

## **Evolution of Society and Historical state development**

### **Introduction**

The countries of the region known as Southeast Asia make, on face value, an odd combination. They comprise some very different countries, one being the world's fourth largest state by population – some 250 million predominantly Muslim people living on around a third of its almost 18,000 islands across a 5,000 kilometre-wide archipelago of almost two million square kilometres. This country, Indonesia, achieved independence in 1949, prior to which its constituent parts comprised the Dutch East Indies. At the other end of the scale is Timor-Leste, one of the world's smallest states by population, with around 1.2 million predominantly Catholic people living on little more than half of an island of a little over 15,000 square kilometres. It achieved independence in 2002, prior to which it was colonised by Indonesia for 24 years and, before that, by Portugal. All of the countries in between have been European colonies but for Thailand, which managed to avoid the formality of that arrangement by being allowed to remain as a buffer between British and French colonial interests.

The region that comprises Southeast Asia is bounded to the west by India, to the north by China, to the east by the Pacific Ocean and its island states and to the south by Australia. Like all such boundaries, these are somewhat arbitrary, marking roughly geographic, specifically colonial and sometimes ethnic distinctions. Manifested as states, Southeast Asia includes continental Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam and the maritime Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines and Timor-Leste.

Like all such boundaries, the distinctions between these states and the people who live in them tend to blur and the lived reality is much less clear than the delineations on a map. If regions were identified by ethnicity rather than states' boundaries, there would be a considerable ambiguity around this region's edges. Yet Southeast Asia is an identified region and self-identifies, in regular discussion with itself through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, on that basis.

The original inhabitants of the more southern parts of this broad region were Australoid peoples, limited remnants of whom occupy some of the mountainous areas (e.g. the Orang Asli of Malaysia). Subsequent populations arrived in the region in waves primarily from around 2000 bce, having migrated south from the Tibetan plateau, overland from regions of what is now southern China and from south-eastern China and Taiwan out towards the Pacific Ocean.

Such waves of migration have, at least for the time being, effectively finished. However, one of the more recent waves of migration was the Hmong, from the highlands of southern China to the highlands of northern Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. Their migration began in the late eighteenth century and did not effectively conclude until the early 1970s.

While the waves of migration that have populated Southeast Asia can be characterised by relatively minor anatomical differences, more usefully they fall into phyla of languages: the Sino-Tibetan languages to the west, mostly Myanmar; T'ai-Kadai in Thailand, Laos and Myanmar's Shan state; and the Austro-Asiatic languages groups of Proto Mon-Khmer across the rest of mainland

Southeast Asia. Austronesian languages of the Malayo-Polynesian group dominate throughout the archipelago, but for the Papuan phylum of the region's south-eastern edges, where Southeast Asia blurs with the south-west Pacific.

The region also has a significant Han Chinese (mostly Hoklo/Hakka) population of around 30 million, some of whom have been resident as traders for hundreds of years but many of whom migrated during the colonial era (or immediately after), taking advantage of increased economic opportunities. While many Chinese have intermarried with others or have assimilated in name and language (e.g. the Peranakan, or 'descendants' of Indonesia), there remain significant and often quite distinct ethnic Chinese communities throughout the region, notably in Singapore and Malaysia. There is also some European racial influence, with elements of Dutch in parts of Indonesia, more notably Portuguese in earlier trading centres of Malacca and Timor-Leste, and Spanish in the Philippines.

While there is much to distinguish the various ethnic groups of Southeast Asia, there are also a number of commonalities across the region. In particular, common to all but a few highland tribes is the cultivation of rice, particularly wet or paddy rice. While wet rice agriculture is not universal throughout the region – there is also some dry rice farming along with other staple crops – it has laid the foundation for the creation of the major civilisations and hence key cultural influences of the region. These large, settled civilisations that, at different times, held sway over significant empires, include the Angkorian Khmer empire, the dynasties of Central and East Java (the most extensive of which was Majapahit), the central Burman empires, the pre-Lao state of Lan Xang, the rise of Thai empires and the southward expansion of Vietnam.

