

Part One

PRESENT AND PAST

This part of the book outlines the emergence of the main countries of modern Southeast Asia. Those in the island part of Southeast Asia – Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and the Philippines – are considered first, then those of the mainland, in particular Burma, Vietnam and Thailand. The continuities, it may be argued, are greater in the case of the latter group than in the case of the former, but there are both continuity and discontinuity in all cases. Nor is their history merely a differentiated working-out of the relationship of East and West. It is longer and far more complicated. In these summaries, the focus is on their previous history, on their relations with Europe, on nationalism, and on the establishment and character of the independent states after the Second World War.

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INDONESIA

Indonesia has a long history, and a long history of connection with the rest of the world, but not as the state of Indonesia. The ancient states of the archipelago are known to us as a result of records, often Chinese, and of inscriptions and monuments, like those in central Java. The work of historians, in particular Georges Coedes and O. W. Wolters, has recalled the kingdom of Sri Vijaya, which seems to have centred in the region of Palembang from the late eighth century CE. States also emerged in Java, the greatest of which was to be the Majapahit empire, which flourished in the fifteenth century CE. Though its influence was considerable and its political ambit wide, it did not extend over all present-day Indonesia. But its existence was an inspiration to Indonesian nationalists, such as Sukarno.¹

In the sixteenth century the world became one, though only through European expansion, and as a result it was shaped in part by European power and aspiration. The Portuguese and Spanish voyages ‘first made humanity conscious however dimly, of its essential unity’.² The Indonesian islands were drawn into that world by the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Spaniards, and the English, and also by others, Indonesians and Chinese, who reacted to them or utilised the opportunities that were opened up. Among the Europeans, the Dutch made themselves dominant during the seventeenth century CE. They founded Batavia in 1619, secured Melaka in 1641, conquered parts of Maluku, the spice islands, and during the succeeding century and a half extended their control over much of Java. But they were not attempting to build an Indonesian state. There were other centres of economic and political activity in the archipelago. Those they did not eliminate, though they often involved other rulers in commercial treaties and contracts. Furthermore, their network of possessions and treaties did not extend merely to the archipelago. Batavia was not the capital of an Indonesian realm. It was the centre of the Asia-wide activities of the VOC, extending from the Persian Gulf to Japan, with settlements on the Indian sub-continent as well as in the archipelago, and with a remote outpost in Nagasaki harbour.

In face of changing economic and political conditions, and of rivalry from the British, the Dutch began in the eighteenth century to focus more on their expanding realm in Java, for which Melaka increasingly became an outpost. That is evident, for example, with the activities of Governor-General van

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Imhoff. But it was only in the early nineteenth century that the Dutch set about building a state they called Netherlands India. The old company had finally been terminated in 1799. During the French wars, the restructuring of the state at home was paralleled by attempts to restructure what became its possessions abroad. Napoleon's brother was put on a new throne, and Governor-General Daendels sought to re-make Java in preparation to resist a British invasion. The defeat of Napoleon in 1814–15 led in France to the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. In the Netherlands, initially expanded to include the Belgian provinces as well as the old Dutch Republic, a new monarchy was created, the Orange princes who had been hereditary Stadhouders of the Republic now becoming kings. A Commission-General was sent out to the Indies.

Even now, though the Dutch shed their possessions on the sub-continent, their possessions in the Indies were not an integrated whole. Nor was the relationship with the metropolis yet clear: in some sense it was formally colonial, in another the islands were an appanage of the monarchy. Both these factors affected the development of the relationship of the archipelago with the rest of the world. Concentrating on the islands after their losses in India, the Dutch concentrated on Java in particular: their claims in other parts of their archipelago often rested, as in the Company's time, on contracts with the rulers, and were seldom backed up by formal possession. The aim, indeed, was still to profit, rather than to rule. The relationship between this entity, or collection of entities, and the metropolis also reflected that. And the relationship with other powers was affected by their readiness to accept Dutch claims, the ability of the Dutch to enforce them, and the Indonesian rulers' ability to sustain their independence in such a situation. In general the creation of Netherlands India was still very much in process. 'The war against the Rajas of Bali' in the 1840s 'was in many ways an uncharacteristic occurrence, a deviation from the general non-interventionist line'.³ But, slow though it might be, the process did involve a loss of international personality on the part of the Indonesian states. By 1848 only a few were, as the Europeans would say, *de jure* independent of the Dutch, though many were *de facto* independent. One of the former was the sultanate of Aceh. Even after the three-stage war with Bali, the Dutch did not at first install a regular administration.

