

CHAPTER EIGHT

EARLY SOUTHEAST ASIAN CATEGORIZATIONS OF EUROPEANS

SOUTHEAST Asia was not "discovered" by world trade systems. It lay athwart the sea route between India and China. For centuries before 1500 it had exported spices to the whole of Eurasia, and imported cloth, political systems and religious ideas from India, porcelain, technology and people from China. A substantial sea voyage lay between these places and Southeast Asia, but there had for over a millennium been traders, adventurers and pilgrims (to the holy places of India and Sri Lanka) who thought that effort justified. Europeans, therefore, were initially just one more strand in the already complex fabric of Asian maritime trade.

CATEGORIES OF OTHERNESS

Many Southeast Asians of the sixteenth century shared a religion with those outside (Buddhism, Islam, or for Vietnamese, Confucianism). Within these larger worlds they distinguished themselves in geographical terms. Vietnamese saw themselves as a distinct "southern" country equal in civilization to China in the north, the constant point of reference.¹ The remainder of coastal Southeast Asia, particularly those parts touched by Malay culture, identified themselves as "below the winds" in relation to India and all points west, which were "above the winds". Barros (1563, II, vi, II: 4) was the first western writer to record this distinction, but William Marsden (1812, II: ix-xiii) was more perceptive about its meaning. He argued that it was analogous to "us-them" distinctions such as Greeks and Barbarians, Jews and Gentiles, Arabs and others (*arabu ajem*), except that unlike these phrases, or similar distinctions made by Chinese, Christians, Muslims and others,

there was no presumption of moral or cultural superiority involved. The Malay-maritime culture of coastal Southeast Asia was itself too ethnically varied, too open to external influences, to be inherently exclusive in that way. When conflict led to polarization against Europeans, as we will see below, the exclusive terminology of believer and infidel became more useful.

Chinese and Japanese were outside the "above the winds" category, since they came from a different direction, with different monsoon winds, and had cultures very distinct from those of the Indian Ocean. Europeans, however, even when they came across the Pacific as the Spanish did, were quickly understood to be part of that world "above the winds", in which Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and such powerful associated symbols as Alexander the Great and the empire of "Rum", all had their origin.

"Below the winds" located Southeast Asians geographically, notably in relation to a set of Indian Ocean ports which already had many points of reference in common. The same points of reference—commerce, cosmopolitanism, affluence, lavish dress, diplomatic decorum, a strong Islamic presence—implicitly juxtaposed the whole universe of Indian Ocean exchange against tribal shifting cultivators of the interior.

Foreign writers no doubt exaggerated the stories they heard in the cities about the savages of the hills. Ma Huan (1433, 92), for example, distinguished three types of people in Java in the early fifteenth century. Both the Chinese residing temporarily and the Muslim traders from every quarter who had taken up residence there more permanently were clean and civilized. The natives of the interior, however, were dirty, worshipped devils and ate unclean foods. Chou Ta-kuan portrayed an even more stark gulf between the civilized lowland Khmers of Angkor and their slaves taken from savage highlanders.

They constitute a race apart known as the *ch'uan* [Ch'ong] brigands. Brought into the town, they do not dare to come and go outside their houses. In town, if in the course of a dispute one calls one's opponent *ch'uong*, he is suffused with hatred to the marrow of his bones, to such an extent are these people despised by other men . . . Males and females couple with each other, but their masters would never have sexual relations with them. If by chance a Chinese arrives and, after his long enforced celibacy, should inadvertently have intercourse just once with one of these women, and the master finds out, then the next day the latter will refuse to sit down in the newcomer's company, because he has had intercourse with a savage (Ian Mabbett's translation from Pelliot's French in Reid 1983a, 44).

A succession of visitors to northern Sumatra, from Marco Polo onwards (Polo 1298, 225–7; Gubernatis 1875, 35), made similar points about the contrast between the civilized Muslims of the ports and the savage cannibals of the interior who lived like beasts.

Although local residents must have been the sources for these sharp distinctions, Southeast Asian writers themselves were more ambivalent about the dichotomy. Almost every lowland people had to deal with adjacent upland people, and often also "sea-gypsies" (usually ethnically Bajau-Samal), whom they regarded as lacking civilization and religion and therefore fit to be enslaved. Yet at the same time they were seen as the original inhabitants, often having a special (if servile) relation with the coastal ruler and mysterious, even magical, powers over the natural and supernatural forces of forest and sea. Their rare appearances in Archipelago sources, therefore, are chiefly as direct servants of the king (Matheson and Hooker 1983, 192–9) or as magically potent individuals (Iskander 1958, 91–2). The riverine kingdoms of Mainland Southeast Asia all saw themselves surrounded by "wild" upland peoples, potentially able to be brought within the ever-changing boundaries of lowland royal control and settled wet-rice agriculture (see e.g. Than Tun 1983, I: 13). The interdependence in trade between the upstream and downstream populations ensured that each side incorporated the other into the myths which expressed their world-view.²

Nevertheless this dichotomy between civilized/cosmopolitan peoples of the cities and coasts, and barbarous/isolated people of the interior or of remote islands, was certainly part of the thinking of the former. It finds one form of expression in the contrast of the Javanese (and Thai and Cambodian) theatre between *halus* and *kasar*, that is the refinement proper to the court and city as against the gross appearance and behaviour of rustic folk, people from the *sebarang* (places outside Java), and demons. It also helps account for the credence given to stories of bizarre savages in some more distant island or mountain valley, whom nobody had seen but all had heard tell about. Some had tails; others had ears so long they could wrap themselves up in them at night; in one mysterious island there were only women, who became pregnant by the wind and put their male children to death.³

In this context one can also understand the response of Raja Soliman, the Muslim ruler of Manila, to the aggressive approach of the first Spanish fleet under Legazpi, in 1570. Manila was already the most important port of the Philippines, but a somewhat tenuous Muslim enclave in an animist Archipelago. Its commercial links with China and the other Muslim ports of the Archipelago were as vital as those with its unruly hinterland. When the Spanish somewhat preemptorily summoned Soliman to talks, therefore,



Fig. 5 French officers depicted in a seventeenth-century Thai watercolour panel from Wat Ban Koing, now in Suan Phakat palace, Bangkok
(No Na Paknam, *Farang Nai Sinlapa Thai*, Bangkok, 1986)

Soliman assumed an air of importance and haughtiness, and said that he was pleased to be the friend of the Spaniards, but the latter should understand that the Moros [Muslim Tagalogs] were not painted Indians [i.e. tattooed Visayans]. He said that they would not tolerate any abuse, as had the others; on the contrary they repay with death the least thing that touched their honour (translated in Blair and Robertson 1903-9, III: 95).

FIRST CONTACTS: "WHITE BENGALIS" AND "IRON HEADS"

Europeans were often astonished at what they found in Southeast Asia, a place of fabulous wealth, mysterious herbs and poisons, and strange sexual customs. It was certainly no less remarkable to them than Africa, the Pacific, or the New World of the Western Hemisphere.

But the surprise was not reciprocated. In a region of enormous diversity, accustomed to having its ports crowded with people of every kind, Europeans represented just another element. Foreign ships were always welcome, for they represented wealth and power. Every coastal ruler wanted to have them calling at his own port and not his rival's. The initial reception Europeans encountered was therefore uniformly agreeable. Even in relatively remote Samar, Magellan's first Southeast Asian landfall in the eastern Philippines, "their chief went immediately to the captain-general, showing signs of joy because of our arrival" (Pigafetta 1524, 23).

