either gods or self, at least as we can conceive those in thought form. Thus the diversity of belief makes it awkward to identify religion in general with any particular structures we can observe in the social and cultural realms. The most useful recent definitions draw attention not to particular structures of experience, thought or action, but to the nature of the linkage between them. Thus Bellah spoke of religion as "a set of

symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence" <sup>120</sup> and Geertz defined religion as:

...the conviction that the values one holds are grounded in the inherent structure of reality, that between the way one ought to live and the way things really are there is an unbreakable inner connection. <sup>121</sup>

In these definitions stress falls on the tightness of the connection between inner experience, belief systems and actions. They suggest that if the system is one in which people experience inner conviction that their beliefs, and the actions prescribed by them, are rooted in self-evident reality, then the system is religious. In these terms each religious system, like every culture, defines a universe of meaning which in the end is only intelligible to itself.

The implication of these definitions is that the most important elements of belief are implicit, hidden or taken for granted. Unstated world views are both critical to action and distinct from consciously subscribed beliefs. So, while religion may include formalised beliefs which do shape tacit views of the world, practiced or lived religion may also depart radically from orthodox doctrines, drawing on a range of other tacit convictions which inform local uses. In practical terms, religion must be treated as an aspect within society and defined by its relations to the whole. The utility of this emphasis was already clear in Malinowski's argument that ritual and magic function and find their meaning through their relation to the social and economic exchanges they rationalise. Similarly Harris, in exploring the sacredness of cows in Hindu doctrine, related that to their economic significance as a source of labour, fuel and milk. <sup>122</sup>

We should bear in mind, as a prelude to exploring Southeast

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<sup>120</sup> R Bellah uses this as his working definition in an essay on "Religious Evolution", in *Beyond Belief* (New York, Harper & Row, 1970)

<sup>121</sup> C Geertz, *Islam Observed* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1971) p. 97.

<sup>122</sup> Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches* (London, Hutchinson, 1975) pp. 11-34.

Asian cultural transitions into the modern era, that until recently religious worlds have been "the world" for most local peoples. Familiarity with the origins, doctrines and practices of Islam and Buddhism in general terms is therefore clearly essential prior to exploring their practical impact on socio-cultural life in Southeast Asian contexts. Buddhism has been the major export from the Indic family of religions. Islam, of the Semitic family from the Middle East, is part of the tradition which includes Judaism and Christianity. The contrast between them, in the way the ultimate is conceived, could not be more striking: Buddhism is technically atheistic and philosophically monistic, Islam is emphatically monotheistic and dualistic. Here we will outline and contrast key elements of the two systems.

Theravada Buddhism is the southern school of Buddhism, "the way of the elders" as defined by the corpus of works codified in SriLanka almost two millennia ago. Until recently Mahayana Buddhism, the northern school, had more exposure in the west and our popular images of Buddhism tend to be dominated by what we know of it through China, Japan, Tibet, Korea and Vietnam, all Mahayana Buddhist. In any case, though present as one of the earlier cults as well, a new wave of Theravada Buddhism, the one which produced its currently dominant pattern, came from SriLanka to Southeast Asia in the 12th century. Mon monks, from Thaton in the southern part of Burma, were sent to SriLanka to re-establish the purity of lineages of ordination and to bring fresh versions of Theravada Scriptures, which had been preserved there. The essence of Buddhist teaching is extremely direct and helped make it one of the great missionary religions, along with Christianity and Islam.

The historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, was born in the 6th century B.C. in the foothills of the Himalayas and is presented within the religion as fully human, if unusual. In Buddhist terms he had passed through profound spiritual lessons in earlier lives which prepared him for his mission. He was born into luxury as a prince, and among the omens surrounding his birth was the

prediction that he would either become a "world redeemer" or a "world conqueror", an ascetic saint or a great ruling conqueror. As a king his father naturally wanted him to be a conqueror rather than a renunciate and brought up in the lap of luxury to protect him from worldly traumas.

Overprotection set the stage for confrontation with realities which counterpointed the comforts of palace life. His father's effort to create a cocoon of the palace meant that when, on successive trips outside the palace, he confronted sickness, old age, death and a monk his sense of the world was shattered and he became a seeker after truth. He experimented with the cults common to his day, practices of extreme ascetic renunciation, and found himself nearly dead and without enlightenment. He experienced enlightenment on his own and his teachings took the form of "the middle path", meaning that they neither required asceticism nor indulged materialism. The Buddha was concerned with practical awareness rather than philosophy. He admonished against speculations, such as about what happens after death. Once he deflected a metaphysical question by pointing out that if punctured by an arrow it is no use wasting time finding out who shot it and why, the object is get the arrow out. The thrust of Buddhist teachings is practical and empirical, to deal with reality now.

His basic teaching is summed up in the Four Noble Truths. First, life is *dukkha*, as we translate it suffering and pain. This is the state of *samsara*, meaning we are bound to the "wheel of rebirth" due to dissatisfaction with our condition. The second is that the root of suffering is *tanha*, craving or desire. The third is that the cessation of suffering is through the elimination of desire and that freedom from suffering is *nibbana*, release or extinction. The fourth is that the way to bring about the cessation of desire is the Noble Eight Fold path, which can be summarised as "the middle path". It is the path of adopting and applying the "right" or correct attitude within whatever we do. The Three Gems of Buddhism, its foundation as a religion, are the Buddha, as exemplar; the *dhamma*, the truth as contained in the teachings; and the *sangha*, the

community of monks which perpetuates the *dhamma*.

The centrality of *bhikkhu* leads us to imagine Buddhism as a religion only of monks, but this has never been the case. Buddhist theories of rebirth present life cycles as fragments of a larger pattern. The attainment of release does not depend on caste, as in Hinduism, though positions in life are seen a consequence of past lives. Though theoretically accessible, it is thought that most people will not attain *nibbana* within this life. Thus while some take on the direct striving implied by the monkhood, many do not and exist as householders, students, children, mothers, fathers and merchants. At the same time within each of these situations it is held that we can act correctly, according to the *dhamma*, the truth or law of nature. Buddhism does not imply that one formula will apply to every person, but images a many tiered universe within which every person progresses toward the *dhamma* in accordance with their condition.

Within Theravada polities kings were "custodians of the *dhamma*". Pragmatically this meant they were to preserve the *vinaya*, the list of 227 rules and prohibitions for monks. The politics of religiosity in Theravada systems centred on schools of interpretation, such as whether the saffron robe should be worn over the left or the right shoulder. As rulers were supposed to guard the *vinaya*, there was also periodic effort to find original texts, to minimise perversions in their translation into *sangha* teachings and to bring monastic practices in line with original tradition.

In the Theravada system monasteries, in Burma *kyaung* or Thailand *wat*, and temples, *vihara*, were no longer royal enclaves. In classical Southeast Asia hermitages existed beyond the sphere of royal influence, as temples or sanctuaries in mountains, forests and caves, but major establishments were associated with courts. With Theravada monasteries reached villages, resulting in the pattern we see today in Thailand, with *wat* virtually defining village boundaries. The *sangha*, the community of monks, the *bhikkhu*, become brokers and the sacred language of Scriptures was not Sanskrit, the high language of early Indic religion, but Pali, the

language of everyday speech at the Buddha's time. Though still distant from local vernaculars, this moved toward language comprehensible to ordinary folk.

Turning to Islam, we do note striking contrasts. Theravada Buddhism is atheistic in the technical sense that it does not involve conceptualisation of supreme being. From the Buddhist point of view it is understood that everything we could possibly conceive of is finite. As our consciousness is limited everything we perceive, see or think we know is "*maya*". This does not just mean "illusion", as it is often interpreted, but that everything in the realms of form we know is passing and not absolute, the absolute being beyond conception. Buddhism emphasises that whatever we can conceive or name is not the absolute, in consequence it gives the absolute no name. This sense of the unnamable is present in early Semitic religion, as "*Yahweh*", "that which cannot be named", is the Old Testament name for "God". But the Islamic response to the dilemma of referring to an ultimate that we cannot characterise has been to give God a thousand names, holding that in the end there is nothing that is not God. Here we have the basic assertion of the Islamic faith: "there is no god but God", which in mystical terms reads as meaning that in the final analysis "there is nothing but God".

Islam is a religion which has grown "in the full light of history".<sup>123</sup> There is no doubt that the Prophet Muhammed was an historical individual nor that the *Koran* ascribed to him was a product of his lifetime. Islam, the religion of those who are called "Muslims" was born in 622 AD, the first year of the Muslim calendar. It spread within the lifetime of Muhammed from its birthplace in Medina to take in the Arabian peninsula, and soon afterwards all of North Africa and the Middle East. In Islamic terms the prophet was fully human and "the seal of the prophets", the last and final receptor of divine revelation in a chain of beginning with the Judaic Adam, extending through Moses and

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<sup>123</sup> HAR Gibb

the Old Testament prophets to and including Jesus. In Islam the miracle of revelation is associated not with the man, Muhammed, but with the *Koran*, the book of revelation. The fundamentals of Islamic belief are also straightforward, though as in all religion their realisation is never so simple.

The Five Pillars are the foundation of practice. These include: the profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, fasting and pilgrimage. The profession of faith, the *shahadat*, is affirmation that "there is no God but Allah, and Muhammed is his Prophet". Repetition of the profession, assuming it is understood and meant is the first requirement. The basis of practice lies in the second pillar, prayer or *solat*. Each Muslim is to pray five times a day, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening, in a pattern set down by Muhammed himself. The Friday noon prayer is to be carried out at the mosque. Almsgiving, the *zakat*, was once centrally regulated, as a religious tax, but has become (in most Islamic countries) voluntary. Fasting takes place during the Islamic lunar month of *Ramadan*, during which all Muslims must abstain from food, drink and stimulants during daylight hours. The final requirement of the faith is that every Muslim who is able to should take the pilgrimage to Mecca, the *haj*, once during their life.

Beyond the Five Pillars there are other central ethical, moral and social obligations, but emphasis on them is variable. The law, the *shariah*, guides social life of believers, the *ummat* or community of the faith. It derives from the *Koran* and the *Hadiths*, or "traditions of the Prophet", a collection of stories about Muhammed and his statements during life. Within Islam there is strong emphasis on the equality and unity of believers, who together make up the *dar-al-islam*, "the house of Islam". Within that community each believer is enjoined to expand the faith and this is the much misunderstood "*jihad*", or holy war. This does not mean obligation to wage war physically, though that interpretation of it is relevant at times. More fundamentally it means obligation to increase the sphere of submission to God, which is what the word "*islam*" means in Arabic. This increase is in the first instance

internal, those who profess Islam are obliged to surrender resistance inside themselves so as to become agents of God's will. It also means, by extension, that the life of surrender will overflow, that magnetic attraction will subsequently increase surrender to God in others.

In Islam there are neither priests nor monks. Each individual is thought to relate directly to God and in theory no one has the right to meddle in the inner spiritual life of another. There is authority invested in the *ulama*, the class of scholars who are acquainted with the *Koran* and *Hadiths*, as they are thought best able to interpret the law for the *ummat*, the community of believers. Because the law and community, the *shariah* and *ummat*, are integrally bound to the practice of submission which is, in the ideal, Islam, there is a strong emphasis all through Islamic history on the ideal of a state and society fully guided by Islamic principles. It is significant in this respect that the first year of the Islamic calendar marks its birth as a practice in the community of Medina; not the prophet's birth, his reception of revelation or even his first following. "Religion" in the Islamic case cannot be separated from the state or society, it depends on being actualised through those.

Two variants within Islam deserve mention. First there is division between two major schools, Sunni and Shi'a. Shi'ites are concentrated in Iran and Iraq, most Muslims, and virtually all in Southeast Asia, are Sunni. The Shi'ites emphasise a line of succession, based on a genealogy extending to Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammed, and transmission of an esoteric, or secret knowledge through a line of *imams*, leaders of the spiritual community. Sunnis emphasise consensus of the *ulama*, called *ijma*, as representatives of the *ummat*, who interpret the law for its application within present society. Powerful social emphasis within Islam is evident in the extreme importance of law within it. Rulers, Caliph or Sultan, are supposed to act as guardians of the law, as representatives of God's will, expressed through revelation in the *Koran*, in social life.

Secondly, and of particular relevance to the extension of

Islam into Southeast Asia, there is a distinction within Islam between levels or depths of realisation. These are related to *tasawuf*, mystical philosophy, as taught even in orthodox Islamic schools. The "*sarengat*" refers to fulfilment of ritual obligations based on literal understanding; "*tarekat*" refers to those inwardly seeking the truth within doctrines "*hakekat*" to the level of those who have direct knowledge of the Truth in its absolute sense; "*makripat*" describes the state of those who not only know, but are experientially united with ultimate Truth. This conception of stages of spiritual life underlies Sufism, the mystical or esoteric element within Islam. On the surface of Islamic life the community is guided by literal teachings; those who follow the tarekats, the spiritual brotherhoods which comprise Sufism, are seekers after inner truth.

In the early decades of this century observers of Southeast Asian religions, influenced by readings of religion which prioritised formal doctrinal and ritual practices such as we have just touched, held that most local Buddhists or Muslims were secretly animists, that either their conversion had been nominal or syncretic mixing so pervasive that the religions were not pure. Imported religions thus appeared to them as a "thin veneer" above resilient local cults. Even through the 1950s and 1960s most studies of local religions dealt with the Buddhist and animistic elements of Thai religion as though they were separate traditions interacting. It was only in 1970 that Tambiah presented them as components within a single system, implying that "Buddhism" as practice involved a complex range of ideas in its Thai context and could not be understood only against the background of formal Buddhist doctrines.

Similarly in the Javanese case there has been a tendency to assume that the same visible persistence of animistic and Hindu beliefs, at least within significant segments of the population, meant that the Javanese have not been really Muslim, or that only those among them who are purist in their approach to the faith deserve the label. This interpretation followed, like readings of

Thai Buddhism, from textually based or scriptural views of religion, a perspective according to which Islam cannot include beliefs which preceded it.<sup>124</sup> We need to operate with a sense of what religion is which helps us register the reality of local practices as unities. We must see religions first as multi dimensional rather than attempting to define it in one realm, that is as including domains of ritual, doctrine, technique and social structuring. At the same time we need to allow that there may be differing local meanings and manifestations, some departing from the orthodoxy exponents of Islam or Buddhism may endorse. In taking these lines we cannot escape tension between the way outsiders, or an academic discipline, define a religion and the perspective of those within it.

A century ago Snouck Hurgronje revolutionised understanding of Islam by approaching it through the way it was practiced in Mecca and Aceh. His approach was sociological and sensitive to interplay between doctrines and their context. Such approaches shift attention from formal institutions and conceptions to local practices and lead to views, such as Gilsenan's that:

... Islam will be discussed not as a single, rigidly bounded set of structures determining or interacting with other total structures but rather as a word that identifies varying relations of practice, representation, symbol, concept, and worldview within the same society and between different societies.

This view of religious systems, rooted in everyday social praxis, is a long way from the assumption that religion can be defined entirely by its own central doctrines. We cannot employ a sense of religion rooted in the simple view that they involve readily

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<sup>124</sup> Especially by the way Geertz's ethnography, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1976 (1960)) was framed, making these elements seem quite distinct even though that was not his purpose.

identifiable beliefs. We should approach interpretation of local practices with Geertz's sense of what constitutes religion and the perspective of Gilsenan or Tambiah on reading local systems as sets of discourses which shift in time and space.

### **Adaptations of ritual monasticism**

The new religious networks constituted a middle level of the Southeast Asian world from several perspectives. If peasant animism was an underlayer and royal cults formed a superstructure we are focusing now on intermediating institutions. In treating institutions, not ideals, we focus on practiced religion within local communities. We can nonetheless see institutions, rituals and teachers as vehicles for religious purpose if we attend to the interplay between outer forms and inner experience. Sociological parallels between the systems are evident to us through Redfield's framework, which draws attention to the broker role of intermediators between court and village traditions. Like the *bhikkhu* the *ulama* were agents of literacy conveying syncretic religions emphasising ritual, esoteric learning, meditation, and experiences tinged by magic.

In shifting to consider local interiorisation of religious idioms, Weber's contrast is an apt starting point. He suggested contrasts though distinction between "emissary" and "exemplary" styles of teaching. Exemplary prophecy, characteristic of Indic religions, emphasises inward process, teachers are meant to be illustrate their message through their being. Thus Theravada *bhikkhu* are supposed to be beacons, radiating peace and by inwardness a point of orientation for others. In contrast emissary models suggest transmission of experience derived through prophetic revelation and teachers, like the *ulama*, reach out to make their message clear to others.

In the Buddhist region the *sangha* was hierarchically organised and linked closely at its apex to the monarchy. Some Islamic teachers belonged to brotherhoods called *tarekats*, but these were not so uniformly structured, and generally the *ulama*

competed more directly with rulers than the *sangha* did. In the Islamic zone religious life centred on mosques, as places of worship, and schools, in Java called *pesantren*, where young students pursued teachings deeply. Within both systems lines of political patronage reached from court centres into village society and often rebellions relied on the support of religious figures, as the new hierarchies could threaten those in power. Rural institutions centred on temples or schools. Theravada *wat* became features of village life, a focus for worship, they have been central in village ritual and as educational institutions.

The *sangha* is the primary physical vehicle for the Buddhist message in the world. *Bhikkhu* are nevertheless only one aspect of a total system including villagers and royalty. Theravada rulers also experienced monkhood, but not as they occupied thrones, and royalty was a source of patronage for the *sangha*. But the *sangha* had autonomous existence beyond royal patronage and rooted in international lineages and schools of thought. Within the kingdom rulers themselves made merit by giving donations and serving as protector of the religion, they received by giving. Tension between the state and the *sangha* arose from the nature of the monkhood. As monks were linked to the grass roots they could represent village communities, becoming channels for criticism and petitioning rulers and their position meant they could claim to be disinterested parties, giving them high moral standing.

There have been three distinct types of *wat*: village, urban and forest styles. Urban temples are often massive institutions and have become the basis for universities, centres of excellence in the study of Pali or in fine points of philosophy. The village *wat* are interwoven with the communities and rituals, which in all *wat* include chanting of Scriptures at length. Forest *wats* are the isolated hermitage like centres which have minimal connection with society. Dispersed in remote forests or mountains they are the centres within which most of the meditation teachers are found, sites for intensive practice of *vipassana*, or insight meditation. The *sangha* was not isolated or separate from village society, but a fluid entity which a majority of people experienced

continually.

Relationships between the *sangha* and community were conditioned by the fact that the monkhood was a phase of life for most people. In theory monks wander, having renounced home and security, with nothing except their robe, an umbrella and a begging bowl; in fact most have been rooted in specific *wat*. All stay settled for the three months of the annual rain retreat, when agricultural activity lulled, chanting, studying Scriptures, meditating and officiating within local rituals. The majority of men became monks for a period, though most only as novices, or *samanera*. Village boys entered virtually as an initiation, marking transition prior to marrying and raising a family. Through association as novices age-mates, the same cohorts who later became elders, bonded into cliques. Even village children who never entered the *sangha* were sent to temples to help and take classes, being inducted into the essentials of Buddhist morality and ethics in the process, and the rate of premodern male literacy was thus extremely in Theravada states.

Even lifelong monks, a minority, have not usually striven to attain the ideal, the end point of Buddhism. Though all monks command respect, few have been seen as saints, *arhant*, who had achieved *nibbana*. Nevertheless, even at a lower level, monks could be beacons, radiating awareness and peace so that ideals become manifest. At the same time many have simultaneously been specialists in astrology, divination and exorcism, the casting out of spirits, they had individual reputations and have been sought out for advise on the timing appropriate for naming ceremonies or the building of houses. Such expertise, not part of doctrinal Buddhism, reflected syncretism with the substratum of folk tradition and, in the case of astrology, maintenance of earlier Indic numerological sciences. Ordinary people conceived of themselves as on a spiritual ladder. Woman hoped to reincarnate as a man; men to reincarnate as a committed monks.

For ordinary Buddhists the most pertinent guide to action has been that people should perform "merit making actions". Working to accumulate merit is their proximate goal, not

achievement of *nibbana*, which for almost all Buddhists is imagined as beyond reach. In practice this principle was translated into graded listing of actions which earn merit and many imagined they could cancel bad deeds mechanically by gifts to *wat* or through having a son who entered the *sangha*. For instance a corrupt politician in Orwell's novel *Burmese Days* spent his life stabbing others in the back, confident that in the end he could donate money to build a temple and earn merit. But if considered closely merit making is in essence not far from the heart of the Buddha's teaching. In principle merit comes through giving without ego, without desire for reward. "Selfless action" is the channel for releasing *kamma* (*karma*) to facilitate spiritual improvement and this is close to the essence of Buddhism in doctrinal terms.

To illustrate consider merit making implications at what appear as the extremes of the Buddhist spectrum. The ostensibly most merit making extreme might be a monk in a forest *wat* meditating under a master who received the transmission of the *dhamma* through a lineage straight to the Buddha. He might own nothing and spend all his time in silent walking or sitting meditation. The other extreme may be an ordinary village woman, relating to Buddhism by the fact she provides rice for monks and attends ceremonies. Surface correlation to ideals would indicate that the monk was gaining more merit than the villager and indeed such hierarchy is explicit in Theravada. But spiritually merit making depends on selfless motive. The forest monk may be constantly, even unconsciously, glorifying himself. If so the very intensity of practice works against him, strengthening the *kamma* of ego. The village woman may give only because of social pressure to conform, she may not pause to consider why, acting automatically as dictated by tradition. It may be that she gives without thought of herself, earning more merit than the misdirected meditation of the monk. This possibility is integral to the notion of merit making and relevant to the translation of the Buddha's message into everyday ritual actions.

Though at first glance appearing radically different, there were profound convergences between Islamic and Theravada structures. Even senses of membership in religious community differ. In Buddhism the *sangha* is the primary vehicle of explicit practice. In Buddhist theory the hierarchy within the *sangha* connects not only states to villages, but ordinary people to the *dhamma*. Guidelines for the *sangha* were established by the Buddha himself and the *vinaya*, the rules of monastic conduct, has origins in the sayings of the Buddha. Bhikkhu taught ideally through radiating *metta*, or compassion, through their own meditative realisation, so that others would be blessed by it through hearing or in rituals.

Islamic concepts of community centre on a brotherhood of believers which is theoretically democratic--all relate to God directly without the intermediary role of a priest or hierarchy. Muhammed did not talk about special orders. Even in Sufi orders members were not separated from society, they were undistinguished, except in privately sitting at the feet of a master or performing exercises under his guidance. However, within Islamic practice teachers have had special status. Masters of mystical Islam and the *ulama*, experts on the texts, have often been seen as having special power as transmitters. In north Africa they are spoken of as having "*baraka*", charisma, a magnetic quality which radiates outward in a fashion not unlike that of a *bhikkhu*.

Though there is no doctrinal place for spiritual renunciates in formal Islam, there were wandering seekers, *santri*, and even spiritual beggars in practice. These approached the ideals of monkhood while, on the other hand, many *bhikkhu* have been far from being the wanderers their tradition images. In traditional *pesantren* the begging rounds and bowls had a place; in Buddhism some monks have not even begged. Thus, though in theory a class of intensive seekers after truth is central in Buddhism and non-existent in Islam, in practice similar groups existed in both contexts. Ostensibly ideals in Islam hold that everybody relates directly to God and in Buddhism that they are placed on a spiritual pyramid of inequity. Counterpointing this, within

Buddhism virtually all males move in and out of the monkhood and Sufi orders distinguish the intensity of individual experience of truth. While at one level Buddhism is hierarchical and Islam democratic, in practice the Theravada monkhood is not extraordinary and in Islam there are notions of special power in saints or mystics.

Within Buddhism, especially after the monastic university of Nalanda was eliminated, there is no equivalent to the *haj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. In Islam the pilgrimage constituted a linking point, currents from throughout the Muslim world always met there and this constantly linked movements across the Islamic world. Committed Muslims who could afford the *haj* undertook it. Those who were serious not only visited briefly, but studied for years under masters of law, theology, morality or mysticism. Those who had stayed at Mecca often became teachers in their home communities upon return. To begin with they would know and understand Arabic. Arabic remains the key textual language because in Muslim terms the Koran cannot be translated, it only exists in its original language and thus Muslims depend on Arabic fundamentally, as do Buddhists on Pali to a lesser degree.