The Belgian revolution of 1830 had deprived the Orange monarchy of its southern provinces, though King Willem I refused for the greater part of a decade to accept the outcome. The year 1848, one of European revolution, did not overthrow the monarchy, but it challenged the Dutch state, and in turn brought changes to the Indies. It encouraged new attempts to round out the realm inasmuch as it opened the way to an emergent Dutch capitalism. At the same time, the Netherlands States-General gained a role in the governance of the Indies, from which it had hitherto been excluded.

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Governments had acted till then, as Sloet tot Oldhuis put it, as if ‘the colonies did not concern the Nation and consequently should lie outside its circle of cognizance, like a sort of crown domain’.⁴ Coupled, therefore, with capitalist penetration, there was an attempt to assert a public responsibility for the empire. That might mean more extensive and more intrusive government: it might also mean a more accountable form of government. Changes in one term of the series affected the other two. The realm, increasingly described as, for example in the Agrarian Law of 1870, a ‘state’,⁵ became more integrated. At the same time its relationship with the outside world became more explicitly and more completely colonial. After a prolonged struggle Aceh lost its independence. So did Bali and Lombok. Though the realm yet remained a congeries of directly and indirectly ruled territories – there were 288 ‘self-governments’ in the outer islands in the 1920s⁶ – no Indonesian ruler now had contact with the rest of the world other than through the Dutch.

There was indeed a tension between the urge to integrate and the urge to control. Earlier in the nineteenth century, the Indies government, like the Company before it, had ruled on the cheap: it relied on native rulers, and even where it ruled directly, on native instrumentality. It wanted an integrated realm. But it also wanted to avoid challenge from within as well as challenge from without. Its realm-building, generally a slow process, was always an irregular one. The ‘short declaration’ that, at the end of the Aceh war, was to displace the more elaborate contracts with many of the rulers, was a step towards regularisation, but not a revolution. ‘Peace and order’, the watchwords of Baud, Colonial Minister and Governor-General before 1848, remained significant for a small colonial power that was attempting a large task.

Furthermore, its priorities, again not unlike the Company’s, remained economic. The Dutch endeavour, as Clifford Geertz put it, was from the economic point of view ‘one long endeavour to bring Indonesia’s crops into the modern world, but not her people’.⁷ A policy of peace and order was designed to avoid trouble that a weak power could not face, and which might even risk the intervention of others. But it was also designed as a means of obtaining economic advantage. That was particularly evident under the cultivation system, when the Javanese aristocracy was closely involved with the attempts to secure produce for export. Their role was indeed to be the focus of much of the criticism of that system, made when the States-General was able to debate the Indies and private capitalists were increasingly critical of state monopoly. The most famous document in that discourse is *Max Havelaar*, a novel by Douwes Dekker (Multatuli). ‘[S]trangers came from the West... They wished to make profits of the productiveness of the soil and commanded the native to devote part of his labours and time to the growth of... products which would yield a greater

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margin of gain in the *European* markets. To make the lower man do this, a very simple policy sufficed. He obeys his chiefs, and so it was only necessary to win over those chiefs by promising them part of the profit, and . . . the scheme succeeded completely.⁸

