

Zeitschrift:	Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie
Herausgeber:	Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft
Band:	22 (1968)
Heft:	1-4
Artikel:	Kingship and political legitimacy in southeast Asia : patterns of an enduring tradition
Autor:	Kroef, Justus M. van der
DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-146134

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 12.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

KINGSHIP AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: PATTERNS OF AN ENDURING TRADITION

JUSTUS M. VAN DER KROEF

UNIVERSITY OF BRIDGEPORT

The present paucity of the data does not allow for an analysis of autochthonous patterns of kingship in Southeast Asia, i. e., those presumably existing before the impact of Brahmanic and Buddhist influences and later of Islam. But in light of the relative ease with which other Indian cultural forms have been assimilated in the region it may perhaps be suggested that the Brahmanic and Buddhist cosmologies which form the basis of the earliest recorded Southeast Asian concepts of kingship and traditional legitimacy were not incompatible with whatever autochthonous patterns may have prevailed, just as the Brahmanic-Buddhist cosmologies in turn subsequently proved relatively adaptable to the Islamic idea of the Sultanate in Malaysia and Indonesia. It is also well to note at the outset that the sources for an analysis of the Brahmanic and Buddhistic pattern of kingship in Southeast Asia are frequently but fragmentary and are heavily mythologized and subject to the particular cosmological bias of their clerical authors. Even so it seems possible to delineate at least the formal structure of kingship and political legitimacy.

Considered then against their Brahmanic and Buddhist background Southeast Asian concepts of kingship are inseparable from a cosmology in which man's world, circumscribed by the sky, is seen as but a miniaturized version of the whole surrounding universe, a microcosmos which simultaneously is the exact image and an extension of the macrocosmos that encompasses it. The ruler, and his abode, whether palace or capitol, are not only the embodiments of this microcosmic-macrocosmic unity and interdependence as well as of their divine creation, but also and particularly of the intended regularity of their function and the immutability of their design. Typically, Southeast Asian kingship has there-

fore demanded the preservation and charismatic restoration of the balance between the universe and the world of men ; and royal coronation ceremonies, titles and regalia constantly underscore the king's intermediary powers in this regard.

Within his own being the king unites the different levels of reality ; and so in Hinduized Bali, where the vision of microcosmic man united with the macrocosmic order has reached a symbolic richness probably unequalled elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the consecration of rulers has ceremoniously stressed the compartmentalization and interdependence of the universe by the process of separately hallowing the different parts of the king's body, a ritual performed by priests who themselves are believed to possess competence only at a specific cosmic level. As master of the world and living repository of its divinely planned order, the Balinese ruler also occupies the central position in a fourfold cosmic classification and correspondence system based on the four major wind directions and which includes all the world's flora and fauna, colors, weekdays, parts or locations of house and village, tools, occupations – in short the whole microcosmic range of things. In the royal consecration ceremonies of Bali the ruler draws strength and dominion from reality in the four wind directions and from the gods identified with them ; all cardinal points of the universe focus on the king. In him all paths merge, all divisions balance¹.

Monarchical tradition in the principalities of Malaya today shows that even Islamization in Southeast Asia did not affect this Hindu vision of the king as preserver of the balance system of the universe. In the Southeast Asian heartland of the Brahmanic concepts of kingship, the sacred numbers 4, 8, 16 and 32, as major and intermediate wind directions, served but to symbolize the cosmic partitions : for example, in the coro-

1. On the position of the Balinese ruler, see J. L. Swellengrebel, 'Introduction', in *Bali. Studies in Life, Thought, and Ritual. Selected Studies on Indonesia by Dutch Scholars*. Volume V (The Hague and Bandung, W. van Hoeve, 1960), pp. 45, 49. On Indonesian cosmic classification generally see Justus M. van der Kroef, 'Dualism and Symbolic Antithesis in Indonesian Society', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 56 (October, 1954), pp. 847–862.

nation ceremony of the Cambodian ruler, 8 Brahmins, representing the Lokapalas who guard the 8 points of the Brahmin cosmogony, surround the monarch who, in the center, is in fact believed to be the pivot of both the micro- and the macrocosmic order, the reincarnation of the God-head. Srikshetra, the capital of the ancient Burmese kingdom of Pyu, was, according to Burmese annals, created by the gods, with 32 principal gates, corresponding to the kingdom's 32 provinces and vassals, constructed in near circular fashion and focussed upon the golden palace in the center, where the king, as the God Indra's representative, maintained his world in the same fashion in which Indra himself, in his own heavenly city of Sudarsana, Srikshetra's model, preserved the macrocosmic order.