Parallel to the establishment of this agricultural phenomenon, and the centralised political systems it helped engender, was the Hindu-inspired cult of the *deva-raja* (god-king) and the development of strongly hierarchical patron–client relations. This Hindu influence was noticeable across the region but for Vietnam, which was more strongly influenced by China, the eastern parts of Indonesia and the Philippines, whose first major external influence was Islam, and some of the south-eastern islands and the northern Philippines, where later forms of Christianity were most influential.

Prior to colonialism, with the exception of Vietnam, states in Southeast Asia did not have demarcated borders, but porous centres of power that waxed and waned. This dynamism of states based on an 'exemplary centre' has been likened by some scholars to a 'mandala' model of political organisation, where the god-king sits at the pinnacle of power, surrounded by successive circles of nobles, courtiers and others in descending order of political importance, often encompassing smaller sites of power within its larger framework and further sites of friendly and enemy states. By definition, in such a model, if an enemy state expands, one's own state contracts, and vice-versa, so that a shifting equilibrium becomes the only constant in inter-state affairs. Populations in this context were important much less in terms of their ethnicity than as a principal source of labour and hence power. Interrupted and in significant part shaped by colonialism, regional states have largely adapted to Westphalian state models, particularly around notions of fixed borders.

Within the traditional patron–client model, rulers usually had some degree of reciprocal relations with their subjects. This tended to decline in more centralised, mandala-type political systems where the monarch sat both at the centre and on top of the political system, protected by courtiers and other underlings in concentric circles of authority. More localised, village-level political systems relied on a much more direct relationship between the ruler and the ruled.

The notion of an all-powerful ruler has not entirely disappeared in Southeast Asia, and royalty and other strong leaders, and charismatic individuals, have frequently continued to reflect both the extraordinary status of royalty, such as Thailand’s King Bhumibol Adulyadej or Cambodia’s Norodom Sihanouk, or the personification of power. This personification of power can also be seen in Myanmar’s Aung San, Ne Win, Aung San Suu Kyi; Cambodia’s Hun Sen; Vietnam’s Ho Chi Minh; Indonesia’s Sukarno and Suharto; Malaysia’s Mahatir Mohamad; Singapore’s Lee Kwan Yew; the Philippines’ Ramon Magsaysay and Ferdinand Marcos; Brunei’s Sultan Bolkiah; and Timor-Leste’s Xanana Gusmao.

Significant attributes of powerful rulers were reflected through the so-called ‘Asian Values’ debate of the 1980s and 1990s, in which there was claimed to be a specifically ‘Asian’ way of understanding and applying political power. This was said to reflect notions of the community over the individual and consequent reinterpretations of civil and political rights, respect for and obedience to elders and leaders, hard work, and the valuing of education. The difficulty with this assertion was that, although it contained elements of truth, there were perhaps more exceptions to the rule than there was agreement with it. Moreover, it neatly reflected the political interests of a specific status quo and disallowed, by definition, meaningful challenge to the assertion.

The ‘people power’ movement of the Philippines and the democratisation of Indonesia after 1998 did much to damage the ‘Asian Values’ claim. Singaporean leader Lee Kwan Yew later modified the term to mean ‘Confucian Values’, which, having a Chinese connotation, clearly did not apply to most Southeast Asians. In the end, what was purported to be a common characteristic of Southeast Asian people transpired to be a common characteristic of authoritarian leaders more widely dispersed. What it meant to be Southeast Asian was less such an overt political construction and more a matter of having to address common sets of challenges around development and, in some cases, democratisation and civil and political rights.