*Pesantren* do not have the place within Islamic teaching that Buddhist *wat* do, yet they are the prime village institutions of Javanese Islam and perform many of the same functions. Local villagers sent their teenage boys to spend time chanting the *Koran*, memorising parts of it, and being introduced to the basics of Islamic theology, morality, and law. Students, called *santri*, also practised Islamic versions of the martial arts, participating in a relatively ascetic life as frugal and sparse as those of most Buddhist monks. Involvement with *pesantren* never became pervasive, as participation within Theravada *wat* did, as only families who were especially serious about Islam would send their children to them. However in both cases attendance has been essentially voluntary and the institutions provided education in morality and religious ethics, introducing ordinary people to whatever literacy they were going to get at the same time.

The nature of learning within traditional religions was similar. Chanting, repetition and meditation, in the Islamic case called *dikir*, repetition of the name of God as a centring device, were basic. In Theravada essential Scriptures have been in Pali, not in the living language of ordinary people. Student energy went into rote memorising and chanting of Scriptures in a language they could not usually interpret. In Islam Arabic is fundamental, no translation can be the *Koran*. Teachers became famous for memorised the *Koran* even without necessarily understanding Arabic. Both systems did not prioritise mental understanding of theological intricacies, though those were explored, but intuitive experience ritually felt. According to traditional systems, including that of Filipino Catholics, repetition of sacred texts in ritual context makes words sacred. The vibrational quality of sounds are held to resonate with states of being; the power of the word was not in literal meaning, but in the utterance itself. Every word or letter in the *Koran* is, like a Sanskrit *mantra*, considered to be power infused. Repetition was not meaningless, but "meaning" lay in the feeling or atmosphere which was ritually generated.

Both formulations of orthodoxy and of the social networks defining communities of practice have differed. Within Theravada issues of orthodoxy centred within the *sangha* rather than on the purity of popular practices, those who remained involved with spirits fitted into an accepted continuum. As within Theravada support for a *wat* came from nearby communities and novices from the immediate area, there has been also been coincidence between regional and religious community. Within Islam support for *pesantren* generally came from the dispersed families of the immediately involved. Consequently *santri* senses of community correlated with intensity of commitment, which cut across village identification. Both doctrines and the interweaving of *wat* with villages explain why there has been a relatively harmonious relationship between Buddhism and the substratum. Conversely within regional Islam religion more easily became a source of social tension. Islam holds a more exclusive doctrinal attitude.

Tensions did take shape in every local context between customary law, termed *adat* by Islam, and spirit beliefs on the one hand and orthodox doctrine and ritual on the other. With the advent of Islam in the region that theme becomes a consistent and powerful axis of local social tensions.

## Chapter 5

### APPROPRIATIONS OF MODERNITY

In each phase of evolution, adjustments in local worldview have occurred as local peoples entered wider circles of contact beyond the region. Early changes are only comprehensible as shifts in vision which went hand in hand with socio-economic change. As intensified commerce brought Sinic, Indic and Islamic vocabularies into the region, changing the local environment, people found their own purposes fulfilled more clearly through new discourses. Applying this same perspective to the present, it is instructive to view the period since the late 19th century as the time in which Southeast Asians have been gaining control over and creatively adapting industrially derived structures.

We mark historical change not by surface appearances, such as religious identification or ethnicity, but by the nature of transaction within local societies and beneath labels, by structural changes in patterns of social life. Thus transition to the traditional era came with the rise of religious teachers as a new element within local societies. The rise of that class corresponded with shifts in conceptions of royalty and the state, as within the new world religions both were subordinated to religious frameworks.<sup>125</sup> Similarly the modern era begins with the impact of industrial capitalism around 1870, rather than with earlier European arrival or activities.<sup>126</sup> In dealing with the modern transformation we clearly touch a profound structural transition which is still in process.

We have access to far more information about the past century than we do of earlier times. But quantities of recorded information do not necessarily correlate with the complexity or significance of historical periods. If making sense of the past

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<sup>125</sup> Benda, structure

<sup>126</sup> Steinberg, van Leur

century is ambitious, it is in principle no more so than attempts to outline key patterns for the even longer earlier periods we have already touched. Recent historians might place great stress on the Japanese occupation, for example, because we know so much of it. But a bird's eye perspective suggests that it should feature no more, in our overview of the region's history, than the Mongol invasions of the 13th century.<sup>127</sup> Even a short overview can highlight the major themes we identify within the modern era.

The term 'modernity' is used here to stress a transformation which has been taking place throughout the world. Terms such as tradition and modernity can be dubious, every label has implications and raises a different set of problems. Our concept of tradition is dynamic, it is not a reference to stasis, and modernity refers essentially to the complex of social and cultural patterns associated with the industrial revolution.<sup>128</sup> Notions of progression through imperialism, colonialism, nationalism, revolution and independence are most common in historical texts but far more misleading. They implicitly emphasise the significance of European-Asian relations and thus make it seem that that interchange constitutes the history of the region.<sup>129</sup> I am stressing 'modernity' in order to present recent local history as part of a general process, the reorganisation of global societies through the impact of the industrial revolution.

### **Globalisation of industrial capitalism**

In dealing with nationalism and modern identities we enter an area public imagery usually frames in tacitly racial terms. Colonialism is imaged as domination of one ethnic group over another; nationalism as reactive, a process of individuals, policies and movements countering that domination. The personalities within and drama of recent political events are intrinsically interesting, but it is very helpful to characterise colonialism and

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127 ref to Benda

128 The best overall treatment of this period is in DJ Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia*

129 Legge, among others

nationalism sociologically, to sidestep implicitly racial categories. Via colonialism the industrial revolution brought new communications systems into Southeast Asia. Following that line we can then see that nationalism has been the competition to dominate these new systems. This definition of nationalism has little to do with ethnicity or ideology, referring us instead to social competition to dominate structures which did not exist before modern times.

Early relationships between ethnic groups and states were defined by spheres of fluid and personalised authority. As modern Europeans, bolstered in the late 19th century by steam, rail and telegraph, competed for influence within Southeast Asia they demarcated fixed territories and by about 1900 the boundaries of modern nations were defined. Each newly defined geographic region also became a frame for cultural interactions and thus distinctive senses of identity emerged within them. If we cannot see the resistance of heroes like Diponegoro as nationalist, it is because in our context nationalism is a function of specifically modern structures of self-consciousness and statehood, as well as of the technology which underpins them in their contemporary forms.

Europeans first had direct influence within Southeast Asia in the early 16th century, and from that time were increasingly influential local actors. However it is too easy to read history backward and see their early presence as the beginning of the modern period. Even when not intending to we also assume that modernisation is westernisation and that either represents progress. It is crucial to place European presence in proper perspective and, as the habitual conflation of ethnicity with modernity is as engrained in Asia as in the west, it is clearly not an easy task. Colonialism and nationalism are also familiar implicitly, so in dealing with interactions over the past century it is especially difficult to avoid identifying, we take sides reflexively as the events we treat often have direct implications in our situation.

Fundamentally modernity is a reference to the social and economic changes resulting from the industrial revolution. It may

have originated within Europe, but is no more essentially European in its nature than earlier technologies of pottery, weaving or barter. Imperialism should thus be read as the vehicle of modernity and nationalism as the process through which local peoples have asserted control over it. Although Europeans were important actors before the 19th century, 1870 marks the general entry of modern capitalism and industry to the region. That is the critical transition to high colonialism, which began then and continued until World War II.

Within it local societies were reshaped just as Europe was being reshaped. The geographical boundaries which were established with precision later became those of independent states. New forms of communication connected events to global patterns; transportation drew economies into a world network; bureaucracies and secular education spread; cities with new functions mushroomed; migrant groups arrived and boundaries between all groups sharpened. Technology, capitalism, modern bureaucracy and education produced a network overlaying the structures identifiable within earlier epochs. Monastic and feudal relationships have been subsumed by the superimposition of a modern grid which sometimes crosscut earlier ethnic differences. Societies had been defined in personalised and magical terms by power at the centre; modern process produced systems of communication which defined communities by geographic limits and institutional affiliations.

Modern mining industries developed in the 19th century and were concentrated in the zones, in areas like Sumatra, Sulawesi and the Malay Peninsula. Tin was mined on a large scale in Malaya and on the island of Bangka, off Sumatra; rubber and tobacco plantations developed in around Medan, in Sumatra, and in Cambodia; and British foresting of teak in the Burmese hills could even be termed a mining operation. These activities expanded most in areas which had been relatively open, in the sparsely populated zones, and drew heavily on migrant workers. Villagers from south India and south China responded to extreme

pressures of famine and social dislocation in their home contexts and came as contract or indentured labourers. They worked under pitiful conditions, being bonded for five or ten year periods, and, hoping to send savings home. Although they generally came with the idea of returning home, and many did, a large percentage stayed. Some remained engaged with plantations, including many Tamils in Malaya, others became market gardeners and shopkeepers or initiated new small industries. These migrants eventually dominated emergent commercial economies at their local level everywhere.

Within the old core areas there was also expansion, but of a different kind. In Java, Luzon, the Mekong delta, central Thailand and the Irrawaddy delta wet rice cultivation was dramatically extended. New technology meant it became possible to dredge channels through previously inaccessible lowlands and swampy deltas. Chinese junks gave way to steamships, which combined in 1869 with the opening of the Suez Canal to create a world market for bulk crops, suddenly those could be transport profitably. The rice growing cores expanded and their populations mushroomed. Both Burma and Thailand became major exporters of rice for a world market. Java's population, of around 5 million early in the 19th century, expanded to about 40 million in 1940 and has reached 100 million now. Excepting Java and north Vietnam even core areas had been under populated, relative to their potential, until the 20th century. Though rice expansion brought huge growth in cores this was 'static' expansion, as modes of production were not transformed. At the same time socially new rice areas were distinguished from older ones by higher concentrations of land ownership and indebtedness.

Few natives wanted to work in colonial plantations or mines. Throughout the core areas rice growers did not respond to economic incentives to the satisfaction of European entrepreneurs, who consequently thought them 'lazy'. As a result Chinese and Indian migrants arrived in larger numbers from the last quarter of the 19th century and there was a disjunction between two economies. In the 'dynamic' sphere private property and waged

employment characterised relationships between workers, governments and producers. Dynamic expansion, through plantations, mining and in new systems such as railroads, had most impact on the zones; at the same time increases in rice production were dramatic within all of the cores. In areas like Malaya and West Sumatra local peoples did produce crops, of copra, rubber or coffee, for a commercial market. Rice growers, also catering increasingly to a commercial market, were not so much unresponsive to market forces as electing to respond, whenever possible, by expanding traditionally preferred activity rather than switching to new industries.

These patterns led Boeke to formulate his notion of 'dual economies', focused on why local people failed to compete in modern terms with Dutch, Chinese and Indian ventures. In particular he explored why, following the liberal period from 1870-1900 in the Netherlands East Indies, peasants did not respond to privatisation and taxation by entering the market economy. Liberals claimed expectation that the market would lead natives to spontaneously create businesses, make profits, invest and multiply them, in short become capitalists. Communally oriented peasants were not intrinsically motivated by wage labour and were pressed into it only through absence of opportunity to work in their favoured rice fields. Similarly, local elites were oriented toward bureaucratic rather than entrepreneurial access to wealth. Insofar as monetary taxation was used as a mechanism to force local people to enter the capitalist sector of the economy it had limited effect. Gaps in economic status, between colonialists, migrant Asians and locals, corresponded to entrenched worldviews and social structures everywhere.

Urban structures were also transformed in the 19th century. Rangoon, Bangkok, Saigon and Manila each became at least ten times the size of competitors within their spheres of influence. In the straits Singapore and Penang competed as centres. In the Dutch East Indies Batavia was paralleled by Surabaya, Medan, Bandung and others, there was more of a gradient of cities.

Generally these 'primate' cities contrasted with traditional urban structures in serving mainly as linking points to colonial metropolises. They became points through which international systems drew out goods rather than being integral, in reciprocal relation, to countrysides they also served. In traditional capitals inter-ethnic and international trade existed, but the economic cycle included hinterlands. Colonial cities became funnels through which Southeast Asian primary products have been sent elsewhere, a function which continued to characterise their relation to the world economy until local industries became contributors to world markets in the 1970s.

Even within these cities, the keys to the transformation, modern sectors were confined. Indigenous inhabitants generally lived in neighborhoods within which the resonances of village organisation remained strong, only a select elite joined Europeans in new suburbs. Cities became centres of administration and educational networks, their growth is accounted for by the fact that colonial bureaucracies centred in them. The development of rail lines, steamship travel, telegraph and telephones systems all focused on primate cities. They were larger than traditional capitals in proportion to their hinterland partly because they were made more exclusively dominant within the political frameworks that emerged, their size reflected modern colonial centralisation of power. The most distinctive feature of colonial systems was not that westerners controlled the apex of power, but that they operated through rationalised bureaucratic systems which coordinated industrially based communications.

The same pattern emerged in independent Thailand. The Thai monarchs Mongkut and Chulalongkorn, who ruled from the middle until the end of the 19th century, actively pursued modernity. Partly through interest in maintaining independence, they brought pervasive changes in Thai educational, military and bureaucratic systems. These integrated North, North-East and South Thailand into a centrally directed structure. Once semi-autonomous principalities such as Chiang Mai related to Bangkok through negotiation and a balance of power, now Bangkok

became the clear centre and Chiang Mai a hierarchical subordinate. In Thailand, as elsewhere, a migrant Chinese minority also expanded to dominate the most capitalised sectors of local economy. Their association with modern communications, in rural areas tied to rice milling, marketing and money lending, is obvious through correlation between concentrations of their settlement and the railroad network.<sup>130</sup>

### **Crystallisations of bounded community**

Modern communication refers not only to the print media, but also to voluntary ethnic, political and religious associations or clubs. Print technology lent itself to forms of social organisation which sharpen concepts of identity in the same way that colonial administrations defined boundaries. As we approach the present in conceptual, social and institutional terms, we think increasingly of religion and politics as though separate from each other. In the 19th century traditional movements were dominant. In the Philippine case historians generally agree a modern form of nationalism predates the 20th Century. But most early movements of resistance and revolt centred on protest against the new order or effort to revive what was imagined to have been traditional harmony. The sense of identity which animated and motivated people was not defined by the modern state. In 19th century movements the pertinent boundaries were those of ethnicity, defined by language group, shared customs, kinship and a body of other social and cultural traditions.

To understand modern movements we need to link changes in consciousness to changes in forms of social, religious and political movement. Dealing with the formation of classical and traditional states drew attention to the emergence in each case of a new category of people. Thus the formation of Vietnam was through syncretic mixing of cultures, writing and blood lines and cultural self consciousness has everywhere been suspended in a

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<sup>130</sup> ref to GW Skinner

web of mixed elements. In the modern context 'semi-westernised intelligentsias' are produced by the new frameworks. They are the 'national bourgeoisie' of Marxist idiom, compradores, brokers or middlemen who initially facilitated western interests. Those classes within local societies naturally related most easily to westerners, because they shared culture and education with them. They are a new class category within the Southeast Asian environment in the modern period.

Nationalists have aimed to control bureaucracies, newspapers and radio stations as a primary objective. In political coups control of radio, or now TV, stations is vital. This is only the most obvious sign that competition for elite supremacy in the 20th century is a struggle to control communications. With this we can see nationalism, beyond natives struggling against foreigners, as struggle to control nationally integrating institutions. Nationalism brings the rise to power of the semi-westernised intelligentsias, of the social groups carrying the consciousness created by precisely the integrating structures they aim to control. Competition has been not only between foreigners and local people, but also between migrant populations and local people and between different local ethnicities. Within migrant communities separate nationalisms developed, some focused on movements in their states of origin, as in Southeast Asian Chinese mobilised on behalf of Sun Yat Sen in the 1920s. On the other hand every local community, including ethnic minorities as well as migrants, has tried to control their own newspapers, associations and schools.

Capital cities became the context within which people from the areas which had been mapped out came together. People from disparate ethnic groups met within them and realised in the process that they belonged to the same system, albeit one dominated by outsiders. Modern educational drew people together and led them to think of themselves in collective terms. In Manila the ilustrados, the mestizo elite, started to think of themselves as Filipino, rather than Tagalog, Chinese or Spaniard, earlier than most Southeast Asians made this transition. In

Indonesia, people began to think of themselves as Indonesian as well as or instead of as being Batak, Minangkabau, Dayak, Javanese or Sundanese. Cities were the melting pots from which national consciousness emerged. The print media and radio communications within them generated new languages. This is particularly the case in Indonesia, where 'Indonesian', the Malay which had become the language of Islamisation, was endorsed as the national language.

In the early 20th century styles of social organisation and cultural expression were strongly affected, especially within urban areas and amongst indigenous elites, by modern systems. It is only with the turn of the century that select elites gained wider exposure to western secular education and within that class literacy became standard. Usually education took place first in French, Dutch or English, the colonial languages, but as soon as it did people began producing literature, poetry, short stories and novels, in Vietnamese or Malay-Indonesian. This represented a departure, only foreshadowed in the 19th century, from earlier styles of cultural production. Within traditional society literatures had been rooted in religious world views and rituals. Authorship was not individual and each performer, even in written form, saw themselves as validated through representing a tradition founded in oral transmission of collective consciousness. In the new literatures individual authors wrestled with issues arising in personal lives confronted with changing times, conflicts between arranged marriages and modern notions of love and choice became prominent themes.

Newspapers and print media took root early, as journals and authored creative prose emerged in remote local settings in the 19th century. Moves into print media came as a vehicle for traditional texts in Thai, Jawi (Malay with an Arabic script) or Javanese (in its Sanskrit derived script) as well as in association with modern authorship in new languages. Even newspapers, which exploded to reach all of the urban elites early in this century, emerged quickly in local as well as colonial languages, presenting indigenous issues as well as world news. Generally

elite appropriation of print medias preceeded the articulation of national political associations as another aspect of the same transformation. By the 1920s and 1930s a new elite culture, rooted in experience of secular modern education and expressed in daily engagement with print and radio medias, informed the social lives of indigenous elites, the same people who led nationalist political movements and worked as doctors, teachers or civil servants in urban contexts.

Among the new urban elites patterns of social organisation borrowed from the bureaucratised models colonial governments imposed. Literary and cultural, as well as political, associations were formed as voluntary associations. This is to say they sought identifiable memberships on an individual basis of choice which it was assumed came through ideological affinity with objectives which were spelled out in constitutions and statutes. Secretaries kept minutes, treasurers recorded dues and elected office bearers became standard. Though this pattern of clubs and associations became a reflexive norm, we might observe that as Southeast Asians adapted aspects of modern association they nevertheless tended to be especially attuned, through traditional conditioning, to organisational minutia and procedure in ritual terms. In any case every style of organisation in the social sphere adopted club lines among the elites.

The Dutch, British and French introduced secular education principally as an aid to colonial administration, but also established technical and medical schools. Their educational systems catered directly and almost exculsively to traditional indigenous elites, who had been largely coopted into alliance with European dominated administrative structures. In the Philippines the Americans aimed to spread secular education further and took schools into villages and towns, where they came to counterpoint the Catholic churches the Spanish had established as the most prominent of local institutions. Local elites gravitated to the new institutions as windows to a wider new world and not only as tools for access to power within colonial institutions of power. Even the schools which were created by colonisers carried a

powerful seed of nationalism. Enlightenment notions of equality and revolution were as foundational as emphasis on reason and science within modern schooling. Thus, even those who were being trained to serve colonial administrations were implicitly taught the values of freedom and democracy. They generally noticed the contradiction.

As soon as new schooling came into view locals appropriated it for purposes beyond those determined by Europeans. In the mid 19th century the Siamese king Mongkut, already familiar with Enlightenment sciences, found an English tutor for his children and sent them to school in Switzerland. In Jepara, on the north coast of Java and before the turn of the century, Kartini aimed to establish schools for local girls. In the 1920s the Taman Siswa movement in Indonesia established a network of independent schools. These were tinged by nativist nationalism and aimed to use modern schooling for distinctive local spiritual and cultural purposes. Every borrowing culture selects elements which conform to established patterns. Thus selected voluntary associations, such as the Theosophical Society, were particularly influential. In them local and colonising elites met on equal terms, a rare event in colonial contexts, and western mysticism converged with local Indianised predispositions. Through it, among other channels, classical ideas, strongest among precisely the court related elites which collaborated with colonial powers, were rearticulated and new patterns of local spiritual practice took shape.

The same cities which forged national identities were also centres of pluralism in an increasingly rigid form. While comparing the social patterns of colonial Burma, Malaya and Indonesia, Furnivall identified a plural social pattern. He characterised it as one within which a diversity of ethnic groups, peoples of different racial or ethnic origins, occupy more or less the same space, but are stratified, their ethnic origin coinciding with particular slots in the economy. For example in Malaya political administration was monopolised by the British; Chinese

worked as indentured labourers in tin mines and as market gardener, in manufacturing and retailing; Indians worked on rubber plantations, as policemen and as cloth merchants; and Malays clung to coconut plantations, farming rice or fishing when they could not enter the bureaucracy.

This pattern developed everywhere in Southeast Asia. Modern migrant communities were not a simple continuation of earlier Indian and Chinese presence. The influx which began a century ago was on a vast scale and was regulated more rigorously by centralised authorities. In earlier periods gradual development of Indian and Chinese trading communities meant they mixed with local populations. Older local communities of migrant Asians remained present at the same time. Indian cloth merchants were long established everywhere and Chinese traders were prominent in local marketing networks, whether of rice, opium or trade goods. In the latter part of the 19th century the influx, of several million migrants in a short period, meant they brought their own culture intact. These new migrants, not independent traders but indentured labourers, were also settled into cohesive working camps, often in isolated environments. Instead of inter marrying, as earlier migrants had, they married and socialised more exclusively among themselves; instead of identifying with the country they had moved to, they remained separate.

In many cases they were actively prevented from identifying locally by regulations designed ostensibly to protect indigenous peoples. The effect of colonial legislation was to exaggerate the ethnic division of labour and polarity of the economy. In Indonesia the Chinese were forbidden from owning land and confined to towns, they could not choose to become market gardeners and their main outlet lay through retail trade, which also happened to be the most dynamically expanding part of the economy. Naturally the Chinese moved into a position of dominance within it they still maintain. Colonial regulations, cultural proclivities and accidents of historical background combined to mean that new migrants entered most vigorously

into the dynamic sectors of the economy.

The same networks which facilitated nationalism created new divisions. In earlier periods boundaries blurred, Chinese communities became mestizo and eventually adopted local languages. After 1870 the volume of migration combined with the mixture of sexes involved to lead to crystallisation of identities, within migrant communities just as among incipient nationalists. From the late 19th century, and continuing to the World War II, Chinese and Indian communities were able to maintain a more separate identity than they had previously. Like indigenous peoples, they also created their own schools, newspapers and associations and through them they promoted identities which departed farther from those of the people they lived among. In the colonial context, where European colonisers maintained precisely such apartheid styles, this development was not out of character. In the modern period lines between communities have been more sharply drawn even as nationalism took shape through the same medias.

### **Scriptural religious reformations**

Religious and political dimensions of indigenous response to modernisation should be considered together. When we refer to nationalism we habitually consider it in political terms, as a phenomenon of mass movements and primarily a response to colonialism. In other words we conflate modern social change with issues of cultural and ethnic identity while also imposing a distinction, which we hold prominent, between religion and politics. Nationalism is not only reaction against western imperialism, an Asian response to an externally imposed stimulus. It has been part of a world-wide process of social change reflected in every sphere of consciousness and organisation and extending far beyond the narrow domain of formal politics.

In touching traditional thought within Southeast Asian societies we noted that political, social and religious dimensions were not separated. Validations of polity have been

simultaneously spiritual, social and political. Early systems did not distinguish religion and politics in the way we do and religious changes go hand in hand with the emergence of nationalism. Even in the Spanish Philippines the church was the most effective link between Manila and provincial powers. There nationalism also emerged first as a result of discriminatory practice on the part of Catholic orders, making it virtually impossible for Filipinos to become clergy, priests or monks. Thus religious issues fed nationalism and agitation centred on efforts of indigenous people to have voice within the most important integrating network, the Catholic church. Distinct modernisms, also related to political impulses, arose within Buddhist as well as Islamic communities.

Indigenous modernism arose first farthest from direct colonial impact as a process of independent religious innovation. In Thailand continuing linkage between the *sangha* and royalty has meant that modernist consciousness came vigorously through dominant religious and political institutions rather than as a counter to them. Mongkut, King of Siam in the mid 19th century, was a monk for 26 years prior to assuming the throne. Having studied Latin, English, mathematics and astronomy, through contacts he pursued with missionaries, he became critical of other monks who engaged in chanting without understanding the scriptures. The emphasis on comprehension of texts he initiated, through the Dhammayutikaya movement founded in 1833, aimed to reduce confusion of orthodoxy with popular magic. He brought modernist ideas into Thai Buddhism, his movement was the first identifiably modernist religious movement in the region and it demonstrates that initiatives to appropriate the fruits of the Enlightenment, were not merely reactive to western colonialism.

