REVIEW ARTICLE

DOMESTICATING IMPERIALISM: THE FASHIONING OF POLITICAL IDENTITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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I

Upon arriving at Denpasar airport in June 2000, I was greeted by an Australian friend who had recently married a Balinese man. The latter, within moments of our meeting for the first time, challenged me about my having been a UN accredited observer of the independence plebiscite in East Timor some ten months earlier. His was an impassioned if, in my view, not terribly well informed view of the torturous relationship between the former Portuguese colony and the Jakarta-based Indonesian government. My interlocutor insisted that East Timor's future ought to have remained an entirely Indonesian matter and that foreign involvement simply demonstrated the determination of the international community to break up Indonesia. The discussion proceeded as we made our way across the airport car park, and became even more heated when I suggested that it was important not just to consider former President Habibie's motivations for offering a plebiscite but also the record of Suharto's government in laying the ground for an East Timorese departure. Perhaps rather tactlessly, I suggested to my new acquaintance that he reflect upon the dreadful human rights record of the Indonesian military in East Timor. If a response was what I was seeking, I certainly found one. Wayan flashed back at me that he knew with certainty tales of human rights abuses were a lie concocted by hostile countries because the East Timorese had made clear their wish to remain part of Indonesia. Upon further pressing, he argued that the fact East Timorese school children sang the same songs as children from all over the archipelago was evidence of their love for Indonesia

and their desire to remain integrated. I was somewhat nonplussed with this turn in discussion and rather unsure as to how to proceed. Could he, I wondered, really believe something that seemed so palpably absurd?

Reading Anthony Reid's *Imperial Alchemy* brought this conversation to mind again for the first time in years, and I am now not as certain that Wayan's response was irrational or, at least, no more unreasonable than a great deal of what many people believe to be true of their and others' nations. The resilience of the nation as an organising principle of international political life and the ways in which an attachment to nation animates the identities of so very many ordinary people are among the extraordinary aspects of this particular form of community. As Benedict Anderson observed with his justly admired concept of imagined community, what is remarkable is not so much that people are willing to kill for their nation, but that they are willing to die for something that has such a remarkably short history. Moreover, those willing to lay down their lives for other members of the national community will never meet the overwhelming majority of those with whom they feel the common bond of nation.[1] I have no reason to believe that my encounter with a young Balinese man feeling the slights of a nation offended suggested his own willingness to sacrifice his life to defend the idea of Indonesia, but he was clearly angry and harboured a deep investment in the outcome of the plebiscite in East Timor. The (then) looming departure of the East Timorese I suspect felt not just a threat to Indonesia's sovereignty but a genuine loss of members of Wayan's community.

Though I am not sure Anthony Reid would necessarily agree, it seems to me that nationalism can be thought of as a particular form of modern technology, a technology that mobilises people like perhaps no other has done. Arguably, in the modern period, the first glimpse of a fighting force motivated by more than mercenary concerns was Napoleon's revolutionary army that prevailed in a succession of conflicts without a reliable supply system, without the backing of an armaments industry, with little barracks discipline but with 'a simple hierarchy of courage' and a belief in the righteousness of its revolutionary creed.[2] Whether Napoleon's campaigns were strictly nationalism at work is contentious but the successful rallying call to arms that fed millions into the meat grinder that was World War I (1914–1918) was explicitly nationalist in its appeal, largely dashing the hopes of socialists and communists for a community based on class interest that transcended national borders. Within three decades of the conclusion of that global conflict the long process of decolonisation with its highly variegated outcomes was under way.

II

From British, Dutch and Portuguese colonies the polities of Southeast Asia were transformed into politically independent nations, a process largely complete by 1960. Decolonisation was difficult, violent and painful in Southeast Asia. The search for internal political settlements was in itself testing in each case but the whole region was destabilised by the war in Vietnam and the US and Australian-made argument that the conflict was primarily about stopping communist aggression in Southeast Asia. The war led to the

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1   Anderson 1991, pp. 6–7.

2   See Hobsbawm 2012, pp. 95–97.

deaths of over two million people, perhaps many more. Real and imagined communists were persecuted in independent Indonesia, in Malaya/Malaysia, in Thailand and in the Philippines, while the communist regimes that finally did take over in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia also dealt harshly with their perceived enemies. The Indonesian political turmoil of the mid-1960s, the brief Khmer Rouge (1975–1979) rule in Cambodia and the Indonesian invasion (1975) and subsequent occupation of East Timor are among the twentieth century's most significant instances of mass political violence. Decolonisation in Southeast Asia was not complete until 2002 when the abortive attempt by the Portuguese to decolonise in 1974 to 1975 was completed by an overwhelming majority of East Timorese voters who chose independence over special autonomy status within the Indonesian state.