Foreign merchants were acknowledged and honoured figures in the diplomatic practice of the region. They were allowed to build temporary houses on shore, to acquire temporary wives, to mingle freely in the marketplace. Their leading figures had much better access to the ruler and his circle than did most natives, for they brought him extra prestige. If they carried a message from their ruler, as most substantial merchants took care to do, they were mounted on richly-decorated elephants or galleys to ride in solemn procession to the palace, where they were entertained with feasting and dancing.

Language was not a major barrier. Linguistic diversity was part of the everyday experience of Southeast Asian commerce, and virtually all had to resort to some *lingua franca*. Arabic was one of them, because of Islam, and provided a key for the earliest European visitors—Italians travelling overland through the Middle East, Portuguese and Spaniards with a long history of interaction with "Moors". The most valuable *lingua franca* was however Malay, which foreign traders including the Europeans were quick to pick up. The first two non-Portuguese expeditions to reach the region already had Malay-speaking interpreters on board who facilitated their early encounters. The Spanish fleet in 1521 made use of Magellan's Sumatran slave as interpreter in the Philippines (Pigafetta 1524, 26), while the French expedition of the Parmentier brothers in 1529 carried two Malay-speakers who had been in the East with the Portuguese (Parmentier 1883, 63, 67).

Women were the crucial cultural intermediaries with the earliest Europeans, as with generations of foreign traders before them, though their role is seldom acknowledged in the literature of either side. It was not simply

that temporary marriage was accepted in Southeast Asia, that divorce could be readily undertaken by either party, and that wealthy foreigners were acceptable marriage partners (except for high-born women) in most coastal centres. Retailing, small trade and money-changing were seen as the domain of women and some very large commercial transactions were handled by them. In all the ports of the region it was accepted practice that visiting traders took a temporary local wife, who was at the same time a commercial partner able to provide local market information, sell foreign goods in the market, and buy and sell trade goods on behalf of her partner during the monsoon period when he was away (see Reid 1988, 155–6). As a seventeenth century Chinese visitor to Hoi An (Central Vietnam) matter-of-factly put it: "The women are very good at trade, so the traders who come here all tend to marry a woman to help them with their trading." (Da San 1699, IV: 9, as translated by Li Ta Na) This practice was especially highly developed by Chinese, but there is no doubt that Europeans also profited from it.

Such relationships began very early, and provided the mechanism whereby Portuguese learned the language and culture of their Asian environment, and the local community domesticated newcomers and learned their languages. Among the tiny proportion of such relationships which happen to have found their way into the literature, some occurred at the very beginning of Portuguese contact. The first European fleet to reach Southeast Asia, that of Lopes de Sequiera in 1509, was reportedly saved from a Malay surprise attack by the timely warning of a local Javanese woman who swam out to alert her lover on one of the Portuguese ships (Albuquerque 1557, II: 74). Among the Portuguese captured in Melaka from that fleet, nine escaped the city with the help of the daughter of the aristocrat to whose custody they had been assigned (Barros 1563, II, vi, II: 28). In Maluku, the "Spice Islands" proper, the first Portuguese commander was Francisco Serrão, sent there by Albuquerque in 1511. Pigafetta, who arrived in Maluku two years after Serrão's death in 1521, happened to report that he had left two children by a woman he had married in Java, presumably during that first voyage from Melaka in 1511 (Pigafetta 1524, 66–7). We have to assume that the harshness of the initial Portuguese irruption into Southeast Asia was very quickly modified by relationships such as these.

Regrettably few indigenous documents have survived from the early sixteenth century, and later reconstructions often carry the burdens of another age. Moreover the impact of the early encounters appears to have been far greater on the Europeans, for reasons sketched above. Except in the cases where they achieved spectacular military victories, Europeans are largely ignored by indigenous chronicles until the eighteenth century. What follows,

therefore, is limited to a narrow range of Southeast Asian literature, supplemented by European descriptions.

The few Europeans who reached the region before Vasco da Gama, like the Jews of Cairo or the Armenians of Persia, usually travelled with Persian or Arab vessels and were identified with them. Nicolo Conti, for example, was a Venetian who learned Arabic as a young merchant in Damascus, travelled to Baghdad in an Arab caravan, and subsequently learned Persian in the ports of Ormuz and Calacatia. There he threw in his lot with some Persian merchants, "having first taken a solemn oath to be faithful and loyal companions to one another" (Major 1857, 5). He sailed with them to India and eventually Southeast Asia in the 1430s. Towards the end of the century, Hieronimo di Santo Stefano of Genoa travelled overland from Cairo to the Red Sea port of Cosseir with an Arab caravan, and then sailed in Arab vessels to India and Sumatra. The people he identifies as having rescued him from disasters were the Muslim *kadi* of Pasai (Sumatra), presumably a learned Arab trader, who knew some Italian as well as Arabic, and some Arab merchants from Damascus whose service he entered in India (Major 1857, 8–9). In the first decade of the following century Ludovico di Varthema learned his Arabic in Damascus, and must have passed as Muslim since he joined a caravan to Medina and Mecca. He found the Persian merchants of Shiraz "the best companions and the most liberal of any men who inhabit the earth", and formed a contract with some of them to explore the world together. Thus in Burma, for example, he was simply a Persian (Varthema 1510, 102–3, 220–2).

Europeans may typically have been a shade paler than Arabs and Persians, but the physical dividing line was not a fundamental one. Both the Russian Athanasius Nikitin and Ludovico di Varthema claimed that their relative whiteness was a source of interest in southern India and Burma. There were places, not easy to locate from their accounts, where women were said to offer themselves readily to the white men, or be offered by their husbands. Whatever the truth of such stories, it is significant that both authors granted that no distinction was made between themselves and their Muslim travelling companions (Varthema 1510, 202–4; Major 1857, 10). The Portuguese conquistadors routinely described their Gujerati or Arab antagonists as "white", as well as the Chinese and Ryukyans with whom they had better relations—implying that European skin-colour was not seen as novel by either side (Albuquerque 1557, III: 69; Empoli 1514, 132; Pires 1515, 130).

The early Portuguese fleets, carrying hundreds of Portuguese with little prior experience of non-Christians, were of course perceived differently from individual traders. The Portuguese began by attacking Muslim ships, which confirmed the earlier idea of Muslims in the Indian Ocean that these were

"Franks", the same people who had attacked the holy places during the Crusades (see below). They now demanded to be classified as distinct from other visitors, especially Muslims. Some Malay accounts of their arrival grant this distinctiveness, though it has to be remembered that none date from before 1536, a generation after the Portuguese had demonstrated a certain uniqueness by conquering and fortifying Melaka.