In common with many societies far removed from Southeast Asia, patron–client relations continue to form much of the basis of society and politics, and often of economies and commerce. At one level, this tends to construct a mutually supportive and reciprocal set of relations which help bond together particular societies or social orders. However, translated into the post-colonial era and in particular into a modern economy, such patron–client relations also lend themselves to corruption, particularly of political office where traditionally there was little or no distinction between power and reward. Once, without formal taxation, there was a requirement for rulers to run the state from their own funds and there was some notion of reciprocity. More recently, however, rulers have been able to rely on state revenue and the reciprocal link is largely broken, leading to corruption scandals such as the accumulation of more than US\$5 billion by Ferdinand Marcos and approximately US\$35 billion by Suharto and his family.

While it is relatively simple to identify social commonalities or the major racial or linguistic families across Southeast Asia, descending into ethnicity is vastly more complex. There are more than 90 language groups across the region, each often dividing into locally distinct languages and dialects. To illustrate, while there are two principle language groups in the tiny half-island of Timor-Leste, it has 28 distinct languages and a further 16 dialects among its 1.2 million people. Neighbouring West Papua (as part of Indonesia) has more than 300 distinct languages. Even relatively ethnically cohesive states, such as Vietnam, have more than 60 languages, which is a common experience throughout the region.

The region's linguistic diversity reflects its fractured geography, with steep mountains and seas dividing peoples into historically relatively isolated communities. It was through such relative isolation that not only did distinct languages arise, but so too did local customs, belief systems and specific forms of social organisation. Without Westphalian borders prior to colonialism, regional authority and influences waxed and waned. This left overlays of some cultures on others, for example the strong Javanese influence in Bali and Sumatran influences in peninsula Malaysia. In some cases, the overlay of some cultures all but eclipsed those they touched, for example the Khmer and Vietnamese diminution of the once strong Cham nation, linguistically related to the Acehnese of northern Sumatra, or the subjugation of the Mon to invading Burmans. There were also more constructive relations, such as ancient Khmer links to the Srivajaya empire, on Sumatra, and to Java, manifested in the joining of their respective royal dynasties.

More widespread influences came from India, beginning around 2000 years ago, with the consequent spread of Hinduism and then Buddhism. This left a deep imprint of not just religion but also the introduction of Sanskritic literature and the embedding of Hindu art, culture and aspects of social organisation. Similarly, the spread of Islam, particularly through the maritime areas, deeply influenced traditional belief systems, cultural practices and modes of social and political organisation. So too the later arrival of Christianity influenced some regional groups, if with lesser total reach. In many cases, these influences have led to a blending with pre-existing modes to form the syncretised cultures, for example, of animism and Buddhism in Myanmar; animism, Hinduism and Islam in Central and East Java; animism and Hinduism in Bali; and Catholicism and animism in the Philippines and, even more pronouncedly, in Timor-Leste.

The impact of competing colonialisms in particular has been profound, not least through the reaction to it informing nascent notions of nationalism. In many cases, this emergence of national identity was framed by the geography of colonialism; though each of Malay origin, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines charted distinct national paths, but for a brief moment of pan-Malayism in 1963. Interestingly, too, despite rejecting colonialism, national identity has been framed not just around colonial borders (independent Thailand had its borders set in the west and south by the UK and in the east by France) but also by adopting internal colonial policies. Such policies include the relocation of majority populations and the displacement of original populations, regional exploitation to the benefit of the centre, and the domination of the state by ethnic majorities, often to the exclusion of minorities.

So, too, ethnic groupings of people that might have otherwise found cause for national unity were divided. The Lao were divided between Thailand and Laos, along the Mekong River as a boundary

between two territories rather than an arterial route within one. The various Malay peoples were arbitrarily divided or incorporated into colonial entities according to deals done in Europe and the US. Arguably the Malays of the Malaysian Peninsula have more in common with the Malays of Sumatra, from whom many are descended, than the Malays of Sumatra have in common with their Javanese counterparts to the south. Similarly, the Malays of Brunei at once reflect a greater Malay identity as well as Brunei's loss of the north of the island, Borneo, the name of which is derived from that of the kingdom.