Those of us schooled in the politics of Southeast Asia learned early of its complexity and diversity and the significance of anti-colonial nationalism in the framing of its polities. The world's major religions are well represented with predominantly Christian (the Philippines), Muslim (Indonesia, Malaysia), Theravada Buddhism (Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos) and Mahayana Buddhism (Vietnam) countries found there. There are constitutional monarchies (hereditary in Thailand, selected in Cambodia and elective in Malaysia), a variety of republican forms (Burma, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore and Timor Leste) and a constitutional sultanate (Brunei). Geographically the countries differ dramatically from the small city-state of Singapore to the sprawling archipelagos of the Philippines and Indonesia to the middle-sized countries of Thailand and Burma. Within Southeast Asian countries there is also a great deal of ethnic and other forms of diversity. For example, upland and lowland peoples developed distinct cultures, economies, and agricultural practices. The great cities of Southeast Asia, Bangkok, Jakarta, Singapore, Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Surabaya are either port cities or at altitudes close to sea level. There are no Southeast Asian cities of comparable stature at higher altitude. However, these broad brush outlines only vaguely begin to indicate the economic, political, ethnic and geographical diversity of the region, and it is Reid's determination to understand how, within arbitrary imperial boundaries, relative political stability has been forged from such heterogeneity that is the focus of the book.

One way Reid highlights the successful alchemy of Southeast Asian political identities is through an exploration of the profound differences in the ways that nationalism has played out in Europe and Southeast Asia. That is, he notes that whereas the imperial borders of the Hapsburgs, Romanovs, and Ottomans long ago dissolved under the joint pressures of industrialisation and the rise of print capitalism, in Southeast Asia, such imperial boundaries have remained remarkably unchanged in the two thirds of a century that has elapsed since the end of World War II in 1945. Despite the convulsions and upheavals of the politics of transition from colonies to independent nations, with only minor exceptions, former imperial borders have remained sacrosanct. The emergence of new nations during the post-independence period in Southeast Asia has indeed been rare. Within the first couple of pages of *Imperial Alchemy*, Reid notes East Timor's departure from Indonesia is the only legally acknowledged change to the boundary of a nation-state in Southeast Asia since 1975 (Reid, p. 2). This is in sharp contrast to the experience of Europeans over the course of the twentieth century, even in the two decades since the

collapse of the Soviet Union. In the book's most memorable phase, Reid notes that for former colonies to become successful and entrenched modern nations, the 'base metal of empire would have to be transmuted into the gold of nationhood' (Reid, p. 2).

In the opening chapter, Reid deftly negotiates the major approaches to the study of nationalism that have, in the main, emerged over the last thirty years. Here one encounters the usual suspects in the study of nationalism: Benedict Anderson (1983) and his *Imagined Communities*; Ernest Gellner's (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*; Anthony Giddens's (1985) *The Nation-state and Violence*; Eric Hobsbawm's (1990) *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*; Anthony Smith's (1986) *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*; Liah Greenfeld's (1992) *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*; Walker Connor's (1994) *Ethnonationalism: the Quest for Understanding* among others. Reid succinctly reviews the contributions each of these volumes makes to an understanding of nationalism but also highlights the various ways in which they fall short of explaining the Asian and Southeast Asian experiences of nation-making and nation-building. Thus, rather than impose particular theories of nationalism and political identity formation, Reid seeks to explain the extraordinary political outcomes in Southeast Asia's polities through in-depth case studies and sensitive adaptations of analytical approaches to nationalism largely derived from European experience. Quite rightly, Reid notes the highly creative nature of the enterprise of nationalism in Southeast Asia. That is, unlike examples such as France, Britain or the US, geographically bounded polities which over time created culturally coherent nations, the Southeast Asian experience is of making nations out of arbitrary, that is, imperial boundaries (Reid, p. 4).

The uniqueness of Southeast Asia's experience of nationalism is also partly drawn out by highlighting significant differences in the ways that states and political identity were formed in Northeast Asia. As Reid notes, the East Asian states of China and Korea were highly successful at placing the state at the centre of the political identification of their citizens, certainly more so than any European state prior to the French Revolution.[3] The modern consequence of 'outrage at state humiliation' (OSH) nationalism, most keenly felt in pre-1949 and post-Mao China, is its desire '... to recreate the state more powerfully, not to build a new polity more reflective of the ethnie' (Reid, p. 10) (OSH nationalism is dealt with in more detail below). This particular manifestation of nationalism clearly highlights the success of Northeast Asian polities in building strong, centralised states. It is here that Northeast Asian nationalism diverges quite dramatically from the European experience. That is, the Northeast Asian states of China, Korea, Vietnam[4] and Japan have produced and reproduced themselves through elitist, dynastic histories, literatures and state forms over centuries. Such literatures and histories are in a form that is as readable to a modern audience as it was to their forebears and so demonstrates not just great continuity of culture but also of the states that produced such histories. Indeed, as Reid observes, the boundaries between these four states have barely changed over a millennium.

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3   For a discussion on the development of the Chinese state in the context of freedom, see Jenner 1998, pp. 65–92.

4   Vietnam is often geographically associated with Southeast Asia and is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) but its history and culture are influenced by its long entanglements with China. Its Mahayana Buddhism is shared with China, Korea and Japan.