The first direct impact of these "Franks" (Malay: *Feringgi*) in Southeast Asia was the mission of Diego Lopez de Sequeira, arriving in Melaka in September 1509. The chronicle of Malay kings, *Sejarah Melayu*, has this to say of the occasion:

Then there came a Feringgi ship from Goa, and it came to trade in Melaka. The Feringgi saw that the city of Melaka was magnificent, and its port was exceedingly crowded. The people crowded round to see what the Feringgi looked like, and they were all surprised at their appearance. The Melaka people said, "These are white Bengalis!" Dozens of Melaka people surrounded each Feringgi; some twisted his beard, some knocked his head, some took off his hat, and some grasped his hand. The Captain [*kapitan*] of the ship then presented himself to the Bendahara [Chief Minister], Sri Maharaja. The Bendahara adopted him as his son, and gave him honorific cloths [the normal honour for ambassadors]. The ship's Captain presented Bendahara Sri Maharaja with a golden chain studded with jewels. He himself put it around the neck of the Bendahara. At that everybody was angry at the Feringgi Captain, but they were stopped by the Bendahara, who said, "Don't get carried away, for these are people who know nothing of manners".⁴

Though any European who has visited rural Southeast Asia will recognize the chaotic scene, we cannot be sure it all happened in 1509. The Malay account is primarily concerned to put the blame for the loss of Melaka on Sultan Mahmud, particularly by his execution of its hero, the Bendahara of the above account. According to the numerous Portuguese chroniclers (notably Barros 1563, II, i: 400-7; Pires 1515, 254-7), the respectful initial reception of Sequeira quickly turned sour, and he was lucky to escape with his life, leaving about sixty of his men ashore who were killed or kept captive. The *Sejarah Melayu* however turns this into two separate incidents, with Sequeira returning to Goa to explain the wonders of Melaka, and the viceroy (*wazir*), Albuquerque, then sending a fleet to try to take the city, which fails. Albuquerque wants at once to send a larger fleet, but is warned against this by his admiral (*Kapitan Mar*), who states prophetically, "Melaka will not fall if Bendahara Seri Maharaja is still there; no matter how great the force sent

against Melaka, it will not fall" (*Sejarah Melayu*, 248-9; Winstedt 1938, 182; Brown 1952, 57-8).

Nevertheless there is much of interest in this account about Malay perceptions of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. In likening them to Bengalis rather than Arabs, a put-down may have been intended. The latter had to be respected on religious grounds, however much laughed at privately, but Bengalis were more numerous and more resented in Melaka. Tomé Pires (1515, 93) noted "When they want to insult a man, they call him a Bengali", since these were a mercantile rather than a military people, alleged to be sharp-witted but treacherous. At all events the Portuguese seemed a variation on the Indian theme. They were a substantial group of over-dressed, round-eyed, relatively hairy males (Malays and Javanese carried women in their ships), coming from above the winds in well-equipped ships. The earliest Burmese references to the Portuguese also describe them as a kind of Indian: *Kala-pyu* (white Indians) or later *Kala-barin-gyi* ("feringgi" Indians) (Saya Lun 1920, 116-17; "History of Syriam" 1915, 53; Lieberman 1986, 244n).

After the Portuguese conquest of Melaka, some Malays made an analogy the Portuguese found more to their taste, with the Ryukyu traders who carried Japanese goods from Okinawa to Melaka. "The Malays say to the people of Melaka that there is no difference between Portuguese and Ryukyus, except that the Portuguese buy women, which the Ryukyus do not." Their country had wheat, meat and "wines after their fashion" as well as rice; they were truthful, non-Muslims, and far too proud to sell a fellow-countryman into slavery. "They are white men, well dressed, better than the Chinese, more dignified . . . If they are lied to when they collect payment [for sales on credit], they collect it sword in hand." (Pires 1515, 130)

The other area where the initial Portuguese impact could not be ignored was Maluku. Again there is a Malay account, written more than a century after the events by Rijali, a Muslim Ambonese taking refuge against Dutch depredations at the court of Makasar. He describes as follows the arrival in Nusa Telu, Ambon, of a small group of Portuguese under Francisco Serrão, shipwrecked nearby in 1512 after having made the first Portuguese voyage to Banda, further south:

At one time a vessel from Sakibesi Nusa Telo went fishing to the Puluh Tiga Sea. Then they came and brought news to the Chief Minister [of Hitu] Jamilu, saying "In all our lives in this world we had never encountered people who looked like these. Their bodies were white, and their eyes were like cats-eyes. Then we enquired of them, but they did not know our language⁵, and we did not know their nationality." Jamilu said to them, "Go, and bring them here." So they went back and brought them to the town, to Chief Minister Jamilu.

He asked them, "Where do you come from and what is the name of your country?" They replied, "We come from *negeri* Portugal with the intention of trading. The reason we came here was that we were lost and didn't know the route. So we were cast upon the coast . . . What will our fate be here?" Then they were given a place they could build a house. After some time they asked that half should stay and maintain the house, while the other half should take the news back to their superiors. When the time of the west monsoon came they arranged for a ship to come every year without interruption. So the market became busy at Hitu, and the whole of Ambon became renowned . . . At that time the name of Kapitan Hitu was famous from *negeri* Ambon to *negeri* Portugal. The King of Portugal gave him two names, the first Kapitan Hitu and the second Don Jamilu. (Manusama 1977, 167-8)

Just as the Bendahara was the central figure of the *Sejarah Melayu* account, Jamilu holds centre stage here, though he eventually comes to a bad end through pride, drunkenness and irreligion. Yet the Portuguese are clearly portrayed as an exceptional windfall, as Chinese and Javanese had been before them to the ports they had frequented. The Portuguese accounts of the early contact in Maluku are more graphic in showing the enthusiasm of the Malukans, much tested in later years, for alliances with the powerful foreigners. Portuguese chroniclers depict the rulers of Ternate and Tidore, rival centres of clove production, trade, and political influence, competing to bring Serrão's men to their capital, and thereafter to play the Portuguese card against their rivals. The same enthusiasm greeted the Dutch, the next unpredictable new factor in Malukan politics a century later.

Commercial wealth was one reason for this enthusiasm, but military prowess was the other. Galvão's view was that small-scale warfare was the favourite sport of the Malukans: "they are always waging war; they enjoy it; they live and support themselves by it". (Galvão 1544, 169) Foreign traders, with large ships, firearms and experienced fighters, were often a crucial factor in these wars. Portuguese immediately acquired a reputation everywhere as formidable warriors, but nowhere more than in Maluku where armour and firearms had previously been virtually unknown:

Formerly, upon seeing a man with a helmet, they said, "Here comes an iron head", and all of them ran away presuming that we were invincible and not subject to death. But at present they know that under that helmet there is a head that can be cut off, and a body that is not immortal. And seeing us fire muskets, they imagined that our mouths breathed out a deadly fire; and at hearing bombards shooting and the Portuguese being mentioned, pregnant women had a miscarriage because among them artillery was unknown nor had

they any inkling of it. But for a long time now [1544], they make war with us and do not hold us in much esteem . . . They are men expert at arms. (Galvão 1544, 171)

Other Portuguese chroniclers relate that the Ternate ruler maximized the effect of his new Portuguese allies by claiming they were the fulfilment of a prophecy: "That the time would come, when Iron Men should arrive at Ternate, from the remotest parts of the world, and settle in its Territory; by whose power the glory and dominion of the Moluco islands should be far extended" (Argensola 1708, 3, 6).⁶

In the bigger ports of the region firearms were already known, and the surprise factor cannot have been as great. The Portuguese claimed, probably with exaggeration, to have taken three thousand guns in their conquest of Melaka, where "the gun founders were as good as those of Germany" (Albuquerque 1557, III: 128).⁷ These guns appear to have been highly ornamented bronze culverins, introduced from both Gujerat and China. They may have been intended to intimidate rather than to injure. In reality it can only have been the way the Portuguese *used* their artillery so effectively that surprised the defenders. The *Sejarah Melayu* account takes this further, making play of the strangeness of the guns:

On arrival at Melaka the ships forthwith opened fire with their cannon. And the people of Melaka were astonished at the sound of the cannon, and they said, "What sound is this, like thunder?" When the cannon balls began to arrive and struck the people of Melaka, some had their heads shot away, some their arms and some their legs. The people of Melaka were more and more amazed to see how these guns were made, and they said, "What is this weapon called that is round, yet is sharp enough to kill?" (Translated from Raffles 1817, 182 with some deference to Brown 1952, 158)

There is confirmation in letters from two Italians in Albuquerque's fleet that the fire from four hundred shipboard cannon was indeed exceptionally intense, especially from a specially fortified junk which the Portuguese anchored in the Melaka river, near its central bridge, in order to bombard the town from very close quarters, "day and night" for twenty days before the assault proper began. According to these accounts the fearful novelty of this did encourage the defenders to treat for peace (Empoli 1514, 137; Gubernatis 1875, 375-6). Yet it is curious that the Malay writers make this alarming bombardment part of the fictional Portuguese attack between Sequeira's visit and Albuquerque's conquest, and make the outcome of it a Portuguese defeat. They wanted to show the Portuguese as a new and

different element in Malay history, but clearly they did not find their modern weapons a satisfactory explanation for the loss of Melaka.

In short, Europeans were initially perceived as another kind of people from "above the winds", who were distinguished by pale skins and round eyes but particularly by the effectiveness of their shipboard cannon, armour, and firearms. Although most indigenous sources took little account of them, they did have a major effect on the military balance in a number of areas and they greatly speeded the transformation of Southeast Asian warfare. In some areas such as Maluku and the Straits of Melaka, the Portuguese state enterprise became a significant player in inter-state rivalries. Elsewhere Portuguese individuals were much in demand as mercenary gunners. In 1550, for example, a Portuguese arquebusier killed one of the leading contenders for the throne of Pegu (lower Burma), and Portuguese mercenaries subsequently helped Bayinnaung to unite Burma by conquering the old heartland around Ava. A first-hand Burmese account of Bayinnaung's five-day bombardment of Ava city in 1555 makes no mention of Portuguese as such, but its amazement at the intensity of the bombardment ("cannon and muskets reverberated like Indra's thunderbolts . . . detonation followed detonation till it seemed a man's ears would burst") (Lieberman 1980, 215) is comparable to the Malay depiction of Albuquerque's onslaught at Melaka.

POLARIZATION

Despite the disaster the Portuguese inflicted on Malay kingship, Malay accounts of their arrival are morally neutral about the newcomers. The wars fought by the first generation of Portuguese were described as if they were fair contests between two honourable parties. The real villains of the story were not the Portuguese, but the Malays who let the side down—Sultan Mahmud himself, and Raja Abdullah of Kampar who foolishly believed Portuguese promises that they would help him become king of Melaka.

The contrast is striking with the outright hostility of their fellow-Muslims "above the winds", notably the Arabs of the Red Sea area: "The vessels of the Frank appeared at sea [in 1502] en route for India, Hormuz and those parts. They took about seven vessels, killing those on board and taking some prisoner. This was their first action, may God curse them." (Serjeant's translation of the Arab chronicle of Hadhramaut in Chaudhuri 1985, 65)

The Portuguese wasted no time in attacking the shipping of the "Moors", beginning with Arabs but quickly extending to the Gujarati Muslim traders who were a far bigger factor in Southeast Asia. Their reputation as fanatical enemies of Islam was carried ahead of them to the ports of the Straits of

Melaka region. When Lopes de Sequeira arrived in Melaka in 1509, according to Tomé Pires (1515, 255),

first the Gujeratis went to the said king Mahmud with a great present, and also the Parsees and Arabs and Bengalis and many of the Klings [South Indians] reported to the said king together, that the Portuguese had reached the port, and consequently were bound to come there every time, and that, besides robbing by sea and land, they were spying in order to come back and capture it [Melaka], just as all India was already in the power of the Portuguese—whom they call *Framges* here—that because Portugal was far away they ought to kill them all here.

The first "ethnography" of the newcomers was undoubtedly provided to local rulers by Muslims in this way, and was not flattering. When Magellan's men reached the Philippines, the same thing happened: a Muslim merchant in the port of Cebu explained to its raja that these were the same *Feringgi* who had conquered Calicut and Melaka (Pigafetta 1524, 33). It was this Muslim term for Frank (Arabic *Faranj*, Malay *Feringgi*), carried by Malays or other Muslim traders, which came to characterize the Portuguese (and Europeans in general) almost everywhere. In Burma the term was *Balang-gyi* or *Bayin-gyi*, in Thai it became *Farang*, in Khmer *Barang*, and in Chinese *Fo-lang-ji*. Only Vietnam encountered the Portuguese without this Muslim mediation, through Macao-based trade, and used geographical terms such as "people from the sea" (*Yang Ren*) or "western sea people" (*Yang Tây Duong*). In the Philippines the Muslim filter was very temporary, and the Spanish were soon called by their own preferred term, *Castila*.

It by no means followed, however, that Southeast Asians, even when they were Muslim, would necessarily share the negative view of the Gujaratis and Arabs. The initial reaction was much more neutral or even positive, as we have seen. Only as Portuguese plundering appeared to confirm the unflattering picture given by the foreign Muslims did Southeast Asians range themselves in opposition to them. An Italian serving a Portuguese cause for which he had no special love, Giovanni da Empoli, gave a graphic account of this mounting hostility in northern Sumatra, where Albuquerque selected the reluctant Florentine as his trouble-shooter:

the General [Albuquerque] was sending me to enemy territory [at Pidie] where there were, as well, people whose boats and belongings had been seized, and whose fathers, sons and brothers, etc. had been killed by us . . . and he commanded this like a man who had little regard for me . . . And while I was there, many people came by night with lights to see me, as if I were a monster;

and many asked how we made so bold as to pass through other peoples' territory plundering peoples and harbours (Empoli 1514, 125).

At both Sumatran ports Albuquerque visited on his way to Melaka, da Empoli was sent ashore to spy out the land and talk to the ruler, and in both cases he received a lecture on how foreign traders ought to behave: "that whoever seized his ships coming to his ports could not be deemed a friend, and that if he desired his friendship what had been seized should be returned" (Empoli 1514, 127-8).

The *Hikayat Hang Tuah* is the most timeless because the most popular of Malay epics. Its earliest versions must have been recited in the fifteenth century, but the versions that survive in written form were adapted and reworked in the following century and a half. It is the story of a warrior hero of the Melaka Sultanate who is the epitome of Malay bravery, loyalty, cultivation, physical attractiveness and mastery of the spirit world. All the other peoples with whom Melaka had to do are brought into this great epic. Hang Tuah travels to India, China and "Rom" (Byzantium/Turkey) to show the greatness of these countries, and the high respect they have for the Malays and their king. He is sent to Siam and Java to get the better of civilized and formidable rivals who have designs on the independence of Melaka. Europeans (*Feringgi*), however, appear only as antagonists for the Malay culture hero.