Burmese kingship in particular appears to have been immersed in the numerical symbolism of the wind directions. For example, Burmese palace construction placed the monarch's chamber in the center, surrounding it in circular fashion with the 8 chambers of his consorts, 4 principal queens and 4 queens of secondary rank. It has been noted that the failure of Burma's last king, Thibaw, to provide himself with the prescribed number of consorts was a source of greater public concern in his realm than the massacre of his relations. The Burmese court entourage included 4 chief ministers, each with an appropriate quarter of the capital in his charge, as well as sets of 4 or multiples of 4 of lower functionaries. The king in this arrangement, it is well to stress, served as an added, overcapping element, being the fifth or central entity in the microcosmic-macrocosmic quadrant, or the ninth or seventeenth factor in systems with eight or sixteen fold divisions. This same pattern appears throughout Southeast Asia, even in the Islamized principalities of Malaya: e.g., in the states of Pahang, Perak and Kedah there are 4 great, 8 major and 16 minor chiefs of the realm, and the architectural design of an old Perak palace indicates the pillars situated in 4 sets of 8, a total of 32 for the main section of the building. Regalia for the ruler of Negri Sembilan includes all manner of implements but always in sets

of 8 or 16 (e.g., 8 swords, cades or water vessels, 16 pennons and umbrellas and so on)².

It is again on Bali that this number symbolism and its cosmological rationale have perhaps reached their greatest refinement in Southeast Asia. An example is the still functioning concept of *nawa sanga*. In Balinese Brahmanic traditions the ultimate reality, manifesting itself as the God Siva in the center of the universe, emanates in 8 directions, each with a divine protector for a specific segment of creation. The unity of the 8 deities with Siva as their center (again the ninth and overcapping element) symbolic of the cosmic order, is called *nawa sanga*, and is frequently sculpted on both the cornice and base of Balinese temples. An easily fashioned and portable symbol of *nawa sanga*, to be used in important public discussions and for the purpose of indicating that matters are proceeding according to cosmic law, is the combination of strips of the colors of the gods of the four cardinal directions, black for Vishnu in the North, white for Iswara in the East, red for Brahma in the South, and yellow for Mahadewa in the West. A cone-shaped floral piece divided into 4 segments with the colors just named or other four-colored flower offerings, have traditionally figured in Balinese public gatherings involving those in authority, also at the village level. Typically, the *nawa sanga* was a royal emblem, showing the Balinese ruler in his function as the divine agency maintaining the equilibrium of the microcosmos of the world in its relation to the macrocosmic order. It is not surprising that in 1947, when Bali became part of the federal state of East Indonesia, the *nawa sanga* was adopted as the emblem of its presidential flag³.

2. Richard Winstedt, *The Malays. A Cultural History* (New York, Philosophical Library, 1950), p. 68, and Robert Heine-Geldern, *Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia* (Data Paper 18, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1956), p. 4. On the historic continuity of the linkage between the micro- and macro-cosmic orders in the traditional conceptions of kingship in Hinduised Indonesia see also Anthony Johns, 'The Role of Structural Organization and Myth in Javanese Historiography', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 24 (November, 1964), pp. 91-99.

3. C. J. Grader, 'De Rijkstempels van Mengwi', *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* vol. 83 (1949), pp. 394-423.

Though the formal institution of kingship in parts of Southeast Asia may now be gone, the thought-world of the number symbolism that is inseparably linked with it is not. Such number symbolism is of course basic to astrological tabulations, and no major act of state in contemporary Burma or in Laos, such as the installation of a new government, occurs without reference to the condition of the zodiac. The rationale of the cosmological quadrant and of the multiples of 4, held together by a separate overcapping entity, is also indispensable to an understanding of much of political ideology and symbolism in Indonesia today. There, in Southeast Asia's most populous nation, President Sukarno has dexterously blended the mechanics of modern Caesarism and traditional Hinduized kingship, providing his nation with a multitude of quintuple doctrines, such as the *Pantjasila*, the official 'Five Principles of the Indonesian State' (which include belief in God, nationalism, democracy, social justice and humanitarianism), the 'Five Principles of Duty' for the army, the 'Five Requirements of the Nation's Youth', and kindred formulations. Just as the *nawa sanga* symbolizes the sacred micro-macro-cosmic balancing function of the Balinese ruler, so *Pantjasila* and similar doctrines reflect the mystique of modern Indonesian nationalism which assigns the Republic and its origins to a transcendent metahistorical order.

