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**The Future of the Past, the Past of the Future: History in Southeast Asia**

by  
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## **1. The Entanglement of histories and futures**

The future in Southeast Asia is intimately linked to its past as well as its present. Starting from any present anywhere, both the past and the future can only be conceived in relational terms. One has to imagine overlaps between past and present / present and future or think in form of forward/backward strings of events, processes and structures condensed into preconditions and consequences. Whereas looking backwards in time has developed into the science of history, looking forward is often felt as a much more haphazard practice undertaken by non-scientific actors such as politicians, administrative planners and even fortune-tellers. Yet the past cannot do without the present, nor the present without the future; the future without the past and even the past without the future.

Screening through titles of studies on Southeast Asia, the multi-directionalities and asymmetrical linkages between past, present and future become apparent. The present is historicised through a past that is perceived, told, written, framed, mapped, but also handed down, transmitted, remembered, recalled as well as examined, interpreted or explained. The future, however, is viewed, faced, approached or bridged in the form of trajectories, prospects and challenges. So it seems that as a general rule the human past needs to be maintained as an ordered space to assist in the structure and stability of the present, whereas the future is primarily linked to change, risk and contingency. This is primarily a function of linear, forward-moving perceptions of time, which sees the present state of (post)modernity as outcome of a specific development of the past, prefiguring a future that is partly predetermined by the presence of the past but also open to the new and unexpected.

However, the connections between future-past-present become multidirectional and highly charged if other perceptions of time are taken in. Hopes or fears of the future certainly impact on present-day peoples' attitudes. The past only acquires meaning through the preoccupations of the present. The future is supposed to be shaped through the experiences or 'lessons' of the past, whereas the past is conceived to contain the seeds of the future. Yet, these kinds of multiple connections only display the 'secure' time modes. In contrast, many temporal entanglements are also characterised by instability, insecurity, crisis and even a psychological state-of-mind called 'Angst'. Angst lies beyond fear, because what one fears can be named and is therefore calculable, whereas Angst refers to an uncontrollable and unspecific feeling of threat. Coming to terms with traumatic episodes of the past as well as with Angst for the future shows how crisis-prone and charged the connections between past, present and future often are, both on the individual and the collective level.

Past, present and future are entangled, but what are the specific processes involved and how can these be captured by using particular terms? Recent literature offers clues to this. One approach is that of using optical terms – that of reflecting and mirroring, which is more sensate than concepts of imagining and visioning.<sup>1</sup> It makes clear that we look at the past as well as the future as a form of a space viewed through a lens from a certain angle, which means with a particular bias. A second approach uses the language of power: the past is empowered, the future is confronted, and history is revived in order to be able to face the future.<sup>2</sup> A third infuses quality into temporal dimensions: the past has been turbulent and the future is uncertain.<sup>3</sup> Human agency is contained in it.

In this short essay, an attempt is made to show how past and future interact in the spatial setting of what is conveniently called Southeast Asia. The core conceptual instrument in approaching this theme is that of ‘representations of social order’. Representations reflect certain cultural predispositions but at the same time open up cultural, spatial as well as temporal dimensions that allow for the construction of orders in which subjects as well as objects can be positioned. Representations are forms of knowledge that allow people to establish their world and cannot be reduced to something that lurks between us and reality. Representations create a social order, but at the same time they are part of it. Representations are not simply ‘depictions’ of the past or the future, but resources for the creation of meaning vis-à-vis the past and the future, which enable individual as well as collective actors and even whole societies to act both within and beyond the confines of the present. By imposing meaning on the past through expectations of the future and the other way around, cultural practices establish, maintain or contest a particular social order.<sup>4</sup> Two dimensions of one major strand of representation are considered here: the way in which the future has been embedded in the past during the colonial and postcolonial eras in Southeast Asia. I will concentrate on Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia.

## **2. Futures of the colonial**

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<sup>1</sup> For instance: Vedi R. Hadiz, ‘Mirroring the Past or reflecting the Future?: Class and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Labor’ in: Robert W. Hefner, *The Politics of Multiculturalism* (Honolulu 2001)

<sup>2</sup> For instance: Andrew Strathern, *Empowering the Past, Confronting the Future: the Duna People of PNG* (2004); John Kleinen, *Facing the Future, Reviving the Past. A Study of Social Change in a Northern Vietnamese Village*. Singapore 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See: Milton Osborne, *The Mekong: turbulent past, uncertain future*. New York 2000.