Chronological sequence is not of great concern in the story, and Hang Tuah first meets the Portuguese on his voyages on Melaka's behalf to India and China. In both cases the local harbour-master (*syahbandar*) asks the Malays to berth their ships adjacent to the *Feringgi*, who become angry at the approach of the Melaka vessels. The Malays reply: "Why should you forbid us? We too are merchants; wherever we are told to go, there we anchor. However if you want to fight with us . . . so be it." (*Hikayat Hang Tuah* 1966, 346, 364) In China the enmity appears more patent, and the Malays respond that they are ready to fight, "for the *Feringgi* and the Malays are enemies". (*Hikayat Hang Tuah* 1966, 364) It is forbidden to fight in a neutral Chinese port but the Portuguese, further humiliated by the magnificent reception given by the Chinese court to Hang Tuah, lie in wait for the Malays when they leave. The Portuguese guns prove useless when Hang Tuah reads his magic spell and the Portuguese are all killed or put to flight (*Hikayat Hang Tuah* 1966, 369-72).

News of these humiliations eventually reach the "Gebernador of Manila" (meaning this story at least post-dates 1571), who reports in person to the king of Portugal. The latter sends a fleet of forty well-armed galleys to attack Melaka in revenge. Although sick, Hang Tuah is there to drive them away

with terrible casualties including the Portuguese commander (*Hikayat Hang Tuah* 1966, 428-35). Only after Hang Tuah's death do the Portuguese succeed in taking the city by stratagem. Not surprisingly, there are many to advise the ruler not to deal with them at all, because "the *Feringgi* are evil people" (*Hikayat Hang Tuah* 1966, 487).

The Portuguese, it seems, were simply like that—born enemies of the Malays. There is nothing in this or other early Malay sources to point to religion as the reason for this antagonism. Some early Portuguese sources, on the other hand, do impute the same religious motive to the Malays as to themselves. Tomé Pires, for example, related that Sultan Mahmud eventually sided with the anti-Portuguese lobby in Melaka in 1509, and told his ministers that the Portuguese "go about conquering the world and destroying and blotting out the name of our Holy Prophet. Let them all die." (Pires 1515, 256) But indigenous sources only picked up this theme in the second half of the sixteenth century, if at all.

A religious polarization between Islam and its enemies became established in Southeast Asia only after 1550. One reason may have been the Catholic Counter Reformation, the arrival of Francis Xavier and his Jesuit followers in 1542, and the beginning of a serious attempt by the Iberians to make conversion one of their major goals in the region. Another was the revival of the Islamic spice-trading route, shipping cloves, nutmeg and pepper directly from Aceh (Sumatra) to the Red Sea ports with increasing efficiency from the 1530s, in direct competition with the Portuguese route to Europe. A third factor was the rise of Turkey as a great Islamic power, commanding the western termini of this route, and able to challenge Portuguese dominance of the Indian Ocean in the name of Islam. Factors internal to Islam must nevertheless be given the greatest weight. In India, as in Southeast Asia, there was a steady shift towards militant orthodoxy during the century between 1550 and 1650. Orthodox Sunni Islam became the state religion not only of the Mughals, but also of southern states such as Bijapur, Golconda and parts of Kerala (Eaton 1978, 83-134; Aziz Ahmad 1964, 182-90; Dale n.d.). In Southeast Asia, states such as Aceh, Brunei, Banten, Makasar (Muslim from 1603) and Ternate were visited by a stream of reformist preachers and teachers from the Middle East, and began to generate revered teachers of their own, some of whom had spent long periods in Mecca and Medina.

Having arisen by uniting the northern coast of Sumatra against the Portuguese, the Sultanate of Aceh set the pace for this militant trend throughout the sixteenth century. Sultan Ala'ad-din Ri'ayat Syah al-Kahar (1539-71) was hailed by the Muslim historian Raniri a century later as "the very first who fought against all the unbelievers [*kafir*], to the point of going himself to attack [Portuguese] Melaka" (Nuru'd-din 1966, 31-2). He was

also the chief beneficiary of the direct spice trade to the Red Sea, now a Turkish lake. Through this connection he received not only a succession of Muslim scholars, but also guns and men with which to fight the infidel (Reid 1969a, 395–414; Farooqi 1986, 267–9). Mendes Pinto put several militant anti-Christian speeches into al-Kahar's mouth, including one justifying his ferocious execution of the king of Aru on the grounds that this rival king had so far forgotten his religion as to ally with "those cursed dogs from the other end of the world who, by the most tyrannous means, aided by our sinful negligence, have become masters of Melaka" (55). Although Pinto's colourful writing must always be treated with caution, there is more direct evidence of the Sultan's thinking in a letter he wrote to the Sultan of Turkey in about 1565 which is recapitulated in the extant Turkish response of 1567.

The Sultan of Aceh says that he is left alone to face the infidels. The infidels have captured islands, and taken Muslims. Merchant and pilgrim ships going from these islands towards Mecca were captured one night, and the ones they couldn't capture they fired upon, causing many Muslims to drown. And infidel rulers have conquered Ceylon and Calicut, where most of the inhabitants are Muslims. If we (Turkey) would send a fleet, all the infidel subjects of those lands would come to the true faith (Saffet Bey 1912, 606–8).⁸

There is no doubt that a militant Muslim "ethnography" of the Iberian Christians was making rapid headway here. An oral and written literature developed in Southeast Asian languages exhorting Muslims to holy war against them.⁹ Similar ideas suffuse Rijali's chronicle about Maluku, the other area of intense Portuguese impact, written about 1650. After the good fortune represented by the initial Portuguese arrival, described above, the *Hikayat Tanah Hitu* changes mood to describe the constant wars against the infidel, and the succession of war leaders who distinguished themselves in them. Although this pattern of Muslim-Christian warfare was in many respects a continuation of traditional hostilities between rival Ambonese *negeri* (village communities), the chronicle portrays a situation of constant holy war (*perang sabilu'llah*) in the second half of the sixteenth century. All the dead who fell on the Hitu (Muslim) side were martyrs (*syahid*) guaranteed immediate entry into heaven (Manusama 1977, 169–71). The Iberians appear as the inevitable enemies of the faithful, now giving a wider meaning to the ancient cleavages within Maluku.

Muslim-Christian conflict affected most parts of the region in this period, with Catholic missionaries, and to some extent Europeans in general, seen by the mercantile Muslims of the cities as inveterate enemies of Islam. A Franciscan missionary, Francisco de Santa Maria, was killed by a militant

Muslim group in Brunei in the 1580s, while the first Dominicans to arrive in the Siamese capital in the 1560s were set upon by a Muslim mob who killed one and badly injured the other (Ribadeneira 1601, 457–60; *Exemplar literarum ex Indiis*, 1571). In the leading Islamic capitals such as Aceh, Banten, Brunei and Makasar, Europeans who broke laws or offended rulers were given the choice of conversion to Islam or death. Some of the Muslim scholars whose job it was to convince such Christians to accept Islam showed from their arguments that they had considerable knowledge of Christianity through an Islamic prism.¹⁰

The Theravada Buddhists of Mainland Southeast Asia had a tradition of tolerating the religious practice of others, and the friendly initial approach of the Iberians gave them no reason to change it. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, a bloody Spanish intervention in Cambodia and Portuguese military activity in Burma changed the perception of the Europeans.