The single largest ethnic group in the Southeast Asian region is the Javanese, with some 135 million people, which tends to dominate the rest of Indonesia's population of some 245 million, scattered across 12 major ethnic groups and hundreds of smaller groups, in terms of politics and cultural influences. The Javanese were originally animist, but broadly adopted and adapted Hinduism from early in the first millennium ce, and then Buddhism towards the end of the first millennium ce, with Islam becoming more predominant from the fourteenth century onwards. There remains, however, a blending of beliefs among many Javanese, who overwhelmingly officially identify themselves as Muslim but whose religious practices and beliefs reflect elements of earlier traditions. To illustrate, the storylines and characters of the Hindu *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* continue to resonate in traditional Javanese storytelling and plays, and the Sanskrit eagle, *garuda*, which occurs in Hindu mythology, provides the backdrop to Indonesia's coat of arms, as well as lending its name to the national airline.

While often characterised as largely homogenous, the Javanese are a useful case study about the unifying and also the dividing effects of ethnicity. Inhabitants of the island of Java, Javanese live in the centre and east of the island, the west being populated by ethnic Sundanese. Like all ethnic groups, the Javanese are not homogenous and manifest distinctions along a number of lines.

Perhaps the most notable distinction is between observant (*santri*) and nominal (*abangan*) Muslims, who are themselves broadly divided by an urban/rural split. This distinction is commonly identified as being along the lines of the modernist, urban-oriented organisation Muhammadiyah and the more traditionalist, rural-oriented Nahdlatul Ulama. However, there are also a range of other, smaller organisations, including Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, segueing into activist groups such as Lembaga Dakwa Islam Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic Propagation Institute); militant Islamist organisations such as the Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders Front); and Islamist terrorist groups such as the descendent organisations of the Darul Islam movements, for example Jema'ah Islamiyah and its successor organisations including Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid. At the other end of the religious scale are organisations such as the Jaringan Islam Liberal (Islam Liberal Network) and a plethora of less formally organised religious groups that are only tangentially or nominally Muslim.

The Javanese are traditionally also divided by status, reflected in distinct languages based on politeness for each status group, Ngoko (lower status), Krama Madyu (middling), Krama (high status) and Krama Inggil (highest status), as well as some 18 regional dialects. Beyond this, there are degrees of influence of colonialism and modernisation, which have impacted on much traditional culture and adherence to ideologies – for example the state ideology of Pancasila, or Five Principles – while communism was relatively popular in Java until its adherents were all but

wiped out in the massacres and imprisonments of 1965–66. Then there is simply the fact that local villages and communities have developed in distinct ways relative to each other depending on prevailing influences and circumstances.

Vietnam's ethnic Vietnamese (formally: Khin) are the next largest ethnic group in Southeast Asia, numbering around 77 million of the country's population of 90 million. The Vietnamese originated in south-eastern China, occupying the Red River Valley from around 1,000 bce. The expansion of the Han Chinese forced the Vietnamese largely out of lands in south-eastern China into the Red River Delta, and brought the people of the precursor state of Vietnam under largely continuous Chinese control until the tenth century.

Despite continuing tensions and occasional battles with the Chinese, and reflecting long periods of occupation by them, Vietnam bears the most distinct Confucian influence of any Southeast Asian state. Even its name is a juxtaposed approximation of the Chinese term for 'South Tribe'. Vietnam used the Chinese examination system and court culture until after the arrival of the colonial French, and employed Chinese characters until 1918. Despite formally rejecting Confucianism, its characteristic influences continue to pervade Vietnamese 'communist' society.

As Vietnam expanded southwards, between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, it conquered and largely absorbed the Indianised state of Champa and then the south-eastern portion of Cambodia around the Mekong Delta. This area is still referred to by Cambodians as 'Kampuchea Krom' (Lower Cambodia), while 'Khmer Krom' denotes the ethnic Cambodians who still live in the region.

With each of these influences the malleability of cultures and ethnicities has shifted, and it continues to shift. Arguably the greatest post-colonial impact upon notions of ethnicity has been the attempted standardisation of 'national' cultures, commonly built more around an idealised state norm than the common nineteenth-century European notion of ethno-nationalism, in which there is a high degree of congruity between the ethnic or language group and the state.