<sup>4</sup> These are among the leading ideas that underpin the Berlin research cluster 640. See: [www.repraesentationen.de](http://www.repraesentationen.de)

The preoccupation with the future was an integral part of representations of the past in colonial Southeast Asia. Studying prophetic writing in Javanese history, Nancy Florida translated the *Babad Jaka Tingkir*, an anonymous nineteenth century text that describes the transition from Hindu-Buddhist realms in East Java to Islamic reign in Central Java two hundred and fifty years earlier. She notes:

(T)his text does *not* chronicle a dynastic history preoccupied with the doings of kings and their armies in a linear narrative fashion. Rather this poem interrupts the dominant genealogical style of the dynastic chronicle to treat the past episodically, to generate a novel genealogy of the future. [...] Rather than register a recuperation of past reality in the name of "objective truth" [...] or a reinscription of the imagined pasts of dynastic presents with an eye to continuing traditional status quos [...], this text constructs an alternative past which, countering its oppressive colonial present, would move towards more autonomous, perhaps even liberating, futures.<sup>5</sup>

The text was apparently written around 1850 on the island of Ambon by someone from the entourage of the exiled king of Surakarta, Pakubuwana VI.<sup>6</sup> Instead of using a traditional linear narrative, it was composed as a series of episodic fragments. Within the context of the absence of a genuine scion of the royal Mataram house being on the throne, the text dwells on 'other powers which arise – repeatedly – at the edges or margins of society'. It refers to the Jayabaya tradition, said to be the prophecies of a Hindu Javanese king concerning the future of Java in the form of eight eras to come. Contrary to *babad* tradition, however, the marginalised figures do not move into the centre but remain obscure. Writing history (Jav. *mengèti*) has also the connotation of bringing about a desired future.<sup>7</sup>

One might question whether the *Jaka Tingkir* text was an exceptional way of writing pre-colonial history, set within a troubled colonial present and therefore provoking a change in the future. I argue this is not the case. Even in the major Javanese chronicle on the history of Java, the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, prophecies (*pasemon*) were regularly integrated into earlier parts of the story as ways to foreshadow later 'predestined' events. The constant rewriting and extension of the so-called major *babad* has the intention of asserting control of both the present and future by wielding power over the past.<sup>8</sup> Nor was this phenomenon of future orientation something limited to Javanese history-writing. In the Acehnese *hikayat* 'Potjoet

<sup>5</sup> Nancy K. Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future. History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Durham & London: Duke University Press 1995) 10.

<sup>6</sup> On the flight and exile of Pakubuwana VI, see: Vincent Houben, *Kraton and Kumpeni. Surakarta and Yoyakarta 1830-1870* (Leiden: KITLV Press 1994) 33-37.

<sup>7</sup> Florida 1995: 270-274, 315, 397.

<sup>8</sup> E.P. Wieringa, 'An Old Text brought to Life again. A Reconsideration of the "Final Version" of the Babad Tanah Jawi', in: *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 155-2 (1999) 244-263.

Moehamat', the story of a conflict between two contenders to the throne unfolds after the younger one has a dream with a 'concealed meaning' in which the land is thrown into chaos but then order is restored. At the same time the record of events omits the conjunctions between individual occurrences.<sup>9</sup> Discussion of the Malay *hikayat* style has likewise referred to the feature of temporal phrases that are attached to individual events but not placed within an overarching temporal framework. Contrary to Western perceptions of the past as a line of events moving towards the present as a privileged point, in the *hikayat* events are temporally flat and recounted when they come up. This does not preclude a sense of future though. On the contrary, as Shelly Errington has demonstrated: 'Thus to be spoken about in future ages provides an impulse for action, drawing the *hikayat*'s figures into the future'.<sup>10</sup> The episodic nature of time in pre-colonial chronicles from Java and the Malay world was linked to their function of being sung before an audience. The social meaning the sounds acquired through their performance was a central feature and in this way *hikayat* history was transferred towards the future.

The social meaning of the future was transported in other ways than through history chronicles and their performance. Throughout Southeast Asia ordinary rural people recounted stories of expectation, that acquired a sense of immediacy and relevance in times of crisis. In Java the premonitions of Jayabaya, a king of Kedhiri, were well-known. G.P. Rouffaer, a Dutch scientist who stayed in Central Java during the years 1889-1890, retrieved and translated a Jayabaya manuscript from the Solo Residency archive. It shows history as an alternation of periods of prosperity and order against times of chaos. The story contains predictions (*pralambangan*) that are linked to concrete turns of centuries in Javanese time-reckoning. A fragment of the Rouffaer text reads as follows:

In the year 1900 the realm shall decay and as a consequence of the will of the Almighty a brave European king will come, accompanied by countless armies, to which all kings will have to bow, without being able to resist him. Java will also succumb to him and he will be ruling there for a long time and in a stringent manner, and establish himself immovably. In these times the king of Rum in Constantinople will sit in a State Council and say to his prime-minister: patih, it is known to me that there are no longer ruling princes in Java, all having been forced to submit to a European ruler. Leave with all your armies and chase this usurper from there. If you won't succeed you are not entitled to go there. The patih and his people will leave for

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<sup>9</sup> James Siegel, 'Awareness of the Past in the Hikajat Potjoet Moehamat', in: C.D. Cowan and O.W. Wolters, *Southeast Asian History and Historiography. Essays presented to D.G.E. Hall* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1976) 322, 327.