Burmese chronicles have nothing good to say about Europeans, despite the crucial role Portuguese mercenaries played in helping Tabinshweti and Bayinnaung reunite the country and bring it to its greatest pinnacle of power. Of Tabinshweti (1531–51) it was recorded that "he gave himself up to the company of his favourite, a *Kala-pyu* adventurer, from whom he learned the habit of drinking. Addicted to hard drinking he began to lose his sense of morality, and had no scruple to commit adultery with the wives of his ministers." (Saya Lun 1920, 118–19)¹¹ More severe judgements were passed on Philip de Brito, the enterprising Portuguese who captured the port of Syriam (opposite modern Rangoon) on behalf of the King of Arakan in 1599, and managed to turn it into a powerful independent kingdom with some local Mon support. The Mon chronicle of Pegu was very Buddhist in spirit, and its main concern with de Brito was his inability to earn merit and ensure the kingdom's welfare because he was not Buddhist: "The ship commander, the *kala* Kappitan Jera [Captain General], was king again in Syriam. Because he was of Devadatta's company, a heretic, he had no opportunity of enshrining at the relic chamber of the pagoda." ("Slapat Rajawan Datow Smin Ron" 1923, 59) The chroniclers of the Burmese Toungoo dynasty, which took Syriam and executed de Brito in 1613, were even more hostile towards this foreigner. Although acknowledging that he made Burmese and Mon allies, including the ruler of Martaban whose son married his daughter, the major chronicles portray de Brito (whom they call the *kala baringyi* Nga-zinga) as plundering the Buddhist shrines and temples of their riches. "He removed the precious stones with which the images were adorned, melted down the gold and silver, and beat them into leaves which he sold to traders calling at the ports. Thus, he waxed very rich by this nefarious trade, and

with riches came power and authority." ("Intercourse between Burma and Siam" 1959, 153; Kala 1961, III: 106–11)¹² After Toungoo had conquered Syriam, de Brito was publicly impaled in the town square because he was "a man who had destroyed religion". Between four and five hundred of his *kala baringyi* followers were sent to Ava as captives, where they eventually served the Burmese kings as soldiers ("Intercourse between Burma and Siam" 1959, 158; "History of Syriam" 1915, 53). According to Furnivall, de Brito was still remembered as "the destroyer of religion" in Syriam early this century ("History of Syriam" 1915, 57).

The lack of interest of the Dutch in spreading their own religion, together with their readiness to ally with all enemies of the Portuguese, undermined the simple polarization between Muslim and Christian. Yet because Dutch did establish a degree of military and economic hegemony which the Portuguese did not, opposition to them quickly became even more universal. One of the greatest VOC empire-builders in the east, Rijklof van Goens, conceded in 1655 that "There is nobody who wishes us well in all the Indies, yea we are deadly hated by all nations." (Quoted in Boxer 1965, 84) English observers make the same point (Dampier 1697, 82–3), and a Chinese memorialist, noting that of all barbarians Europeans alone should be feared as "the most evil and intractable", singled out the Dutch as especially insatiable.¹³

A good example of the mood of those who suffered from Dutch expansion was the *Sja'ir Perang Mengkasar*, a verse epic in Malay celebrating the fierce wars of the 1660s through which Makasar lost its independence to the Dutch (with much Bugis help). Its author uses the terms Hollander (*Welandu*) and infidel (*kafir*) interchangeably to suit his metre. Each term is invariably accompanied by some colourful epithet—"cursed", "devils", "fiendish", "renegade", "perfidious", "greedy", "thieving", "insane".¹⁴ As others have pointed out, the term *kafir* was not in itself necessarily abusive (Skinner 1963, 11n; Skinner quotes Snouck Hurgronje on the same point). In referring to the English who supported the Makasar side as far as they could, the Malay writer noted, "their minds were as sharp as a *keris*; although they were crass *kafir*; they were unwavering, with upright hearts" (Skinner 1963, 144). On the Dutch, however, his judgement is clear:

Listen, Gentlemen, to my request
never make friends with the Dutch
they behave like devils
when they are about no country is safe (Skinner 1963, 214)

EMULATION

The Southeast Asian sources of the period show both neutrality and hostility toward the European, with the latter gaining ground over the former. Positive remarks about Europeans are extremely hard to find before the nineteenth century. Yet that cannot have been the whole picture. In the first century and a half of intense contact, before the gulf in power and wealth had become substantial, there were numerous Southeast Asians who responded enthusiastically to the new ideas introduced by Europeans. King Narai of Siam, Karaeng Pattenggalloang of Makasar and Raja Laut of Mindanao were three seventeenth century statesmen known from European sources to have read European books and creatively mediated European scientific and historical knowledge to their people (Reid 1988, 232–4). The conversion to Christianity in the short period 1570–1650 of the great majority of lowland Filipinos and substantial numbers of Malukans and Vietnamese, is evidence of a positive response at a mass level. How did such converts perceive the Europeans who presented the gospel to them? For the most part we can only guess, on the basis of missionary accounts, that they saw them as having the keys to a great source of power.

The only Filipino author who wrote in Tagalog and touched on the issue was Tomas Pinpin, a Tagalog printer whose *Librong Pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang uicang Castila* [Book with which Tagalogs can learn Castilian] was published in Manila in 1610. He took for granted that his fellow-countrymen wanted to emulate the Spaniards:

No doubt you like and imitate the ways and appearance of the Spaniards in matters of clothing and the bearing of arms and even of gait, and you do not hesitate to spend a great deal so that you may resemble the Spaniard. Therefore would you not like to acquire as well this other trait which is their language? . . . it is this [Castilian] that is the source of a lot of other things and it is like the inside of things, and everything else is only its external covering. (Translated in Rafael 1988, 58)

The prologue of this work promised that learning Spanish would help or "cure" Tagalogs, and was sure to give pleasure. Vicente Rafael's intriguing analysis argues that Pinpin and his readers saw Spanish as a source of protection against the unpredictable shocks of the hierarchic system the Spanish sought to impose (Rafael 1988, 55–83). However Pinpin's complex text is read, it is almost the only extant Southeast Asian writing from this early period to the effect that the Europeans had introduced something of real importance.¹⁵

EXPLAINING EUROPEAN POWER

In every culture, perhaps in every soldier, there is a curious mixture of belief in technology and belief in fate. Few soldiers neglect to sharpen their swords or keep their powder dry before the battle, but equally few will explain their own survival or their comrade's death in purely material terms. In saying that Southeast Asians of the sixteenth century believed power to be essentially spiritual in nature, therefore, we are placing them on a continuum, not in opposition to Europeans. Portuguese too attributed their victories to divine help and the intervention of Santiago (St James). Their early victories were however partly attributable to the stronger conviction among their Southeast Asian antagonists that there was no use fighting if spiritual forces favoured the other side. Southeast Asian wars had often been decided like trials by ordeal, by an initial skirmish or battle between individual champions or leaders. If the spiritual preparation, moral worth, and reading of the signs were superior on one side than the other, one death could be enough to show it (Reid 1988, 121–9).

As we have seen, Southeast Asian sources refused to attribute defeat to inferior technology, even when they described the superiority of European firepower. As European power grew and the memory of its origins faded, stories were developed to explain it which were progressively more symbolic. The royal chronicle of Melaka, in the post-conquest versions that have come down to us, can be seen as a moral text on the theme that Melaka was made great by virtue and destroyed by vice. The dying testament of the penultimate ruler to his successor is that if you put your people to death when they have done no wrong, "your kingdom will be brought to nought". It is then made crystal clear that Albuquerque's conquest of the city was only possible because the great Bendahara Sri Maharaja and others were unjustly executed by the Sultan (Brown 1952, 124–5, 156–71). The best of nineteenth-century Malay historians, Raja Ali Haji, retold this story more simply: "According to the story, when His Majesty Sultan Mahmud killed Bendahara Sri Maharaja without just cause, by the decree of God Almighty the Portuguese came and attacked Melaka." (Haji ibn Ahmad 1982, 17)

In Malay texts intended more for popular entertainment than for royal instruction, explanations in the tradition of the beloved trickster tales play their part. These have nothing to do with the facts of Albuquerque's conquest in 1511, but draw inspiration from the tortuous attempts by later European companies to build permanent stone dwellings in the trading cities. Up until 1619 their requests were sometimes granted in return for favours rendered, but in that year the Dutch made themselves impregnable in their fort in

Jakarta, which they renamed Batavia and established as the headquarters of their Asian trade empire. The same mistake was not made again.

