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DILLINGHAM DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES

"THE RE-EMERGENCE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA:  
AN INDONESIAN PERSPECTIVE"

by

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at the

CENTER FOR CULTURAL AND TECHNICAL INTERCHANGE  
BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

HONOLULU, HAWAII

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Adlai Stevenson is reported to have said that the job of an ambassador consists of one-third protocol, one-third alcohol and one-third Geritol. Although lately I have been made uncomfortably aware of its basic truth, this job description makes no reference to one redeeming feature, namely the opportunity to travel and to meet interesting, as well as interested people. I am, therefore, very glad to be here in your midst.

The subject I am going to discuss with you today deals with the re-emergence of a region of many cultures, inhabited by many races. To be able to do so on this beautiful island, with its own history of racial and cultural interpenetration, very significantly adds to this pleasure. Because of the cultural sensitivity that must have developed from your history, and the resulting awareness of the opportunities that cross-cultural relations provide, Hawaii has a good chance to develop into a real center of a distinct Pacific community. Given its geographic location, it will entirely depend on the intellectual strength and creativity as well as on the commercial vigor and resourcefulness of its people, whether the state of Hawaii can play this role. The institution of the Dillingham Distinguished Lecture Series certainly demonstrates the presence of both these qualities, and I deem it an exceptional honor to have been asked to open this series. That the East-West Center is sponsoring this endeavor, only lends substance to its reputation of imaginative intellectual leadership.

The region I am going to discuss with you today is a constituent element of that Pacific community. At the same time it is also part of another group of countries bordering the Indian Ocean. The history of this area has been very much determined by this geographic location, and by its function as a link between these two great ocean basins. By the same token, this region has felt the contradictory pulls that these two basins have exerted upon it, one towards the Pacific, one towards the Indian Ocean. This is still very much the situation today.

It has been one of the ironic corollaries of independence that in breaking through to a new future the nations of Southeast Asia have been much more deeply and much more forcefully made aware of their history and its continuing impact into the present. During the struggle for freedom almost all of us only looked forward towards a future of freedom, towards the creation of new societies. There was in the nationalist movements of that period generally a radical rejection of the past, of traditions and the institutions that went with it. There was an openness for new ideas, a feverish and bold experimentation; many of us struck out in new directions. It was from that period that in many countries of the region a new literature began, new pictorial styles developed, new genres in music and dance, new attitudes towards religion, and new political beliefs.

Independence, however, also brought the need for self-identification, for defining the national self in relation to the outside world. The requirement to build political organizations of mass support and participation, the need to make people share in the new freedom and modern political concepts in terms that made sense to them, likewise compelled a renewed emphasis on the particular and the traditional in our cultures. After the attainment of independence, moreover, all the new nations found themselves saddled with a number of intractable problems that could only be overcome on the basis of a clear understanding of their historical roots. It is the awareness of their history that is to many of these nations



the source of their strength and their weakness. It is in their history that their pride and their sense of identity is rooted. To understand present day Southeast Asia, therefore, its problems as well as the motivational forces that determine the thrust of its movement, one inevitably has to start by turning, however briefly, to the history of the area.

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Southeast Asia's early history, from roughly the fourth to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, was shaped by the confluence of the cultural and commercial currents emanating from the two great centers of culture and power of the time, India and China. Each of them left, rather unevenly, its mark in different areas and in different ways. In these areas, indigenous popular systems of beliefs, closely tied to a developing system of wet rice cultivation, were re-formulated and integrated into the higher religions that came from these centers. It should be noted, however, that these higher religions changed as well in the process. It was this syncretic adaptation of the higher religions which in many important ways influenced social organization. In those areas where more elaborate power structures developed into inland kingdoms like Khmer and Mataram, they shaped the concepts of power, of kingship and of the state.

The shift of communications on the Asian mainland from land routes to the sea subsequently promoted the growth of a number of trading principalities and even empires, side by side, and very soon, in competition with the older inland kingdoms. Of these, one of the greatest in its day was the Kingdom of Criwidjaja near Palembang on the southern east coast of Sumatra. Up to the eighth century it exercised predominant control over the trade between China and Indonesia and between Indonesia and India. The struggle for hegemony over the important waterway of the Straits of Malacca has dominated much of Indonesian history. And when in the early part of the sixteenth century the Portuguese, the Spaniards, and a little later the Dutch, arrived to participate in the spice trade, they too became involved in the struggle for control of this vital artery.