In a highly evocative comparison, Reid notes that to appreciate the experience of modern China in European terms, one would have to imagine a Europe where the Roman empire had not fragmented '... into dynasties and ethnies speaking different vernaculars, but repeatedly reconstituted itself after each dynastic crisis around the same core area and around the same written language' (Reid, p. 15). Such a Europe would presumably be a vast, single, perhaps Latin-speaking polity with its various ethnie contained within and by a powerful, centralised state which had generated an experience of identity through its histories and literatures shared by hundreds of millions of people. If, as a result of one of the dynastic crises to which Reid refers, the Roman empire had contracted into a western European heartland, would that Europe have eschewed further imperial expansion and the racially motivated politics of colonialism? Might such a Europe have avoided the bloodshed of religious conflict? Would this Europe have avoided the bitter ideological and political transformational struggle of the first half of the twentieth century that inflicted upon two generations of ordinary people appalling deprivations of warfare and which laid waste to much of the continent's built environment? What forms might Europe's distinctive high cultures have taken? It is almost impossible to imagine a Europe so differently configured and yet Reid's provocation does help one to understand the extraordinary nature of the Chinese polity and the uniqueness of its identity politics. The identity and governance histories of China and Japan are also a reminder of the strong and enduring nature of their states and those of Korea and Vietnam. While the states of each of these countries have been substantially remade with China, Vietnam and (North) Korea among the last of the world's strong communist states, they arguably demonstrate a form of continuity not evident in the European experience. For example, in the wake of World War I, every government between the Rhine and Vladivostok fell and with them the power of the royal houses and aristocracies of Europe.[5] Such changes in Europe have led to more profound transformations of political identity than those that have occurred in Northeast Asia.

The comparison Reid draws between Japan and the British Isles is also worth pausing over. Reid notes Japan's islands were unified by Tokugawa Ieyesu in 1603, by which time there was a shared literary and religious culture stretching back several centuries. In contrast, it took until the late sixteenth century for Westminster to extend its rule over the entire British Isles and until the end of the nineteenth century for the English language to prevail (Reid, p. 17). Moreover, with devolution of powers to Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland and, indeed, Scottish independence a distinct possibility with a referendum due to decide the issue by the end of 2014, it may be that a major reconfiguration of Britain is in the offing in ways that one cannot currently envisage of Japan. On the European continent there also exists the growing possibility of a Catalan nation emerging in the foreseeable future which would alter the territorial boundaries of Spain, France and perhaps Andorra. And Belgium does not look certain to retain its current boundaries given the lingering problems between French and Flemish speaking communities. Fluidity in Europe's borders looks set to remain the norm for a little longer yet.

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5   Hobsbawm 1994, p. 67.

While the period between the end of World War II and the present has been characterised by a rapid proliferation in the number of identifiable (or perhaps self-identifying) ethnic groups, this particular pattern has not been nearly as evident in Southeast Asia. Rather, with a few exceptions, diversity in Southeast Asian nations has not led to the kind of intensive political demands often (rightly or wrongly) linked with ethnic politics. For example, Ted Gurr and Barbara Harff argue that since 1950 the number of ethnic identities has roughly quadrupled.[6] They associate this proliferation of identities with an increase in conflict in world politics albeit of a different kind to violence arising out of ideological clashes. That is, anyone could ostensibly be a liberal or a communist irrespective of other aspects of identity, suggesting liberalism and Marxism make no distinction on the basis of ethnicity or gender. Fascism is a more complex case given its propensity to identify a variety of perceived social ills, with enemies external to the core group whether they be ethnic minorities or in some other way constructed as degenerate. As already suggested, Southeast Asia is immensely ethnically diverse and colonial boundaries enveloped many peoples that had little or no shared history. Yet, while there has been significant violence in postcolonial Southeast Asia (particularly in Indonesia), its perpetrators have not, with the exception of anti-Chinese rhetoric, discursively framed violence in ethnic terms in the ways that were apparent in the break-up of Yugoslavia or the pogroms against Jews and others in National Socialist Germany. For these reasons, Reid is generally positive about the ways in which nationalism has succeeded in welding together political communities in Southeast Asia.

III

The key challenge of the book is to set out the specificity of nationalist political identity in Southeast Asia. Reid goes part way with Anthony Smith in identifying a group that '... imagines itself kin as **ethnie** and in its political assertiveness as **ethnie nationalism**.' The strong identities produced by states via the modern means of education, state ritual and media, Reid calls **state nationalism** (emphases in original text; Reid, p. 5). But neither the ethnie nor civic nationalisms, the forms Reid most closely analyses in his examinations of the European experience of nationalism, are adequate to explain nationalism in Asia because multi-ethnie anti-imperial, anti-colonial nationalism are of profound importance to the shaping of post-independence polities in Southeast and Northeast Asia. One of the features of anti-colonial nationalism is that in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, it stopped short of full-blown social revolutions and instead saw the emergence of heavy-handed but not necessarily strong states as anti-imperial sentiment turned into state nationalism. The particular success of this transition is the maintenance of an emotional pull of national identity through the overcoming of imperialism's racial humiliation (Reid, p. 5).