Assuming that the idea of 'nation' is based upon a geographically specific bonded political group, there are two principal conceptions of 'nation' in Southeast Asia. The first is the more conventional ethno-nationalist model, which is demonstrated in the core populations of states such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Brunei, Singapore and Thailand. Even among these states, however, there are numerous ethnic groups which have at various times resisted central control or the imposition of dominant ethnic characteristics.

This resistance is more pronounced in less ethnically coherent states, including Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines. Each of these states has, at different times, experienced high levels of armed rebellion against national inclusion, and there have been and remain numerous assertions of distinct national identity and related claims to separate statehood within these states.

In Indonesia, while Aceh's most recent rebellion (1976–2005) against the state has ended, there remains among many within Aceh and among its diaspora a continuing claim for independence from the Indonesian state. West Papua, too, continues to experience claims for separate state status, based on the shared ethnic and racial identity of that territory's Melanesian population as distinct

from the predominantly Malay racial background of most of the rest of Indonesia. Indonesia has experienced a number of rebellions over its relatively short history, with claims to separate national identity also in Ambon (Republic of the South Moluccas) and northern Sulawesi, based on competing understandings of culture, power and imposition.

Tensions have also arisen in Malaysia, Singapore and Timor-Leste over ethnic distinction, leading to inter-ethnic violence in both places. In neither case were there separatist movements, although in Malaysia in particular the distinction between the three main ethno-racial groups – Malay, Chinese and Indian (mostly Tamil) – remains pronounced and is institutionalised in political parties.

This brings us to the second and more common sense of nation in Southeast Asia, which is defined as a state that has had its borders defined not by a particular bonded ethnic group but by geo-colonial circumstances. In most cases, the borders of such states were defined by colonial powers, if in some cases approximating to pre-existing polities. To illustrate, Myanmar occupies a territory that approximates to an area ruled by the majority Bama peoples prior to colonialism, but which varied over time to include or leave out territories which were once under Bama imperial domination. The T'ai-speaking Shan state, in northeast Myanmar, has at times been a vassal state to the imperial powers located in what is now central Myanmar, but at others was independent.

Myanmar's north-west area, approximating to the western Sagaing Region (and now a Naga self-administered zone), was historically an area subject to no external rule, but was demarcated in 1826 under the Anglo-Burmese Treaty of Yandabo, which ended the first Anglo-Burmese War (and in which Burma lost the vassalage of Assam and Manipur), and the 1953 Indo-Burmese Boundary Demarcation. Assam, Manipur, Jaintia and Cachar, in what is now part of north-east India (and therefore technically part of South Asia), was under Bama domination until 1835; Asam itself was a T'ai-speaking kingdom from the fourteenth century and is therefore more closely related to Southeast than South Asia. Similarly, the Dao of Yunnan Province, China, are a T'ai-speaking people more closely related to Thais than to Han Chinese.

In terms of ethnic identity, the T'ai-speaking Dao, Shan, northern Thai (Lanna) and Laos also shared as much in common with each other as the northern and southern Thai, who have since become a nation within a unified state. (The Assamese were linguistically assimilated into the Indo-Aryan language family and now speak a version of Bengali).

While post-colonial states largely exist within exact or approximate colonial boundaries, the states themselves were mostly formed in opposition to colonialism. In one sense, there is an inherent contradiction in some of the more overtly constructed states having explicitly rejected colonialism, but having adopted colonial boundaries (and sometimes oppressive colonial-era laws) in the post-colonial setting.

In this state-centric approach, the sense of 'nation' is more highly constructed, including through the standardisation of a common language, requiring a common academic curriculum (which frequently valorises 'nationalist' heroes whose agendas were less encompassing), and often inclusion by force. This, then, divides the 'nations' of Southeast Asia between those that are largely voluntary and those that are based on a significant element of compulsion.