It was through this trade route that both Islam and Christianity were introduced, spreading quickly throughout the insular part of Southeast Asia. From that time onwards, much of the history of Southeast Asia has been a history of multicorned rivalries, sometimes under the banner of different religions, skillfully exploited by the Europeans to increase their own power. The sequence of trade-religion-political control became in this way the standard pattern in the development of colonial rule. It was only after the industrial revolution in Europe, however, and the building of iron ships, that the definitive change in the balance of forces occurred. Until then, Europe had only been one of the many forces in the area, operating more or less on an equal footing.

If we now make a cross-cut through Southeast Asian history, the picture that emerges is one that resembles a layer cake with layer upon layer of cultural-religious sediment, some of them thick in some places while thin or entirely absent in others. Depending on the area under observation, one commonly finds an indigenous animist layer, a subsequent layer of Hindu or Buddhist sedimentation, or Hindu with an overlay of Buddhism in its Indian or Chinese variety. On top of this comes Islam or Christianity, either Catholic or Protestant, or both. In the political field, primitive belief in magical powers, covered by a layer of more sophisticated



concepts of statehood and kingly power, related to concepts of the cosmic order. On top of that, more or less modern notions about state, society and politics.

Like all similes, the analogy of the layer cake does not, of course, convey the full picture. Elements of the earlier layers continue to be present in the superseding ones, up to the very top, even to this day. And more important than the origin of the various influences on the region is the fact that none of these influences retained their original identity. Whether they came from India, China, Arabia or from modern western Europe, all of these influences were changed in the process of their absorption and integration, however incomplete sometimes, into the previous cultures of the region.

It would seem to me that the capacity of the peoples of Southeast Asia to digest and adapt these influences according to their own genius does represent the most striking element in this acculturation process. As a result, the cultures of Southeast Asia emerge with an autochthony quite distinct from the sources which have helped shape them. Viewed in this light, there are sufficient grounds to assume that in developing their answers to the problems of the post-independence era, and to those which accompany their transition into the twentieth century, the nations of Southeast Asia will eventually come up with responses, structures and institutions that are once again very much their own, differing from those prevailing in either the liberal-capitalistic or communist models.

Another set of factors should be borne in mind when we look at present-day Southeast Asia from this perspective of history. The first is the cultural and political heterogeneity in the Southeast Asian region as a whole; the wide variety of historical experience and response; and thirdly, the existence in many nations of deep religious, ethnic or racial cleavages, here and there reinforced by the remnants of traditional conflicts of a dynastical nature.

The consolidation of colonial rule in Southeast Asia, as of the middle of the nineteenth century, further complicated the situation. Many of the boundaries along which Southeast Asia was balkanized by the colonizing powers were drawn quite arbitrarily, sometimes by the whim of the local colonial administrator, sometimes on the basis of erroneous assumptions, sometimes formulated in Europe as part of the effort to establish a new balance of power in the post-Napoleonic period. Colonial boundaries often cut across populations of the same ethnic origin. In several instances the colonial ruler used one ethnic group preferentially above others for purposes of administration or to facilitate and protect colonial rule in certain areas.

It was not surprising, therefore, that when the decolonization process set in, the old tensions, rivalries and conflicts, and many of the problems that had remained frozen in the general social stagnation that is characteristic of colonial rule, came to the fore again. What was more, they became heavily intertwined with the new problems of independent statehood: serious political discontent in one form or another because of neglect, sluggish economic growth, uneven distribution of wealth, population pressures or sometimes plain managerial inability on the part of the new government.

One further observation should be made. While on the one hand colonialism has led to social stagnation, stunting the natural growth of our societies, it also upset the traditional social fabric of these societies, starting from within the modern economic enclaves. In doing so, it released new creative forces from which the modern nationalist movements for independence eventually sprang.



With the attainment of independence, then, the new nations were faced with three different sets of problems. The first revolves around the very obvious question of how to run their country as a free nation: how to build the political and social institutions that would serve to inculcate among the population at large a sense of nationhood and shared responsibility; how to integrate the often disparate groups, at various levels of political development, and of various ethnic or racial origin, into a single political system that would enable the country effectively to deal with the need for rapid economic development; how to break out of the lopsided colonial economy they have inherited. The second set of problems arises out of the arbitrariness of colonial boundaries, the inequalities and injustices resulting from colonial favor and privilege. The third concerns the deepest motivational forces for social action that are rooted in the religious substratum of the traditional societies of Southeast Asia.