Thus early in Reid's account he has established three of the four analytical categories necessary for understanding nationalism in Asia: ethnie, state and anti-imperial nationalisms. He explicitly rejects class struggle as a fourth category and instead highlights the significance of outrage at state humiliation (OSH) nationalism in Asia. OSH nationalism is distinctive and uniquely Asian. It is characterised by humiliation of the state, not the

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6   See Gurr and Harff 1994.

ethnie. It is not anti-imperial because it is most powerful in states that were formally inde-
pendent but not as strong or independent as their citizens demanded. It is not state nation-
alism because it is ill at ease with the compromises made by the state and so is a factor in
the overthrow of states. It puts the state at the centre of political identity, particularly in
countries such as China and Korea, and its key task in the post-colonial period has been
to recreate an even more powerful state rather than to oversee the making of polities
more reflective of the ethnie (Reid, pp. 10–11). It is a form of nationalism that the contem-
porary Chinese state has quite actively deployed in its identity-making project, though this
particular genie may be extremely difficult to rebottle.[7]

In contrast to the core states of Northeast Asia, strong states did not materialise in
Southeast Asia with highland and island cultures remaining deeply suspicious of the
externally-supported states primarily centred upon coastal, trading hubs (Reid, p. 18).
The different pattern of authority is in part a factor of the geography and climate of
Southeast Asia. That is, a humid, wet climate and heavily forested land conspired to
make rice growing with its intensive labour requirements and associated dense populations
difficult to achieve. Thus, climatically and geographically influenced patterns of agricul-
ture and habitation also meant that strong, bureaucratic states did not evolve in
Southeast Asia as they had in China, Vietnam, Korea and Japan. Rather, island and high-
land Southeast Asian societies developed complex civilisations, including systems of writ-
ing, defined by kinship and ritual rather than the power of a state. However, citing Victor
Lieberman (2003), Reid notes that ever-greater concentrations of power in mainland
Southeast Asia did eventually lead to the narrowing of independent polities from twenty-
three in the mid-fourteenth century to just three in the early nineteenth century, closely
paralleling the emergence of state nationalisms in Europe (Reid, p. 19).

However, despite important differences between the two regions of Asia of interest to
Reid, OSH nationalism is also present in Southeast Asia in the context of the weakness
and humiliation of Islam by European powers between the sixteenth and nineteenth centu-
ries (Reid, p. 11). This is a form of humiliation that plays out differently in the present. That
is, while the strong, centralised state of contemporary China enacts humiliation through
school curricula and has created an at times difficult to manage popular sentiment of grie-
vance against various others (notably the Japanese), in Southeast Asia, such grievances about
the West and its perceived abuses have resulted in a highly politicised and occasionally vio-
lent Islamic nationalist movements in parts of the region. There is at least some evidence that
supposedly unifying forms of state nationalism are being challenged by forms of religious
national identity. However, the experience of electoral politics in Indonesia particularly is
that Islam has struggled to establish itself as the primary loyalty of voters. More moderate
forms of secular nationalist identity have been important in that domain of political life
even if Islam registers the discontents and dissatisfactions of secular nationalist life most
vocally.[8] Nonetheless, Reid cautions that despite the successes of the Malaysian and
Indonesian states in weathering (as he puts it) the era of nationalism, the primary threat
to those states comes not from ethnie forms of identity but from religious identities in

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7   See, for example, Callahan 2006, pp. 151–57.

8   For a discussion of the politics of grievance and Islamic identity in Southeast Asia, see Abuza 2003, pp. 33–88.

their newly globalised forms (Reid, p. 215). It would, though, be wrong to suggest that all politicised forms of Islamic identity struggle are motivated by OSH forms of nationalism.

Other global forces are also important in understanding contemporary processes of identity formation in Asia. Asian states form part of a world of various pressures, opportunities and other economic and political changes that force the hands of custodians of state identities. Reid highlights a series of changes in the global environment that have had direct effects on the contours of post-colonial, anti-imperial nationalism. He notes that the end of the Cold War, globalisation of markets and trade, the extension of electronic media, the movement of labour across national boundaries and profound ideological changes, particularly those concerning the rolling back of assimilationist policies, have all shaped contemporary nationalism and in the direction of a post-nationalist age (Reid, pp. 13–15). Asian states are not immune to such changes, indeed are active participants in a range of international and regional institutions and activities that, arguably, are promoting the integration of Southeast Asian states into the global economy and multilateral processes (Reid, p. 216).

The typology of Asian nationalisms that Reid succinctly sets out in the first chapter of the book does the necessary work of distinguishing between Northeast and Southeast Asia and allows him to focus more on Southeast Asia in the book's second chapter. Again Reid deftly analyses the development of political identity in Southeast Asia drawing upon his deep understanding of the region. One remarkable aspect of this discussion is how recently formed are political identities that now appear to have undergone a process of sedimentation in Southeast Asia. Reid notes that an interesting dimension of Southeast Asian nationalism is the capacity for at least some of its subjects to 'layer' or 'nest' their identities such that being Indonesian does not preclude being Christian and Batak or Hindu and Balinese (Reid, p. 12). On this view, Reid endorses the idea that ethnic and other identities are invented (but not artificial) and that it is nesting or layering that has proven the more adaptable and successful in terms of folding disparate ethnie into the nations created within imperial boundaries.