Divinity doth hedge a king in Southeast Asia, but there are significant, if often subtle contrasts in the traditions of divine kingship. One common form, which particularly lent itself to elaborate and refined variants, was the concept of a fusion of a God and the king, each of whom, however, retained his separate identity; this in contrast, for example, to the notion of the king as a complete reincarnation of the deity, or again to the idea of the king as being merely the deity's representative, though equipped with special cosmically evident powers. From the ninth to the twelfth centuries A. D., rulers, princes, and other notables of the Khmer empire in Cambodia were the centers of personal religious cults in which homage was rendered to images which had the attributes of the great figures of the Hindu and Buddhist pantheons; but the names

on the statues fused the god's name with that of the human being who had merged or was eventually expected to merge with the deity. The notion of such a fusion, in turn, closely involved the concept of *devaraja*, the eternal 'essence' of kingship, said to be expressed also in the particular personality of the monarch. A Khmer ruler's *devaraja* tended to be especially, though not exclusively, identified with Siva, and the king's essence and the God's essence were thus blended in the *lingga* or phallic-shaped monument dedicated to Siva as Lord of fertility, prosperity and of the micro- and macrocosmic orders. In this *devaraja* cult eclecticism was the rule, however: for example, under the influence of Vaisnavism, Vishnu would be identified with the *devaraja* and, under that of late Mahayana Buddhism, Buddha became so identified. Statues of Vishnu or Buddha, but having the features of the king, were common under these circumstances. More categorical formulations, blotting out the separate essences of God and king altogether, and suggesting in fact an unalloyed royal divinity and reincarnation, also abound in the inscriptions and genealogies. Thus, early Cham rulers were regarded as sons of Siva; Krtaya, ruler of Kadiri in Java in the 13th century, was held to be able to assume the appearance of Siva; while Angrok, founder in the same century of the Singasari dynasty in Java, is described as an incarnation of Vishnu, begotten by Brahma and simultaneously Siva's son. The Tamil poem 'Manimekailai' describes two Malay kings who claimed Indra as their ancestor, and the capital of the Malay state of Pahang used to be called Indrapura or 'town of Indra'.⁴

The religious eclecticism in the deification process of Southeast Asia kingship also meant that earlier mentioned concepts of cosmological division according to the principal wind directions, along with their numerological systems, tended to be readily assimilated, providing still other elements for metaphysical elaboration. Examples are readily appa-

4. Georges Coedès, *Les Etats Hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* (Paris, 1948), p. 207; H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Pre-history and Religion in Southeast Asia* (London, 1957), pp. 131-134; Winstedt, *op. cit.*, p. 66; Heine-Geldern, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

rent in the Hindu-Javanese court chronicles, which, as the suggestive if still controversial researches of Berg have indicated, were essentially instruments of a priestly magic, designed to fit various dynastic changes and political upheavals within the unchanging framework of the traditional Brahmanic cosmology. Thus, according to Berg, five major kings of the Javanese empires of Singasari and Majapahit in the 13th and 14th centuries A.D. appear in the court literature as earthly manifestations of Pançatathagata, the 'Five-Fold Buddha' of late Mahayanistic speculation. The essential unity of the five Jinas (Dhyani Buddhas) is made to reflect in the oneness of the five Javanese kings, Krtanagara, Jayanegara, Rajasanagara, Jayawardhana and Rajasawardhana, as evidenced in the lengths and achievements of their respective reigns, the number and position of their relatives, and various incidents in their lives⁵. Javanese cosmology, which had already made Siva and Buddha into twin brothers as symbols of an all-integrating cosmic dualism emanating from a single Godhead, had no difficulty uniting the divine 'essence' of kingship with the unity of the 'Five-Fold Buddha'. The eclecticism in the conception of the Buddha King is carried to inordinate lengths in Majapahit tradition: the 'essence' of kingship is now fused with the Mahayanistic idea of the saviour, as well as with the structure of the compartmentalized universe, described above, and the ruler thus balances not only his microcosmic order with the macrocosmos, but with a particular refinement of the latter. For through the Buddha the way of deliverance from the macrocosmic operation has been disclosed, and the king shares in this role of saviour, his Messianic dimension becoming an important aspect of his being.

But this process is certainly not unique with the Majapahit conception of kingship, for it appears centuries earlier in the whole Buddhist rationale of universal kingship, particularly in Burma. King Kyanzittha of the

5. Cf. C. C. Berg, *Het Rijk van de Vijfoudige Buddha* (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks, deel LXIX, no. 1, Amsterdam, 1962).