The economic policies of the Dutch also transformed the relationship of the islands with the rest of the world. In earlier times there had been two main foci of economic activity. One was the entrepot traffic, available to political entities that had positional advantage, in particular where the trade of the islands linked up with the traffic to India and China. Sri Vijaya had enjoyed such a position. So, later, did Melaka, the first port to be captured by the Portuguese in 1511, only to be lost to the Dutch in 1641. The other focus of economic activity was east and central Java. By contrast with much of the rest of the archipelago, it was relatively fertile, and able to sustain a substantial rural population, and a dynastic system bearing some comparison with the feudal structures of western Europe. At Batavia the VOC was placing itself between these two foci of economic activity and political power. For two centuries it was also the focus of an Asia-wide economic endeavour. In the nineteenth century, it became the administrative capital of Netherlands India. It was also one of the ports through which the Dutch sought to channel the Indies' trade, which now was more and more a colonial one. No longer were the Dutch profiting from the intra-Asian trade. Their profit now came from securing coffee and sugar from Java, and, increasingly, selling there textiles from Twente and Overijssel.

The islands were connected with the world in ways other than the political and the economic, in particular through religion. Indeed earlier rulers and peoples would not have recognised such divisions among human activities. In the Buddhist or Hindu-Buddhist states of Sri Vijaya and Majapahit, the ruler had a special role and might even be an incarnation of a deity, and ritual surrounded him and underpinned the administration. The Islamisation of the islands, which increased in impetus with the founding of Melaka, also saw a transformation of its political structures, though not necessarily their complete elimination. The advent of the Europeans in some respects stimulated Islam and domesticated it. Reacting against the Portuguese capture of Melaka, new Muslim sultanates appeared, Aceh and Makasar among them. Islam identified with resistance to the Europeans, and a different link with the outer world was thus established. Much of the resistance to the Dutch in the colonial phase had an Islamic aspect to it, most famously, of course, that of Diponegoro in the 1820s, the Aceh war, too. Their reliance on the *adat* chiefs for peace and order could not but provoke a closer identification between the peasants and the Islamic leaders.

The opening of the Suez canal in 1869, though not of course so intended, intensified the links with the Islamic homeland. The political and economic links of the colonial period, particularly with the Netherlands, but also with

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other parts of the world, facilitated many other contacts as well. Within their territories, furthermore, the Dutch provided limited opportunities for Western education, initially for economic reasons, and later with a rather larger purpose. Improved communications within Netherlands India, as well as with the outside world, also contributed to a cultural ferment in which Indonesians, as some of them came to see themselves, felt both a greater sense of unity among themselves, and also a greater distinctiveness among peoples. Where the local Dutch, the Chinese communities, resident or 'sojourning', the Eurasians, fitted in, if at all, remained to be determined: to some extent the growing sense of Indonesian identification was predicated on their marginalisation or exclusion.

These changes contributed to the rise of an Indonesian nationalism. That was itself a process, the outcomes of which were not predetermined. But the process necessarily involved a growing sense of unity, at least among the elite, and a growing perception among them that such unity could and should be expressed in a sense of nationhood. The European world of nations with colonies and dependencies was to become a world of nations in the European style. The colonial leaders aspired to form nation-states in a world of nation-states. In some cases it helped to win them international support, even in the metropolis. At home it required the recruitment of mass support. There the leaders had to compete or work with the colonial government, the old elite which had often worked with it, the Islamic elite which generally had not. To inform the masses, still largely rural, of the concept of nation and state was a tough task. Often the masses saw the struggle differently, as one against an alien government, against the infidel, against the dislocation of old ways of life by economic, administrative, and social change.