IV

For this reader, three of his case studies stood out when thinking about the ways that political identity has been crafted in Southeast Asia. They are indicative of quite different responses to external pressures and the internal dynamics of maintaining particular forms of identity in the face of such pressures. Firstly, there are the peoples of the Indonesian province of Aceh who have maintained a close identification with a polity that long precedes the emergence of the Indonesian nation-state. As Reid makes clear, the Acehnese have never been at ease with externally-imposed political arrangements and have been thorny opponents of the Dutch colonisers and the successor state based in Jakarta. In a neat summary of what all this has come to mean in Aceh, Reid observes that:

> Acehnese break into their own language, out of the formal Indonesian in which government and university proceedings are conducted, more frequently than do other Indonesians, and rejoice in this sign of both solidarity and jocular informality. Yet there is almost no writing in Acehnese ... (Reid, p. 143).

To a non-specialist there is something striking about the people of a region of Indonesia having a strong memory of pre-Indonesian and pre-colonial state forms, a history of resistance to intrusion by outside forces, and a self-perception of being under military occupation for much of the last 150 years having little literature in the vernacular that integrates them through this chronicle of defying hostile interference. It is tempting to argue that it is precisely such a history that produces a literary canon in which identity is imagined, and its absence in Aceh perhaps again speaks to the dramatic differences between the Asian and European experiences of nationalism.

A second case arises in the form of the Sumatran Bataks, peoples who share the same island as the Acehnese. However, the Bataks have a more complex ethnic history, and one that shows the signs of a great deal more creativity in producing a people whose identities are secure but fluid and whose young people almost exclusively leave their homelands to make lives, careers and families in the larger cities of Java, in the industrial zone of Batam and in less populated parts of eastern Indonesia and Borneo (Reid, p. 169). Unlike the Acehnese who see their home as a refuge, the Batak peoples came late to modernity, but embraced many elements of its offer in the form of Christianity, state authority, education, and in the broadest sense, progress that has propelled them out of their highland homelands across many parts of Indonesia (Reid, p. 173). Reid creates the impression of peoples much more open to the fluid negotiation of their identity, yet able to maintain a firm grip on their heritage that enables an acting out of identity in the present. While the use of vernacular languages is falling away across Indonesia it is more marked among the Batak peoples (Reid, p. 174). Moreover, the Bataks have shown a capacity to renegotiate many other forms of cultural identity markers including ritual and tradition, architecture, music and dance, and dress. On Reid's reckoning, the '. . . Bataks are an excellent example of layered identity, for whom both the ethnie and Indonesian identities are strongly internalised and expressed, but on different levels of social interaction' (Reid, p. 185).

However, the third case study, on the Chinese in Southeast Asia, is absolutely fascinating. Perhaps it is no accident that this is the first of Reid's substantive chapters after his discussion of nationalism in its wider Asian and more specific Southeast Asian contexts. The Chinese are, of course, a profoundly complicating part of the story of identity development in Southeast Asia. Reid terms them 'essential outsiders' and, citing European colonial attitudes, 'Asia's Jews' (Reid, pp. 56, 68). Importantly, Reid notes that the label, the identity, Chinese, was affixed by those indigenous to Southeast Asia and by later European colonial power elites. It is an identity that has proven profoundly divisive though it might have been entirely different. He argues that the singularity of the category China, and Chinese, is blunt, offensive and a refusal to recognise the diversity of the Middle Kingdom and its peoples (Reid, p. 54). Prior to 1567, Chinese sojourners, unable to return to China under threat of death, had little incentive to maintain distinctively Chinese dress, language and hairstyles and indeed, experienced significant pressures to assimilate through marriage and becoming bicultural. This, Reid argues, was not just helpful in a commercial environment but a distinct point of pride for many Javanese and Malay traders who freely shared information about their cultural heritage with the incoming Europeans of the sixteenth century (Reid, p. 54). The decision of the Ming dynasty to permit sojourners to return began to change the history of assimilation. Chinatowns began to spring up in the major trading ports, and by the seventeenth century with the advent of racially

conscious and discriminatory European rule taking hold across island and mainland Southeast Asia, the Chinese were cemented as a particular identity and encouraged to remain as such and not to attempt boundary crossing (Reid, p. 56). It is here that the seeds of antipathy towards the Chinese are planted despite European rulers finding the Chinese a most convenient buffer and commercial intermediaries between rulers and ruled (Reid, p. 56).

Reid charts the changing migratory flows of the Chinese in Southeast Asia and the changing fortunes of peoples who were obliged to negotiate the highly fluid environments of colonial Southeast Asia. Europeans readily likened them to Jews in Europe and regarded these ever more important middlemen with a mixture of admiration, fear, scorn and racially motivated revulsion (Reid, p. 56). He notes the historical accidents that saw the creole Chinese form part of the Filipino nationalist movement, but be excluded from the emergent movement in early twentieth-century Indonesia as it was articulated in Islamic discourses with a specifically anti-Chinese element. These differences can be explained by the Chinese revolution of 1910–1911 which provided a means by which young Sino-Southeast Asians could address the racial hierarchies entailed in European colonialism (the Dutch, for example, had made Japanese residents of the Netherlands Indies the racial equivalents of Europeans but had not extended such recognition to the more numerous Chinese residents). The Dutch of early twentieth-century Netherlands Indies demonstrated the typical anxieties about the supposed superiority of their race and its achievements when compared to the 'natives' they ruled over, but this also led to the Chinese differentiating themselves from 'natives', Europeans, and Japanese in their quest for racial equality. Interestingly, Reid notes that up to the 1930s, the indigenous mixed-ethnicity Chinese (*peranakan*) of the colony were as linguistically and culturally 'Indonesian' as anyone because their loyalties were strongly local and not (unlike their European masters) to a distant metropolitan centre (Reid, pp. 64–65).