Pagan dynasty in Burma in 1098 or 1099 expresses this Messianic role of kingship well when he speaks of 'the exalted mighty universal monarch, the omniscient one, the Bodhisattva, who shall verily become the Buddha that saves and redeems all beings ... Men who are not equal in body, speech or spirit the king shall make them equal ... so that all beings may obtain ... plenty and be free from famine – in every place that lacks water and land, our lord the king, digs water tanks, creates cultivation ... even all the poor old women who sell pots and potlids ... they shall become rich ...', and so on⁶. As will be indicated shortly, the king's role as the balancer of the cosmic order and the provider of plenty has also been basic to modern millenarian movements and expectations in the Southeast Asian area today.

But while Mahayana Buddhism, as evidenced in Majapahit kingship, undoubtedly was hospitable to the deification of kings, Hinayana Buddhism, certainly in Burma, was not. Kyanzittha's 'universal monarch', even as saviour of his people, even as Bodhisattva, is no God; Hinayanaism allows for a kind of supernatural being but not for an eternal deity; all creatures, even the most exalted and 'god-like', are equally in the grip of the cycle of death and rebirth. Within this context there is no formal divine reincarnation in the kingship, and the ruler can either be venerated as a representative of deities such as Indra, who in this Hinayana soteriology are but little better off than human beings, or – because of his conduct, personal qualities and popular expectation – as a Bodhisattva, a potential saviour figure also for other men. Yet in either case he holds a cosmic stasis preserving authority, balancing the separate but interlocking orders of the universe.

Formal concepts of royal divinity may in one way or another have been imposed on less exalted autochthonous traditions of kingship in

6. C. Duroiselle, ed., *Epigraphia Birmanica* (Rangoon, 1920), vol. 1, part 2, pp. 117, 123, 142, 146, 166, cited in Manuel Sarkisyanz, 'On the Place of U Nu's Buddhist Socialism in Burma's History of Ideas', pp. 54–55 in Robert K. Sakai, ed., *Studies on Asia* (Lincoln, Neb., University of Nebraska Press, 1961).

Southeast Asian culture, although popular awe and veneration for the monarch are uniformly encountered. In Assam, royalty traced its descent through the Boar incarnation of Vishnu and some rulers were either compared to Gods or formally considered divine reincarnations. Yet one is informed that 'The doctrine of royal divinity was not pushed to the extreme' in Assam and that the monarch's deification, also in popular belief, rested upon his display of certain traits, attributes and qualifications of splendor and power⁷. These included active concern for the popular welfare, and the ideal ruler is described as one who pleased his subjects, removed their liabilities, also in a spiritual sense, and restored the stability of the world. Maintaining the balances of the cosmos was, of course, equivalent to maintaining established religious life and its appropriate ceremonials; hence in Burma the preservation of Buddhism, or rather of the tranquillity which makes the pursuit of salvation possible was the ruler's prime concern. That kingship was expressed through certain personality traits and achievements is a concept which will engage our attention again shortly. Suffice to note here now that Assamese kingship according to epigraphic data appears also from time to time to have been elective, and it would seem that theoretically he was chosen ruler who possessed the necessary royal qualifications; admittedly, high officials almost always chose a prince of the former ruling family, but the idea that 'kingship is what kingship does' – if one may so put it – is not thereby in principle impaired. In Siamese royal tradition the same pattern of beliefs obtains. Hindu influences over time presumably exalted a more democratic indigenous concept of Siamese kingship, providing the ruler in his coronation ceremony with titles like 'Incarnation of the Celestial Gods' (*Dibyadebavatara*), with the trident of Siva and with the discus of Vishnu; yet in popular belief, backed by the Constitution of the *Thammasat* (from the Pali *Dhammasattha*), which came as the result of the impact of Mon culture, the ideal monarch is described

7. P. C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A. D.* (Ph. D. Thesis, University of London, Gauhati, Assam, 1959), pp. 281, 283.

as the 'King of Righteousness' who is 'elected by the people', and as having such qualifications and virtues as merit him the royal title. It is through these virtues, ranging from the maintenance of justice to the display of knowledge of and kindness toward his subjects, that the king may aspire to the dignity of a *Çakravartin*, the Buddhist concept of the universal sovereign, who, as has already been indicated, is believed to be the Bodhisattva, a future Buddha, the saviour ideal⁸.