The colonial power was, partly wittingly, partly unwittingly, building a political entity in Netherlands India that was changing its relationship with the rest of the world. In the early twentieth century, some of its leaders, the Ethici, saw that the relationship with the Netherlands would have to change. They tended to stop short of advocating independence, but preferred to believe in some form of association with the 'motherland'. Indeed Ethical Policy was a means to defend the Indies. Pointing to the fate of Spain in the Philippines, van Deventer suggested in 1899 that 'there is no better way of ensuring that we keep the East Indies than a policy of righteousness and honesty'.⁹ The new elite could be brought to recognise the continued value of an association with the Netherlands if it were put on a new basis. But that basis was not the relationship of one independent state with another. Increasingly these views were shaped by the emergence of the nationalist movement. In face of it some of the Dutch became more conservative and were inclined to revert to 'peace and order' policies, or to insist on the validity of *adat*, or custom, and to emphasise the diversity of the Indies.

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The nationalist movement also offered a recipe for the emergence of a modern state. In some sense its view was shaped by the policies of the colonial state itself, the two movements indeed reacting against each other and working in combination. It faced the opposition of the 'police state', state control over education, limits on participation. It fought against divide-and-rule by insisting on unity. 'It is the responsibility of each and every one of us to study these three aspects', nationalism, Islam, and Marxism, Sukarno argued, 'and to show that these three "waves" can work together to form a single, gigantic and irresistible tidal wave.' He was 'convinced that it is only this unity which will bring us to the realization of our dreams: a Free Indonesia'.¹⁰ Generally without weapons, the nationalist movement endeavoured to evoke popular support, often working against, sometimes co-opting collaborationist leaders, utilising ideologies not squarely nationalist, enlisting religious impulses sometimes xenophobic in approach rather than inclusive. With a vision of the future as a nation among nations and a state among states, it also recognised the importance of support from nations and states, emerging and actual, outside the colonial framework.

The emergence of Communism was both advantage and disadvantage. It assisted nationalists and it hindered them. It gave them an additional organisational capacity and an additional appeal, but its aims were not coterminous with theirs. Tensions were apparent almost from the start, within the proto-nationalist Islamic League (Sarekat Islam) as it became a mass movement, within nationalist movements that were concerned lest social disruption undermine political ambition. Nor did the Communists always escape the millenarian thrust that Marx both felt and sought to contain: in Indonesian society, indeed, the millenarian traditions were a reason for the popularity of Communism. They also undermined its long-term success. Communist uprisings were premature. And they intensified reaction on the part of the colonial ruler. Indeed the link between Communism and nationalism was counterproductive in this respect as well. The violence and extremism were arguments for overall repression, and for the abandonment of the Ethical Policy, for the recrudescence of *adat*-based policies, for Governor-General De Jonge. 'A world-wide conspiracy of international communism was detected in the most improbable organizations', especially after the insurrections of 1926–7.¹¹

Nor was Communism an unequivocal advantage in the shaping of Netherlands India's changing relationship with the world. Nationalist movements could look to the example of other nations, to the success of the Japanese, to the Chinese revolution of 1911, to *swaraj* and non-cooperation in British India, to Kemal Ataturk. Communist movements, too, could look for inspiration overseas: the movement was, after all, based on an allegedly universal concept; and the creators of the Soviet state were 'internationalists'. But their aim was not a world of nations. At most their nationalism

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was a strategy rather than an objective in itself. Nationalists were, therefore, always at a tangent with Communists internationally as they were internally. Each might find a use for the other, but their marriages were marriages of convenience. And sometimes of inconvenience. For, while Communists might precipitate crisis with the colonial power by premature action, by 'adventurism', so also, too, their relationship with a foreign power of universalist pretensions gave nationalists a problem and colonial rulers an argument. Could nationalists use the Communists and yet retain their purpose? Was nationalism pushed or deflected by a foreign power or a foreign influence?