However, for the Chinese of Indonesia and Malaysia, the six decades between 1940 to 2000 were particularly traumatic. Japanese occupation of the Netherlands Indies and Malaya was brutal and the Chinese were not spared the worst of Japan's imperial racist project. Reid, though, argues that the Japanese interval and later the passing of the colonial regimes created opportunities for vulnerable but ambitious risk-takers. Smuggling and bribing Japanese officials later gave way to alliances between revolutionaries (particularly in Indonesia) and Chinese-speaking entrepreneurs who could provide the material to sustain the revolution even while it tore apart the interests of the established *peranakan* elites. Ethnically Chinese 'outsiders' (*totok*) with nothing invested in the Dutch colonial order formed new partnerships with rising revolutionary hard men and laid the foundations for long-term economic achievement through this early collaboration with the young military men of the emerging republic (Reid, p. 67).

But the lives of those identified as Chinese in independent Indonesia, Malaya/Malaysia and the Philippines was far from easy and the post-independence period, particularly in Indonesia, has been punctuated with short but quite nasty outbreaks of anti-Chinese violence. Malaysian and Indonesian policies towards those identified as Chinese have proven extraordinarily distorting of political life in those countries. On the one hand, the entrepreneurialism of many Chinese was essential to the economic vitality of newly independent and struggling countries, and indigenous political elites, particularly in Indonesia,

came to depend on Chinese wealth as a means of dispensing political patronage. On the other hand, the public, often hostile, marginalisation of the Chinese by those same elites, and particularly Indonesia's Suharto, was a key factor in the entrenchment of racist antipathy toward this most Indonesian of minorities. In Indonesia, decades of anti-Chinese animus led to the vicious attacks on person and property in 1998, including pack rapes of women identified as Chinese, and contributed to the fall of Suharto. And yet, traumatic though these events were, including for the many Indonesians not of Chinese background who finally accepted that everyday forms of racist disparagement are profoundly harmful, the period since has seen a tremendous reflorescence of Chinese culture. Indeed, Reid argues that it is the diversity of Indonesia's social fabric, of which the Chinese form an important if numerically fairly insignificant component, that inoculates it against the worst excesses of ethnie nationalism as seen in the Balkans conflicts of the 1990s. Reid also notes the ways that labels like China or Chinese continue to hobble political possibilities given they blend a minority, Indonesian 'in every respect' as he puts it, and the distinct language, culture and emergent superpower polity that is contemporary China, to some a highly threatening entity (Reid, pp. 67–80).

The long history of people of Chinese descent negotiating political conditions, very often not of their own making and beyond their power to control, highlights an important part of Reid's overall argument about the relationships between ethnic and civic forms of nationalism. For example, Soviet forms of authority achieved little in terms of creating the vaunted 'Soviet man' and, with the collapse of communist rule in the former USSR, ethnie nationalism re-emerged, sometimes in great violence. In comparison, the anti-colonial, anti-imperial forms of nationalism characteristic of Asia are necessarily multi-ethnie solidarities in their striving against colonialism. This applies as much to the East Timorese who campaigned against Indonesian occupation as it does to the Indonesians who decades earlier fought against attempts by the Dutch to reimpose colonial rule after World War II. Yes, peoples of Chinese background have experienced political marginalisation and episodes of, at times, quite pointed violence. Yet, as Reid argues, their linguistic, cultural, political integration into Southeast Asian states forged out of imperial boundaries fixes them much more clearly in these polities than arguably Estonians, Lithuanians, Georgians or Armenians ever were of the USSR. In this respect, and despite Reid's qualifications, Asian nationalism clearly veers more towards civic than ethnie forms (see discussion at Reid, pp. 3–6).

Reid's chapters on the Acehnese and the Bataks, along with those on the Chinese in Southeast Asia and the Kadazan of Malaysia, are incredibly detailed accounts of the emergence and consolidation of these identities in contemporary Southeast Asia. However, with the exception of his account of the Chinese, these are chapters that really are for those with a deep interest in these parts of the region and the individual countries. For sure Reid demonstrates his wonderful knowledge and scholarship but the detail is somewhat overwhelming, bewildering even. While the accounts are important to making his arguments about the highly varied experience of identity formation in Southeast Asia, it is hard to maintain enthusiasm for the wider argument buried as it is in excessive detail. Perhaps it is the unfair criticism of the dilettante to observe such concerns, but the reader battles through the chapters on Aceh, the Bataks, and the Kadazan because of the density of detail in direct contrast to the lightness and elegance of the opening chapters and the well-drawn conclusions.