King Mongkut of Siam, as Thailand was called in the 19th century, was the same king referred to in 'Anna and the King of Siam', but far from being the benign fool he is made out to be in popular reproductions of that story. He was a noted scholar, a serious Buddhist and an astute politician with an innovative mind. These qualities of some account when we note that Thailand was

able to maintain its independence partly because of them. Although close to the line of succession he was not selected as ruler in the 1820s and it was convenient for him to remain in the *sangha*. Had he come out of the monastery it might have appeared as a claim to power, as his support within the elite was considerable. So Mongkut remained a monk while Rama III, his half brother, was king. Though he was a monk, as royalty he also had special influence. He was made the abbot of a prominent wat in Bangkok, which became the centre of his new movement, and the continuing close link with royalty meant that the movement he founded has had special influence, disproportionate to its size.

The Dhammayutika, still considered an elite order within the Thai *sangha*, continues to emphasise a critical rational and scholarly approach to original scriptures. Its following study Pali so as to actually understand it, rather than memorising scriptures as many traditional monks might. At the same time the movement translated understandings into the language of Thai experience by introducing a sermonising style of delivery as an adjunct to ritual. The Dhammayutika is still associated with effort to purify Thai popular Buddhism of syncretic accretions, to reduce confusion of Buddhism with popular cults, magic, spirit beliefs and practices. The form of religion he advanced involved quest for meaning rather than magical, intuitive and ritualised powers. This can be glossed as a shift from an intuitive to a more intellectual sense of and approach to what religion is.

Subsequently related reformist sects become important in all of the mainland *sangha*. In Thailand, Laos and Cambodia the traditionalist group is known as the Mahanikaya, or 'Great Order', and the reformists belong to the Dhammayuttikaya. In Burma the traditionalists generally belong to the Sudhamma, the 'Good Dhamma' order while the reformists belong to the Shwegyin, also founded in the 19th century. In each case modernist groups are more committed to study of Pali texts, practice rigorous meditation without the magical purposes which tinged earlier habit and are strict with regard to prohibitions on the handling of money.

As the relationship between the Thai monarchy and *sangha* was continuous and royalty initiated western education, as well as change within the *sangha*, modernisation did not appear as opposition to tradition. In Burma, as in Thailand, the traditional state had acted as the major patron of the *sangha*. But British conquest eliminated the traditional state and Burma was subsequently administered as a province of the British Indian empire. Because the state had strongly resisted British control, the province was ruled directly rather than through residual elites. This meant the *sangha* was weakened, but on the other hand it was the only remaining significant traditional structure potentially challenging the British and nationalism in there took distinctly religious form. The *sangha* not only lost royal patronage, it was positively disadvantaged by British policies. As a result it did not have the strength and vitality which produced a revival and modernisation, such as we find in Thailand.

Lay Buddhists played a prominent role in the early 20th century reform of Burmese Buddhism. Modernism and religious change within Burmea thus came through different channels than in Thailand. It was generated by the western educated laymen who saw Buddhism as a point of reference for opposition to the colonialism. The impact of imperialism thus directly generated a division is between religion and political power. Where colonialism divided spiritual and secular domains, they nevertheless went hand in hand within nationalism. The first notable victory of Burmese nationalism came when agitation led to concession that even the British had to take off their shoes when entering temple compounds.

The early modernisation of Burmese Buddhism is most clearly associated with the Young Men's Buddhist Association, the YMBA. The parallel with the Young Men's Christian Association, YMCA, was not incidental. From its origins in the late 19th century until around World War II the YMCA was not just the youth recreation movement it appears as now, but an active mission force. During the 1920s there were 80 western YMCA workers in China alone. Their work was part of a wider Protestant

'social gospel' movement, which aimed to demonstrate Christian brotherly love through social service. Thus the Young Men's Buddhist Association in Burma was similarly dedicated to practicing Buddhist values through social, as well as ritual, expression and this social reorientation of religious teachings has been a fundamental correlate of religious modernism, one which, as it happens, converges easily also with political readings of religious purpose.

As has been noted, Islamisation was in the first instance facilitated by the fact that Islam came to Southeast Asia in a Sufi form. Its mysticism meant that continuities with earlier practices were clear, as sufism emphasises charisma and magic in a way that modern scriptural Islam does not. In the case of Islamic modernism there was a shift, not unlike that within Theravada, toward stress on the primary messages of the *Koran* and away from emphasis on relationships with charismatic teachers. The *haj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, was facilitated by the same steamships which carried cargoes of rice, so after 1870 the number of Southeast Asians with experience of the heartlands of Islam increased dramatically. Print increased the availability of both Arabic and local religious works, changing media of instruction about Islamic teachings. The development of new religious thought in Islam was tied to expression through newspapers and at the same time a challenge directed against British or Dutch power.

The Islamic University of al Azhar in Cairo became as much a 'Mecca' for archipelago Islam as Oxbridge did for elites colonised by the English. It was a clear alternative focus for a reformed identity in the Malaysian case and depended, in the same way transmission of European culture did on modern communications. Malay nationalism initially centred on modernist Islam with roots in Cairo, initiated in the late 19th century by Mohammad Abduh. Abduh was influential in effort to reconcile Islamic doctrine and theology with modern scientific thought and his works fed Islamic modernism worldwide. Whether through the *haj* or through study

in Cairo archipelago Muslims encountered nationalists from colonised Islamic countries in the Middle East. As a result effort to renew Islam, to interpret it in a way that made sense in the modern scientific world, went hand in hand with increasing awareness of colonialism as an international, rather than local, phenomenon.

In Indonesia the diversity of societies is greater than in Malaysia and modernist Islam took a variety of forms. The Padri movement began in the 1830s among the Minangkabau in West Sumatra. The Padris were followers of Wahabi purism, which had become prominent in Arabia in the late 18th century. They created a network of schools which competed with the older sufism in Minangkabau society and set the stage for a civil war which led to Dutch intervention and control. Even after conquest, the Padri movement continued to revamp the traditional religious schools of the Minangkabau area. Throughout the 19th century new Islamic impulses spread through the islands. In the first instance, as in the case of the vigorous Nakshabandi *tarekat*, these came in the form of new versions of sufism. These movements, were interwoven with local revolts, such as the outbreak in Banten in 1888. On the whole we should view them as parts, albeit new waves, of the continuing process of Islamisation. That theme, ongoing since the advent of Islam in the archipelago, continually brought intensification in local practice and new versions of what Islam was understood to be.

More distinctly modernist versions of Islam become prominent only early in the 20th century. In Java the Muhammadiyah movement was founded in Yogyakarta by Ahmad Dahlan in 1911. It set itself against the Islam of the *kyai*. Most Javanese, even in cities, experienced Islam as part of a synthesis including Indiic and animistic beliefs. Muhammadiyah stressed a revamping to expunge what it saw as outdated elements, setting itself against the syncretism present within the *pesantren* pattern. Muhammadiyah established its own modern schools with a curriculum including mathematics, science, and social science along with traditional Islamic subjects, as taught in

*pesantren*. It also, like the YMCA or YMBA, aimed to work through social welfare associations and sponsored medical clinics. Ideologically the movement was against interaction with spirits in local practice and was originally not especially anti-colonial. Muhammadiyah stressed self-improvement of the internal structure of Islamic community.

Overview of religious movements suggests that in the modern period religion and politics have become more separate. Distinction between religious and secular power was increased by the colonial situation, as Christian powers monopolised political and military force in countries where most people were Buddhist or Muslim. In Burma early nationalism focused on Buddhist issues as counters to English monopoly of political power. The Burmese who were involved may have felt that religion and politics ought to be integral, but in the least their circumstance informed them that religion was no longer convergent with power. Islam served as a banner of revolt against Dutch and English power in Indonesia and Malaysia. The first mass movement of Indonesian nationalism, the Sarekat Islam which emerged in 1912, used Islamic identification to bring cohesion to opposition, directed in the first instance against Chinese business competitors but rapidly focusing on the Dutch.

New tensions arose as religious communities were defined in scriptural and purist terms. Syncretic practices did not emphasise boundaries, the outer limits of community. Religious communities focused on courts, schools or monasteries in a hierarchical world where people progressed through layers of knowledge until they came to a mystically conceived centre. In becoming scriptural people defined experience and identification in increasingly exclusive and literal terms. Whether in the Islamic or Buddhist cases, this meant that in modernism there was a new preoccupation with boundaries. Concern for the boundaries of religious community mirrored the development of national identities and brought conflict in new ways over religious issues. Paradoxically the very strength with which people held ideas

isolated them more from each other. Growing separateness within the religious sphere was another aspect of the same forces and process which generated plural societies under colonialism.

With the print revolution Protestantism brought emphasis on scriptures accessible to local people, the *Bible* was translated from Latin into German or English. Use of languages that people understood brought emphasis on what was contained in scriptures and challenged the hierarchy of the church. Earlier religion had been considered implicitly universal within the contexts it dominated. Reform movements, whether of Protestant Christianity or of Southeast Asian Buddhists and Muslims, introduced notions of religion as a distinct and cohesive domain. Traditional religion had appeared as melded with society and folk practices. Geertz termed this 'scripturalism', when commenting on Islamic modernism, and we can obviously relate it to an emphasis on doctrines presented through writing and accessible via print media. Print naturally brings more widespread focus on mental understanding which contrasts with emphasis on what may be felt, through personalised relationships within monastic structure or ritual practice.

Modernist shifts can thus be related to growing separation between the intellect, critical faculties, and other parts of the body. In commenting on traditional monastic systems within Theravada and Islamic, I suggested that participation was defined by attunement in feeling. The significance of ritual chanting lay not in whether words were understood but in the very act itself. Emphasis was on experience as such, not in understanding of or abstraction about it. In contrast within modernist movements emphasis falls on written words everybody has access to and these are located outside, apart from inner experience. Mental or rational understanding of teachings has been prioritised as a result. Both the Dhammayutika and the Muhammadiyah aim to 'demythologise' religion, paralleling a theme of Christian theology. Each modernist movement works to disentangle what it registers as the kernel of religion, from the ritual, mythic and participatory structures which used to be fundamental to local practices. Ritual

participation speaks to intuition through the heart; reformed religion appeals more directly to the intellect, to the head.

### **Spiritual visions of independence**

We began by considering the formation of the substratum, of village communities, and the classical era, which produced elite court cultures. Then we dealt with the growth of a middle sectors, in religious communities and trading classes, and now we have touched the generation of modern movements. In dealing with millenarian aspects of liberation movements we come full circle, to conjunction between the most deeply rooted perspectives of and the most recent influences on the region. In the first instance the village majority has interpreted recent events through old cosmologies. Though seeking social justice and economic wellbeing as we also imagine them, they have still tended to see those as reflections of cosmological mandates. Villagers have thus looked to leaderships, even when those have been drawn from modern classes, with expectation that they would be aligned to cosmic principles, even if in a new time, in the way earlier royalty was supposed to attune to their time.

Traditional spirituality is not an incidental leftover from a past era but a continuing source of dynamic response to new pressures. Some people cling conservatively to tradition, but on the whole traditions are being reintented, remoulded, readapted and redirected. By focusing on the 'millenarian' impulses of transition years we will highlight pervasive spiritual purposes; these appeared prominent to locals but seem incidental in our political narratives. Excellent new social histories treat local perspective through focusing on peasants, emerging new class groups and the diverse impulses revealed through local process. But beyond noting heterogeneity in local process or the presence of ordinary actors, we can also entertain local visions to grasp their volition.

Asian revolutions have usually been linked to millenarian impulses. Within upheavals such as the Chinese or Russian revolutions, peasants, who animated them, remained

conservative.<sup>131</sup> Historians view millenarianism as a throwback and usually distinguish peasant, religious, communist and nationalist movements. Some even hold that peasants are essentially duped if school teachers translate their aspirations into communism, as they did in Vietnam, and there is no doubt that for peasants ideology was secondary. Asian urban elites, the bourgeoisie or intellectuals formed by modern education and media, did formulate ideologies in western terms from early in this century. But even when peasants followed them, they read different meanings into those ideologies and from their perspective revolutions were neither nationalist nor communist at base.

Connecting peasants to states has been a primary challenge of nationalism and the fact that their movements take utopian form has influenced the linkage.<sup>132</sup> Of modern ideologies communism converged most with the utopianism of earlier traditions. As Marxism offered a coherent critique of imperialism, early in this century it influenced even elite religious and secular nationalists who did not identify with it. More critically, it was easier for animists to relate to than scriptural or liberal modernism, as its utopianism facilitated their identification with it. Communism envisions classless society through revolution and projects a future without contradictions between capital and workers. It is totalistic and dialectical, holding that understanding depends on comprehending relations to the whole, and rooted in an absolute, in conviction that the doctrine itself is comprehensive; if a party is unsuccessful it is because it has not embodied the principles of historical materialism correctly. This circularity parallels traditional idioms of power, as within notions of divine kingship, or indeed most religious thinking, the human can err, but principles of the system are immutable.

Millenarianism is evident in all world cultures. In the book

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<sup>131</sup> ref to Meisner on Maoism

<sup>132</sup> ref to Hobsbawm and Wolf and Cohen

of Revelations *The Bible* images final judgement and the beginning of a new epoch in which heaven and earth are merged. Periodically Christian utopian movements still crystallise around expectation that the day of judgement is near and will be heralded by a second coming of Christ. In this sense the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are millenarian. Whether through floods, divine intervention or atomic war there is expectation of cataclysmic change implying purification: those who are damned will find out they are; those who are saved will be elevated into a new world run according to God's will. Millenarianism refers not only to utopian movements tinged by Christianity but also to the range of movements which speak of radical end to the order we know, of a new order in which all things will be right.

The ghost dance religion, of the 1880s among the Sioux on the plains of the American west, shaped their violent outburst against domination. It was framed by prophecy that white people would be eliminated and the ancestral spirits and buffalo would return in the flesh. Hundreds of cargo cults in Melanesia have involved belief that westerners had magical access to material goods but colluded with local ancestors to keep a secret key hidden from local peoples. Expectations focused on the time when white people would disappear and 'cargo' would continue to arrive. There are senses of the millennium in both Buddhism and Islam. The famous General Gordon of Khartoum fought a *Mahdi*, an Islamic saviour in the Sudan. Buddhist notions of *Maitreya*, the coming Buddha, have been strong in China, Tibet, Japan, and within Theravada societies.

Christian time emphasises linear progression of events which do not repeat, leading to a final end. Indianised Southeast Asians have not held this sense of finality, their time repeats in cycles. Even the Brattayuddha, the final war in the *Mahabharata*, is not seen as a singular event, but as an acting out timeless struggle between spiritual and material dimensions. Within Khmer, Javanese or Burmese societies millenarianism is linked at once to ancestral spirits and Indianised cults. Concepts of the *devaraja* relate to the ebb and flow of power with the rise and fall of

dynasties. In that frame when times are out of balance economically, politically or personally resolution is supposed to come through emergence of a new god king. The Javanese called their messianic figures the Just King or *ratu adil*, imagined as an ideal monarch who would again bridge the gap in planes between human life and cosmic law to re-establish balance.

Villagers usually expressed anger at oppression, frustration due to crop failures and resistance to demands in millenarian terms. For them material imbalances have been evidence, even proof, that rulers, whether kings, princes, presidents or prime ministers, are not in tune with the cosmos. Their movements typically focused on charismatic leaders presented, if in rudimentary terms, as kings to be. Leaders, thought to have extraordinary powers, collected regalia, claimed lineages connecting to royalty and structured village retreats as bamboo palaces. The most famous Burmese movement, the Saya San rebellion during the depression of the 1930s, took such form. Saya San was a western educated clerk in the tax office who was provoked by awareness of economic pressures on the peasantry. Despite western education and Buddhism, he had also been a monk, his movement took millenarian form and he was tagged as at once the founder of a new dynasty and the coming Buddha. The force behind uprisings in the Philippines, including the Sakdal movement during the 1930s in Luzon and the Huk movement after the war, cannot be explained by Marxist ideology.

In Indonesia the Sarekat Islam, begun in 1912 as a movement against Chinese traders, is seen as the first mass movement of modern nationalism, but its leader, Tjokroaminoto, was identified by Javanese with Herutjokro, the *ratu adil*. From its origins in 1921 the PKI, the Indonesian Communist Party, became mainly a vehicle for *abangan*, or peasant, Javanese interests. It became the largest party outside the communist block by its peak in the early 1960s, but from its inception membership was concentrated in animistically oriented Javanese communities. It extended to take in many who were not disciplined by Marxist ideology partly because it had no competitors in linking peasants to national

politics. Although led by westernised elites peasant support for these movements has not been determined by modern ideologies as such.

For local intelligentsias everywhere independence meant opportunity to replace Europeans, to assume control over modern communications infrastructures, and political narratives focus on the contention which brought them into power. At the same time social history has highlighted the plurality of motives and crosscurrents in transition years. Only remote minority groups were untouched by the disruptions of the depression and war. But however sweeping the changes, most people no doubt remained embedded in ongoing life and wanted mainly to be left alone; the grand narrative of political drama intruded as a disruptive tangent in their lives. Insofar as subsistence oriented villagers considered independence, it likely meant aspiration for an idealised normalcy and balance in a context of minimised demands from the state. For religious people, whether embracing Christianity as an appropriation of modernity or celebrating established faiths, the shifts at the end of the war provided an opening to base wider social practice on their faith.

From a spiritual perspective colonialism was not just mechanical mastery of institutions, guns and economies, it was also a spell. In magical idiom the suppression of will, as in any hegemony, rests on tacit convictions about the way things are and can shift suddenly. In Southeast Asia at the end of the war, as in Europe recently, changes reflected not only who held what instruments of power, but also how human will was mobilised and perceptual gestalt configured. Sweeping changes in popular perception of the possible can occur almost instantaneously and such shifts are what millenarian projections refer to. For example the opening provided by glasnost led to dramatic shifts in perspective on Soviet dominance and a reconfiguration of social realities in Eastern Europe followed rapidly at the end of the 1980s.

Similarly the enforced quiet of colonial twilight in the

depression years was broken dramatically when the Japanese punctured the myth of white supremacy. As the occupation drew to a close in 1945 most Indonesians, Burmese, Vietnamese and Filipinos felt the prewar order was already past. Urbanites and villagers shared this conviction and prepared for an independence which seemed immanent and cosmologically destined. European blindness to the spiritual depth and pervasiveness of popular sentiment contributed to the protracted painful transitions which ensued, as in the first instance colonialists assumed that only a small elite stood against them. The force of millenarianism was difficult for them to grasp. They did not recognise that its reference was to the same shifts in atmosphere which we register through different idioms, and it appeared irrational to them.

From religious perspectives the transitional revolutions have been the outer layers of a reshaping which was also taking place spiritually. The state is responsible for regulating or providing a context for spiritual life according to traditional Theravada, Confucian, Muslim and Catholic religions. That conjunction had been suspended under colonial regimes, dominated by foreign worldviews. Though a reformation styled separation of political and religious spheres was evident in some elite ideologies, at the roots of social life traditional vision predominated. Thus among the plurality of interests and ideologies shaping transitions to independence we register powerful groups who pursued visions dominated by spiritual senses of purpose. These resonances are most apparent in the widespread movements toward an Islamic state, termed *darul Islam* in Indonesia, but similar convergence was evident in Buddhist senses of the Burmese revolution and even in the Confucian spirituality which remained implicit within Vietnamese communism. These perspectives both influenced transitions to independence and moulded trends of the postwar era.

In Vietnam traditional images presented the end of the war as implying an irrevocable end to the French order, one which had still held a place for imperial rituals. According to local spiritual

culture the name for 'village' (*xa*) meant at root 'the place where people come together to worship the spirits'. In the Vietnamese variant of the Chinese model it had still been held, even within the French order, that imperial rituals such as the Nam Giao drew on the power and good will of ancestors, especially those of the royal clan, to guarantee crops and the social welfare of the population. Rulers had to be tuned to nature and changed according to rhythms which, even when not apparent on the surface, were felt in the tight village communities.

When the Emperor Bao Dai abdicated on August 22, 1945 he sanctioned the Democratic Republic led by the Viet Minh and especially entrusted it with the maintenance of his ancestral temples. To villagers, still bound to the land through cults of tutelary spirits focused on ancestral founders, this act represented more than a change of dynasty, it foreshadowed the end of a profound constellation of relationships between heaven and earth. Nevertheless ancestral rituals, including festivals such as Tet, the lunar new year celebration of ancestors, continued to have symbolic force as a way of reforging bonds between the ancestors, nature and society.<sup>133</sup>

Deeply imbued vision of social order implied for Vietnamese contestants that the tensions at the end of the war would lead to one victor from among the many who initially appeared as candidates, not to pluralistic accord. Circumstances made it appear that the communists had made the most successful effort to assimilate modern western notions to the universe of Vietnamese discourses. This implied their victory was not only tactical, but also cultural, based on a shift in the mandate of heaven which could not be reversed by ploy or strategy. According to Mus's argument the revolution was decided in popular eyes in the critical period from August 1945 to March 1946 and this marked a whole generation of leadership, as the same period also did in Indonesia.<sup>134</sup> This culturally rooted sense

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<sup>133</sup> Landon, *Southeast Asia* pp 194-7.

<sup>134</sup> D. McAlister & P. Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution*, New York, 1970, pp 118 & 126.

of the revolution remained largely invisible to French or American analysts and strategists. By focusing on ideologies, institutional structures and urban centres they consistently failed to register that the mobilisation of popular will, conceived locally as spiritual even when communist, influenced events more than formalised ideologies.

Imperial powers did note that in the Mekong delta the Hoa Hao variant of Buddhism attracted a following, as did analogous Javanese movements, around the founder's visionary projection of French defeat in 1940. Within its practices of individual spiritual enlightenment clearly intermeshed with the impending revolution. As Woodside noted, "...classical culture had been more discredited at the upper levels of society than at the lower and...the eighth-century Chinese poet Li Po (whose spirit regularly entered Cao Dai mediums in the 1920s and 1930s) still touched the hearts of more Vietnamese peasants than did the Paris commune."

<sup>135</sup> Within that movement much was made of ethnic myths of origin which saw the primordial spiritual strength of the people as lying in a magical prowess which would defeat the technical advantages of modern powers.

The strength of the Hoa Hao movement, which had an independent military-administrative structure in the villages of the Mekong delta, provoked violent elimination of its leader in 1947. Insofar as Hoa Hao prophecy held true in the end it was as a statement about communist rather than syncretic Buddhist power. In urban centres a vigorous but limited (in 1935 some 2000 adherents) modern revival of Buddhism competed with Marxism in attracting intellectuals to a vision of independence in Vietnam. Though rooted in older Mahayana Buddhism these new movements emphasised the explication of original scriptures in the vernacular and especially competed with Catholic missionaries. The latter had succeeded in communicating to villagers through local language at a time when most local Buddhists still seemed esoteric and technical, making Mahayana

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<sup>135</sup> A.B. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, Boston, 1976, p 188.

appear as a preserve of monks.

At the same time on another front, examination of how communist intellectuals were drawn together led Marr to note significant resonances between communism and engrained millenarianism. Terms in prison politicised many Vietnamese who had not previously been radical and in the process they forged spiritual bonds which later underpinned revolutionary cells.<sup>136</sup> While millenarian religious impulses converged with revolutionary commitment for many people, at the same time many intellectuals did opt for Marxism as a liberation from what they considered a stasis oriented Confucian traditionalism which they did want to jettison.

In Burmese theorising the interchange between Marxism and Buddhism was direct and profound. Sarkisyanz established that underpinning the ideology of U Ottama in the 1920s there were notions that political struggle for independence paralleled the stages of Buddhist progression toward enlightenment. Pursuit of '*nirvana* within this world' was a Buddhist equivalent of the contemporaneous Christian sense of the 'social gospel'. Burmese nationalists clearly evoked ideals, of how the state is supposed to house spiritual endeavour, which trace as far back as the Indian Emperor Asoka.

Communal values of selflessness and an ethos of leveling were related at once to Buddhism and communism within the Thakin movement of the 1930s. Even popular readings of terms such as 'revolution' and 'liberation' were shaped at critical junctures by Buddhist imagination and constraints.<sup>137</sup> While diverging radically in other respects most nationalists converged in this respect. Aung San's leadership of the revolution, at the close of the war, brought an emphasis on separation of religion and politics, on socialist militancy in modern secular terms. But the culturalist anti-western traditions of U Ottama and Saya San

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<sup>136</sup> D. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, Berkeley, 1981, pp 305-6 & 316.

<sup>137</sup> E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*, The Hague, 1965.

became especially relevant again under U Nu's leadership, after Aung San's death and up to 1962.