The people of the Indonesian province of Aceh, perhaps more than others, bring together some of the complementary and contradictory characteristics of ethnicity and nation. The people of Aceh are primarily of Malay stock but, occupying the north-western tip of the island of Sumatra at the entrance to the much-travelled Straits of Malacca, they have also been subject to numerous other influences. Commenting on the variation in physical features, many Acehnese say that it is not what one looks like that makes one Acehnese, but what is in one's heart. This then goes to the question of ethnicity.

Ethnically, being Acehnese is defined primarily by being able to speak Acehnese, an Austronesian language related to but not mutually intelligible with Indonesian (a dialect of Malay), and by being Muslim. Being at the first port of call in the region, Aceh was the first point in maritime Southeast Asia to receive Islam, and is colloquially known as *Serambi Mekkah* (Mecca's Veranda). As such, many traders intermingled with its earlier inhabitants, so that the racial characteristics of Acehnese are largely Malay but also reflect Arab and Tamil influences, among others. Interestingly, the ethnic group that the Acehnese are closest to is the remnant Chams of central Indochina, who speak a close dialect of the same Chamic language and who are also Muslim. There are indications that Aceh and the former state of Champa may have had close political and economic relations, or that Aceh was influenced by the rise of the Khmer empire and the southward movement of Vietnamese, forcing many Chams to flee to overseas locations.

Although based on predecessor states, Aceh developed most clearly as a state from the thirteenth century, rising to a position of being a regional power in the seventeenth century. A sense of distinct Acehnese national identity, based on a shared village order, religious belief and adherence to a central sultanate, can be clearly marked from this time. The practice of political power in Aceh has long rested on a complex of factors, with power-sharing traditionally expressed through what is referred to as the 'state code', translated as 'Power rests with the king, Law with the great imam of Syah Kuala [Bandar Aceh's great mosque], Tradition with the Princess of Pahang and Regulations with the Bentara [similar to a police chief].' Deleting the role of the Princess of Pahang, which refers to cultural matters, this traditional political system reflected a triumvirate in which no individual (or single group) dominated political relations. The Acehnese state, which manifested this sense of national identity, was internationally recognised until 1871, when the UK withdrew opposition to Dutch incorporation of Aceh into its East Indies colonial possessions, which started two years later. The Acehnese resisted the Dutch for 40 years, with limited guerrilla activity against the Dutch until Japanese occupation in 1942.

Some scholars have suggested that notions of Acehnese national identity were relatively recently constructed, as a means of providing an ideology for Aceh's separatist war (1976–2005). There is some truth in the assertion that Acehnese national identity has been valorised and reified, although a similar assertion can be made about many nationalist movements claiming a glorious past upon which to base contemporary nationalist claims. There has also been a claim that Aceh's participation in the war against the Dutch, and agreement to be part of a post-colonial Indonesia, limits nationalist assertions. However, the Acehnese had agreed to be an autonomous part of an Indonesian federation which, when undermined by incorporation into the wider province of North Sumatra and the abolition of Indonesian federalism in 1950, led to rebellion in 1953. That rebellion



ended in 1963 with the promise of greater autonomy, which was not implemented and which, in turn, led to the renewal of armed separatist activity 13 years later.

Despite a 2005 peace agreement which saw the implementation of greater autonomy for Aceh, a local sense of a distinct 'national' identity in Aceh remains pronounced, and continues to be asserted by many Acehnese activists. This sense of nation, then, continues to sit at odds with Indonesia's assertion of an overarching 'national' identity, which is constructed around the state, a generic language and its own somewhat glorified 'national' history, much of which finds its foundations in the greatest (claimed) extent of the Majapahit Javanese empire of the fourteenth century.