But, whether fully deified or not, the king, by his very being, is believed to possess special competencies which may range from the simpler shamanistic powers, as in the case of the rulers of Malaya, to the most elaborate theologized attributes. His power is always supernaturally tinged, even if he lacks the formality of divine status. His capital, his palace, or his court temple, are the pivots of the microcosmic order, just as Mount Meru, the cosmic mountain around which, according to Brahmanic and Buddhist doctrine, the whole universe revolves, is the pivot of the macrocosmos. In Brahmanism Mount Meru is also the abode of the Gods, and the king is the image of and the mundane pathway to their powers. In Buddhism as well as Brahmanism cosmic concentricity and regularity emanate from Meru, and the whole order of the universe, whether impersonal or deified, finds its expression in the king. It is therefore not surprising that royal *linggas* were regularly depicted also as representations of Mount Meru, reinforcing the idea of the unity of the divinely protected eternal essence of kingship with the center of creation.

But in all this symbolism and its attendant ritual the assistance of clerics and literati is considered indispensable. The priesthood, whether at the courts of Angkor or Kediri, performs a legitimizing function which encompasses the whole range of royal attributes and power. Rulers may ascend thrones through usurpation or by rightful inherit-

8. H. H. Prince Dhani, 'The Old Siamese Conception of the Monarchy', pp. 163, 164, 169, 171 in *The Siam Society. Fiftieth Anniversary Commemorative Publication. Selected Articles from the Siam Society Journal*. Volume II, 1929-1953 (Bangkok, 1954).

ance, through 'election' by the populace or by the notables of the realm, through accident or the display of wondrous *darma* – but always it is the priesthood which merges the new ruler into the patterns of traditional kingship, assuring the continuity of the cosmic order⁹. To this end clerics falsify genealogical tables and court records, mythologize historical events and endlessly theologize new royal attributes – yet falsification and mythologizing are perhaps not the proper terms for these exercises in priestly magic. For the court's clerics and literati are believed to possess the power to create reality retroactively, so to speak, what they bind on earth will be bound also in heaven, i. e., their intervention in the microcosmos, performed in the interests of assuring the continuity of the pivotal role of kingship, is regarded as approved of by and is paralleled in the macrocosmos. To show the unbroken regularity of monarchical rule in terms of its universal attributes, and to do this in and through the symbols of royal sanction, i. e., genealogies, legal codes and court histories, is from this particular vantage point an act of consecration as important as any formal acknowledgement by the gods that a newly coronated king is one of their own.

Thus the hallowing of the ruler and the attributes of his office are believed not to be for ordinary human understanding; there is a special supernatural and sanctifying quality about all these things that belong to the ruler, and so kingship itself in Southeast Asia has tended to become identified with certain tangibles and intangibles, with possession of places, objects, regalia and special formulas – the whole instrumentation of him who balances the cosmic orders. It is for this reason that the mere control over this instrumentation automatically was conceived of as bestowing royal powers. Thus in Burma the royal palace as the center of the world and as the cosmic pendant of Mount Meru had a sanctity quite apart from its resident, and to occupy the palace was therefore a constant temptation to would-be usurpers who by occupying the royal

9. Compare J. C. van Leur, *Eenige Beschouwingen betreffende den Ouden Aziatischen Handel* (Diss., University of Leyden, Middelburg, 1934), pp. 121, 123, 127, 132–133.

abode also then gained possession of the symbol of all kingly power. 'Many Burmese and Siamese kings therefore were virtual prisoners in their palaces which they did not dare leave for fear it might be seized by a usurper¹⁰.' The *payong* or *song song*, the wide, richly decorated or golden umbrella, a symbol of divine protection and regarded as a source of magical inspiration, and used not just by kings but also in different form by the aristocracy throughout Southeast Asia as a token of its status, had in this respect a significance similar to that of the palace. Possession of it, or of the royal lance or dagger, or of the coronation sandals, all endowed one with the power of kings. An extreme form of this belief is encountered among the Makassarese and Buginese of South Sulawesi in Indonesia, for whom the royal ornaments, weapons, boxes (some in animal form), statuetes, and cloths were in fact the true rulers of the realm, and hence were ceremoniously carried throughout the land especially in periods of adversity, such as a drought, while the king, as their 'owner', followed deferentially behind, correctly conveying the impression that he but governed in his ornaments' name¹¹.