The relatively westernised ethos of transitional leaders like Aung San, or Sjahrir and Hatta in Indonesia, gave way quickly to a neotraditionalism U Nu shared with Sukarno. In Burma dedication to fostering a Buddhist basis of the state was foreshadowed in 1950 and in place by 1951. U Nu reasserted the traditional role of the state as the protector of religion, seeing it as embodying the cultural values which, following the era of colonial suppression, needed to be enhanced to facilitate spiritual liberation. Socialism continued to be invoked in Burma, as in Indonesia, but communism was disavowed by the political philosophies which became dominant in both. From 1949 onwards the presence of communist insurgents in the hills led governments, first under U Nu then Ne Win, to emphasise the incompatibility of Buddhism and Marxism, but they advocated Burmese Buddhist socialism in the same breath.

Revolutionary transitions to independence, as in Indonesia, Vietnam and Burma, sharpen collective focus on spiritual issues in the same way that the prospect of death does for individuals. In Indonesia intense energies were unleashed during the suspension and excitement which birthed the Republic. Whatever their variant views most participants look back on the early days of the revolution with nostalgia. They recall a spiritual unity of purpose which they imagine drew diverse classes and ethnic groups, if momentarily, into united effort and aspiration. Whatever the actual unity no doubt they were touched by the intensity of the time. Those of formative age remained indelibly marked and the way they were marked matters, because their generation moved on to assume leading roles in the Republic.

Stringent wartime circumstances and policies combined with chauvinism to alienate locals but many Javanese initially saw the Japanese as the liberators who had been predicted in the prophecies of Joyoboyo, a thirteenth century king of Kediri.<sup>138</sup> The

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<sup>138</sup> B. Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence*, Ithaca, 1969, chapter 1.

deprivations of the occupation functioned like an enforced asceticism, focusing senses and concentrating energies, but they were tempered by conviction that freedom (*merdeka*) would follow. Anderson suggests that local youth were spiritually especially prepared for revolution by the Japanese, who trained militias through ascetic practices not unlike those employed earlier in hermitages or Islamic schools (*pesantren*).

In Javanese millenarian imagery the revolution was a momentary vacuum, an upheaval resulting from the departure of divine sanction (*wahyu*) from those in power, a time of craziness setting the stage for a new golden era. During the revolution defeudalisation was a theme alongside decolonisation, millenarian senses of the revolution underpinned populist idiom and mystical sects thought of their practices as integral to revolution.<sup>139</sup> The collapse of the outer walls of the Yogya palace (*kraton*) was connected to deeper changes, reading symbolically as a physical parallel to a spiritual opening and leveling. Powers (*kasekten*), which had been concentrated in kings and courts, were seen as flowing outward so that the communion between human and cosmic planes, previously mediated through royalty, became widely accessible for the first time.

Even where the political order was relatively stable or transitions less violent religious aspirations have been interwoven with revolutionary movements. In the Philippines the hierarchical organisation of the Catholic Church tied its leadership closely to the state, paralleling social linkages between the Thai *sangha* and royalty. But liberation Theology, especially influenced by currents from Latin America from the 1960s onward, appealed to sectors of the priesthood who identified their mission with social and spiritual welfare. The people power revolution, which contributed to the end of the Marcos era in 1986, involved even the hierarchy of the Church and made candlelight prayer vigils a weapon of

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<sup>139</sup> C. Geertz, based on fieldwork in an East Javanese town in the early 1950's, in *The Religion of Java*, Chicago, 1976, notes both the emergence of sects (pp 112-8, 339-52) and that activists connected changes in spiritual practices to the revolution.

protest. At the grass roots of society Catholic idiom has been appropriated to converge with calls by the poor for social justice.

Traditional imagery throughout Southeast Asia presented events within the human microcosm as interwoven with and parallel to the social and natural orders of the macrocosm. Accordingly, at the deepest level the idiom of local movements suggests that the spiritual struggle of revolutions related to a reorganisation within the individual psyche. This, simultaneous with the displacement of colonial power over national cultures, related to unseating the 'imperialism of the mind within the body'. Releasing spiritual consciousness, suppressed by the same colonialism which subjugated locals in political and economic terms, read as integral to external revolutionary process.

Throughout the archipelago Japanese appeals to Islam enhanced conviction that the occupation foreshadowed the creation of the dar-al islam (the house of Islam). Movement toward an Islamic state had already been a leading current in prewar nationalism and played an especially consistent and powerful role in Aceh, which was never regained by the Dutch. Elsewhere in Indonesia, in Sumatra, Sulawesi, West Java, along Java's north coast and within its heartlands Islamic teachers (kyai) and the ideal of Islamic statehood sparked movements which competed with secularism at local and national levels right through the 1940s and 1950s. In the southern Philippines the Muslim struggle began later but paralleled the Darul Islam in representing revolutionary nationalism in an Islamic mould.

Orthodox Muslims aspirations in Malaysia and Indonesia had been suppressed by colonialism, but were tuned within early nationalism. Contacts with Mecca and Cairo brought awareness that European colonialism was a dampening force throughout the Islamic world. Muslim movements were not simply expressions of purism, at root they also drew from millenarian and magical strands of Islam. The Darul Islam, or Islamic state, movements of Indonesia carried emphasis on the internal spiritual facet of the holy war, the *jihad*. Both highly educated leaders such as

Kartosuwirjo, and many followers understood that the establishment and expansion of the house of Islam involved inner purification as well as external war.

The Indonesian leadership contained these aspects of their revolution, standing against changes they felt could jeopardised negotiations. The relatively secularised *priyayi*, heirs to Indic court traditions but Dutch educated, controlled the bureaucracy and constrained the social and religious impulses of both the Darul Islam and communism. Implicitly religious differences undercut communist claims on Indonesian nationalism. In 1948, virtually as the revolutionary army under Sudirman threatened to break with Sukarno, enforced demobilisation of communist regiments precipitated civil war within the Republic, centring in the Madiun area of East Java. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was eliminated, as it had been previously by the Dutch in 1926, and many thousands died in local killing overseen by the firmly Muslim West Javanese Siliwangi division.

By surmounting these populist guerrilla and communist 'threats to nationalism', the leadership gained ground for negotiation, but at the expense of elevating the cleavage between Islam and Javanism to a new order of intensity which persisted through the 1960s. Post independence divergence between Muslim parties, the traditionalist Nahdatul Ulama and modernist Masyumi, and the syncretic or secular parties, the nationalists (PNI) and communists (PKI), converged with difference in cultural orientation and related to differing underlying spiritual senses of what the national revolution aimed to accomplish.

Though framed as banditry by the ostensibly secular victors, from an internal perspective Darul Islam movements, like the Moro nationalism of Mindanao and Sulu, expressed conviction that national revolutions remained unfinished so long as resulting states built on European rather than Islamic models. Like Marxists, for whom the revolution was incomplete without radical social transformation, many Muslims fought for a revolution they never won. In Aceh and along the north coast of Java changes were deep rooted and spontaneous, reflecting populist and religious

impulses contrary to the thrust of what Europeans could register as 'nationalist' political development.

National revolutions have not operated within self-evident boundaries. It is notable that the boundaries of new states do correspond, through most of Southeast Asia as in Africa, to those of colonialism. But within those diverse ethnicities maintain contending views up to the present and many impulses have been suppressed completely. We should consider revolutionary transitions as continuing well beyond the time frames usually defining them. In the broad sense, that is when considering national revolutions as more than a matter of legal recognition of national sovereignties, national revolutions continue now. Even those which might be considered 'complete' certainly involved extensive contention well beyond the apparent point of victory.

In Indonesia regional struggles all through the 1950s continued the process of consolidating the state which had been proclaimed in 1945. In Burma wars have never stopped. In Cambodia the complexion of independence still remains indeterminate. In the southern Philippines, Aceh, East Timor, Irian Jaya, as among the Karens and other self-conscious groups, submerged nationalisms or proto-nationalisms remain present. At the same time populist and socialist energies within Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines animated activists earlier but have been suppressed. In the process of national revolutions there have been innumerable ethnic, social and religious aspirations which have been marginalised as victors captured the capacity to define states.

On the margins of the state colonialism meant not only conquest, but also missionising, mining and plantations. Communities such as the Karen in Burma and the Batak of Sumatra came into contact with modern education through Christianity in the 19th century. But on the whole colonial rule did not integrate tribal minorities culturally into modern states. Similarly, anti-colonial movements, such as the Aceh or Java wars in the archipelago or the Saya San rebellion in Burma during the

1930s, centred on aspiration to harmony through tradition. Within them opposition to imperialism was filtered through and identified with ethnicity, language, or kinship.

These early peasant, court and religious movements were thus the dying gasps of traditional entities. They may be connected to nationalism through elements of aspiration and the mythology of subsequent activists but contained no vision of a modern state. In the modern era boundaries between worlds of symbolic meaning are sharpening as much as those between spheres of power. Even probing how religious changes relate to nationalism reveals a mentality once foreign to the region. Traditional validations of power construed politics as one aspect of an also spiritual process; their apparent separability, increasingly institutionalised, is a key feature of recent changes.

Local appropriations of classical and traditional idioms meant synthetic reformulation of identity at every stage. Vietnamese used Chinese structures as a weapon against China and synthesis made Indic myths local. Now local peoples aim to adapt modernity to their purposes and at the same time the prominence of spiritual commitment within their cultures means that independence has not been read simply as a matter of political and economic autonomy. Usually political independence has been seen locally as interwoven with social and religious purposes. Thus revolutions focused not only on transfers of sovereignty or promise that stomachs would be filled but also on aspiration to achieve spiritual freedom from imported idioms imposed through history.

## Chapter 6

### FORMATIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

For most Southeast Asians World War II involved two and a half years of deprivation under Japanese occupation. After the close of the war, in August 1945, local societies become independent of colonial rulers, a process which was virtually complete, at least in legal terms, by 1960. In Malaysia and the Philippines diplomatic transitions were achieved; in Burma, Indochina and Indonesia violent revolutions marked transition. But economically, with the partial exceptions of Burma and Vietnam, every state in the region has been increasingly integrated into global and multinational systems. This trajectory, which counterpoints political independence, does justify questioning of the conventional sense that states are freer from outside influence in the postwar era than under colonialism.

In social terms the consolidation of modern states and increasing interpenetration clearly cross the boundary between the eras of colonialism and independence. The fruits of the industrial revolution tie local states to global patterns and bond peoples within them to each other with new force. Modern states entail instruments of intervention, through the reach of print and electronic technologies, far more pervasive than those available to earlier states. Systems of government and taxation; forces of warfare, trade and tourism; state education and electronic media all intrude increasingly in the lives of remote peoples. Nevertheless recent trajectories are still shaped by or refracted through persistently religious cultures and do not always match expectations suggested by economic logic. Southeast Asians are claiming new voice through adaptation of industrialised media.

Every shift in the region crystallised new classes. Germinal intelligentsias of the prewar era, drawn from elites who were already products of earlier fusion, became the seed for cosmopolitan national super-cultures. Transitions of the postwar

era brought other groups into elite status. The economic strength of migrant Chinese and Indians gives them a central position, however ambiguous and uncomfortable, in cities. Military systems, prominent due to their especially coherent communications, have also been prime avenues for new upward mobility. Secular education, if tied to patronage and old class divisions, offers a channel for others who had less scope through monastic or religious schooling. The newly independent elites were initially very small but, like earlier royalty, they have magnetic power in their environment. Now, as the prime mediators of industrial culture they channel influences and lead in producing local modes of modernity.

### **Neotraditional impulses and ideologies**

Although social historians define nationalism as the rise to power of westernised elites we have noticed that for the mass of the population revolutionary movements were shaped by both modern ideologies and popular utopian yearnings. Here my aim is to identify cultural trajectories within postwar transitions and politics. Politically liberal ideologies have been short lived in the region and the consolidation of authoritarian structures has been the clearest line of development. Authoritarianism, whether in military or communist form, has in each instance meant that tight hierarchies have cemented control over increasingly modern media and power structures. In cultural terms styles of political leadership, especially immediately following independence, resurrected earlier moulds. Expectation that modernity would produce European styled polities was crosscut by revivalistic quests for identity.<sup>140</sup>

Spiritual impulses are implicit within political cultures and cultural policies as well as in everyday popular practices. Thus reformulations of religion are evident through politics as well as through institutions we conventionally recognised as religious. Insofar as political cultures have been neo-traditional, they have

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implicitly or explicitly infused religious meanings within politics. Generally spiritual nuances and essentially religious meanings are clear within neo-traditionalism. But when elites now invoke indigenous cultures it is within contexts which make the process one of reinvention rather than strictly of preservation. Viewed in that light neo-traditionalism is a major theme of cultural politics in independent states, it is a process of creative reinvention which aims to syncretically incorporate the modern within local frames.

Most of the dominant political philosophies of the postwar period can be characterised as 'neo-traditional'. New national rituals, including ostensibly western elections, clearly build on senses of state ceremony embedded within earlier societies. If reading the national elections of postwar Indonesia against idealistic democratic notions, which in any event rarely translate into western practice, we fail to notice their ritual function, as celebrations aimed at forging unity. Religious holidays are designated national holidays and new public memorial rites now commemorate revolutionary heroes as the founding ancestors of states, modern guardian spirits. Even if dirt paths have become concrete highways these patterns reflect choices guided by deeply worn tracks. This is to speak of a positive rather than strictly negative process. When modern actors appeal to Buddhism or the *wayang* they actively construct as well as cynically manipulate older popular symbols.

Confucianism resonated in Diem's South Vietnam, U Nu's socialism was also Buddhist and Sukarno's Nasakom reflected how Javanist impulses could guide the formation of national ideologies. Vietnamese communists prioritise communal values, consonant with Confucian tinged spirituality, which western Marxists have found hard to either grasp or correlate with their understanding of communism. Suharto has built a striking family grave, next to the grave complex of the Mangkunegaraan court, and modeled it on the temples of Indic Majapahit. He may aim to memorialise his role as the man who has guided the nation into modernity but his manner of doing so emulates the way Indic

kings commemorated their accomplishments. Even Lee Kwan Yew, the Cambridge trained lawyer who guided Singapore into hyper-modernity, prioritised Confucian family values and maintained a mandarin autocratic style.

Though the power of kings is circumscribed, royalty as such is a continuing centrepoint of ceremonial life in significant parts of Southeast Asia. Wherever it remains it carries religious resonance. Kingship remains a central institution within national politics in Thailand and Brunei, it continued in Laos through the 1950s and it existed in modified form in Cambodia until 1975. When the courts are considered more widely, beyond their overt political functioning and as complexes of ritual, belief and art, their residual role is obviously even more significant. In Java and Malaysia the sultanates retain special religious influence even though their political role is very limited. In Thailand and Brunei, where courts are central to the state, their vigour is political as well as social and religious.

When Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX, of Yogyakarta in Java, died in 1988 the commemoration of his passing drew extraordinary crowds and was widely noted in the press. Ironically he maintained the magical power of royalty precisely by the strength of his support for the revolution and his role as Vice-President of the Republic in the 1970s. In Cambodia Sihanouk evoked similar sentiments and for similar reasons throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Precisely through having adjusted to constitutional monarchy he preserved the sacral power of royal tradition and continued to receive the homage due to earlier kings. This respect has made him a key player within peace negotiations, even in opposition, into the 1990s.

Modernisation was spearheaded by royalty in the Thai case and the nexus bonding the court to the *sangha*, to village and to distant regions has been gaining strength consistently. The 1932 constitutional revolution turned what was Siam into today's Thailand and repositioned, but did not eliminate, the kingship. Kings thus retain a powerful ritual and ceremonial place within

Thai society. In the postwar period Buddhism has been even more firmly enshrined, theoretically at least, than ever. Along with the monarchy it is as a key ideological basis of the nation. Marshall Sarit, whose views dominated the 1950s and early 1960s, reinstated some of the lapsed ceremonial functions of kingship and looked to Buddhism as a bulwark against what he perceived as the threat of communism.<sup>141</sup>

Ironically the strength of continuity with tradition has allowed a less ambiguous pursuit of modernity in Thailand and it is especially clear that religious purposes inspire modern state construction. On the other hand modern Buddhism, as promoted by the state, simultaneously reflects creative adaptation to the 20th century, there has been a shift of emphasis from esoteric spirituality toward social action. Thus traditional institutions have been reformed while their power has been enhanced, underpinned by modern media, as a basis for integration of the state. In Thailand some correlates of modernity, repudiated as too western elsewhere, have been embraced. Variations on traditional images of the relationship between religious and political domains continue to apply throughout the region.

In Burma virtually all residues of the monarchy were eliminated by British colonialism. Nevertheless the independent state resurrected traditions rooted in local religious notions of kingship. U Nu, who was Premier for most of the period from 1948 to 1962, adhered to a version of socialism which departed from that of his more secular Thakin colleagues of the 1930s. Observers uniformly note the genuine qualities of a personal spiritual commitment he underpinned with a simple lifestyle and there is no doubt he sincerely believed the spiritual health of the

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<sup>141</sup> As Tambiah observed, religious purposes inspire government visions of progress: "...from early times Buddhism has been positively related to a conception of an ideal politico-social order, whose cornerstone was a righteous monarch who would promote a prosperous society and religion....Given this interlaced totality of religion and politics, of national consciousness and religious identity, of righteous morality and politics, it is difficult to see in Thailand a secular nationalism dispensing with Buddhist referents in the near future."<sup>141</sup>

population would be enhanced by proclamation of a Buddhist state.

At the same time U Nu's Buddhism was inseparable from the cult of the *nat*. He justified propitiation ceremonies through reference to scriptures, his Pyidaungsu Party gave annual offerings to the spirits and he spent periods at sites sacred to them even when deciding economic matters. In 1961 he initiated the construction of 60,000 sand pagodas with iron spires and, as opposition to the declaration of Buddhism as the state religion grew, he spent 45 days in spiritual retreat on Mount Popo, a sacred site interwoven with the *nat* cults.<sup>142</sup> Elements of the *sangha* accused him of prioritising the cults at the expense of Buddhism, but for U Nu himself these two aspects of his commitment did not appear in conflict.

National regeneration and the enhancement of Buddhism were seen as coterminous within a vision of the socialist state framed by Buddhist values. The revival U Nu led emphasised the Buddhist nature of Burma and the importance of its world role as 'the strongest home' of its contemporary practice. Under his leadership the Ministry of Religion was established in 1950 and from 1952 onwards the government employed monks to facilitate its objective of fully incorporating of hill tribes into the nation. It sponsored Mahasi Sayadaw's insight (*vipassana*) meditation centre in Rangoon, which became a showpiece of modern Buddhism, one foreign visitors of the time were regularly introduced to as an example of truly modern Buddhism.

The Sangayana, the Sixth Great Buddhist Council of 1954-1956, was the centrepiece of revivalism and associated activities coloured the whole decade. It marked the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha and to some extent became the world event it was intended, as representatives from thirty countries met. Building of the Kaba Aye Peace Pagoda began in 1950, on a site which was selected on the basis of a visionary experience, and the Council

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<sup>142</sup> M. Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma* (J.P. Ferguson ed), Ithaca, 1975, pp 273-4 & 350.

took place in what was called 'the Great Sacred Cave', a huge hall constructed next to the Peace Pagoda to house the projected 10,000 Buddhist representatives expected. At the same time the rebuilding of old derelict pagodas, of which there were thousands became an object of government policies.

In Indonesian prewar nationalism, in the Pancasila, the national political philosophy, and in the formulation of the constitution, at the time of the proclamation of independence, traditional preoccupations were already apparent. Later the concept of Guided Democracy elaborated by Sukarno, which framed politics from 1959 to 1965, more explicitly revived the ethos and style of *kraton* culture.<sup>143</sup> Within it both purist senses of Islam and western pluralistic notions of democracy were excluded in favour of syncretic thought and the politics of consensus. Magical senses of power may have been implicit in the government's effort to concentrate energy on glorification of the capital and on its unifying struggles to liberate Dutch New Guinea and confront 'neo-colonialist' Malaysia. He certainly actively recalled the traditional glories of Majapahit, presenting it both as a peak of the past and model for the present.

Sukarno's populist imagery, of the primal peasant (*marhaen*) and of principles of cooperation (*gotong-royong*) and consensus (*musyawarah-mufakat*), were elevated as national ideology. Nasakom (the acronym for 'nationalism-religion-communism') was proclaimed as a synthetic and transcendent ideology and Sukarno presented himself as the mouth-piece of the people, meaning that he conceived of his personal consciousness as linked to the collective as its prime mechanism of representation. His charismatic invocations of the spirit of 1945 came with opposition, inflation and unresolved ills so that in retrospect even Javanists, who were generally sympathetic to his enterprise culturally, eventually felt that it fell short in practice. If Sukarno aimed to

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<sup>143</sup> B.R.O'G. Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture" in Claire Holt et al eds, *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, Ithaca, 1972 and C. Geertz, *Islam Observed*, Chicago, 1972.

transcend ideology through synthesis Suharto has aimed to purge politics of ideology; if the 'theatre state' called Guided Democracy resurrected Indic courts the New Order can be seen as representing a surfacing of village temperament.

Suharto is a committed Muslim, but like Sukarno his grounding is in syncretic Javanism. Along with a foster father and several early advisers he participated in a prominent cult of the guardian spirits. The group emphasises pilgrimage to the power points at Dieng and Srandil, both linked to Semar as the guardian (*danhayang*) of Java, as a route to power. Within it activation of the throat *cakra*, associated with mediumistic reception of spirit messages, takes place in rituals framed by modern versions of courtly dress and attention to power objects, like the *kris*. Though privately pursued even by those in power within government, ironically this Javanist ethos is obscured by cultural defensiveness. It is less articulate than either Indic styled syncretism or traditional religions and the official status of such mysticism remains insecure. Nevertheless the underlying spiritual ethos of the governments led by both Sukarno and Suharto have been inspired by syncretic Javanist rather than orthodox Islamic or exclusive modernist sensibilities.

Observers, in stressing the crisis of 1965 which unseated Sukarno, fail to note that Suharto has accomplished what Sukarno intended. He has enshrined the principles of Guided Democracy, which Sukarno articulated, as the basis of polity. A 'family principle' rationalises New Order politics and was articulated in the philosophy of Dewantoro, the founder of the Taman Siswa movement in the 1920s. It fed into the state educational system and emphasises corporate identity and consensual politics. It is tied to commitment to develop the whole person in balance, engaging the mind, feeling and will through awareness of all of the senses. Taman Siswa was connected to the mysticism of Suryomataram, a famous prewar mystic of Yogyakarta, and with teachings of both the Theosophical Society and Maria Montessori.

<sup>144</sup> This philosophy converged with what was to become the dominant philosophy of the nation as expressed in the 1945 Constitution, the Pancasila (the five principles articulated by Sukarno, which underlie state philosophy), Guided Democracy in the late 1950s and, not least, the Golkar organisation under Suharto.

In Indonesia we may imagine a reversal of historical sequence in the cultural domain. Historically animism, the Indic, Islam and then the modern follow each other. If the revolution was a 'zero point', then unwinding is evident. Parliamentary Democracy was modelled on European images and led by the most westernised elite. That broke down in the 1950s at the same time as Islamic separatism, in Java, the Celebes and Sumatra was suppressed. Sukarno's Guided Democracy has been interpreted as a resurrection of the Indic, as attempt to construct a modern state inspired by the logic of kingdoms focusing on the ruler and capital. <sup>145</sup> Sukarno's roots were at the lower level of the court oriented elite; Suharto's are in villages. The pragmatism of Suharto's village style contrasts with the theatrical, symbolic and intellectualist politics of Sukarno. While heralding internationalism the New Order did resurrect animistic culture linked to Semar and other guardian spirit cults. Sukarno legislated requirement for Indonesians to belong to world religion; Suharto initially encouraged legitimation of syncretic cults. Religious trajectories in the decades after the revolution can be read as an unwinding and, in the least as a component of popular consciousness, a resurfacing of Semar.

### **The politics of contending values**

Political tensions within every state have converged with differences of religious outlook. In many contexts, as in the case of *dar al-islam* movements, explicitly religious ideas of the state competed with secular modernisms of all stripes. In others the

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<sup>144</sup> D. Reeve, *Golkar of Indonesia*, Singapore, 1985, pp 355-356 .

<sup>145</sup> . Geertz, Anderson and others have

constitution of political parties has drawn explicitly on distinct religious communities. Even when such links are not explicit in the formulation of parties, groupings implicitly embody contrasting values which inform local politics. The region wide prominence of religion means that politics has not been only competition between social classes or political ideologies, but can also be read as competition between divergent worldviews.