As all-encompassing systems of integration, the great religions have in the past determined the manner in which man sees reality and relates to it. They have helped shape social organization and have defined the terms in which man perceives the meaning of his life as an individual, his relations to his fellow man as well as his relations to the Divine. Colonial rule as well as modernity in general has wrought radical changes in this state of affairs, by setting in motion a largely autonomous process of rapid social development in a new direction.

Once the religiously determined system of values and attitudes, which was attuned to relatively simple, static agricultural societies, had broken down, the traditional religions in all these nations faced the problem of perceiving the new social realities and of developing a relevant relationship to them. Many of the intractable political problems that the new nations have to cope with are rooted in the crisis in which these traditional religions are now finding themselves. The depth of the religious and cultural crisis that these nations face, therefore, shows how deep the roots of political instability go and how superficial the categories of communism, anti-communism or socialism are, either as a means to understand the social and political processes that are going on, the dynamics of political choice, or the shape and structure of society toward which these nations are moving.

It should also be clear by now that the real dynamics of economic development are only partially reflected and can only be partially measured by external, quantifiable indices such as growth rates, per capita incomes, export rates and the like. When we speak of development, we speak of movement, of goals, of values, of motivation. We are essentially concerned with developing a new sense of direction for society, and with the deepest, often moral, motivations for social action. When we speak of development, we are really speaking about the modernization of the soul.

It is only when the goals of economic development and the need for social and cultural change can be shown to make sense in terms of traditionally accepted, religiously determined values and purposes, or can be shown to make sense in terms of newly acceptable structures of meaning, that the full mobilization of the motivational forces especially within the traditional sectors of these societies become possible. Addressing themselves to this problem is for the new nations almost as important as questions of savings and investments.



No wonder then that before new value systems have crystallized we are beset by such deep emotions, of fear, insecurity, but also of hope. The emotional upheavals, the political convulsions and the instability of these countries in general should, therefore, be seen as a reflection of these deeply rooted problems that are inescapably part of the process of modernization.

Against the magnitude of these problems the importance of nationalism as an integrative and constructive force becomes obvious. Nationalism is essentially the expression of a nation's will to reassert its own authenticity. In turn, it has the capacity to release other creative forces, for freedom is the essential condition for creativity and the blossoming of all human faculties. Nationalism is in the early stages the only force of sufficient cohesive strength to consummate the process of nation building and to set into motion the process of economic, social and political development. It is inevitably accompanied by the drive for social justice as well.

It should also be stressed that the many problems I have mentioned above will remain insoluble as long as the present level of poverty in the area persists. The absence of hope for a better future reinforces the inclination to cling in desperation to traditional and familiar institutions, attitudes and concepts. Or, to the tactics of violence and destruction. It is only at a higher level of economic life, when the most pressing problems of material want have been reduced in intensity that these tremendous problems will lend themselves to solution.

The first prerequisite facing all these governments, therefore, is rapid economic development. It goes without saying that economic development in the final analysis rests on the peoples of the Southeast Asian region themselves. It will very much depend on their will and their determination to pursue this path, on their capacity to create a political system that will make possible the fullest mobilization of all internal resources. It requires in short, the reorganization of these nations for development purposes and the capacity to harness the desire for a better life that exists among the people in general.

The role of foreign assistance is crucial in the development effort, however small it may be in relation to the magnitude of the national effort that is required. It is important for the transfer of capital or skills that are non-existent or in short supply, thereby speeding up the development process, and as a vehicle for the transfer of developmental values and the ethos of work, efficiency and progress that is necessary to make economic growth a self-sustaining process. Even more important, it can alleviate the burden to be carried by the indigenous population, thereby reducing the need for coercion in the mobilization for development. Foreign assistance in the economic development of the new nations, therefore, will help determine in a crucial fashion what kind of societies will eventually emerge in the Southeast Asian area. Will they be open or closed societies, increasingly free or increasingly repressive, friendly or hostile to the West? It will be an important factor in determining whether nationalism in Southeast Asia will turn towards the world its aggressive, xenophobic face or its constructive and cooperative aspect.