These, then, are the traditional instruments of royalty-appreciated, if one may so put it, almost positivistically, as objects of veneration or visible paraphernalia of authority in their own right, as if they had little or no reference to the metaphysical rationales of kingship itself. Also in this positivistic respect the modern instrumentation of power in Southeast Asia seems sometimes largely a continuation of the old, particularly if one looks at the nationalist Caesarism of Burma and Indonesia whose purveyors consciously seek to manipulate the ancient symbolism. The formulations of modern charisma here are projected in terms of traditional patterns of kingship and legitimacy, now fused with the vision of a modern welfare state and its new national greatness. In Burma the Buddhist eschatology of the universal sovereign has continued to

10. Heine-Geldern, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

11. J. P. Duyvendak, *Inleiding tot de Ethnologie van de Indonesische Archipel* (3rd ed., Groningen, Djakarta, J. B. Wolters, 1946), pp. 135-136.

provide a basis until the present day for various millenarian expectations ; in books and prophesies, in cities and countryside, the theme of a perfect Buddhist ruler closely associated with a future Buddha continues to be popularized. According to ancient Pali Buddhist thought, the illusion of self resulted in the institution of private property and the loss of the fabled Padeytha Tree which once had supplied all human needs in common ; this loss, in turn, necessitated the appearance of the first 'cosmic restorer', i. e., the first king, a future Buddha. After the fall of the Burmese kingdom in 1885, utopian expectations, including folklore beliefs in the loss of a perfect society inspired by early Buddhist thought, gradually entered into the developing ideology of Burmese revolutionary nationalism¹².

Quite deliberately the leaders of the new Burma have employed the symbolism of the old : in the nativistic rebellion in Burma of 1930-31 one of the first acts of the rebel leader Saya San was to build a 'palace' in the forest with an appropriate designation describing it as the 'Palace of the Buddhist King'. In recent years the autochthonous Buddhist element has become ever more prominent in Burmese social theorizing, and the rationale of the modern welfare state in Burma is derived not from Marxism – indeed with few exceptions the Burmese political leadership presently in power seems almost as one in formally repudiating Marxism – but (1) from the folklore of Buddhist millenarianism, with its belief in the restoration of an ancient order that prevailed before self illusion and private property destroyed communal happiness, (2) from the coming of the Buddhist universal ruler and the creation of the Lokka Nibban the earthly *nirvana*, and (3) from 'Burma's Buddhist heritage of the Asokan tradition'. These, clearly, are the roots of the welfare state ideology of such Burmese statesmen as U Nu. When in March, 1962, General Ne Win seized power in Burma, these trends were, if possible, accentuated even more. Burma's new military masters have attempted to provide a new national philosophy for their people, a philosophy that

12. Sarkisyanz, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

rejects virtually all of formal Marxism because of its alleged economic determinism and materialism, though it retains a greatly attenuated concept of class conflict. The new national ideology is equally scathing in its criticism of the selfishness, violence, and folly that presumably underlie and are perpetuated by capitalism. But while men like U Nu had sought to retain Western parliamentary democracy and sought to fit it into a modernized Buddhist political ethic, Ne Win has also rejected the parliamentary system as incompatible with what he has termed the 'Burmese Way to Socialism'. Buddhist eschatology, such as the 'law of permanence' and the 'law of change', is now made to undergird such 'laws' of 'Burmese Socialism' as 'the Law of Contribution' (according to capacity) and 'the Law of Distribution' (according to work). The steady shift away from Western political constructs in Burmese national development in the past decade now appears to have culminated, for the time being, in the adoption of an essentially Buddhist charismatic rationale, rooted in indigenous traditions of kingship, by a military dictatorship of a kind encountered with great frequency in the new countries¹³.

A related development is met with in Indonesia. Despite successive waves of Islamic and Western influences, Hinduized traditions of kingship and political legitimacy have remained a vital element of Javanese folklore, expressed, for example, in Javanized conceptions of the Eruçakra, the Hindu saviour king, who as Ratu Adil (the 'Just King')

13. Heine-Geldern, *op. cit.*, p. 11; Sarkisyanz, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-59, and the same author's *Russland und der Messianismus des Orients* (Tübingen, Mohr Verlag, 1955). On Ne Win's 'Burmese Way to Socialism' see *The System of Correlation of Man and his Environment, the Philosophy of the Burma Socialist Programme Party* (Ministry of Information, Rangoon, January 17, 1963), and *The Burmese Way to Socialism. The Policy Declaration of the Revolutionary Council* (Ministry of Information, Rangoon, April 30, 1962). I am indebted to an unpublished paper 'Political Leadership in Burma. Evolution from Modern to Traditional Elements in its Ideological Orientation', by Professor Victor M. Fic, of Nanyang University, Singapore, for insights into the Burmese development. It may be noted that the new 'Burmese Socialism' has now become the only officially tolerated educational philosophy in the country's universities, and Western textbooks which might be presenting 'capitalism' or 'colonialism' in a favorable light have reportedly been 'discarded'. *The Asian Student*, vol. 13 (November 28, 1964), no. 11, p. 1.