Among Vietnamese activists spokespeople like Thien Minh held that Buddhism represented a choice of values not present in either western or communist countries. He commented that "...we are convinced that Buddhism can build up a nation because it represents a unified force and because it teaches the doctrine of tolerance and understanding."<sup>146</sup> But Buddhist views were strongest in Central Vietnam and the national *sangha* was relatively small. The appeal to Buddhism, as a potential basis for nationalism, was undermined by the presence of a strong Catholic community, Cao Dai cult dominance of Tayninh Province, syncretic Hoa Hao power in the western Mekong delta and the semi-autonomy of the Montagnard animists, Khmer border people, and Muslim Cham remnants.

Though he was a Catholic, Diem's policies also appeared to be based on old patronage models of government more than on Catholicism as such, in fact the Vatican was at pains to disassociate itself from them. Postwar revival of Buddhism began in 1951, when a national conference was attended by fifty monks and lay people in Hue. They joined the World Fellowship of Buddhists, which had been formed in Sri Lanka in 1950, and took issue with the Diem government, because it was unwilling to recognise a role for them. In 1963 tensions peaked around Waisak, the celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing in early May. When a crowd in Hue was met with tanks nine people were killed. Petitioning and demonstrations spread to Saigon as well. The self immolation of Thich Quang Duc on June

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<sup>146</sup> J. Schecter, *The New Face of the Buddha*, New York, 1967, p 160.

llth followed repeated unsuccessful petitioning to Diem on behalf of Buddhists. In August 1964 Buddhist antagonism to the Diem government led as far as rioting in Danang, where Buddhist led mobs burned down the huts of Catholic refugees.

As General Ky assumed power in mid 1965 and the war situation worsened, lay Buddhists backed off their activism to concentrate on education and social welfare activities. They published magazines and periodicals, ran 135 primary, 35 secondary schools and a university and recruited youth to increase their strength.<sup>147</sup> Tense negotiations continued throughout 1966 between Catholic, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Buddhist groups and the Ky government over the holding of elections and prospective representation in the constitutional assembly. Periodic violence between the military and Buddhist student groups in Danang and Hue failed to bring responses from the government. In May Thanh Quang, a fifty five year old nun, immolated herself before the Dieu De pagoda in Hue. Her expression indicated the depths of distress at American support for Ky's government, it was an appeal to the hearts of Americans and symbolised commitment to the spirit of non-violence. But the power of Buddhist activism, strongest in 1963, dissipated gradually in 1966.

When U Nu campaigned for reelection in 1959 he announced his preference for establishment of Buddhism as the state religion, but ensuing controversies even divided Buddhists. Recurrent disciplinary and factional problems, a residue of the fragmentation resulting from colonial removal of royal patronage, plagued the *sangha* throughout the 1950s. In 1951 a fight followed a refusal to allow *pongyis*, Burmese monks, free admission to a theatre; in 1954 two *pongyis* died in a clash over control of a temple school (*kyauung*); in 1956 factionalism led to rioting of monks in Mandalay; and in 1959 the police resorted to tear gas, arresting 89 monks after student rioting in Rangoon. When the legislation to amend the constitution was pending monks objected to the protection it

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* p 210.

offered to minority religions. By promising minority religions a share of state religious funds it appeared to allow them increased scope for growth. In November 1961 monks went so far as to burn down mosques on the outskirts of Rangoon.<sup>148</sup> When the constitutional change went through in 1961 the minorities seethed because the bill did not bring the expected counterbalance of federalism. Mild as the proclamation superficially appeared, even the *sangha* remained split or neutral in relation to it.

State sponsored revival of Buddhism lost momentum with Ne Win's coup of 1962. The philosophy of the military has been relatively secular, though even it has theoretically prioritised material development only 'in balance with spiritual life'. The Revolutionary Council announced its guiding philosophy through the Burma Socialist Program Party in January 1963. Elements of both Marxism and Buddhism found a place in that philosophy, but key traditional notions relating to the *nats*, Buddhist philosophy of *samsara* (the wheel of rebirth) and *kamma* (karma) were omitted. Its thrust was essentially humanistic, even while appealing to spiritual values and affirming that the state had responsibility for improving the spiritual life of its citizens. Ne Win has not tolerated respect for *nats*. His government launched a concerted attack on spirit beliefs and even banned film productions centring on them. Following Ne Win's coup, attempts to pacify minorities forced retraction of the religion bill and worked to exclude *pongyis* from politics. After 1962 the Union Buddha Sasana Council was abolished; in 1965 the Vinasaya Act of 1949, the Dhammacariya Act of 1950 and the Pali Education Board Act of 1952 were all repealed and thus the major elements of U Nu's legislation of the 1950s, which had consistently aimed to strengthen the *sangha* were all eventually eliminated.

Most Indonesians do believe in God, as their state requires them to, and experience a spiritual dimension as real. One

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<sup>148</sup> D. Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*, Princeton, 1965, pp 206-7 and Mendelson, *Sangha and State*, p 353.

corollary of that is that they see the national identity as palpable, a spirit rather than just abstraction. Insofar as identities are spiritual a reflexive implication has also been that national reconstruction involves spiritual struggle. But for some this has meant movement toward collective realisation of submission to the will of Allah; for others it has meant repetition of endless tension between desires, linking us to the material plane, and impulses toward spiritual release. These views, one Islamic the other Indic, are suggestive of the major contenders which have been asserting the right to define the spiritual identity of the national entity in independent Indonesia. The western notion of division between secular and religious spheres has had only narrow purchase and the few genuinely secular nationalists have always had to address religious, especially Muslim, people, movements and interpretations.

At the same time though 90% of the population profess to be Muslim the nation is not characteristically Islamic in the way its cousins of that religion's heartlands are. Variants of animism and mysticism remain significant counterweights to the strength of Islam. Within Sukarno's PNI Javanese spiritual philosophy underpinned political thought and even the communist PKI converged with millenarianism insofar as it extended into Javanese rural life. The Dutch aimed to prevent Islam from becoming a focaliser of nationalism and especially forged bonds with *adat*, or customary, elites. This alliance deepened existing polarity between religious and political elites, continuing subordination of mosque officials (*penghulu*) to a bureaucratic elite (*priyayi*). Under the Japanese Islam gained momentum, as they recognised the influence of religious teachers and aimed to mobilise support. They gave authority to the Office of Religious Affairs and in effect established the basis for postwar Muslim power through Masyumi.<sup>149</sup>

Strengthened by this leadup, Muslims demanded establishment of an Islamic state. But Japanese reliance on Sukarno

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<sup>149</sup> H. Benda, *The Crescent and the Rising Sun*, The Hague, 1958

had given him an access to radio other nationalists never had and his effective domination of it elevated him to primacy in the public eye. Secular nationalists regained relative strength as the occupation closed even though the new institutional basis of Islam irrevocably altered the balance of powers. The place of Islam was a key issue in the lead up to the proclamation of independence. Some Muslims thought the Jakarta Charter, a draft preamble to the Constitution, stating that Muslims would be required to adhere to Islamic law, would be official. Secularists prevented the compromise, arguing it would endanger the revolution. Until the 1970s recognition of the Charter remained an objective for Islamic politicians. Subsequent social tensions have still corresponded with religious cleavages. Divergence between Muslim orthodoxy and Javanism underlay the rhetoric of the 1950s, helps explain the crisis of the mid 1960s and remained an explicit focus of tension into the 1970s.

The Ministry of Religion and Islamic parties initially held a Muslim interpretation of commitment to freedom of religion. As Van Nieuwenhuijze observed, at the time of independence many Muslims viewed religion as synonymous with Islam and interpreted religious freedom as meaning 'freedom for Islam'. Until the 1955 elections the leading Islamic parties assumed that Muslims would vote for them and were shocked when only 42% of the population did. This contributed to Islamic and outer island separatism in the late 1950s and led even purist Muslims to reassess their assumptions. Muslims gradually and reluctantly accepted that they remain a fractional element within a plural religious scene. But notions of Islamic domination remain strong and many feel even now, as under the Dutch, that essentially foreign political repression prevents them from establishing the mould for a nation Islam ought to dominate.

Darul Islam movements continued in Aceh, West Java, and South Sulawesi through the 1950s and in Aceh active separatism has voice to the present. But the elections of 1955 and 1957 remain the best marker of religious commitments within the nation as a whole. In those Masyumi, modernist Islam, was strongest in the

outer islands, West Java and in urban areas. The traditionalist Muslim Nahdatul Ulama, the nationalists (PNI) and communists (PKI) all had roots in the heartlands of Java, but each within different social groups. After the elections Muslim and Christian fears about growing PKI strength and resentment of Java oriented policies contributed to regional revolts. Association of Masyumi with the PRRI-Permesta rebellion, in Sumatra and North Sulawesi in 1958, meant that Islam was thoroughly marginalised by the end of the 1950s.

The nationalist party of Sukarno, based on courtly sense of patronage and rooted in the bureaucracy, expected that claim to the 'mantle of nationalism' made little effort to seek votes. Muslims parties also assumed in the 1950s that people would vote Muslim. In contrast the PKI campaigned down to the village level to bridge urban and mass nationalism. At the same time the PKI leadership accepted its situation and accommodated Sukarno, hoping he would pass the mantle of nationalism to them. In this they perhaps themselves acted more in terms of Javanese mystical notions of power than of Marxist strategy. The Aidit led PKI had implicitly become a vehicle for what was then known as *abangan* sentiment, rooted in nominal rather than even syncretic village Islam. Land reform laws of 1959 were never put into effect and this led communist cadres to stimulate unilateral seizures of land, which in turn provoked powerful Muslim counter offensive. These tensions set the stage for the killings of the mid-1960s.

The suppression of communism meant that populism, like Islam, was marginalised by a military dominated centralising state. Suppression of the widespread Darul Islam movements and the regional revolts of 1957 and 1958 also coincided with the nationalisation of Dutch businesses and the movement to claim Irian Jaya. Each of these processes drew the military further into civilian administration, combining to eventually make it the prime vehicle of national integration. Social tensions led toward the coup of 1965. After the coup and the pogroms of late 1965 and early 1966, Suharto consolidated control through the army. Within the New Order the role of the army within civilian administration has

been legitimated as a foundation of the state.

The ethos of the New Order is suggested by its emphasis on the Pancasila--in 1981 Suharto conflated criticism of himself with that of the Pancasila. In 1983 the MPR (Parliament) formalised separation of religion and politics, undermining Islamic parties by legislating requirement that all political organisations had to adopt the Pancasila as their basis. This principle was subsequently extended to all social organisations and is tied to consistent and self conscious argument that democracy had to be tuned to the 'Indonesian soul'. Islamic parties commanded around 30% of the vote nevertheless, despite adverse circumstances in elections in the 1970s, and it has been clear that Islam remains the clearest opposition to the New Order. Nevertheless, recent assessments of Islam in Indonesian politics point out that Muslims have become a majority with a 'minority mentality' and that the faith is 'an outsider'.<sup>150</sup>

Elsewhere in the Islamic zone, as in Sulu and Mindanao, changes have been especially coloured by social dislocation. From the vantage point of the Manila government its policies in the south have been strategies for development and national integration. The government has promoted the migration of northern Christian settlers and businesses into what they deemed a relatively underdeveloped south. For Muslim locals these programs have represented the imposition of a new and more intense colonialism even if disguised as national development. It is impossible to separate changing religious practices, in this context of intermittent bloodletting, from the socio-economic and political strains of relations between poor Muslim southerners and relatively rich northern patronage powers.

Marcos policies provoked the founding of the Philippine Muslim Nationalist League (PMNL) in 1967. That became the

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<sup>150</sup> W.F. Wertheim "Moslems in Indonesia: Majority with a Minority Mentality" (Townsville, Queensland: Southeast Asian Studies Committee, James Cook University, 1980) and R. McVey "Faith as the Outsider: Islam in Indonesian Politics" in J. Piscatori ed, *Islam in the Political Process*, Cambridge, 1983.

Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), with a military arm which grew rapidly through the 1970s. Misuari, the most public and astute leader of the movement, eventually sought support from Libya and blended Islamic nationalism with Marxist populism. Religious connections also became a bridge, along with ethnicity, complicating relationships between Manila and Kuala Lumpur. The Tausug, living in both Sulu and Sabah, established a working relationship across the border. Between 1973 and 1978 important steps were taken to regularise trade between Sulu and Sabah and to adjust the national legal system to account for local Muslim law. These steps took some of the fire from separatism, but it has remained a running sores, among the many inheritances of the Marcos era which now also plague the Aquino government.

In the largely Catholic Philippines the church has been basically conservative and closely tied to elite dominated governments. There were less than 4000 priests in the 1960s and the priesthood has a very different relationship to the general population that Theravada monks. Notwithstanding currents of liberation theology from Latin America and the critical stance of some Church leaders, such as Cardinal Sin against Marcos, the general tenor of the church has been conservative. This stance is rooted both in the social origins of its leadership and in its staunch anti-communism. Since the Huk movement of the 1950s communism has remained an active social issue and there have continually been a scattering of underground cells and guerrilla bands operating in its name.

Resonances of traditional ethnic and religious difference continue to underlie or converge with politics. Tensions have been explicitly religious within the archipelago. The Muslim south and Catholic north have been at odds throughout the history of the modern Philippines. In Malaysia religion converges with race and the intensity of requirement that Malays practice Islam implicitly reflects tensions between Chinese and Malay groups. Indonesian politics have certainly been shaped significantly by the underlying division between syncretic traditional and modern orthodox

Islam. In the 1950s the communists drew support mainly from syncretic Javanese and opposition was strongest among the Muslim youth who helped the army eliminate it in the 1960s.

Though less prominent, similar tensions have been clear through the mainland states as well. Religious issues wove into the politics of the thirty year long Vietnamese revolution. Catholics from the north sometimes worked together with syncretic southern cults during the 1950s and 1960s in opposition to the socialist revolution. In Burma (Myanmar), Buddhist Burmese speakers from the lowlands have been resisted by Christian Karens ever since independence. In Thailand the Malay speaking Muslim minority of the south has not easily endorsed or been integrated into a state which makes so much of the conjunction of Thai ethnicity, Indic styled royalty and Theravada Buddhism.

The religious revivalisms of the postwar era make nonsense of assumption that Muslims would separate, any more than Confucianists or Buddhists ever did, between spiritual and social spheres. Religious impulses intersect with political-economic purposes in underlying postwar state construction throughout the Islamic and Theravada regions. Political process has been consistently construed by most local peoples as a sphere of cultural and spiritual contention. This has often remained the case even when revolutionary actions and political ideologies have appeared secular on the surface. At the rice roots of village societies even ostensibly secular ideologies such as Marxism have intersected with millenarian spirituality. Nevertheless it is apparent that economic concerns and secular politics have appeared to be increasingly separable from spiritual concerns during recent decades and that as those divide preoccupation with economics has also increased at the expense of spiritual concerns.

### **Policies of integration and regulation**

If colonialism defined current maps of the region, independent states have been left with the task of effecting integrating policies. Religious and ethnic identities within each

state have been multiple and competing claims to national identity have thus produced prominent fracture lines within all postwar societies. Ethnicities were subsumed within colonial territories and those relationships carried into national structures. States like Aceh and ethnic groups such as the Karen and Meo were drawn, more through colonialism than by earlier states, into social units dominated by Burmese, Thai, Vietnamese, Javanese, Malay and Tagalog speakers. These majorities, for the most part occupants of core areas, dominate the new states. At the same time social boundaries between local peoples and migrant Indian, Arab and Chinese groups hardened from the turn of the century. Fragmentation of local identities has been self-evident and the fragility of unity transparent. Throughout the region constructions of national culture have self-consciously aimed to produce a dominant mould which would override these profound differences.

We relate the rise of nationalism and religious modernism to the impact of print technologies. In considering cultural processes of integration within the new national states, especially since the 1970s, we are dealing with the impact of electronic media. In the past several decades electricity has reached villages, in tandem with centralised bureaucratic administration, and with it radio and TV convey messages carefully orchestrated by governments. The appropriation of media is not simply a matter of the obvious, of indigenous control over print, radio, film and television technologies. It is also a way of talking about wider correlates--forms of entertainment, militaries, bureaucracy and government. Cultural integration is especially carried out through schools and bureaucracies and we can read their technical underpinings as tools. The extension of modern institutions and media into village societies has been remarkable. Radio, TV, education and government policies are deployed to alter attitudes and family life along with agricultural practices.

Newspaper and radio communications were widely disseminated before World War II, but now electricity and TV

reaches villages as well as towns. Burma has been least affected by modern media, as it has remained relatively isolated under Ne Win. But increasing consumerism and the urban classes who benefit from it, in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, is linked to a new phase of communications revolution which has accelerated since the early 1970s. Now integrative revolutions aim to bring all the peoples of each national territory into a single socio-cultural frame.<sup>151</sup> Beyond linking peasant villagers to urban centres each state in Southeast Asia is challenged by the struggle to integrate diverse ethnic groups within one territory. During the past several decades this effort extends far beyond what colonial systems attempted, as the new national states are not satisfied with the pluralism imperialism both generated and enshrined.

Appropriations of new media and the apparatus of statehood have been taking place within a context of severe limitation. The legacies of colonialism, including international imbalance and the dislocations attending warfare, poverty and rapid urbanisation, impose heavy costs. Internal migration, new agricultural regimes and deforestation have restructured the physical as well as social environments of tribal minorities and shifting cultivators. Grasping recent changes in culture clearly depends on awareness of how, among other things, economic shifts and population movements threaten the capacity of village communities to sustain old rituals. Such stresses condition social process and establish a frame for understanding changes in popular culture and religion, as indeed similar factors do through earlier history.

Policies of integration which verge on effort at monocultural homogenisation go hand in hand with the formation of new national cultures. Resulting programs often imply cultural genocide and mirror the green revolution in agriculture. There hybrid species increase the uniformity of genetic stock and crops become at once more productive and more vulnerable to pests.

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<sup>151</sup> ref to Geertz integrative revolution

Through the self confident modernism of current governments monocultures extend in the social domain with vigour and the same double edge. Prewar European colonial governments subordinated local populations politically, but often also worked to insulate them from cultural change. Sometimes, as in Bali, they claimed this was to protect local peoples and preserve their cultures. In other instances, as in British or Dutch containment of local religions, insulation aimed to prevented locals from competing with colonial enterprises. In the postwar era the independent states, dominated by Burmese, Thai, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Malay and Javanese speakers, have spearheaded a new wave of polices geared much more toward cultural integration than those of the colonial era.

Since World War II the residual autonomy of communities in the remote zones of the Shan plateau and previously relatively untouched parts of Mindanao, the Mentawi islands and interior Borneo or New Guinea. This process particularly threatens the tribal and ethnic beliefs of the Karen and Chin of Burma (Myanmar), the Meo of Thailand, the Jarai in the hills of Vietnam and the Mentawai, Punan or Asmat in the archipelago. Visayan and Tagalog migrants to Mindanao and Javanese migrants to Kalimantan, Sulawesi or Irian displace and marginalise indigenous peoples. Resettlement programs, like the rapid expansion of forestry, also work to destroy the habitats which underpinned shifting lifestyles and the earlier rich diversity of local cultures. At the same time tribal peoples, even outside areas of internal migration, have been brought into direct routinised contact with institutions of government, foreign capitalised businesses and national education and health systems. These factors combine to threaten, ironically more than colonialism, and lead to disappearance of the hundreds of tribal minority ethnic groups which have inhabited the less trafficked zones of the region.

Similarly even in rice growing villages of dominant populations there has been a penetration of state control far surpassing colonial interventions. Through most of the region

village heads and councils had functioned to represent local communities, and by their mediation they always muted the intervention of outside forces within village life. Now village heads are increasingly the bottom rung of bureaucracies and their responsiveness to local demands has weakened along with the claims of residents to land and the strength of ritual contacts with spirit realms. Even dominant ethnic communities and recognised religions have been subject to a restructuring which has been facilitated by instruments allowing previously impossible regulation--extending to licensing of folk healers.

Warfare, the most obviously disruptive mode of intervention, has shaped the experience of most tribal areas of the mainland through much of the past four decades. The Vietminh defeated the French in the hills at Dien Bien Phu through alliance with hill peoples who they had depended on throughout their struggle. This alliance laid the basis for an unusual degree of autonomous tribal power in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which adopted Chinese policies with regard to ethnic minorities, promotion of literacy was channelled through indigenous tribal languages.<sup>152</sup> But the Annamite chain, bordering Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos, has for decades also been a key channel supplying guerrilla armies. First it was used by the Vietnamese against the French and then Americans, then as a supply line to China for the Khmer resistance against the Vietnamese. As a key communications line it suffered intensely from both bombing and the movements of armies, so much so that the ecology of those hills has been, very likely permanently, altered.

In Thailand extension of Theravada into the hills is underway, but some hill groups have become Christian instead. Missionary Biblical translation has facilitated conversion of predominantly oral traditions into writing, providing a route to literacy which is especially relevant for minorities interested in maintaining their language while accessing modern education.

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 28-29.

This has competed with nationalist policies which have usually emphasised literacy through schooling in the language of the dominant ethnic group. In Thailand's Northeast, North and South there have been periodic communist or ethnic guerrilla movements and since the war the Thai government has felt that the security of its borders depended on assimilating the minorities into lowland Theravada culture. Thus in 1963 the Dhammajarig (travelling *Dhamma*) program began self consciously to promote the extension of Buddhism to the hill tribes with an assimilationist objective. By 1967 one hundred monks were sent and instructed to explain their practices whenever local people inquired.<sup>153</sup>

Similarly until the early 1970s Sihanouk self consciously considered Theravada Buddhism as the prime instrument of national integration for Cambodia. Since 1962 the Ne Win government has actively pursued a policy of assimilation, but militant Karen nationalism remains in residual form along the Burmese-Thai border. In the Shan plateau the mainly Christian Karens, separate communist groups and opium warlords have been fighting intermittently since 1948. Among the Karens, many of whom were converted by Baptists or Buddhists during the past century, natural (*Y'wa*), ethnic cultural (*Mu Kaw Li*) and ancestral (*bgha*), spirit forces continue to interact even among the large number who became Christian. Traditional ceremonial, political or economic exchange between hill and valley peoples had built in mechanisms to moderate inequities and maintain distance; modernising governments work to incorporate local chiefships or village councils into national administrations. As in the colonial era conversion to Christianity sometimes appeared an attractive counter option.

In the archipelago periodic military conflict in Mindanao relates to government efforts to subordinate the Moros within the Catholic Manila dominated state. In Malaysia the so-called 'Emergency', a war between Chinese, British and Malays extending through the 1950s and drove guerrilla fighters into the

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<sup>153</sup> Lester, *Theravada Buddhism*, pp 123-125.

forest areas of the Semang, forcing some of them to cross the border into Thailand and others into resettled villages.<sup>154</sup> Indonesian confrontation with Malaysia in the early 1960s similarly drew armies to the boundary area of Sarawak and Kalimantan. Indonesian action against the Dutch, in what became Irian Jaya, established a military channel for integrating Irian into the state. Previously Christian missions became intensely active there in the 1950s, in the last decade of Dutch control, and since its defacto incorporation into Indonesia in 1962 they remain the major alternative network to the government in Irian Jaya. Subsequently the protracted war against Fretlin in East Timur, beginning in 1975, has had a similar complexion, aiming to subsume ethnic identities into the nation and facing resistance which has drawn on Catholic networks.

### **Constraints on religious discourse**

Here we will consider religious change at the macro level, in its external dimensions, by dealing with intersections between governments and the institutional levels of religious life. The consolidation of new states has led to increasing centralised control over institutional religious life, the same powers which limit smuggling or collect revenue have been exercised in regularising religious hierarchies which are increasingly articulated at national level. This is a corollary of the general process of forming national cultures, and is also due to the special interest governments have had in mobilising religious institutions for other, political, cultural and economic, purposes. As many neo-traditionalist philosophies carry religious senses of purpose, intervention by governments in the religious sphere have usually been sanctioned by postwar states. Policies with respect to religion are based on the view, one governments share even when they are ostensibly secular, that the ambit of state authority includes the spiritual welfare of its population.

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<sup>154</sup> C. Keyes, *The Golden Peninula*, London, 1977, p 38.

The establishment of national educational systems has been a mechanism of integration. Consolidation of public education, spreading literacy and secularism into villages, has been notable throughout Southeast Asia, as only the Philippines had a relatively advanced state school system in the colonial period. There have been massive rises in adult literacy since the 1950s. However, despite the fact that governments emphasise secular education, religious schooling continues to occupy strong ground in every part of the region. At the same time the lines between traditional religious and modern secular education have blurred. Religious schools everywhere now give increasing attention to secular subjects, government sponsorship has extended to supporting religious education and at the same time religious education has expanded even within secular systems.