The main Javanese chronicle of the kings of Banten, suzerains of Jakarta, tells this story in realistic terms. Kapitan Jangkung [Jan (Pieterszoon) Coen] requested a piece of land from the Pangeran of Jakarta, and built a strong wooden fence around it. When goods were stolen, he was allowed to strengthen this fence. A large Dutch ship then sank in the harbour, and the Dutch received permission to unload it into their factory. Trade goods were unloaded by day and, unknown to the Javanese, arms by night. Approval was sought from Banten for this increasing strength, and the Banten authorities accepted Jangkung's argument that the Dutch would be a buffer against the greater threat of Mataram (which ruled central and east Java). However several ministers gave the prophetic warning: "The Dutch now were like a spark no bigger than a firefly. They must be smothered now lest that spark become a great fire which would destroy all." (Djajadiningrat 1913, 43–4).

The Batavia experience seems the likeliest origin for a trickster story which quickly spread around Southeast Asia and beyond. This has the Europeans requesting and receiving a plot of land no bigger than an oxhide. They then cut an oxhide into long strips, so that it embraces enough ground for them to build a great fort. This story is told of the Dutch occupation of Jakarta by several Javanese histories (Djajadiningrat 1913, 165; Raffles 1817, II: 154). It is also told of the Portuguese conquest of Melaka by a number of Malay texts, including the popular *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (see also Linden 1937, 31–7). While the borrowing of stories between Malay and Javanese texts is to be expected, it is surprising to find exactly the same story told to explain the power of the Portuguese in Cambodia and Sri Lanka (Ponchaud 1990, 3; Silva 1994, 320). The Burmese chronicle of Syriam uses the same legend to explain Philip de Brito's capture of that city. De Brito made the Burmese ruler numerous presents so as to be "allowed to found in our town of Syriam a village such as might be included in a hide. When this request had been granted, he drew out the hide like a wire and on the North, South, East and West, he measured out land." ("History of Syriam" 1915, 53)

Classicists will not need reminding that this is exactly the tale told by Virgil about how Dido established Carthage, by purchasing from the king of Libya as much land as an oxhide would cover, and then stretching the hide out in narrow strips. The story may be even older as a Phoenician legend, carried by them around the Mediterranean, and notably to the Iberian coast. Spanish and Portuguese folklore adopted it as a kind of origin myth of civilization, so that the Iberian Peninsula is still sometimes referred to as *la piel de toro* (the oxhide).¹⁶ The Phoenician story could have been carried by Arabs into the Indian Ocean, but it seems more likely that it was the Portuguese themselves

who took it to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, making it seem to Asians a particularly appropriate explanation of Portuguese conquests. At all events it must have been thought apt as well as entertaining, explaining as it did how a handful of people coming from the other side of the world, ostensibly to trade, could have ended by making themselves impregnable and strangely powerful.

In the colonial era the mental world of businesslike Dutchmen and mystical, hierarchic Javanese seemed poles apart, and theories of dualism were popular to explain how they coexisted without influencing each other. Looked at in the longer term, however, this dualism can be seen as an historical construct which suited the Dutch East India Company (VOC) very well. The earliest Dutch descriptions give no suggestion of such an opposition—indeed the Dutch were known to complain that “a Javanese would sell his own father for a little business” (Heemskerck 1660 in Jonge 1862–88, II; 451). But under Jan Pieterszoon Coen’s guidance the VOC showed itself on the one hand absolutely ruthless towards its commercial competitors in the spice trade; on the other hand indulgent towards the symbolic claims of rulers in the interior to divinely-ordained and universal power. VOC factors at Semarang and Padang sent regular tribute to the “Emperors” of Mataram and Minangkabau respectively, addressed them in appropriately humble terms, and supported them against their more commercially oriented local antagonists. Although the military power of the Dutch was far beyond that of their Iberian predecessors, they used it for calculated commercial advantage, never for symbolic victories. In effect, if not in deliberate intent, they encouraged Southeast Asian rulers to retreat from economic and military concerns to symbolic and spiritual ones where they did not compete with Dutch ambitions.

Java was the principal battlefield where this symbiosis was hammered out, and it is to Javanese chronicle literature we should look for how it was perceived at the end of the day. Unfortunately almost all of this writing has come to us in versions written *after* the Gianti Treaty of 1755, whereby the Mataram kingdom was divided under Dutch sponsorship between Surakarta and Jogjakarta. To that extent it can be seen as a literature trying to make the best of a series of humiliating setbacks.

The only Javanese historical text definitely pre-dating 1755, the *Babad ing Sangkala* of 1738, treats very cryptically the failure of the Mataram expedition sent to expel the Dutch from Java in 1629 (Ricklefs 1978, 37). A much fuller account was given in the “Great Babad”, the version of the *Babad Tanah Jawi* which did not achieve its definitive modern form until 1836 (though undoubtedly based on earlier texts now lost). This text has the great Sultan Agung sending one of his commanders, Mandura-Reja, with a vast army to

drive the Dutch into the sea. While the battle rages at great cost to both sides, the Sultan sends a more trusted retainer, Purbaya, with instructions simply to scare the Dutch. Purbaya has some share in the supernatural powers of the ruler himself. He flies over Batavia, mocks at the Dutch and with a wave of his hand causes a breach to open in their fortifications. Then he returns to advise the Sultan to stop the war, “since the Dutch have only come here to trade”. The king agrees. The Dutch coming was God’s will, since he knows the future when they would assist his successors. “The reason I began this war,” he says, “is only to make an example, so that in the future they will be fearful.” The army is withdrawn and Mandura-Reja and other commanders are executed. The Dutch are of course relieved, but “all realize that this resulted from the desire of His Majesty, who had offered forgiveness to the Dutch. The Dutch thereupon sent an envoy to Mataram to present a great number and variety of gifts.” (*Babad Tanah Jawi* 1987, 140–3)

Underlying this specific story of one defeat was a broader mythological theme used by a number of Javanese texts to legitimate Dutch power in Batavia as a successor to the Sundanese kingdom of Pajajaran in west Java. This Hindu kingdom, defeated in the sixteenth century by the rising Muslim power on the coast, was seen by Javanese as legitimately distinct from Javanese kingdoms (indeed early Portuguese maps, based on Javanese information, placed a waterway through the island separating Sundanese from Javanese territory). At the same time its dynasty was believed to possess great spiritual powers. From their line came the Queen of the South Sea (Nyai Loro Kidul), mystical bride of all legitimate Javanese rulers. The common element in all the stories in question is a beautiful Pajajaran princess so sacred (or perhaps accursed) that flames issue from her genitals whenever a normal mortal attempts to sleep with her.¹⁷ Other rulers having failed to conquer her, she is exiled to the island of Onrust (off Jakarta), where a Dutch captain arrives and marries her—or more commonly buys her for the price of three magically powerful cannon. Their union is the origin of all Dutchmen, or at least of the Governors-General of Batavia, and explains why the Dutch are appropriate rulers of western Java and allies of the Javanese kings (Pigeaud 1968, II: 249, 333, 361, 463; Djajadiningrat 1913, 285–6).