is expected to inaugurate a new era of abundance and peace. The prophecies attributed to King Jayabaya, the thirteenth century ruler of the Kingdom of Kediri in East Java, which revolve around a coming period of new independence after domination of the country by white and yellow skinned races, have long played a role in Javanese pre-nationalistic millenarian expectations. As has been indicated elsewhere, this Javanese millenarianism, nurtured unquestionably by enduring Hinduistic traditions of the king as cosmic balancer and restorer of world systems, notably influenced the ideology and symbolism of modern Indonesian nationalism, particularly the theorizings of Sukarno¹⁴. The course of history, according to this nationalist mystique, shows Indonesia passing from an era of imperial greatness (during the days of the Java-based Hinduized empires) through a period of tribulation (the colonial epoch) and violent change (the revolution and its aftermath) to a new future age of greatness and prosperity. In this vision the charismatic instrumentation of the past will balance the presently disturbed cosmic orders once more and inaugurate a new state system which is a kind of restoration of the old. Thus, as in Burma today, Marxism, capitalism and Western style parliamentary democracy were rejected as unsuited, and it was not Socialism that became the official objective of national economic development but 'Indonesian Socialism', which would presumably be free from the allegedly unconscionable, impersonal materialism that is believed to cling to both Western style Socialism and capitalism.

The type of collectivist order that was desired, according to Sukarno's theories, was consciously related to the Indonesian past, to the social amity and cooperative spirit of the traditional Indonesian village society usually symbolized by the term *gotong royong* (mutual endeavor and

14. J. M. van der Kroef, 'Javanese Messianic Expectations: their Origin and Cultural Context', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 1 (June, 1959), pp. 299-323. For a parallel analysis see Bernhard Dahm, *Sukarnos Kampf um Indonesiens Unabhängigkeit. Werdegang und Ideen eines asiatischen Nationalisten* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Alfred Metzner Verlag 1966).

assistance), which appeared everywhere in government exhortations. As for government, it too was considered as having to reflect the indigenous traditions of the past: power, therefore, should be in the hands of elders, the presumably wise and benevolent patriarchs who have always been the leaders of Indonesian society and among whom the king was chief. This, as Sukarno has repeatedly emphasized, is the origin of *demokrasi terpimpin*, or 'guided democracy' in Indonesia, imposed in the late nineteen-fifties, and a system described as being much nearer to 'the soul' of the Indonesian people than Western style parliamentary democracy. Thus it was not the clash of opinion and a resulting dominance of the majority (but with room for continuing opposition) that was held up as ideal, but rather *musjawarah* and *mufakat*, i. e. mutual deliberation and the reaching of unanimity, all according to the traditions of the political process in the village. The accelerating dynamics of mass democracy, meanwhile, facilitated a new kind of 'deification' of the head of state. Until the recent ascent to power of the military following the abortive Communist coup of September 1965, it had become commonplace for various Indonesian groups and societies to shower new titles and honorifics upon Sukarno, from 'Great Leader of the Revolution' to 'Mandatory of the Indonesian Spirit', re-enforcing the similarity of his status with that of the Hindu-Javanese kings. And over all hovered an official national ideology, involving various doctrines and dogmas, all of which, however, like the earlier mentioned concept of *Pantjasila*, were seen as uniquely Indonesian, and as having been 'dug out of the Indonesian soil', as Sukarno put it.

This is not the place to evaluate the extent to which concepts like *gotong royong* and 'guided democracy' still reflect a living tradition in Indonesian society, a society where individualizing and secular tendencies have long eroded ancient communal patterns; nor is there space here for an analysis of the possible motives which prompted Sukarno and his associates to play a leading role in bringing about the demise of constitutional government and a parliamentary system in Indonesia in recent

years¹⁵, or the consequences of Sukarno's recent fall from power. The point rather, that needs to be made is that the rationale of 'Indonesian Socialism', of *gotong royong* and *demokrasi terpimpin*, of *Pantjasila* and *Manipol* (the abbreviation commonly used by acrostic minded Indonesians to designate the nation's 'Political Manifesto', also invented by Sukarno) were all reflections and facilitated the establishment of an authoritarian political system and enforced consensus by a central executive power, which reminds one in its structure no less than in the mystique of its operations of nothing so much as the institution of Hindu-Javanese kingship. The recent Indonesian political system and its mystique seemed consciously turned toward the nation's pre-colonial past, and the repudiation of the West lay not just in such incidents as the public burning in Djakarta of books by Western authors described as belonging to the 'old established forces', but rather perhaps in the attempt to justify each new major policy turn and act of state with an appropriate symbolism or ideological incantation that was asserted to stem from specifically indigenous resources. Thus, nationalism in much of Southeast Asia today has turned into a new variant of nativism in which traditional concepts of political legitimacy predominate.