For we should not forget that post-colonial nationalism also has its pathological sides. By now we are all familiar with the deep suspicion, the potential xenophobia, the irrationality, the egocentricity or ethnocentricity and intolerance of which it is capable.



The question, therefore, of what kind of societies will emerge in Southeast Asia, open or closed, is a question that is important not only in terms of the immediate future. It is of even greater importance when we think in terms of 30 or 50 years from now, at which time we will have moved into the 21st century. One thing seems certain to me, and that is that Southeast Asia will progress economically, will industrialize and will develop the degree of national power that will enable it to hold its own in the future. If we look at the changes that have taken place in the last ten years, however slow they may seem in our day-to-day observations, the strides that have been made in developing modern technologically oriented economies have been truly impressive.

In looking at Southeast Asia, therefore, we should not merely be obsessed by its difficulties and its instability. Against the background of the history and the motivational forces that I have tried to present to you, the dominant feature that emerges is that the whole region of Southeast Asia is still in the process of philosophical and ideological re-orientation, and of political formation and consolidation. Of very few countries in the area can it be said that their political systems have yet found their final expression. In almost all, the search for a viable and adequate system is still going on. In almost all, some degree of political reform is bound to take place before their systems will be able to accommodate the cultural and political pluralism of their societies; absorb the social tensions that inevitably accompany rapid social and cultural change; integrate racial or religious minorities; and absorb into their political elites ever wider groups demanding political participation and responsibility.

As I have stressed before, the political systems should, above all, make possible the pursuit of rapid economic development, the harnessing of the creative energies of the people, and the mobilization of the financial resources needed to this end. At the same time, they should be able to withstand the stresses that arise out of demands for greater social justice, out of the discrepancy between the heightened expectations which political consciousness brings and the limited growth capacity of developing economies.

The depth and magnitude of the cultural re-orientation process that is part and parcel of modernization, should also make us aware of the depth of the emotions that are involved. Hope, uncertainty, fear, despair and even hatred will be the constant companions of the change, revolutionary growth and development through which the peoples of Southeast Asia are going at present. In a few other new nations outside Southeast Asia too we have seen some terrible expressions of the pathology of fear and despair. In a way, the attraction which Mao's type of communism still holds in some areas is very much a function of this despair, with an admixture of age-old chiliastic expectations.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that it will be some time before the countries of Southeast Asia will have worked out their own, viable political systems. Nor should we be frightened by the likelihood that in this process the viability of some of these countries as nation-states will be severely tested. What we will need is time and the opportunity to work out these problems ourselves. Already a number of developments are taking place that have made it possible for us to look at the future with a greater degree of confidence.

First, there is the so-called Green Revolution. The development and increasing utilization of the new miracle strains of rice and wheat have already dramatically changed the outlook on the future. For the problem of hunger now seems,



in principle at least, to be soluble. But it is also beginning to dawn on us how vast and revolutionary the consequences will be that arise out of the systematic utilization of these new strains and the new technology that they require. For it is bound to lead to fundamental social changes in the villages, the emergence of new types of economic and technologically-oriented local leadership, an increased demand for storage, transportation, and marketing facilities, for irrigation works large and small, all serving as an incentive to the development of agriculture-supporting industries. And the end may yet not be in sight.

Secondly, there is the fact that besides the already industrially developed countries of Japan and Australia, some of the new nations in the Western Pacific recently moved into their industrial phase. South Korea, Taiwan and of course China fall within this category. This has opened the perspective of new intra-regional trade patterns, which will further accelerate the development of the Southeast Asian region as a whole, and possibly the emergence of a new regional identity. In fact, this process has already set in. To the west of the region, India's entry as an exporter of manufactured goods will, in time, likewise affect the trade patterns across the Indian Ocean basin. An increased exchange here will no doubt provide a powerful pull in this direction again.