While this story is usually but a small episode in mythical histories of Java, one cycle of stories set out explicitly to explain in extraordinary complexity who the Dutch were and why they were powerful. This is the story of Baron Sakender, whose name appears to unite a Dutch aristocratic title (familiar only from the time Baron van Imhoff became Governor-General in 1743) and the Javanese name of Alexander the Great.¹⁸ In this text the princess with the flaming genitals is married by Sakender’s brother, Baron Sukmul, who returns with her to Holland after his successful trading expedition to Java.

The son of this union is Jangkung (J. P. Coen), a famous warrior who determines to avenge the insult to his mother and her loss to the Muslims of her Pajajaran kingdom.

It is Baron Sakender who dominates the story, however, with a succession of superhuman exploits worthy of Ulysses or the Monkey King. Though these are too numerous even to summarize, some of them reveal much about the then perception of the Dutch. The first Dutch ruler is called Nakhoda (i.e. ship-owner or supercargo), who has eleven other sons besides Sakender and Sukmul, all of whom have the names of prominent Dutchmen in the east such as Speelman, van Imhoff, and (again!) Coen. After obtaining various magical powers and assistants, Sakender saves the kingdom of Spain from attack by all the other known kings of the world above the winds (Persia, England, France, China, the Arabs), and marries the king's daughter. The Spanish throne, now suzerain over all these countries, is repeatedly offered to Sakender, but he seeks more adventure and so bestows it instead on his father, Nakhoda, the king of Holland. Nakhoda regulates this great kingdom to be governed by his other twelve sons, who are the founders of the *Edele Heren*, the members of the Dutch *Raad van Indië* which ruled Batavia. He tells them:

Suffer no misfortune in what you desire,
even though it comes to thievery,
These worldly goods I name, "The Company".¹⁹
But to be consulted over by [you] twelve are all of its affairs:
Commerce, war, the destroying of cities.
These worldly goods be salaries then,
But omit not to calculate,
write up precisely
the profits and losses (Ricklefs 1978, 396).

This is the foundation of the curious power of the VOC, so utterly at odds with eighteenth century Javanese ideas of what kingly power should be. The Company was ruled by a committee of men equal in rank, yet it was heir both to Dutch mercantilism and the world-empire of Philip II of Spain.

Baron Sukmul and his son Coen carry this power to Batavia to claim the inheritance of Pajajaran. It is not their firepower which gains them victory, but the characteristic trick of firing coins from their cannon, causing the defenders to become so distracted they can easily be killed. The truly powerful figure and hero of the story, Baron Sakender, appears to play no further part in advancing the cause of Holland or Europe. He flies off to see the wealthy land of Java, together with his magically powerful companions, the eagle Garuda and the horse Sembrani. In Java they appear to meet their match.

Their powers of flight are negated by some more powerful force. Alarmed, they disguise themselves in new curious forms and go to meet Senapati, the first ruler of Mataram (ruled 1600–13), whose service they enter. Attention then switches to Senapati, and a prophecy about the greatness of his dynasty, which will nevertheless fall after three generations.

By the time this tale was written, the power of the Europeans could not be ignored. Javanese attempted to domesticate it through myth; others saw it as a punishment by God, or a sign of the approaching end of the world. Curiously, it was not until European colonial power was at its arrogant peak, after 1890, that Southeast Asians could see in the ideas behind it a great source of new hope.

NOTES

1. The founder of the Lê Dynasty put it clearly after driving out the Chinese in 1427: "Our state of Dai Viet is truly a cultured land. Our mountains and rivers have long been different, as likewise have the customs of South [i.e. Vietnam] and North [China]". Quoted in Whitmore (1985, 128).

2. The upstream-downstream symbiosis was set out by Bennet Bronson (1977, 39–54). It has been sensitively explored in a Sumatran context in two recent studies: Jane Drakard (1990) and Barbara Andaya (1993).

3. Local informants of Pires put the people with long ears in Papua and the island of women off the west coast of Sumatra; those of Pigafetta put the former in the lesser Sundas and the latter south of Java (Pires 1515, 222, 162; Pigafetta 1524, 93, 95). The notion of an island of women somewhere in the Indian Archipelago was reported by Chinese writers as early as the sixth century, and Arabs in the tenth (Hirth and Rockhill 1970, 151–2).

4. I have translated this from the Shellabear text of *Sejarah Melayu* (1961, 248). The Raffles text, better known through Brown's translation (1952) is almost identical except for the omission of the final sentence of this paragraph.

5. The fishermen were therefore portrayed as simple folk who knew only their local language, and not the lingua franca, Malay, in which the Portuguese would have conversed to Jamilu.

6. A similar allegation is made by the major Burmese chronicler U Kala, with similar scepticism, that Mon monks had claimed that de Brito's advent had been prophesied in their religious texts, which foretold that "strangers with white faces and teeth [Southeast Asians blackened their teeth] and cropped hair" would have a period of ascendancy (Lieberman 1980, 218).

7. The more balanced account by the Italian Giovanni da Empoli (1504, 136–7) confirms that Melaka did defend itself with cannons.

8. I am grateful to Professors Salih Ozbaran and Cornell Fleischer for the outline translation of this letter.

9. The oldest known version of the popular Acehnese *Hikayat Perang Sabit* [Rhymed chronicle of the Holy War] is dated 1710, but there were probably oral predecessors (Alfian 1987, 109–14).

10. Frederick de Houtman's account of his captivity in Aceh (1948, 96–100). A more fatal Catholic experience in Aceh is chronicled by Tres-sainte Trinité (1652, 496–515).

11. The adventurer in question was Diogo Soares. The rise and fall of this "Justful Galician", who was military commander and confidant of Tabinshweti, but stoned to death by an angry crowd under his successor for his "abominable crimes", is colourfully told in Pinto (1578, 425-30).

12. I am grateful to Maung Maung Nyo for translating this last source for me.

13. Quoted in a letter from Beijing by the Jesuit de Mailla, 5 June 1717, in *Lettres edifiantes* (1781, 10-12). See also memorial of 17 January 1684 by Shih Long, translated in Fu (1966, 60-1).

14. *Kusuk*, *syaitan*, *iblis*, *murtad*, *dusta*, *bacil*, *pencuri*, *gila*, respectively.

15. As has been shown by Iletto, Filipino borrowing of Spanish motifs extended to the popular myths through which they expressed their longing to be free in later centuries. The holy week drama of the passion of Christ, and the heroic struggle of the Spanish millennial hero Bernardo Carpio, were rendered into Tagalog verse so emotionally powerful that it provided the language for nineteenth century liberation movements (Iletto 1979a; 1979, 379-400).

16. Personal communication from Dr Eduardo Aznar-Vallejo.

17. An established theme in Javanese mythology, since Ken Dedes in the sixteenth century *Pararaton* had the same miraculous power, which only the legitimate ruler Ken Anggrok could cope with.

18. The only scholarly edition of this epic is by A. B. Cohen Stuart (1850), which uses a text dated 1845. The same text was published with an Indonesian translation in Jakarta in 1978. I am indebted for what follows, however, to the lengthy summary and analysis provided by M. C. Ricklefs (1974, 377-407) based on an earlier British Museum text of about 1810.

19. *Kumpeni*, a term by which the Dutch were known throughout Indonesia until early this century.