As was indicated at the beginning of this essay, the sources of this traditional political legitimacy, including those of kingship, are mythologized and epigraphic, scanty and fragmentary. The pattern that can be woven of them presents at best a fairly clear picture of the monarchical system in its more formal – perhaps one should say 'idealized' – aspects. The data do not allow for much of an analysis of the actual pragmatic exercises of power, of the functional relations of the ruler with subsidiary élites, say, of the limitations on royal power exercised by law, custom or even by the threat of popular discontent, or of the manner in which successions to the throne really occurred. Theology and cosmo-

15. For an analysis of this motivation and for a discussion of the decline of parliamentary government in Indonesia generally, see Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1962).

logical symbolism in the written records obscure such matters, for indeed from the viewpoint of the symmetry of the king's cosmic position such incidents are indeed altogether unimportant: it is not *how* matters are, but *how they should be* that was the chief concern of the chroniclers. And this too, it may perhaps be suggested, has contributed to the enduring influence of the traditional patterns of power. For the very schematized formality, as well as the scantiness, of the data have lent themselves much more readily to various doctrinaire legitimizations of the present by appeals to the past than if profusion and variety characterized our knowledge of the old political forms. Like the Brahmins of yesterday, the modern Caesars of Southeast Asia and their court ideologues use but few principles, endlessly spun out rearranged and yet rarely concisely defined, to form their national programs and national philosophies¹⁶. Asserted with a dogmatic finality, often against a background of heightened popular frustration and expectations, the principles appear almost to have a charismatic function and authority of their own that defy, and indeed render unnecessary, a close understanding of their nature. Like the regalia of the Buginese kings they are appreciated positivistically, as stasis-restoring devices: with 'Burmese Socialism' wealth and happiness will come again, with Pantjasila and Manipol the nation will be restored to greatness, and so on. For all the imagery of a new era that is now said to have dawned in the underdeveloped countries of the world, much of the present political system, in Southeast Asia at any rate, seems to suggest nothing so much as the enduring vitality of its antiquity.

This vitality poses complex problems for the student of comparative political and social institutions, particularly in the underdeveloped world. Is, for example, the resurgent nativism in the recent evolution of some Southeast Asian countries truly expressive of popular interests

16. See, e.g., J. M. van der Kroef, 'An Indonesian Ideological Lexicon', *Asian Survey*, July, 1962, pp. 24-30, and Donald E. Weatherbee, *Ideology in Indonesia: Sukarno's Indonesian Revolution* (Monograph Series no. 8, Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, 1966).

and national needs, or is it but the rationalization of elites unwilling or unable to structure the governmental process in the direction of modern, Western style parliamentary democracy? For the nationalist movement in Southeast Asian countries, particularly during the long decades of struggle against Western colonial control, shows a broad endorsement of the principle, if not the specific operations, of that democracy – it is the very heritage of Western constitutional government which nationalists appeal to in their struggle against Western colonial domination. In the aftermath of independence that heritage comes to be repudiated, however, and authoritarian constructs, said to reflect more truly the indigenous traditions of legitimacy and even of kingship, are imposed. Granted that the antithesis between tradition and modernity, between Western and non-Western political institutions and processes of developments has tended to be drawn too sharply on occasion, the fact remains that recent political thought and experience in Southeast Asia makes the antithesis still valid. For while forms of authoritarian control, of ideologized types of dictatorship, East or West, recent or old, readily lend themselves to comparative analysis and so, admittedly, may invalidate too categorically drawn contrasts between political traditionalism and modernity, the principles and methods of operations of modern Western parliamentary democracy, on the other hand, are relatively unique. The espousal of them by a sizable segment of the nationalist leadership of Southeast Asia, was, as a political event, as important in the evolution of the countries of the region as the subsequent repudiation of them once freedom had been attained. The persistence or resurgence of pre-Western or pre-modern political rationales in the nations of Southeast Asia is a dialectical turn which cannot be understood without reference to the experience of these same countries with modern Western parliamentary institutions in the context of their formidable social and economic problems. Whether the new nativism and its authoritarian constructs will be more successful in meeting these problems than the Western parliamentary processes – now often in disrepute – remains to

be seen. The revival of the traditions of Southeast Asian kingship and their magic-religious aura in the guise of contemporary Caesarism and its ideologies may be no more than a fleeting transitional phase in the development of the new Southeast Asian nations as they struggle toward greater national stability.