Thirdly, I should point to what may very well be the most important event in Southeast Asia, namely the emergence of the first post-independence, post-revolutionary generation in positions of power. This generation grew up, or was born in a free Southeast Asia. Their souls have not been scarred or twisted by the pain and humiliation of the colonial experience. More self-confident, less bothered by the sense of inferiority with which their elders were afflicted, they are also, perhaps helped by changing world conditions, less afraid of the specter of imperialism. Though no less patriotic than their parents, they are therefore less ideologically inclined, more pragmatic, less suspicious and more open to the outside world. They are no longer inclined to blame colonial rule or outside forces for their present difficulties and are quite willing and ready to face up to these problems themselves. But even more important than these attitudes is their acceptance of and their familiarity with science and technology. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the crucial importance of these new attitudes. In general, this generation realizes that the rate of economic development is not determined by the ideological orientation of the country, but rather by the size of investment, the application of technology and science, managerial effectiveness and efficiency and sustained commitment to the priority of development. It would be a mistake, however, to look at them only as a generation of technocrats. They themselves are too deeply aware of the structural changes in society that are required before modern techniques, skills and technology can be effectively applied. They themselves are too deeply conscious of the need to relate developmental goals, i.e., goals that pertain to the improvement of material life, to other purposes that give meaning to man's life in this world. Social justice for instance is one of these. This generation does not speak of crisis, but of challenge, and they are determined to succeed.

It is essential, therefore, that the advanced countries respond positively to the emergence of these new creative forces by helping to provide them with the means to succeed. In doing so, the forms and the manner in which assistance and cooperation is given will be of decisive importance.



For all its differences in orientation, this generation is no less nationalistic than its predecessors. History since World War II has shown that if fears of neo-colonialism and capitalist exploitation are to be avoided, economic assistance and cooperation will have to be based on new concepts and instrumentalities. This requires a search for new forms of cooperative endeavor, which will break with the unequal relationships of the past and effect the closer integration of foreign investment into the purposes and patterns of national development. It also means that in developing trade and investment, deliberate efforts should be made to accelerate the growth of an indigenous commercial and entrepreneurial middle class. Here the traditional American inventiveness and ingenuity could make an important contribution. On the whole, without denying their essential nature as profitmaking organizations, the creative role that private foreign business could play not only in speeding up the process of economic and social development, but also in fostering regional economic cooperation, should not be underestimated.

Beyond this, it should be realized that without foreign aid at adequate levels, private foreign investment could not play the creative role envisaged here. In a number of Southeast Asian countries, private foreign investment could only operate profitably and socially effectively after the infra-structure has been sufficiently developed. For this the continuation of government-to-government aid at adequate levels is essential. American business, therefore, also has a stake in the continuation of United States aid to these countries. To think that private foreign investment could take over the function of foreign aid is an illusion.

In the political field, an understanding of the developing nations on which economic cooperation could be based would require an awareness of the necessity as well as the inevitability of social and political change and a degree of instability resulting therefrom. Hence, a measure of political instability, should not be seen as a condition to be removed before economic development can be started. Rather stability should be seen as the end result of economic development begun under conditions of relative political instability. To be sure, certain elementary preconditions are necessary, as for instance a commitment to economic development on the part of the political elite, within as well as outside the government of the day. Also required is an openness towards private economic enterprise. But beyond this, the insistence on political stability as prior condition for economic development and for international support of economic development is both unrealistic and self-defeating. And it is even more important to understand the basic creative drives that underlie the complex situations in the new nations and to relate to them.

Within this framework we will then be able to understand that the problems these countries face and the developments they go through are inherent in their condition of underdevelopedness, and that their efforts at building political and social institutions that can effectively cope with the problems of poverty and backwardness are rooted in the underlying search for a new meaning of life.

In this first lecture I have deliberately avoided speaking about the concrete political problems that the Southeast Asian nations face, the threats to their security, or the impact of external forces on them. These aspects I intend to discuss with you in my second lecture. My purpose in doing so has been to first bring out as clearly as is possible within this brief compass some of the basic problems with which we are wrestling, some of the motivating forces inherent



in the region that, over and beyond the short term vagaries of international politics, constitute the region's essential dynamic thrust.

Hopefully this has also made clear the importance of the continuation of the United States' role in Southeast Asia in supporting the developmental impulses that exist in the region. It may have a crucial bearing on the way in which we will solve our problems and the manner in which consolidation will take place. In the further development of the relationship between the United States and Southeast Asia it is not only the statesmen and politicians, but the intellectuals and businessmen as well who will have to play an active role.

Inevitably this problem is bound up with the process of re-examination of basic values and purposes of American society and the re-ordering of its national priorities through which the United States is going at this juncture of its history. The developing nations of Southeast Asia can only hope that the American people, throughout their own process of transition and re-definition of their identity as a nation, will remain true to their traditional universalistic vision of mankind that has been the source of their strength, their generosity and their world leadership.

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