V

Earlier in this essay, I referred to nationalism as a technology that has, arguably, been more successful at mobilising large numbers of people to particular causes, to heightened emotional states, to practical action and to willingness to kill and to die, than any other identity discourse. In this volume, Reid has provided an extraordinarily rich account of discourses of identity in Southeast Asian colonial and post-colonial, national, societies. Part of what make the findings so persuasive is Reid's insights into how colonial framing of identity has been transmuted into successful national identities in the hands of Southeast Asia's skilled politicians and bureaucrats. Thus, while I endorse David Campbell's argument that identity and difference are mutually constitutive and so not fixed in nature or by God or produced by intentional behaviour, it is important to acknowledge that identity is nonetheless crafted, produced.[9] *Imperial Alchemy* provides ample evidence of this, demonstrating the creative ways that ordinary people create, layer and nest their identities to negotiate the complexities of political and economic life, but also the ways that deeply entrenched discourses and powerful institutions have laid down certain 'truths' concerning identity. Arguably though, there is something missing in Reid's analysis and that is a sustained attempt to address the question of how it is that the alchemy has been achieved. Here I cannot help but wonder about the material technologies that have been put to work to facilitate the creation of nations from disparate communities unified perhaps only by imperial borders. Reid devotes some effort to examination of linguistic change and the role of literature and newsprint in the development of identity in Southeast Asia but it is, arguably, an aspect of political identity development that warranted closer attention. That is, the technologies by which nations and national identities have been constructed are, in Andersonian terms, print (and capitalist) and more latterly, literary, visual, radio broadcasts (not least in Indonesia where Japanese occupiers permitted Sukarno and others to rally Indonesians against the European colonialists and the Allies), and television (the Suharto government recognised the importance of satellite usage for these purposes by the late 1960s).[10] More recently the use of a variety of electronic technologies incorporating new social media to consolidate alternate visions of the nation and even satellite television broadcasts emanating from beyond the nation's boundaries have often left hapless information ministries struggling to cope with the challenges to state control of information.[11]

In fairness, Reid notes in a brief section on the possibility the world is in or entering a post-nationalist phase that the global media is a factor in the shape of a new era of identity politics. He raises three key points. Firstly, that there are increasing numbers of international alternatives to national broadcasters when people search for information and entertainment. Secondly, he notes that there are increasing numbers of media products and outlets targeted at particular interest groups, movements, ideologies, hobbies and

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9   See Campbell 1992, p. 8.

10   See Kahin 1955, p. 108, and Atkins 2002, pp. 14–34.

11   There are a growing number of studies of the relationships between media and politics in Southeast Asia but three from the early part of the twenty-first century provide a good sense of the scope and nature of the challenges faced by governments attempting to cope with contemporary electronic media at that time. See Woodier 2001, Atkins 2002, McCargo 2003.

causes. Thirdly, highly mobile elites in several multinational regions or language groups are increasingly interested in supra-national journals and news sources. These are imagined trans-national communities defined by language, ideology and temporary migration (Reid, pp. 13–14). However, the enduring and important question of how it is that particular technologies work to inculcate a sense of nation, or indeed, a sense of grievance about dominant discourses of identity are not as well developed as a book of this detail and quality might have done. Here I have in mind the work of William Connolly who in his enraged assessment of the Bush presidency noted the ways that distinct elements, cowboy capitalism, evangelical Christianity, the Republican Party and the electronic media, infiltrate each other and metabolise into a moving complex. One might baulk at Connolly's post-structuralism and his argument that the assemblage he attempts to define is a kind of resonance machine, but it is harder to deny a key finding. Americans, Connolly argues, have become profoundly hostile to a wide range of others, particularly Muslims, and the intensity of the hostility is in part an effect of the electronic media. Moreover, the resonance machine goes a long way to explaining the 'congealed . . . disposition of fixed resentment against an actually existing world' evident in American identity discourse.[12] Connolly's more important point is the specific form of identity-making that has arisen from the confluence of social and technological developments in the US. Despite a degree of OSH nationalism being evident in Southeast Asia, Reid's more general argument is that nationalism has become less impassioned and ethnically focused and increasingly civic and pragmatic, suggesting that there is no preordained outcome when identity discourses are articulated through the electronic media. In short, there is a case for a sharper focus on what, if any, integrative role electronic mediation of identity has played in Southeast Asia.

VI

Anthony Reid makes significant contributions to the literatures on nationalism and Southeast Asian politics with this absorbing volume. His question about whether nationalism is at a different stage of development in Southeast Asia or of a different type to European nationalism is an important one. Upon my reading, Reid hedges his bets as to the answer. On the one hand, he notes that Southeast Asia's imperial boundaries were the subject of dispute on 'historical, cultural or ideological' grounds between 1940 and 1980 but that attempts to vary such boundaries resulted in failure. He notes that distrust still characterises many of these borders but that military confrontation is now a thing of the past (Reid, pp. 2 and 216). The reasons for the failure to change boundaries are complex, but relative political stability within existing borders, the success of state nationalism in turning even the most far flung of peoples into citizens, and an increasingly multilateral international environment and economically integrated region are important. These factors suggest that it is not that Southeast Asian nationalism is at a different level of development, but that a range of factors, domestic and international, have fundamentally altered its political prospects and emotional force. On the other hand, the Hapsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires as well as Yugoslavia and the USSR are relatively recent examples of failed attempts to weld together multi-ethnie polities. This suggests that there is precedent for the

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12 Connolly 2005, p. 881.

model but European examples lack the anti-imperial, anti-colonial element that is so important to understanding Southeast Asian nationalism.