The role of religious specialists at the local level has been changing. They are direct agents of change, whether on behalf of governments or through their perception of themselves. Local religious leaders generally conceive of themselves now as agents of social, as well as specifically religious, change.<sup>155</sup> This shift in the role of religious specialists was noted by Geertz, who observed that in the 1950s the politicisation of rural life through parties led the rural *kyai*, Javanese Islamic teachers, to become brokers for modern politics and ideas, as well as continuing to function as teachers within the religious schools, the *pesantren*, which housed them.<sup>156</sup> At the same time other local Islamic authorities, such as the *penghulu*, in charge of mosques, and *hakim*, religious judges, have become directly part of national structures through their integration, via the Ministry of Religion, into the national bureaucracy.

Though failing to claim the Indonesian nation fully for Islam, the strength of Masyumi as an umbrella Muslim party, was sufficient to ensure rapid establishment of a Ministry of Religion.

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<sup>155</sup> von der Mehden, *Religion and Modernization*, p 86.

<sup>156</sup> C. Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji: the Changing Role of a Cultural Broker", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol II (1959-1960).

This was dominated by the traditionalist Nahdatul Ulama until 1971, at which point the New Order effectively displaced that party as the dominating force behind the Ministry. Though responsible for all religious communities funds within it are allocated according to census statistics and Islam has thus dominated it heavily. The Ministry administered government subsidies to more than 13,000 primary, 776 secondary and 16 higher *madrasasin* 1954 and to a total of 22,000 *madrasas* and *pesantren* by 1965 and these figures kept increasing in the 1970s.<sup>157</sup> The separate Islamic educational network has come increasingly into its own, especially since the 1970s through the tertiary level IAIN (State Islamic Institutes), as substantial oil revenue has been channeled toward it

This relatively autonomous educational network has been the basis for a new wave of nationwide Islamisation. The Ministry became the main stronghold of Muslim influence within the bureaucracy and a counter to Javanist domination of the Ministries of Information and of Education and Culture. Given the importance of law within Islam the establishment of the Ministry of Religion had immense practical implications for local religious life. Islamic courts came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religion rather than the Justice Department. In issues of family law, notably divorce and inheritance, a legal basis for religious authority was established. From the mid-1950s to 1974 there was intermittent and severe controversy over marriage legislation, especially concerning polygamy and non-Muslim marriages.

Muslim reaction to the government's proposed civil legislation of 1974 provoked such extreme reaction the bill was withdrawn. For Muslims frustration has often focussed on the codification of customary (*adat*) law undertaken by the Dutch. The Ministry channeled funds and created institutions in a way that strengthened Islamic organisations. At the same time it also implicitly limited the potential for Muslim activists to challenge the basis of the state, as its very establishment implied Muslim

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<sup>157</sup> B.J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia*, The Hague, 1982, p 117.

endorsement of the state. NU control of the Ministry, which was firm by 1954, led that party to endorse the state which underpinned it. Other Muslims protested because they wanted to challenge the basis of the state more fundamentally.<sup>158</sup>

At the local level in Indonesia the prewar Muhammadiyah has remained a powerful organisation through its own school system. It has been joined since the 1970's by a series of newer *dakwah* movements and religious impulses of all sorts were strengthened through the coup of 1965, as they had been earlier through the revolution. A combination of political pressure and personal trauma led many Javanese to fill the mosques for Friday noon prayers in the late 1960s. Many people since 1970 have undoubtedly found renewed and genuine commitment to a more purely Islamic faith in the process, but these movements clearly reflected political enforcement of necessity to activate religious commitments. But Islamic effort to purify Islam of syncretic beliefs and insistence that Muslims must rigorously obey the injunctions of their faith had unintended effects, often pushing committed Javanists to define themselves in non-Islamic terms.

In the Malaysian context Islamisation has been intensified through its role as a vehicle of Malay cohesion. Governments have contributed by proclaiming Muslim holidays, upholding Islamic values in education and economics and by encouraging internal conversion (*dakwah*) movements. The relationship between Islamic and national law in Malaysia remains complex, partly due to variations between states. In the sultanates colonial policies allowed distinct religious rights to remain with sultans and in the modern states local authorities still retain significant powers in this area. Tun Mustapha, for example, made especially notable appeals to Islam when he was chief Minister in Sabah, working against Christian influences and promoted conversion to Islam.

Since 1960 the Malaysian government has administered collection of the *zakat*, the religious tithe. States administer the

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<sup>158</sup> D. Lev, *Islamic Courts in Indonesia*, Berkeley, 1972, p 50.

collection of 10% of the paddy and at the same time villages levy their own *zakat*. In urban areas people pay an extra tax instead. In 1968 roughly US\$3.5 million was collected and funds have gone for religious buildings and education, in direct subsidies to the poor, even to some business oriented programmes.<sup>159</sup> Elsewhere national governments have no direct involvement in collecting religious taxes. In Indonesia it is only through private organisations, such as the Muhammadiyah, that *zakat* is collected and disbursed at a local level. The *haj* has also been facilitated by the combination of government offices and, since the war, air travel. By the 1980s over 70,000 Indonesian pilgrims went to Mecca annually; Malaysian pilgrims increased from about 5,000 to 15,000 between 1965 and 1980 and in the same year over 7,500 pilgrims went from elsewhere in Southeast Asia.<sup>160</sup>

Within Theravada states the spread of modern education, whether through reorganisation of *sangha* based education or the creation of new national schools, reshapes popular perceptions of Buddhism. Secular education competes with the *sangha* as a vehicle of social mobility and recently fewer have chosen the monkhood as a long term vocation. The proportion of monks relative to the male population halved in Thailand between the 1920s and 1970s, although remaining high, at about 1:34. In both Burma and Thailand the number of village youth who ordain briefly, for the annual rain retreat, is still high. In Burma the *sangha* declined from perhaps 100,000 in royal times to 70,000 in 1941 then even more rapidly, to 45,000, in 1958.<sup>161</sup> In Kampuchea and Laos the *sangha* has lost ground more dramatically, but it has not disappeared even under communist governments and notwithstanding brief almost total eclipse under Pol Pot in Kampuchea.

Naturally neither Christian Karens nor animists were

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<sup>159</sup> von der Mehden, *Religion and Modernization* p 58.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* p 62.

<sup>161</sup> Mendelson, *Sangha and State*, p 336.

attracted to the prospect of Buddhism as a state religion. In deference to the Karen, Kachin and Chin minorities Burma was not declared as a Buddhist state, to induce them to join the union. Nonetheless its first constitution, of 1947, recognised a 'special place' for Buddhism and once U Nu was in office, in 1948, he concentrated on promoting Buddhist revival as part of his vision of the national revolution. For example, The Vinicchaya-Htana Act of 1949 aimed to remove religious disputes from the jurisdiction of civil courts by establishing ecclesiastical courts at the town level throughout the country. It was modified in 1954 to take account of the strength of divergent sects within Burmese Buddhism. Sectarian fissures have been prominent there and local abbots have had more power within their temples (*kyaungs*) than their colleagues elsewhere, so centralisation ran into resistance.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs was established in 1950, partly to restore cohesion to what had become a fragmented religious structure. Meanwhile the Ministry of Education engaged actively in regulating and supporting monastic examinations and standards within the larger monastic universities. From 1947 onwards there was discussion of establishing a Pali University. These moves countered the long absence of royal sponsorship and strengthened government intervention in the affairs of the *sangha*. Periodic debates through the 1950s, over the registration of monks and the holding of monastic parliaments, provoked Buddhists, such as those of the Anti-Hluttdaw Association, to demand the abolition of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1959. Revolutionaries in many instances worked through the *sangha*, gaining a mobility through that they would not otherwise have had, so registration was an touchy political issue.<sup>162</sup>

One notable intervention in Buddhist developments, the Institute for the Advanced Study of Buddhism, was founded through collaboration with the American Ford Foundation in 1954. It implied a mixture of secular and religious objectives which sat uncomfortably within Burmese traditions, which had separated

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<sup>162</sup> Mendelson, *Sangha and State*, pp 240-62 & 341-5.

those spheres under colonialism. Emphasis on English language learning and missionary expansion of Buddhism went hand in hand with what became a Burmanisation of the curriculum and personnel.<sup>163</sup> This new style of government and foreign sponsored training was tied to notions of social service. Promotion of Buddhism was linked at once to consolidation of the state internally and to projecting its image in the international environment. In Burma by 1962 there were 84 temple schools (*kyaungs*) which had enough highly trained monks to register as colleges. More recently the Ne Win government has given no encouragement to *kyaung* schools, but they remain a vital component of Burmese education, even if the 70% who attended religious schools in 1952 must have declined significantly since.<sup>164</sup>

The Thai government has been in the strongest position to patronise Buddhism and it has not held back from fostering and attempting to manipulate the strong local *sangha*. The government attitude was reflected in a 1963 pamphlet which indicated that: "...the complexities of living in the modern world...necessitates a close cooperation and mutual understanding between the State and the Sangha working harmoniously together for the economic and spiritual well-being of the people."<sup>165</sup> The 1963 Sangha Act, initiated under Marshall Sarit, constituted a powerful intervention in the life of the *sangha*. The previous Acts, of 1902 and 1941, had contained more democratic features. The 1963 Act centralised power in the name of defusing sectarian rivalry between the cohesive, and hence relatively better represented, modernist Dhammayut, and more diffuse Mahanikai sects within the *sangha*.

This restructuring reflected Sarit's recognition that Buddhism and the monarchy remained critical to achievement of modernising objectives. Each adjustment in state policy with regard to the *sangha* has matched modernising reforms, relating

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* pp 299-306.

<sup>164</sup> F. von der Mehden, *Religion and Modernization in Southeast Asia*, Syracuse, 1986, p 136.

<sup>165</sup> Quoted in Lester, *Theravada Buddhism*, p 104.

first to the reforms of the nineteenth century, then to 1932 revolution, and finally to Sarit's coup of 1957.<sup>166</sup> Continuous strengthening of the bonds between religion and the state, as hierarchical ties have tightened through the Ministry of Religion, has decreased the prestige and autonomy of local *wat*. In Thailand monastic examination regulations came into effect in 1910 and remain in force. According to figures from 1968 there were about 25,000 *wat* and 185,000 monks, perhaps one third of them 'temporary', in a Thai population of around 34 million.

Schools both linked the state to religious institutions and introduced religious specialists to secular learning. In 1967 half the primary schools were still *wat* schools, where teaching was done by monks and there were 6,634 Nak Dhamma schools and 615 Pali schools. Two *wat* institutes in Bangkok, Mahamakuta Rajavidyalaya and Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya, became the basis of modern universities in 1945 and 1947, and from that point offered a wide range of technical and secular subjects along with Buddhist Pali studies.<sup>167</sup> The hierarchy of monastic institutions, leading up toward these elite 'university *wat*' of the capital, matched the socio-political hierarchy of cities. As in earlier times, the *sangha* offered a channel for upward mobility and status, especially for the relatively poorer villagers of the Northeast.<sup>168</sup>

It is recognised in all village studies of the Theravada countries that through the period since the war monks continue to play a key role as consellers and advisors, as well as as officiants within religious ceremonies. Now their traditional centrality in this respect has been counterbalanced with community development training. In the late 1960s Mahachulalongkorn University in Bangkok sponsored community development training for monks in centres dispersed though the country. Monks who attended were expected to return to their villages and apply the skills and perspectives gained in whatever way they

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<sup>166</sup> S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, Cambridge, 1976, pp 252-5.

<sup>167</sup> R. Lester, *Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, Ann Arbor, 1973, p 97.

<sup>168</sup> S.J. Tambiah, "Sangha and Polity in Modern Thailand", in Bardwell Smith ed. *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, Chambersburg PA, 1978, pp 123-4.

could. There is little doubt that many, as in the purely secular cadre training programs in Vietnam, absorbed and applied the lessons learned.

Similarly in Cambodia Sihanouk held that "...our 70,000 monks are the 'officers' conducting our people to work, just as the officers conduct the troops into combat..."<sup>169</sup> Because the French did not cut the tie between royalty and the *sangha* in Laos or Cambodia it remained relatively tight until the socialist revolutions of the mid-1970s. In Cambodia, as in Laos and Thailand, the state and *sangha* were much closer than in Burma. There Buddhist schools included 600 primary, two secondary and one tertiary, the Preah Sihanouk Raj Buddhist University of Phnom Penh.<sup>170</sup> Traditionally schooling reached young males in most villages through the *wat* but by 1967 all but 10% of schools were in the government system and enrolments were increasing rapidly.<sup>171</sup>

In Laos roughly 25% of schools were religious and in 1962 there were 95 Pali schools. There were only a few vernacular high schools up to the time of Pathet Lao victory in 1975. The French and Americans looked to the *sangha* as a potential counterweight to communism in Laos throughout the 1950s and 1960s and its strength was undermined as a result. The *sangha* was particularly deeply divided between Mahanikai and Dhammayut sects, a tension lending itself to factionalism, and at the same time strongly committed to a vision of itself as the prime vehicle of Lao culture, a mission easily construed as counter to American secularism.

By the early 1970s, especially as the Pathet Lao gained strength through growing anti-Americanism. The politicisation of the *sangha* was ironically facilitated by its own initiatives to broaden its base, through lay missionising and meditation, and undermined its role within Lao society. With its victory in 1975 the

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<sup>169</sup> Lester, *Theravada Buddhism*, p 126.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* pp 96-7.

<sup>171</sup> C. Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula*, London, 1977, p 293.

Pathet Lao made every effort to use monks in order to extend its message to the population. It announced policies of religious freedom and there was already a strong basis for collaboration, as notions of Buddhist socialism were well established. At the same time the new government set out to reeducate monks, restrict their privileges and bypass their central social and symbolic role. By 1979 the number of monks was said to have dropped from 20,000 to 1,700 and the subordination of the sangha to politics appeared to be complete.

Christian missions and churches have remained active through most of Southeast Asia, representing an avenue of continuity for western influence through education and health work. In areas like Timur, Irian Jaya or among the Karen, as noted already, Christian institutions have constituted independent networks which may threaten, or at least appear to undermine state control. In this respect churches may parallel the function of Muslim networks in Mindanao and Sulu. In Indonesia and Malaysia governments have been pressed to respond to Muslim sensitivity by actively restricting Christian missions, especially in areas like Aceh, where there have been popular protests against even locally rooted Christian church construction. In the late 1970s the Indonesian government pressed overseas missions to replace foreign missionaries with local people.

Even in the secular and materialistic city state of Singapore the government has actively concerned itself with both promoting and regulating religious life. By the late 1970s Confucianism was promoted as an ethos convergent with government interest in social stability; in the 1980s this encouragement was underlined as a way of promoting extended family support for the elderly--to reduce welfare demands on the state. By the end of the 1980s the government was concerned with the rise of fundamentalisms and contingent discord. A white paper on the *Maintenance of Religious Harmony* was tabled in Parliament in December 1989 and noted incidents of social conflict in the late 1980s involving aggressive Protestant and Muslim fundamentalists. Muslims reacted

indignantly when Protestants used the term 'Allah' for 'God', a translation which had already been banned by the Malaysian government. Dravidian and Aryan Hindus complained of each other and that Christians were too aggressive. At the same time Sikhs and Hindus brought the tensions of South Asia into Singapore.

In Indonesia a subordinate position in political terms has limited Muslim influence over national institutions but in the cultural and religious arenas the balance of power differs. In that domain other parties respond to Islam in the sense that discourses about religious issues are framed increasingly by Islamic idiom. The state endorses an Islamic sense of God, requires citizens to identify with a religion Muslims can acknowledge as such and sees itself as having active responsibility in the religious sphere in terms no secular western state does. In each of these spheres Islamic discourses define the context of spiritual life, influencing other strands of religion implicitly and pervasively. Muslims still associate mysticism in many forms with the residue of pre-Islamic traditions and it is very often seen now as irrational projection or fantasy, as contrary to the realities of development and modernity.

Dominance of Islam within the Ministry of Religion, especially up to 1972, is reflected in its definitions of religion and its role in promoting Islamic senses of what can be religious. When the Ministry was established in 1946 it was acknowledged that Protestants and Catholics deserved places, as even in the strictest Islamic terms Christianity is legitimate, a religion of the Book. Other religions were initially lumped under the rubric of 'ethnic' and those of Asian origin had to struggle for recognition, their status remaining problematic in some respects to the present. Each had to reorganise to match essentially Semitic senses of what constitutes religion--they are legitimate now to the degree that they emphasise belief in one God, a clear system of law, a holy scripture and a prophet. To date the official list of acceptable religions is that promulgated in Sukarno's Presidential decree of 1965: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and

Confucianism. The only exception is Confucianism, which has been relegated to the status of Judaism, being viewed essentially as an ethnic faith rather than an international religion.

This restricted sense of the term does not allow animism, folk spirit cults, new religions or independent mystical practices as 'religion'. Even the Balinese had to struggle actively before gaining official recognition in the 1950s. Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian communities were forced to conform to monotheistic conceptions of divinity. Whether in scholarly debate, public discussion or government legislation, the accepted Indonesian definition of religion now accords with the Islamic model of what can constitute one. The recasting of Buddhist idiom gave an advantage to Mahayana groups, as Theravada Buddhists faced particular difficulty before they agreed finally that the Adi Buddha, roughly referring to the innate Buddha nature in everything, could be identified as God. In the process of gaining recognition scriptural factions within each community gained strength at the expense of traditional syncretists.

More critically, Islam conditions government views of its responsibility in the religious arena. The government sees itself as having the responsibility to ensure that citizens follow an acceptable religious faith as an obligation of citizenship. In the *Five Year Plan for 1969-1974* (in Chapter IX on 'Religion') it is stated that:

...the Government of the Republic of Indonesia has the responsibility of giving guidance and assistance to facilitate the development of each religion according to its own teachings, and to maintain supervision such that each citizen maintains their religious practice according to their beliefs...

This sense of responsibility distinguishes Indonesian views of religious freedom from those of western liberal regimes. In western states professions of belief in God play a passive role, meriting rhetorical invocation. Indonesia may not be an Islamic state, but it takes from Islam its sense that authorities should

intervene to guide the spiritual lives of citizens. Under the New Order the first principal of the Pancasila, belief in the God, is read as a programme for action, citizens have to list religious affiliation on identity cards. This view of religious freedom, obviously in marked contrast to that which pertains in the west, is essentially consistent with the Muslim view of the responsibility of the state vis-a-vis religion.

Government regulation of mystical movements extend colonial policies. Traditional courts were transformed through colonialism into an element within the new state, but policies aimed mainly to contain Islam. This alliance, with what were coincidentally the syncretic, mystical and Indic segments of the population, continued an opposition between Islamic and court powers of the pre-colonial era. That opposition is consistent again with the tension between Islam and the New Order. The Dutch were sensitive to the dangers of millenarian and mystical movements and surveillance of them has been continued since independence through Pakem, an agency of the Department of Justice since 1954. Offices in major cities supervise meetings and keep records. Even routine sessions of a spiritual nature in individuals homes and the practices of traditional healers (*dukun*) require license and registration. The Ministry of Religion also researched folk practices, indicating until 1978 that mysticism lay within its authority. It aimed to guide adherents toward orthodoxy by clarifying that mysticism originated from Islam.

In 1973 independent movements were recognised as legitimate options within the terms of the 1945 Constitution, making it legal for citizens to list a mystical movement instead of a religion on their identity cards. But in practice when the census took place in 1980 no record of mystical affiliation was registered. Legislative changes have had limited effects and in many areas it has been considered provocative to publicise the new laws. The Marriage Law of 1974 resulted in broader guidelines, easing requirement to adhere to Islamic ritual. Though the government attempt to establish civil marriage was withdrawn, some mystical groups conducted their own marriage ceremonies after 1974. In

1978, responsibility for *kepercayaan* was shifted from the Ministry of Religion to that of Education and Culture, weakening the claim of Islam to jurisdiction over it.

Recently changes indicate another shift in government thinking about the relationship between mysticism and religion. Now affiliation with mystical movements is separated from the question of religious membership, which is again seen as essential. The pendulum has swung back toward the position of the late 1960s and affirmation of religious commitment is again seen as essential. In any event there is strong pressure behind the growth of a literalist monotheism. The first principle of the Pancasila is an underscoring of the profession of faith in one God, though omitting reference to Muhammad, in Islamic terms. Islam may not have established itself as the religion of Indonesia, but there is no doubt that its sense of religion defines, shapes and constrains discourse about religion and spiritual life. This pressure is conveyed through the bureaucracy and influences private practices as well as public expression of religious life.

## Chapter 7

### THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Recent changes do not seem incremental, as they do in our vision of early history. Time no longer appears as a constant as we near the present, it accelerates along the same dramatic curve as technological innovation or population growth. An overview perspective is also naturally more easily attained for early and distant appropriations of systems of government, writing, trade or agriculture. But insofar as we can achieve such a perspective on the present it marks a distinctive phase of evolution, a change perhaps more profound than the emergence of states and made more dramatic by the compression of time.

Even in the contemporary context foregrounding of cultural and religious history may enable registration of local volition more than social history does. With high colonialism industrial capitalism and globalisation marked local process. Undercurrents of indigenous cultural voice are not so obvious now, as political-economic realities dominate perceptions increasingly. But just as early societies adapted imports people now adapt new technologies through their own worldview, producing unique versions of modernity even when pressures of social dislocation and international intervention are intense.

New contexts and mediations have brought new modes of access to what Southeast Asians of this era are able to know or believe as real. Symbolic structures, on the surfaces of cultural life, have been either evolving, as old symbols accommodate new contexts, or shifting, as new systems replace old ones. At the same time and at a deeper level we can also note that the very nature of the relationship between individual experience, cultural structures and social life is also changing. Religious changes are not simply a matter of shifting objects of belief or ideology, of altered allegiance to clearly designated organisations or even of changes in the degree to which people are spiritual in orientation. Religion, as we

understand increasingly, is a matter of what we experience as real, of how we know truth, indeed of whether we can believe there is such a thing and equally of how our ways of knowing influence our interactions.

Change is channeled through metropolises which exemplify the trends they mediate. In premodern capitals, such as Mandalay, Chiang Mai, Surakarta or Klungkung traditional arts and ethos may be maintained to some degree, but those residual centres are like the eye of a cyclone. The new capital cities provide our paradigm for wider changes and their early centres were already superseded by expansion in the late colonial period. Bursts of construction in the 1950s seemed dramatic then but now appear hesitant. Singapore, Bangkok, Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta have seen such profound expansion in the 1970s and 1980s that their origins have been overwhelmed. Where there were canals and tree lined avenues in 1950 we see cement in Bangkok. Skyscrapers and multilaned highways reshape the spaces of Jakarta so that suburbs like Kebayoran, created only in the 1950s, are almost unrecognisable. Though restructuring is concentrated in these metropolises they reach out to reshape the ambiance of their hinterlands and the changes in them indicate the depth and pace of wider transformation.

It would be a mistake to read local modern medias simply as vehicles of propaganda and equally wrong to conclude that radio and TV in the Southeast Asian context produce only western styles of culture. Western patterns do intrude through these media, but even modern art forms--films, TV programs and music--have also carried creative new local cultures. Generally postwar governments have been extremely sensitive to the way modern media bring westernisation; in the early decades of independence they restricted the dissemination of imported media cultures and local contributions through modern media may have been stronger than they now are. New media have been a vehicle to convey traditional arts, making people aware of diverse styles within their country as well as producing homogeneity. In many

areas traditional music is more prominent through radio and still fills the atmosphere of local nights.

### **Secular modernism and purist revivalism**

Every transformation in Southeast Asia has been attended by changes in religion and some were pioneered by emissaries of new faiths. Pragmatic utilitarianism, the faith of those who live without religious meanings, is now the most powerful missionary force in urban contexts. It vies with equally militant literalisms in Muslim and Christian idiom and those are also, like secularism, distinct products of the post industrial era. Extending outward from urban areas, and reflecting the outlook of those educated in western styles, we can identify many variants of scriptural modernism. Generally arguing at once for adjustment to modernity and return to the original canons, rationalising reformists have emerged within all local communities as well as reflecting the activity of missions from beyond the region. While most people still pursue folk traditions, syncretic religion or other styles of religion fully formed in earlier periods, there are distinctive new currents of postwar religious practice, all of them now products of electronic, as well as print, media.

The emergence of secularism within the urban middle classes and among industrial workers and itinerant traders has been significant. For the first time in regional history there is a vigorously growing sphere of agnosticism. However even in contexts of radical modernisation, traditional practices are often reformulated rather than dropped, as is evident in the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur through cases of spirit possession among factory women from village origins.<sup>172</sup> Though modernity does appear to lead to a streamlining of beliefs it clearly does not always lead to secularisation. Changes are not confined to shifts of membership from one religion to another, or from being religious to becoming agnostic or atheistic. Those shifts are significant and allegiances have been fluid in the region. But at the same time notable internal

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<sup>172</sup> A. Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*, Albany, 1987.

transformations have occurred within every community of belief.