While the example of Aceh stands out, it is indicative of the at times mutually engaging or overlapping but otherwise quite separate and competing histories of various peoples of the region, their assertions of particular identities and the extent to which they agree with or accept the confluence between ethnic identity and the state. The Islamic Malays of (the former kingdom of) Pattani in southern Thailand have long asserted an independent identity and a claim for separate status, as have the Islamic Moros (from the Spanish 'Moors', Moroccan Muslims) of the southern Philippines; the Karen, Mon, Kachin and others of Myanmar; the racially distinct Melanesians of West Papua from the rest of Indonesia; and, at various times, populations within Indonesia in Ambon, Sulawesi, West Sumatra, Riau and elsewhere.

The status of pre-colonial states, kingdoms and sultanates reflected a shifting ordering of the ethno-political geography of Southeast Asia, some of which was nominally locked in place under colonial administration but which rarely survived intact the experience of post-colonial state formation. In part due to this distinct prior status and in part due to the centralist qualities of most post-colonial states, Southeast Asia has, as a consequence, experienced widespread and often sustained separatist insurgencies.

Having noted this claim to non-state national identity, Thailand has been quite successful at building a sense of Thai national identity, if with a significant exception in the country's Muslim Malay south. The Thais of Bangkok are, in many cases, ethnic Chinese, but have for over a century adopted 'Thai-ness' as their national marker, starting in 1913 with the compulsory use of Thai names in order to gain Thai citizenship. The northern Thais, who were of a separately administered region and, at different times, a separate country, are to outsiders effectively indistinguishable from southern Thais, while the Thais of the north-eastern Isan region, many of whom are ethnic Lao, have also increasingly assimilated their sense of 'Thai-ness'.

Similarly, the Indonesian state's intentional nation-building program has been increasingly successful, in that the Indonesian language is now dominant, if sometimes alongside local languages. There is also a greater sense of agreement with national identity, which is more firmly embedded than in the past. In particular, in the post-Suharto 'reform' era, there is more coherence around a sense of national identity based on a civic identity. Where once being 'Indonesian' implied agreement with a largely unresponsive authoritarian political system, it has increasingly come to mean a more nuanced and plural set of political values, including the opportunity for and right to disagreement, robust political debate and open participation in largely free and fair

procedural democracy (there continue to be questions around more substantive aspects of Indonesia's democratic process).

Negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have also moved towards establishing greater regional autonomy within the framework of the pre-existing Philippines state. At one level, this also implies agreement, if a negotiated one, around the status of the state and supra-national identity. Elsewhere, what it means to be Filipino is broadly accepted, even where there remains an ideological contest over the orientation of the state. Philippine communists do not agree with the ideological orientation of the state of which they are, for technical purposes, citizens, but they do agree that they are Filipino.

So too in Myanmar, where there has been separatist rebellion predicated upon separate ethnic and national identities since just after independence, there has been movement towards agreement around a set of negotiated relations. This was intended to see previously opposed groups incorporated into the overarching state and thus, in a practical sense, accepting at least some of what it means to be of Myanmar. Interestingly, on this point, there is debate within Myanmar about accepting the idea of being a constituent member of the Myanmar nation but, if of Burman ethnic background, still being referred to as 'Burmese' rather than Myanmarese/Myanmese. This, then, distinguishes non-Burman citizens of Myanmar by their ethnicity and continues to reinforce the dichotomy that historically separated the central *Burma Pyima* (Burma Proper; *pyima*: ruling/administration/benefactor) and the peripheral ethnic groups as *Pyinay* (inferior/subordinate).

This goes to the question of geo-institutional arrangements, rather than to the sense of the shared identity upon which a coherent and politically bonded nation is predicated. In this respect, while many peoples of Southeast Asia accept, with varying degrees of willingness, their incorporation into particular states, their sense of bonded political identity may exist on quite a separate plane. Unlike in much of Europe and some other specific areas, states exist in Southeast Asia and nations also exist, but the confluence of both in the 'nation-state' exists, even in the strongest examples such as Vietnam or Cambodia, only in a qualified and distinctly multi-ethnic sense.

Reference Book: Politics in Contemporary Southeast Asia: authority, Democracy and Political Change

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