In his conclusion, Reid focuses particularly on Indonesia and Malaysia. Of the former he notes the terrible price of forming a unitary republic borne largely by ordinary Indonesians. 'State rituals and state museums were designed to remind that this idea was conceived in blood, and further blood was permitted in its name' (Reid, p. 212). And, as Reid observes, a great deal of blood, much of it perpetrated or encouraged by the state, flowed in Indonesia, and yet, the republic has had more success in turning the disparate polity inherited from the Dutch into a nation of Indonesians than the Malaysian government has had in creating Malaysians. Of that country, Reid points to the federal nature of the settlement that has seen a stronger role for the rule of law and, while hardly perfect, its 'consensual, constitutional and peaceful' integration of Borneo peoples into the Malaysian nation. Malaysia, says Reid, has proven 'far more congenial' to ethnic groups endeavouring to maintain unique identities. Federalism has well served democracy, not least because opposition parties can gain valuable experience at state level with a degree of separation from the zero-sum game of centralised electoral politics. The price, though, has been an electoral politics framed in discourses of religion and ethnicity, as parties so organised have a strong interest in maintaining the distinctiveness of their constituents at the expense of a broader Malaysian identity (Reid, pp. 213–14). Nonetheless, Reid is in little doubt that the Malaysian experience is more successful. Not only has the country been spared the violent upheavals that have scarred the Indonesian experience of nationhood, the country is economically far more prosperous than its Indonesian neighbour: from comparable GDP per capita in 1940, Indonesia's per capita GNP is now only a quarter of Malaysia's (Reid, p. 214).

Perhaps the most significant conclusion that Reid draws is the changed international environment of the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. With the precedent of the European Community demonstrating that violent nationalisms could at least be partially tamed through economic cooperation, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) set about overcoming its Cold War origins and softening 'the tyranny of boundaries' through trade, intra-regional investment, growth triangles and other regional groupings designed to facilitate economic prosperity and moderation of 'the absolutism of borders'. The receding threat of communism in much of Southeast Asia and the formal end of the Cold War marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s certainly provided a fillip to intra-regional relations. Moreover, the development of multilateralism in recent decades has provided a much more sophisticated toolkit to prevent or ameliorate nationalist disruptions to the world order, and this too has been of great benefit to the Southeast Asian nations that have both participated in and improved the effectiveness of multilateral institutions (Reid, pp. 217–18). On this view, the question of whether Southeast Asia's nationalism is of a different time or type seems to be resolved in favour of the latter. In other words, it is impossible to imagine nations taking quite the shape they have without considering the major influence of the world order upon them at the time each was founded. It is not just that Southeast Asian nations emerged at a different time to those of Europe; they were forged in distinctive global circumstances largely not of their own making. Despite the traumas associated with their establishment, it might just be that the world order in which they were partly shaped is, ultimately, to their advantage.

A decade on from East Timor's independence and with Indonesia's transformation into a multiparty democracy looking ever more secure, I cannot help but wonder what kind of conversation Wayan and I might now have about the events that so riled us both. I have no doubt that my appreciation of Southeast Asian nationalism is more sophisticated as a result of my reading *Imperial Alchemy*, and wonder if I may be able to better see some of the subtleties of his sense of community and appreciate his concerns a little more clearly. For example, perhaps now I would ponder why a member of the Balinese, Hindu community, whose own relations with the Javanese and Muslim-dominated Indonesian state have at times been difficult, seemingly had little empathy for another minority struggling against the military-backed Jakarta government. That Wayan, in this context, primarily felt 'Indonesian' rather than 'Balinese' now makes me wonder if I failed to appreciate that he may well have been incensed that the blood and sacrifice, real and imagined, that was spent in establishing Indonesia was so easily spurned by the East Timorese. How might Wayan's knowledge of the mass killings of 1965–1966 that had proceeded with unusual ferocity in Bali have informed his understanding of the dangers of things falling apart when the centre cannot hold? Wayan was angry about what he perceived as the role of the international community in prising East Timor away from the Republic but maybe he also feared the consequences in his own community. In 2000, I gave none of these matters any thought.

Is it also possible that with Suharto's heavy-handed military government increasingly a distant memory, Wayan's own senses of community, threat and security may have changed? The existential crisis posed by the Asian financial catastrophe of 1997–1998 and the deep uncertainties generated by Suharto's fall in 1998 may well have influenced Wayan's interpretation of the East Timor plebiscite of 1999, and one wonders if in the present the loss of East Timor may not seem quite as threatening as it did a dozen years ago.

Each of us has something of our nations inscribed into our identity. However, what Reid's outstanding book demonstrates is that human beings are not stone tablets bearing an unchanging inscription. Rather, through global circumstance, individual necessity and the work of national alchemists, our identities are always in flux and increasingly multiple. If that is the route to increasing peacefulness and tolerance, then long may it continue.

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