Though the nexus between cultural and spiritual life has been weakened this has led more often to restructured belief than to secular disbelief. The breakdown of communal structures through the rapidity of socio-economic change has brought a variety of responses. Fundamental revivalisms, popular purist movements of regeneration and internal conversion, are especially apparent in the Islamic sphere but have analogues in every community. The groundswell of revivalist religion within most of Southeast Asia undercuts the assumptions of many, both within and beyond the region, who have assumed that modernisation and the pressures of urban life would decrease the role of religion.

Islamic modernism has not been only a new wave of revivalist purism. Nationalism went hand in hand with renewal of religion and since independence Malay ethnicity has been identified increasingly with Islam, adding force to purism and influencing the complexion of religious practices on the ground. In one sense this recent trend is simply a continuation of the longstanding process of '*masuk Melayu*', that is of 'becoming Malay'. Whether in Indonesia, as especially in Kalimantan, or in Malaysia, as minority groups come increasingly into contact with urban currents they often adopt Malay-Indonesian language and Islam simultaneously. The modern context extends a longstanding process, but now usually with more direct movement to purist forms of Islam.<sup>173</sup> If Islamisation has been a continuing process, it has also been one which has involved continual reformulation of what it is that constitutes Islam in practice.

In Malaysia the *dakwah* movements do some external missionising but can be generally characterised as movements of internal conversion. Notable groups within this ambit include Darul Arqam, a small group centring on a commune near Kuala Lumpur; Jemaat Tabligh, an international movement originating

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<sup>173</sup> D. Miles, *Cutlass and Crescent Moon*, Sydney: Centre for Asian Studies, University of Sydney, 1976 and R. Hefner, *Hindu Javanese*, Princeton, 1985.

in India; and, most importantly, ABIM, a nation wide local movement. Like Muhammadiyah in Indonesia or the Dhammayut sect in Thailand, the Darul Arqam has power beyond its numbers due to tight organisation and the high profile of its school and clinic. In both it draws strongly from traditional practices. The Jemaat Tabligh came to the peninsula in the 1950s and exists throughout the country, but with little formal organisation. ABIM, the Muslim Youth League of Malaysia, was founded in 1971 and now has a membership over 35,000. It sponsors rallies and is well organised throughout the school and university system. It has been strongly connected with international revivalism in Iran and the Arab Middle East, raising consciousness of those areas locally. It attracted a young and well educated membership under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim and continues to emphasise internal purification of practices.

In the newest wave of purification and intensification modern media have produced an increasingly stark, postmodern, variant of Islam. Contemporary purism is not simply a continuation of prewar modernism, it takes a sharper form. Generally in Malaysia during the 1970s and 1980s explicit and publicly indicated adherence of Islamic practices has been strongly on the upswing within the Malay community. The conflation of Malay ethnic and Muslim religious identity has been longstanding, but it is only recently that this has become a focus of constant invocation. Muslim holidays have become more definitively national in scope. Civil servants dress more conservatively, moving away from the British conventions many had adopted in the colonial era. Religious issues have converged with ethnic conflict to a remarkable and uncomfortable degree.

As Malays have moved increasingly into urban environments, largely facilitated by patronage through the bureaucracy but also by movement toward factory labour and away from the farms, they have confronted Chinese domination of the economy and conflict with western values more directly. These contexts have sharpened, rather than decreased, movement toward local values in a more purist form. Local movements have

also been powerfully influenced by the post oil boom increase in the self confidence throughout the Islamic world. In part this is related to a world wide Islamic movement to reject the philosophical baggage which appears to go hand in hand with westernisation. The new strength of economies throughout the Islamic world provided an underpinning for this revival and can be related to the fact that Islamic intellectuals, Edward Said among them, are among the strongest sources of contemporary challenge to western theorising.

Indonesian *dakwah* movements have been increasing in strength since the early 1970s. The government has promoted renewal and reemphasis on Islam, almost in spite of itself. Though significant elements of the national leadership might be privately otherwise inclined, contributions from Suharto's discretionary funds to the *pesantren* have been consistently high from the late 1970s onward. The Ministry of Religion, still preponderantly Muslim, carries out missionary activities, produces publications, and coordinates legal and educational offices which encourage purism. Government ironically goes farther in this respect than many of those it is presumably catering to want. All government buildings have a prayer room to cater to Muslims, the consequence is pressure to use these facilities. Muhammadiyah continues to be active through its many schools and hospitals and, while relatively moderate by the standards of many groups, contributes to continuing Islamisation. The Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia has been under the leadership of Muhammed Natsir, former Masyumi leader and one time Prime Minister.

The previously apparently conservative Nahdatul Ulama has been reinvigorated since the 1970s. We can say that the roots of local Islam have now been nourished by cross fertilisation with international education. Local Islam, previously virtually impermeable for outside observers, who could related better to the articulate modernism of Muhammadiyah, now has its own voice. A dynamic new generation of activists, including Abdurahman Wahid and Nurcholish Madjid, both products of highly charged

modern *pesantrén* education, present it with a radically new image. The *pesantrén* networks have been revitalised and the *tarekats*, which were linked strongly to them earlier on, have regained a new legitimacy. It appears as though the modernist disdain for mysticism of the prewar era, one which drove those so inclined to distance themselves from Islam by associating with independent and explicitly syncretic movements, has shifted. Since the late 1970s the sophistication of Islam has increased its sensitivity.

While from many points of view the government has, in the past two decades, made powerful gestures to neutralise Islamic fundamentalism, within the Islamic community dissatisfactions remain strong. There have been few public demonstrations, but the incidents which have come to the surface have attracted a great deal of publicity. The Kommando Jihad movement was banned in the late 1970s through association with movements to overthrow the government. In 1978 the Gerakan Pemuda Islam (Islamic Youth Movement) was banned. Libyans were associated with movements in Aceh, in 1981 another group was accused of having support from the Ayatollah Khomeini, a Bandung group commandeered a plane in 1980 and in 1985 the bombing of Borobudur was blamed on Muslim extremists.<sup>174</sup> One indication of the government's attitude is that Libya and Iran are listed along with Israel and China as being among the countries citizens may not enter with an Indonesian passport. Many felt the New Order's willingness to accommodate mysticism threatened the position of Islam.

In gaining recognition Indic organisations in Indonesia were pressed into scripturalist styles. As a result, all the national organisations of the world religions in Indonesia are modernist in tone and exclusive in structure, emphasising ritual, text, and doctrine rather than mysticism. New requirements challenged local religious communities to redefine themselves in scriptural terms. This challenge forced Balinese Hindus to redefine their practices during the 1950s. They renewed contact with India in

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<sup>174</sup> von der Mehden, *Religion and Modernization*, p 110.

order to gain the recognition they sought from the Ministry of Religion and similar changes have been necessary within other Asian based religions.<sup>175</sup> Modernism, though usually associated with Muslim organisations, can even be identified within the sphere of the mystical sects. Some Javanese movements are defined by revealed texts and their practices, as in the large and well established Pangestu movement for instance, can be more intellectual than meditative, resembling Protestant, Muhammadiyah or Dhammayut groups in this respect.

In the late 1960s several hundred thousand converts joined Christian Churches and Hindu, Buddhist, and mystical movements were also injected with new vitality through the same pressures which led to those conversions. The small, previously urban, modern Buddhist movements became mass movements, though conversion to Christianity has been more widespread. Modern Indonesian Buddhism has roots among the local Chinese and in *priyayi* circles some of whom came to identify with it through the Theosophical Society of the late colonial era. Only in the postwar period have Buddhist communities reformed on modern lines in Indonesia. Southeast Asian Hindus have also experienced significant reformation. Balinese Hinduism, as folk practice, is complemented by a nationally administered orthodoxy reflecting postwar contacts with modern India.

Reformism has appeared in every religious community. Vietnamese Buddhism had been a syncretic blend of spirit beliefs and Confucianism but was reshaped during the 1920s and 1930s. In the most dynamic phase of the postwar period for Buddhists there, a Vietnamese Buddhist Reunification Congress took place, in the week of the New Year of 1964 at Xa Loi Pagoda in Saigon. The congress aimed to unite the South's Mahayana and Theravada followers through a new modern structure, but only perhaps a

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<sup>175</sup> C. Geertz, "'Internal Conversion' in Contemporary Bali" in his *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, 1973 and J.D. Howell, "Modernizing Religious Reform and the Far Eastern Religions in Twentieth Century Indonesia" in S. Udin ed. *Spectrum*, Jakarta, 1978.

million joined the resulting United Buddhist Association.<sup>176</sup> Six regional groups of monks and two million estimated Theravada followers, mainly from along the Cambodian border, remained unconnected to the federation, and traditional syncretic Buddhism remained strongest at the local level. Movements such as the Arya Samaj, allowing non Indians to convert, have been present in Malaysia. One leading modern Indian teacher with a world wide second generation following, Swami Sivananda, worked as a medical doctor in the Malay peninsula early in this century. Revivals of Vedantic philosophy such as his now complement Tamil trance rituals such as Thaipusam.

### **Continuing syncretic orthodoxies**

Southeast Asia remains a site of encounter between deeply held and widely divergent worldviews. A rich tapestry of ancient traditions is sustained with remarkable force and significant communities derive practices from all of the world faiths in many of their forms. These diverse experiences of reality, shaped by magical animism, esoteric mysticism, traditional piety, scriptural literalism and modern scepticism, intersect routinely in villages, markets and offices. At the same time, because most people still feel their religion is substantive and significant, contention over spiritual convictions is, as we have seen, foregrounded in politics.

Landon stressed that up to World War II imported religions were subordinated to ancestral spirit cults grounded in relatively autonomous villages, that even elites adapted modernity to a worldview shaped by tradition. In the same breath he suggested that the middle of this century marked a turning point, that colonialism and the disruptions of war had definitively shaken the foundations of local life.<sup>177</sup> Most people still live in villages but urban populations have mushroomed. An increasing majority have grown up in a world dominated by modern states rather than ethnicity, by education in schools rather than village ritual

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<sup>176</sup> Schecter, *The New Face of the Buddha*, p204

<sup>177</sup> KP Landon, *Southeast Asia*, Chicago, 1949 pp 202-3.

religion, and by monetarised economies rather than communal cooperation.

The settled rice farming grandparents of today's Southeast Asians bowed to Indic or Chinese styled royalty even in colonial contexts. Now cosmopolitan white collar workers in glass and concrete office blocks, Javanese transmigrants to Kalimantan or Sulawesi, factory women in Malaysia or Thailand, Visayan street people in Manila or prostitutes from the Northeast in Bangkok can hardly imagine cosmological realities or relate to ultimate meanings in the way their grandparents did. The realms of the gods become distant and their connections with people loosen as miracle rice and chemical fertilisers move in--some even say that only older strains of rice are connected to spirits.

Spirits are also less central to social life, as customary and religious law is being replaced rapidly with rationalised and centrally administered justice. Formerly village heads and councils interpreted custom to resolve disputes, theoretically in an atmosphere guided by sensitivity to local spiritual atmospheres. Religious law though significant, especially in Muslim Malaysia, is also marginalised as decisions are coded by Parliaments and interpreted through bureaucratic representatives down to the village level. The spiritual beliefs and practices which are rooted in regional prehistory are unquestionably now declining.

Everywhere old cultures are at risk and spiritual sensibilities die with them. In extreme cases, as in Pol Pot's Kampuchea, minorities such as the Muslim Chams face genocidal policies. At the same time even the apparently benign intrusions of mass tourism have similar and even wider effect, also jeopardising the identities of what were earlier isolated minorities.<sup>178</sup> Changes are also coming through the ways in which previously distinct communities are being tied together and through shifts in generational, class and gender relations. The radical transitions of

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<sup>178</sup> B. Kiernan, "Orphans of Genocide: The Cham Muslims of Kampuchea under Pol Pot", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* Vol 20 No 4 (1988).

mid-century ensured that the generation which came of age during and after World War II has dominated socio-political institutions through most of the region since then and they have set the tones of cultural evolution right into the 1980s through most of the region. Nevertheless the diversity, vitality and depth of religious commitments within Southeast Asia combine so that it remains a rich laboratory for the exploration of religion.

Vibrant ritual enactments embody almost the full spectrum of earlier historical practices, even sacrificial animism remains cohesive in some communities. In Hindu Bali people routinely enter altered states through ritualised trance, as also in Malaysia's annual Thaipusam festival and the *jatilan* and *reok* dancing of Java. They touch realms of consciousness, even when performances are televised, remote from people in industrialised societies but common in the widely dispersed ceremonies of primal peoples, such as the Sakkudei of the Mentawi islands. Meditation practices of Javanese syncretic mystics and Theravada forest monasteries counterpoint traditional orthodox Islam and ritual Buddhism even while the latter are balanced by rationalising modernisms. Vigorous reborn Christianity contrasts with centuries old Catholic and Protestant communities and the syncretism of Philippine faith healers.

In village societies the maintenance of traditional beliefs is still associated with continuing agricultural and life cycle rituals. Continuities within ritual life can be remarkable: even in Bali, long innundated by tourism, ritual practices still mirror those of the prewar era.<sup>179</sup> In the Philippines fiestas celebrate not only holy days and national holidays but also harvests and life-cycle events. Patron saints, as elsewhere in the Catholic world, occupy a position similar to that of guardian spirits in other parts of Southeast Asia. Even among Southeast Asia's widespread Chinese

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<sup>179</sup> This remarkable continuity is evident in the three part documentary film by John Darling, "Bali Triptych" (Bozado Pty Ltd 1988). Part two, "The Path of the Soul", especially compares footage of rituals performed in the 1930s, taken by Mead and Bateson, with his from the 1980s.

migrant population the cohesion of spirit medium cults remains.<sup>180</sup> In Java village life still centres on communal rituals even though they have begun to become expensive to maintain. Financial stresses have not stopped villagers in Kalimantan (Borneo), Bali or Burma from competing to outdo each other in funeral or initiation ceremonies and often these now lead hosts into severe debt. While orthodox Muslims in Indonesia or Malaysia are less likely to overextend in this fashion, some of the same impulse is displaced among them into excesses of giving with Hari Raya, at the end the fast month of Ramadan.

The syncretic traditional religions, notably local versions of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, blended with these undercurrents of local culture and still remain the largest formal communities of believers. Within rural Malay and Indonesian societies traditional syncretic Muslims still far outnumber adherents to the urban based modernisms which extend among them. According to Gourou the central social focus in every village of the Red River Delta was never the Buddhist temple, but the *dinh*, a house for ritual and communal meetings to harmonise with the deities who were the patron spirits of the village. This housed the major agricultural and other minor rituals. For the populace in general ancestral spirits have continued to appear as unquestionably real. Buddhist monks were usually present but not central to village communities.

The resilience of village beliefs in Vietnam was evident in the 1970s when, even after several decades of communist rule, "...village elders were found to be restoring the old ritual processions to the *dinh*, the village communal house, whose mystique--and the politics associated with it--had supposedly been transformed and transposed with the downfall of colonialism."<sup>181</sup> Local Vietnamese rituals combine Buddhism and Confucianism with spiritualist seances, and other elements of

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<sup>180</sup> Cheu Hock Tong, *The Nine Emperor Gods*, Singapore, 1988.

<sup>181</sup> A.B. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, Boston, 1976, p 259.

animism. About ten percent of the population in Southern Vietnam were Catholic in the early 1960s, an estimated 35-40% were considered strong believers in Mahayana Buddhism, the remainder were gauged nominal, meaning that they adhered to a mixture of animism, Taoism and Confucianism.<sup>182</sup>

Throughout the village societies of the lowland Theravada Buddhist regions, including the Lao, Burmese, Khmer and Thai, villagers maintain animistic as well as Buddhist beliefs. Students like Spiro have seen animism and Buddhism as though they are separate systems interacting, but most now analysts now concur with Tambiah, who presented them as sub-complexes within one system.<sup>183</sup> Rites oriented toward summoning and ensuring the presence of the "vital essence" of life, *leipya* in Burmese, *khwan* in Tai, and *pralu'n* in Khmer, represent the presence of ongoing animistic conceptions. Respect for village guardian spirits and interest in the sacred power of places and amulets or ritual objects still combine with indigenous systems of astrology, tattooing and sexual magic and those with systems of merit making, monastic schooling and the doctrine of karma. These are most elaborated in the *nat* cults of Burma, but everywhere through the region practices of spirit possession and healing which are linked to beliefs in life essence remain powerful at the village level.

Observers of lowland villages uniformly note that the village *wat* remains the prime socially integrating institution of rural Thai society. Some argue that the boundaries of villages in central Thailand are defined by participation in *wat* communities. Everywhere participation involves rites associated with agricultural cycles and normative Buddhist celebrations. Village monks commonly involve themselves in labour projects as well as with spiritual or secular teaching. While they may now help build roads or advise local military officers, the religious respect villagers and officials alike demonstrate is still strong. Villagers view monks as a separate class despite the fact that most men have

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<sup>182</sup> Schecter, *The New Face of the Buddha*, p 180.

<sup>183</sup> M. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, New York 1970 and S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand*, Cambridge, 1970.

briefly been ordained. The vast majority of Theravada monks still do not teach, or for that matter even practice, meditation and only a minority of urban lay people who have taken it up on a regular basis. At the same time increasing numbers of monks are actively concerned with trying to reconcile their practices with modernising life. Even many of those who may be influenced by aspiration to move upward socially, also show every indication of seriousness in their meditation practices.

For Javanists religious identification has not been an exclusive matter. Among the traditionalist Muslims, those associated with the Nahdatul Ulama, their Islam is woven into involvement with spirit beliefs. These are embedded within the rituals of marriage and the protective ceremonies marking birth. They are also related to patterns of pilgrimage and spiritual quest which urban and village Muslims regularly make to sacred sites, some of those now being the graves of Muslim saints. Even when converting in the modern period they maintain syncretic tendencies. Hinduism, Hindu Dharma in Indonesia, was exclusively Balinese until 1965, when scattered villages, especially in the mountainous regions of East and Central Java, chose to identify themselves as Hindu. In opting for Hinduism or Buddhism, villagers in Java have done so out of conviction that, among the alternatives presented, the Indic religions are closer to the reality of ongoing traditional practices than modernist Islam.

Within the Hindu and Buddhist spheres there have even been rebels who created new organisations rather than joining the increasingly modernist Hindu or Buddhist hierarchies. Javanists preserve versions of the Indic harking back to syncretic Majapahit, to mysticism rather than scriptural modernism. In the 1970s the Surakarta based Sadhar Mapan advanced Javanist Hindu yogic rather than Balinese ritual practice as contained in the mainstream Parisada Hindu Dharma and Kasogatan, a small tantric styled group, also looked to the Majapahit text *Sanghyang Kamahayanikan* rather than to the purism of many modern Buddhists. In Indonesia even migrant Chinese Buddhism, the only visible Buddhism of the

prewar period, has generally been so emphatically syncretic that it was officially called 'Tridharma', meaning the three teachings and referring to Lao-tzu, Confucius and the Buddha. Temples invoked all three while generally emphasising one, at the same time housing spirit medium practices related to folk ancestral cults.

### **Magical and mystical undercurrents**

Many tribal and village cultures preserve their commitment to rituals and respect for the spirits of sacred sites. Spiritually linked healing practices remain widespread, as are possession cults and magical undercurrents within urban populations. Ordinary people still use amulets and folk medicines; students visit the graves of grandparents to contact spirits, now perhaps as an aid to success in examinations; and rituals at sacred springs still help others find lovers. In the cities it is clear that even those who participate in the most modern sectors of the economy still actively seek and employ magic whether when dealing with their health or in aiming to increase their wealth. As an undercurrent of local practice interest in magic remains powerful among a large percentage of those associated also with formal religious systems.

At the same time national governments also most actively suppress the most obviously magical and millenarian elements of local religion. They do so partly for ideological reasons, relating to the low status such practices hold within modernising scientism, but also because such movements are instrumentally and power oriented, meaning they can become sources of challenge to those in power. In effect governments favour formalised orthodoxies, which they can manipulate more easily and consistently make attempts to promote superstructures, umbrella associations, even for the mystical movements which are not linked to formal religions. In socialist Vietnam, for example, there has been willingness to compromise with Buddhism, allowing it a central committee and extending to the establishment of a High Level School of Vietnamese Buddhist studies. On the other hand the government is actively hostile to popular millenarianism, which it

sees as a throwback to outdated superstitions.<sup>184</sup>

Alongside traditional religions there have been substantial new sectarian movements everywhere in Southeast Asia. These too take new form in the modern era, adopting organisational patterns which characterise other spheres of social life, even while aiming to preserve or reformulate older styles of syncretic and mystical religion. Spontaneous local and unregulated practices, especially those related to healing and growing initially from shamanic cultures, are easy to ignore in focusing on institutionalised syncretic mysticism. The faith healers of the Philippines, blend animism with Catholicism and use imagery of medical operation as a shamanic ploy to facilitate healing, are but one example of a widespread pattern. At the local level everywhere there are innumerable individual practitioners who self consciously work with spiritual powers to heal. These healers and those who seek help from them represent a much larger percentage of local populations than those who join formal organisations.

However the numbers of those involved in syncretic mystical sects have been substantial. In Vietnam the Hoa Hao sect, founded in 1939, claimed a membership of 450,000 in 1964 in the Province of Ang Giang alone and two million overall. It has been essentially a local form of Buddhism, but with emphasis on traditional folk practices rather than the more scriptural style of the Thien (Zen) revivalist monks, who began to gain strength from the 1930s onward. Teachings included not only a strong element of millenarianism but also emphasis on moral reform. In 1966 the Cao Dai, founded in 1925, was estimated to have between one and two million members. It recognised the revelations received by the prophets of all the major world religions, somewhat in the fashion of Ba'hai, presenting them all as vehicles of God's purpose in the world in the past.

In Cao Dai the presence of belief in the one God stands

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<sup>184</sup> D.J. Steinberg ed. *In Search of Southeast Asia*, Sydney, 1987, p 465.

above notions of karma and reincarnation, as is also the case in many Javanese movements. Syncretism, in the context of most of these modern movements, has meant that they have adopted significant new elements of thought, not only from Christianity, but also from modern science, into frameworks which prioritise personal experiential religion. In Burma large numbers of Chin followed a syncretic movement which, like other millenarian movements since the late 19th century, adopted aspects of Christianity. The Pau Chin Hau, can be interpreted as a movement which adopted elements of Christianity as an indigenous democratisation movement which countered both traditional chiefly authority and the intensification of Burmese control.<sup>185</sup>

Lay practices of *vipassana*, of insight meditation, previously the domain of monks, have been especially prominent in Burma since early in the century and they are represented in the postwar period through teachings such as those of U Ba Kin and Mahasi Sayadaw. The growth of new styles of and the extension of contexts for insight (*vipassana*) meditation had roots early in the century, but after 1950 was formally encouraged, particularly by state sponsorship of meditation centres. These were recognised in varying grades and then registered and granted subsidies. From an early stage these centres catered to foreign students of Buddhism. Since the 1950s small groups of foreign students have always been present and in this sector Burma has never been completely closed. Within that sphere Mahasi Sayadaw occupies a special place, due especially to the patronage provided to him during the 1950s by the U Nu government.

In Thailand the most internationally known exponent of modern Buddhist mediation has been Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, who has presided over the forest hermitage of Suan Mokh in the South. While doctrinally orthodox and borrowing from Zen he presents a view of Buddhism grounded in this worldly action, relevant not cosmologically as though in some future life, but in terms of its

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<sup>185</sup> Keyes, *The Golden Peninula* p 49.

relation to continually evolving living situations, that states of *samsara* and *nirvana* are interiorised conditions in the here and now. He set himself early on against the notion that Buddhism was fatalistic and in relation to the teachings of all religions argued for emphasis on practical realisation. In the political context his teachings can be styled a form of Buddhist socialism, one which rejected both communist and capitalist materialisms. He has been able to speak to many of the younger more educated Buddhists who are trying to reconcile their traditional faith with modern civic action.

There have been several other equally significant schools of *vipassana* practice extending from the *sangha* to Thai laity and even overseas. In the early 20th century the meditation master Achaan Mun, who spent most of his career in the Northeast of Thailand, revived the longstanding tradition of forest monastic disciplines. His disciples are now scattered throughout the country, having founded their own schools of meditation for both monks and laity. His most noted follower, Achaan Chaa of Wat Pah Pong in Ubon Province, attracted continuous patronage from Bangkok and has sent disciples to establish forest meditation centres in England and Australia.