In the event the colonial regime was displaced not by internal opposition, nor by Communist subversion, but by the Japanese invasion of 1942. That affected all the terms in the equation. Economically the Japanese broke off the links with the European and American economies. Culturally, they boosted the role of Islam, played down the role of Dutch, encouraged the use of Indonesian, attempted to develop a youth culture, promoted a Japan-led movement of Asia for the Asiatics. Politically they destroyed the colonial power and gave its adversaries, the nationalists, new opportunities, in administration, in the army, even in politics, though, of course, severing their Communist connexions. At the same time, Japan treated the frontiers of Netherlands India arbitrarily, and it had no real interest in promoting independence till what turned out to be the last year of the war.¹²

The defeat of the Japanese in 1945 was followed by an attempt to restore the colonial regime. By that time the Indonesians led by Sukarno and Hatta had on 17 August proclaimed a Republic, and the Dutch were never able to reach what they saw as a satisfactory accommodation with it. 'And why must Indonesia willy-nilly be made partner of a commonwealth in which the Dutch tail will wag the Indonesian dog?' Hatta asked. 'The Dutch are graciously permitting us entry into the basement while we have climbed all the way to the top floor and up to the attic.'¹³ They believed that there were more moderate elements in Indonesia whose collaboration they could evoke on a more-or-less prewar model, backing that collaborative system as in colonial times with a limited use of force. But their attempts to re-introduce this pattern failed, and their resort to force in two police actions in 1947 and 1948 in fact made the republic stronger. At the same time the international position changed, and the republican leadership was adept at taking advantage of it. It welcomed the mediation of the British, anxious to withdraw their largely Indian troops, yet still hoping for reconciliation between the Europeans and the Indonesians. The republic welcomed support from India and Australia, and from the United Nations, to which those states took its case. Above all, the republicans won the support of the US, in particular by putting down the Communists, who initiated another ill-timed revolt at Madiun in September 1948. The Indonesians secured independence, partly

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by their continued guerilla struggle within Indonesia, partly by their diplomatic struggle outside Indonesia. They neatly reversed the colonial recipe of force and collaboration with guerilla struggle and internationalisation.

The republic had been proclaimed in 1945. The independence of the Republic of the United States of Indonesia was acknowledged in 1949. It was recognised by other states and took its seat in the UN, the two signs of independent statehood in the postwar world. Emerging from a struggle with a colonial power that had limited democracy, winning support from the leading democratic power after a war fought against non-democratic powers, the new state endorsed democracy. Though it had the trappings of a democratic state – parties, parliament, cabinet – it did not hold elections till 1955. Then there was a massive and impressive turn-out. Yet in some ways the elections may have destroyed the democratic experiment. The struggle against the Dutch had tended to muffle the divisions among Indonesians which the colonial power had liked to emphasise. The end of the struggle revealed deep differences about the next step: what kind of Indonesia should an independent Indonesia be? The federal structure, tarred with the Dutch brush, was quickly abandoned. But that focused the divisions on the central government in Jakarta, as Batavia had now become. The governmental instability that ensued would, it was thought, be ended by the elections. They indeed produced a decisive result. But it tended to polarise the interests of Java and the outer islands, and within less than a year a series of regional revolts ensued. Martial law was established, and the power of the army, inheriting, too, the prestige of the guerilla struggle, was increased.

For a while President Sukarno sought to sustain what he called ‘guided democracy’. Indonesia would not abandon democracy, but pursue its own consensual version. But many of the parties had been undermined by the elections, or discredited by association with the regional revolts, and in a sense there was no democracy left to guide. Instead of eliciting consensus, the President was reduced to a precarious balancing act between the army and the Communist Party, which had revived since the Madiun disaster by pursuing a nationalist and populist but not revolutionary line. In 1965, it seems that premature action once more led the communists to disaster. Though its origins remain controversial, the attempted Gestapu coup of 1 October precipitated a seizure of power by the army, now led by Suharto, commander of the Army Strategic Reserve (KOSTRAD). Under the *dwifungsi* concept, the army has never relinquished this power.

It is not perhaps facile to suggest a comparison between the colonial regime and the New Order. In both democratic politics is strictly limited. The letter is in part there, the spirit is not. The priority, it might be said, was once more peace and order. If the Dutch regime was dedicated to export, the New Order was dedicated to development. The Dutch regime had one advantage: there was a regular means for changing the ruler. By contrast, the