The prominence of *vipassana* movements draws our attention to internal and non political aspects of modernising mystical religion. In them we can see that religious styles are self consciously adapted to changing urban lifestyles and modern education. The overall effect of modernising meditative practices is a new strength of emphasis on the possibility of contributing positively through social action by being more tuned and egoless--thus in contemporary Buddhism there is a positive evaluation of social actions. The gap between monk and laity, at least with respect to spiritual practices, is also being reformed and in some respects closed. There can be no doubt that the meditation movements, in and out of the *sangha*, represent an active repositioning as well as a continuation of commitment to spiritual realisation.

Within Indonesia changes in the relationship between politics and religion have altered the context and internal structures of mysticism. Sukarno's voice had joined others in warnings against black magic, a recurrent issue throughout the 1960s. Recognised movements have had to abjure interest in political power, as only apolitical movements have legitimacy. The modern context of religious plurality, Islamic strength, and secular government pressures Javanists into organisations defined as purely mystical, separating mysticism from the magical and millennial elements to which it was bound by tradition. The term '*kejawen*' refers to traditional styles within which spirit relations, magic powers, and millennial expectations were fundamental. Such movements remain as a substratum of popular outlook and cultic movement. At the same time new forms of mysticism have risen out of Javanist orientations.

Repression of millennial movements has been recurrent. In 1967 the Mbah Suro movement was suppressed after it spread rumours of radical change from its centre near Ngawi; in 1968 the Java wide Manunggal movement was outlawed after a public trial. Tens of thousands of members, some highly placed military and civilian officials paid homage to their *guru*, Romo Semana. The government felt this evoked a competing court, defenders argued that it was ordinary respect for an elder. The government announced it had uncovered an attempted coup in September 1976. It centred on Sawito, who had visited power points and claimed to have been given authority previously held by Semar. He gathered elite signatures to a document criticising the moral fibre of Suharto. Former Vice-President Hatta and national religious leaders, whose signatures appeared on the document, denied having known what was in it, but it was taken seriously. From outside Sawito's threat seemed trivial, but the magnitude of Suharto's response demonstrated vulnerability, special fear of mystical claims that he lacked the *wahyu*, the divine sanction on which power rests.

Mysticism refers to the inner, spiritual and esoteric dimension within all religion and also to beliefs, practices and

movements defined by focus on realisation. There are hundreds of movements. Subagya listed 288 in 1973; an inventory in 1980 registered 160; but there is no definitive listing.<sup>186</sup> Many groups are small, local and ephemeral, some so informal they never merit note. *Tarekats*, the Sufi movements, are mystical, but because their affiliation with Islam is intrinsic they are not bracketed with independent movements. Several dozen movements have Java wide or genuinely Indonesian membership. These include Pangestu, Subud, Sapta Darma, Ilmu Sejati, Sumarah and Hardopusoro. A few claim memberships over one hundred thousand but most of them have at best several thousand core members.

Such movements existed within the colonial framework but were often secretive. They came into view during the revolutionary fighting of the late 1940s. Then, paralleling the organising process of the 1950s through all sectors of society, major movements adopted formal patterns with elected officers, minutes, conferences and all. This process was in part spontaneous, in part a response to the new demand for records of membership and meetings on the part of government agencies. Members use Javanese in daily life and group meetings, but Indonesian is used for organisational matters. Traditional cults focused on charismatic guru, modern movements have semi-rationalised structures. Leaders are distinguished from spiritual teachers and if the patronage model remains strong in practice theory no longer places it at the heart of organisation.

Organisations adopt the administrative hierarchy common to all national organisations, but growing care in the keeping of membership lists is often mainly to facilitate relations with supervising bodies. In the early 1950s a number of movements argued that they deserved recognition as separate religions, suggesting that in the context of national independence it would be an anomaly if only 'imported' religions received government approval. Sapta Darma, maintained that argument into the 1970s,

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<sup>186</sup> R. Subagya, *Kepercayaan dan Agama*, Yogyakarta, 1973, p 129-138.

but most accepted early on that they were unlikely to get recognition as religions because the violent response that would have brought from Muslims precluded it.

Major sects are relatively open in structure and streamlined in practice, esoteric tendencies decline with emphasis on instrumental magic, ancestral spirits, and occult powers. Healing plays a major role in sects such as Subud and Sapto Darma, but is balanced by emphasis on God's responsibility for effecting cures. Monotheistic emphasis is reflected in often puritanical distaste for the possession cults characteristic of tradition. Similarly, movements speak of meditation as *sujud* (surrender) or *panembah* (prayer) rather than *semadi*. The Indic resonance of the latter renders it suspect to Islam, which sees *semadi* as entry into a Godless void because it usually comes without the notion of personalised divinity.

Popular association of mysticism with occultism, no less than analytical association of mystical gnosis with instrumental effects, represent confusion of forms for essence. The major national movements disassociate themselves from occultism, emphasising consciousness of God rather than culturally rooted symbols and spirits. This shift of emphasis is not simply a response to the politicised context of Javanese mysticism. The polarity is rooted within early Indic culture and it also represents penetration of Semitic monotheism into the Javanist world. Javanist tradition prioritised tantric styled identification of consciousness and powers, but also contained Buddhist emphasis on the void as a counter to that. Tantric patterns continue implicitly to have strength in village practices, the *danhyang* cults, and in movements such as Sadhar Mapan and Manunggal. But the Buddhist tradition and mystical separation of consciousness from any visible effects is also rooted in a tradition extending back over a millennium, one which has dovetailed with modern pressures to produce more exclusive emphasis on consciousness.

Mystical movements in Indonesia are mainly Javanese in origin and composition and see their practices as rooted in ageless indigenous wisdom. The movements are not equivalent to Sufism,

which is integrally tied to a 'world religion', but rather to culturally based traditions such as Taoism or Shinto. Sufism and Zen place emphasis on lineages connecting living masters to Mohammed and the Buddha. In Javanism such lineage is denied not just as a counter to Islamic claims that it is derivative, but also as an assertion that religious knowledge comes direct from God, in short assertion that these 'faith' movements are mystical in the fundamental sense of the term.

### **Resonances of the substratum in time**

Through the cycles of history Sinic, Indic, Islamic, and European forces have been superimposed on Southeast Asia. Each worked in some sense to claim it, to recast society within borrowed models. Local cultural memories nevertheless preserve senses of primal identity and at the moment still struggle to assert those through modern forms. Nationalist culture began to take root at the turn of the century, just as the colonial framework defined the boundaries of the contemporary state. Now metropolitan super cultures radiate from the new national centres, promoting new languages and the growth of a supraethnic identity they spread through the bureaucracy, schools, literature, electronic media, and, not least, the military. But the national revolutions have not been just a matter of achieving political and economic independence, they also involve assertion of identity in autonomous rather than derivative terms. Following the revolutions, the forces of modernity appeared to define national governments through models borrowed from the west and dominant elites, whether secular or religious, comprised the most westernised Southeast Asians. Tension between trajectories of growing global integration and resurgent primal identity combine to generate the pressures under which contemporary Southeast Asians labour.

The gestalt provided by the substratum has suggested that local peoples have appropriated symbolic, social and economic

systems in each historical phase. Each adaptation involved restructuring of internal as well as reordering of external relations in a context of increasing integration into global networks. Traditional societies blended animistic and classical influences with world religions. As Islamic, Catholic and Theravada patterns became entrenched they were amenable to synthesis, blending with ancestral beliefs and rituals. Consolidation of a Theravada pattern involved no major conceptual break with the also Indic mold of previous classical states. Continuities are evident in traditional schooling and ritual. Whether in Islam, Catholicism or Theravada the focus of attention remained participatory and in this respect reminiscent of earlier animistic or Indic ritual. Ritual repetition, primary in all systems, infused sound with sacral power so that it resonated with states of inner being as much in Arabic, Pali, or Latin as it did earlier in Sanskrit.<sup>187</sup>

Emphasis on the role of Sufism in conversion of the archipelago drew attention to the openness of the line between Islamic and pre-Islamic archipelago cultures.<sup>188</sup> Examination of interplay between Islam and *adat*, or local custom, images that as a gradual dialectical redefinition within archipelago Islam.<sup>189</sup> The earlier supposed disjunction between Islam and the substratum was not so severe as is implied through the scriptural view of religion, prevalent underlying earlier interpretations.<sup>190</sup> Though traditional Southeast Asian Islam was more mystical than earlier recognised, tensions between customary spirit beliefs and doctrinal orthodoxy nevertheless began early, as 17th century Acehnese and Javanese disputes indicate.<sup>191</sup> Presumption that Catholicism was more radical a break than Islam would also be unjustified. Syncretism predominated within the Hispanization of the Philippines and Catholicism has been deeply domesticated to

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187 (Tambiah 1970 p 195)

188 Johns (1961)

189 Abdullah's (1966), as do recent studies (1983)

190 Mature grasp of Islam, as in Woodward (1988)

191 al Attas (1966; Johns (1965)

Tagalog purposes.<sup>192</sup>

Theravada Buddhism has generated other contradictions, but does not problematise the substratum in the way Islam has. Buddhist theory fits spirits into a continuum everybody is placed on and core scriptures incorporate spirit beliefs.<sup>193</sup> Vietnamese also blended folk beliefs relatively comfortably with Chinese derivatives. Recent Chinese migrants brought folk religious patterns from the substratum of their ancestral villages in South China, compounding guardian spirits with Confucianism and Buddhism. Syncretism was characteristic among all local Chinese communities, as they had brought folk southern Chinese religion with them. Chinese temples still draw variously on elements of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Within all traditional religious domains people drew on earlier popular magic as well as later ritual, maintaining an intuitive sense of what religious experience essentially involves.

At the social level a convergent analysis can be maintained to distinguish the impact of Islam and Theravada in relation to the substratum. In Thailand the boundaries of village society have been defined by relationships to Theravada temples, community and religious identities coincide. In Islam emphasis on law and ritual prescribe exclusive commitment as core profession. The territory of submission, *dar al-islam*, is defined by profession and ritual prayer and implicitly marks off those who do not belong. Traditional Islamic schools draw students from dispersed areas so the resulting sense of community correlated with intensity of personal commitment, institutional engagement, and lifestyle rather than with geographical community, as in Buddhism. Both doctrinal theory and the social nexus interweaving temples with community help explain the relatively harmonious relationship between Buddhism and the substratum.

Generally we can say that religion has been more politically volatile in island Southeast Asia than on the mainland and that

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<sup>192</sup> Phelan (1959) Iletto (1979)

<sup>193</sup> Lester (1973 pp 45, 135)

this correlates to, being partly explained by, contrasting Semitic and Indic postures on syncretism, differing attitudes toward allowance of interchange between orthodoxy and the substratum of folk magic. In any case the syncretic mentality of earlier practices did not emphasise pre-occupation with boundaries, community was formed in and focussed on courts, schools or monasteries. Traditional religious ideologies everywhere did not distinguish religious and political domains as we now do. This break became more severe only with the development of modernism beginning in the 19th century.

Scriptural religion allowed such distinction and arose through institutions and technologies mediated by colonialism.<sup>194</sup> Whether in the Malay, Thai or Vietnamese cases scripturalism defined identities in increasingly exclusive and literal terms, generating religious boundaries paralleling the geographical limits produced by imperialism. The context of and concern for boundaries produced new modes of contention and increasing division between religion and politics. This happened despite the insistence of many Muslims and Buddhists that those remain intrinsically related, as was evident in nationalism throughout the region.<sup>195</sup> To put this point more properly, some local actors have been consistently unable to imagine these as separate; their commitment has still been to spiritual purposes expressed only sometimes through what we call political process.

In all contemporary polities in the region states have aimed to construct entities which link peasant and tribal structures to national centers. This integrative revolution related urban structures to the substratum within national territories to a previously unimagined extent and explains much of the way national politics have drawn from, and then worked to contain, popular impulses.<sup>196</sup> Peasants have not distinguished as we might

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<sup>194</sup> Geertz (1971)

<sup>195</sup> von der Mehden (1963)

<sup>196</sup> Geertz (1973 ch 10)

between nationalism, millenarianism and communism. Religious conflicts have often thus underlied and related directly even to those political movements which are framed in secular political terms on the surface. In several notable cases the force behind uprisings which are communist, in ideological terms at the top, has been closer to the animism of the substratum at base.

Indonesian tensions in the initial period after independence were clearly shaped in part by division between syncretic and modernist Muslims.<sup>197</sup> The Indonesian Communist Party has been widely interpreted as having, in its effective operation in the end, represented the most syncretically oriented Javanese, those most committed to patterns rooted in the substratum. The party was strongest, certainly in its numerical membership, among syncretic Javanese; opposition to it was also fiercest from orthodox Muslims youth, who along with the army helped eliminate the party in the mid 1960's. The party became a vehicle for *abangan* Javanese interests through the fact that it made an effort to forge a new link between peasant society and politics at the centre.<sup>198</sup>

The notion of the substratum also helps us grasp the Vietnamese wars of independence. The French scholar Mus emphasised that French and American protagonists did not see the political situation or issues in the same terms as Vietnamese. Westerners tended to be aware of and pay attention to events in urban centres, the sites colonialism created, and never knew the hearts and minds of villagers. He evoked images of primal village spirituality and cosmological court traditions to suggest local perspectives.<sup>199</sup> His analysis suggested that most of the Vietnamese population concluded in 1945 that the 'mandate of heaven', the mantle of nationalism in our terms, had clearly fallen on Ho Chi Minh. Drawing attention to cultural miscommunication as an aspect of the Vietnamese wars does not imply it is the only

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<sup>197</sup> highlighted by Geertz (1976) and Jay (1963).

<sup>198</sup> Mortimer (1974)

<sup>199</sup> ref to Mus

element worth considering.

But tragic events such as those of Indochina recur, in Kampuchea they continue, and remind us that comprehension is a prerequisite to constructive communication. Enlarging our worldview to subsume another lies beyond translating other worlds into our established frameworks. The Vietnam wars represent powerful evidence that societies, insofar as we can speak of collective consciousness, misread each other in the same way that individuals may. Western powers remained oblivious of both the pervasive power of and radically different attitudes present within village society. The Indonesian and Vietnamese illustrations are but two suggestions of the ways substructures surface through social contention in the recent past. Animism is relevant to understanding both popular movements and Marcos ideology in Philippine politics.<sup>200</sup> The resonances of revolutionary ideology and earlier religion in Burma are analogous to those Geertz and Anderson noted for Indonesia or Mus for the Vietnamese.<sup>201</sup>

At another level, through the formation of neotraditional political ideologies, examples from the contemporary period suggest that early beliefs about power still have relevance. Sukarno emphasised slogans and symbols in an effort to subsume diversity within one vision of the world. He claimed, in syncretic terms, to be simultaneously a Nationalist, Marxist and Muslim and argued that these were not different in essence. A similar emphasis existed in U Nu's Burma, as his sense of socialist Buddhism highlighted underlying similarities between these frameworks and translated the national revolution into Buddhist notions of merit-making, reciprocity and equality. Another exemplar of this style has been Sihanouk, who throughout his career has tried to work as a balancer, to balance Thailand against Vietnam, East against West.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Sukarno concentrated on

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<sup>200</sup> McCoy (1982) linked them to the same wider patterns I note

<sup>201</sup> Sarkisyanz (1965)

maintaining consensus among the elite, among those who were political voices in the capital. When it looked as though elections and the rise of the Communists threatened elite consensus he insisted that Indonesians had to formulate their own style. He invoked notions of *gotong-royong* and *musyawarah-mufakat*, traditions of mutual help and consensual community, within a nationalism welded to Marxism and Islam. In his terms problems arise from the fact that people catch the embers rather than the flame of these systems, they became dogmatic literalists. He argued he was not against Islam, but the corruptions of practice, and held that his ability to synthesise depended on capacity to see the essence rather than just outward forms of systems. His thus thoroughly syncretic approach suggests precisely the conjunction of consciousness and power emphasised within traditional systems.

As a communal substructure within Southeast Asia the substratum is certainly now both breaking down and becoming less visible as it disintegrates. But at times, as in eastern Europe with the turn of the decade, superstructural cracks reveal cultural forces which had been obscured by political oppression. Ethnic and state identities had been submerged within umbrella structures, but surfaced with an intensity and trauma commensurate with preceding repression. Powerful popular movements such as those recently in Poland or the Philippines combine with less dramatic instances to remind us that long repressed and unspoken forces can be sustained, sometimes bursting through powerful hegemonies. Even when peoples have been declared extinct, as some native Australians or Americans have at times been, renewal of identities remains possible and often become, through 'reinvention', sources of inspiration in the present.

Casting an eye back through time, we can say that everywhere external influences have been transformed, reworked and used by local systems which have had ancestral spirits at their heart, that the template world religions have fitted into is

animistic. There is no doubt that guardian spirit cults and magical practices also still percolate below the surface throughout Southeast Asia. Malay spiritual specialists can be linked not only to shamanism but also to shaivism and sufism; the strands of Malay religious history wove into a pattern based on a pre-historic systems. Kalijaga's conversion is presented in Javanese mythical histories as a fulfillment of earlier Javanese ideals through Islam, without implying insignificance to the shift. Animistic healing practices transcend boundaries between Buddhism and Islam among Thais and Malays.

Structural breaks in spiritual practice occur and these are clearly present when burial practices change or there is a transition from a multiplicity of deities to one God. But continuities are also often remarkable and subtle. In Java the establishment of a saint cults became a new cover for an old pattern of spirit contacts. If local Muslims meditate on the graves of the *walisanga* in search of magical powers we may question whether the primary modality of their spiritual life is Islamic. In New Order Indonesia Suharto's grave complex mimics earlier Indic styles and the enshrinement of Sultan Agung as a national hero suggests dynastic claims to a guardian ancestor. Spirit houses complement Buddhist temples in Thailand, the mosque becomes a gateway to grave shrines in Java, and claims to royal power in Burma or Java still seem to depend on relations with ancestral figures.

There has been a clear trajectory within the religious sphere in postwar Southeast Asia and it has been a major area of domestic concern. The dominant trajectory has been that of increasing scripturalism, increasing force to outlooks associated with the west but reflected locally in a range of unique local adaptations. Colonial students of Theravada or of Islam suggested that the Thai or Javanese were not 'really' Buddhist or Muslim. Their view derived from a textual sense of religion and, in the face of animistic practices, they could only see claims to membership in

world religions as a facade. The traditional syncretism of Southeast Asians did not mean that they did not belong within the sphere of the world religions they associated with, it meant that the religions themselves were syncretic.

Now everywhere clearer demarcation of religious communities has paralleled the modern establishment of national boundaries mediated initially by colonialism. Syncretic styles of religion had not focused on boundaries, but on courts or monasteries. Those had existed in a hierarchical world conceived as requiring progress through layers of knowledge, guided by apprenticeships analogous to those in other domains of traditional learning, to a mystically conceived centre. Scripturalism redefined individual experience as literal and social identification as exclusive, thus tensions increased, intersecting also in new ways with political process. Buddhists felt their conviction as an element of revolution in Burma and many Muslims held that their revolutions should lead to an Islamic state.

Paradoxically the strength of adherence to exclusivism undermined its realisation in a context crosscut by social and religious pluralism. The nature of tensions between communities was transformed through the growth of the scripturalist community. Scripturalism has meant that religion has been defined in increasingly concrete terms. Scriptures, rituals, and doctrines are definable; the mystical is not. Modern structures have meant that definition and distinction have been of increasing importance. This has highlighted differences and increased tensions by sharpening the lines of contrast. Within the traditional religious world there was a layered cosmos, a hierarchical structure in nature and within consciousness. Indianised states were defined cosmologically by their centres; now states are defined geographically by their borders.

The same shift has taken place within religious communities, as modernity has flattened local senses of spiritual space. Religious communities tend now to be closed and with clear boundaries, not open ended and fluid, boundaries have arisen in precisely the same way that political boundaries have and as a

result of the same forces. Even in the new meditation movements boundaries sharpen and earlier styles of mystical, millenarian and syncretic spiritual practice, however strong as a substratum throughout the region, are giving way. These currents are now also counterpointed by vigorous secularism and equally modern fundamentalism. The spirit realms, once central to local maintenance of balanced relations with ancestral culture and the physical environment, now appear to be receding along with the forests as a developmental world view advances.

Radical though the changes of the postwar period have been, spiritual values and issues remain pervasively and surprisingly prominent. It is instructive, for example, that even in the secular state of Vietnam self conscious appeal to spirituality remains. Vietnamese communist literary critics commented in 1970 on the American Susan Sontag's critique of the *Tale of Kieu*, their classic poetic novel of the early 1800s. They observed without reservation that she was deeply socialised into the individualistic consciousness of the modern west and unable to grasp the 'limitless richness' of the Vietnamese soul or, with that, the value and emphasis within its culture on communal sharing.<sup>202</sup> Spiritual values can thus appear to remain prominent even within cultures which adhere to what most westerners identify as a materialistic ideology.

New art forms recast the social rituals of everyday life in urban contexts. In them we see both traces of earlier forms and radical steps into new worlds. Peacock's study of the *ludruk* theatre in the early 1960s, a proletarian drama still popular in parts of Java, if less than it used to be, presented it as a 'rite of modernisation'. The themes and dramatic form invoked for urban vision, in a way that local film production has since taken over, ritual visions of access to material progress. Even the modes of presentation replicated traditional drama, in the nature of concentration displayed by actors, as they virtually unconsciously

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<sup>202</sup> Woodside, *Community and Revolution*, p 307.

drew on bodily modes of learning and dance resonating with tradition.<sup>203</sup> *Ludruk* has taught some urban publics in the postwar era in the same way earlier *wayang* spoke, and still also speaks, to traditional audiences.

In the development of tourist industries there is an ironic rebound affecting local cultures. Apart from the fact that tourism is itself a powerful instrument of new culture, urban and internationally oriented Southeast Asians are themselves increasingly positioned as tourists in relation to communities who retain what are now packaged, for tourist purposes, as 'indigenous' and authentic culture. In areas particularly geared to tourism, such as Bali or Toraja in Indonesia, production of art is separated in new ways from the ritual context it previously sat within. This has an affect also, however inadvertently nevertheless profound, on those engaged in the artistic productions at issue. They imagine themselves and even become the museumised specimen the commodification of their culture, though packaging of tourism as a national industry, aims to turn them into.

Within elite sectors many people now profess the view that tradition inhibits development. This belief, a common borrowing from scientism, applies most emphatically among modernising medical workers who contest earlier healing practices. Apart from the self confidence evident in radical religious and mystical circles, there is little confidence that western systems of knowledge can be challenged on their own grounds. But even many of those who profess modernity do so strictly in rhetoric. In their public life within modern institutions educated people in the region believe they have to play roles expected by logics modernity represents. Some Indonesian lecturers in psychology or politics thus teach only western theories while remaining privately most motivated by traditional visions. Tambiah argues that commitment to Buddhism has not declined even though expression in organisations, as in numbers in the monkhood, may have

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<sup>203</sup> J. Peacock, *Rites of Modernization*, Chicago, 1968, p 242-3.

dropped.<sup>204</sup> It is most likely that the extent and depth of religiosity has not changed so much as the way it is socially articulated and publicly expressed.

Modernist commitments have implications for experience. Traditions emphasised intuitive aspects of religion; modern styles prioritise the intellectual. Each modernism disentangles what it presents as the essence of religion from ritual, mythic, and intuitive aspects. Education in *wat* or *madrasah* was defined by attunement through sacred language and significance lay in the act of chanting, emphasis was on experience as such, not on understanding of or abstraction about it. Within modernism emphasis falls on written words everybody has access to and the defining features of belief are outside and apart from experience--emphasis on rational apprehension is a corollary. As community is defined increasingly through literally seen and logically understand forms, there has been a shift of emphasis from the heart to the head, from the intuition to the intellect. People are now more likely to have faith in religion rather than accepting it implicitly as a system everyone belongs to.

The pervasiveness of concern with spirituality in Southeast Asia remains despite materially directed ideologies from above and social stresses from below. The most significant changes have been not in allegiances, but in the ways symbols mediate access to what Southeast Asians in this era are able to know or believe as real. The most obvious change has been in the *nature* of adherence to beliefs, in the tendency to hold convictions as ideological systems. In earlier periods people breathed their religion, as an integral and multidimensional part of a given social atmosphere. Within the now more pluralistic world, religions assume increasingly distinct conceptual and institutional forms. In this era of globalisation and encounter no culture or religion, indeed no system of symbols, appears able to claim the exclusive grip it used to. But beyond formal systems and in everyday transactions there

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<sup>204</sup> Tambiah, *World Conqueror*, pp 267-268.

are pervasive and subtle ways in which earlier modes of awareness are maintained tacitly. These, along with the surface changes of modern life, still deserve notice if we are to register the cultural world of Southeast Asians today.