<sup>10</sup> Shelly Errington, 'Some Comments on style in the Meaning of the Past', in: Anthony Reid and David Marr (eds.), *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Heineman 1979) 38.

Java and drive the European king out. The people will thereafter be happy, live peacefully and united.<sup>11</sup>

Jayabaya prophecies were circulating widely in Java and certainly fed into expectations of the future held by the people. Similar prophetic expectations were contained in an Islamic vocabulary (al-Mahdi), whereas in the Philippines they were of Christian provenience (Pasyon). Millenarian and messianic movements in Southeast Asia have been extensively studied by authors like Michael Adas, Sartono Kartodirdjo, Ray Ileto and others.

Ideas of a future beyond colonialism were therefore prevalent in indigenous societies and certainly were a threat to the colonial order. Therefore, manuscripts and pamphlets referring to the future were meticulously collected by colonial authorities, creating fear among Europeans that ideas might lead to social action, as it sometimes, but certainly not always, did. The pasts contained in *babad*, *hikayat* and millenarian traditions were, however, far from ordered and singular. The dynastical chronicles were connected to oral traditions, which circulated widely but were manifold in their meaning, whereas narratives of expectation on a change of eras had a timeless ‘empty’ quality. Like the past, the future was therefore a reservoir of dreams that were beyond control and were unspecific with regard to time and space.

### **3. Projecting nationalist pasts**

The first decades of the twentieth century fundamentally changed the representations of past and future in Southeast Asia. The key to this development was modernity, which, in the words of Anthony Giddens, separated time and space and therefore opened up the social order to time-space ‘zoning’. The historicity associated with modernity depended on a new, unitary kind of ‘insertion’ into time and space.<sup>12</sup> The major vehicle of Southeast Asian modernity was the idea of nation. Nationalism intertwined representations of pasts and futures into a linear scheme and gave it a single meaning.

Whereas history in nineteenth century Vietnam had, besides providing legitimacy for the ruling dynasty, the function of strengthening ‘timeless’ Confucian ethical principle, from the beginning of the twentieth century this began to change due to the interventions of intellectuals such as Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh. They adopted the idea of linear progress. The major change in ideas, however, was promoted by Vietnamese who had been to

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<sup>11</sup> KITLV Collection G.P. Rouffaer H 391.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press 1990) 16, 20-21.

France and exposed to Western philosophy. Tran Huu Do, who had a keen understanding of Hegelian dialectics but gained little recognition, and Ho Chi Minh belonged to this group.<sup>13</sup> A similar development took place in Indonesia, where a small urban intelligentsia had received a Western education and were exposed to Western versions of history. In a similar vein, on the Malay Peninsula, the Malay college in Melaka introduced in 1918 the subject of *tawarikh* ('history in dates'), which led to a new sort of *hikayat*-writing.<sup>14</sup>

Both history and future were encapsulated by the project of the nation and their representations needed to be modelled on the social order strived for. A fundamental qualitative change was that from then on the future was the main orientation. Just as there were multiple modernities,<sup>15</sup> there existed multiple ways to imagine the national future. The nationalist movements of Southeast Asia often contested not only colonialism, but also each other. One could distinguish between a secular, religious and Marxist version of projecting the past towards the future, but all were characterised by hybridity emanating from transfers between the old, the novel and the outside turned inward.

When Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) secretly returned to his home country in 1941, he sat in a cave at Pac Bo typing letters to the people published in the Indochinese Communist Party's newspaper, in an attempt to merge anti-traditionalism with a nationalistic version of the history of Vietnam. Historical dialectic with a teleological basis was combined with the idea of timeless Vietnamese tradition, thus creating the mould for nationalist historiography that was to come afterwards.<sup>16</sup> Of central importance was his pamphlet titled 'The History of Our Country' (*Lich su nuoc ta*), published in 1942. Besides stressing the importance of resistance to foreign intervention, the major lesson of history was that the people should act united. An appended list of dates ended with 1945 – predicted by him to be the year of Vietnamese independence.<sup>17</sup>

Early Indonesian nationalists also argued for unity on the basis of a nationalist past, inspired in fact by Dutch histories of pre-colonial Java published around 1920.<sup>18</sup> Sukarno himself was a leading architect of national history. He set out his ideas on history and the future of Indonesia in a speech in his defence read out in court in 1930, titled 'Indonesia accuses' (*Indonesië klaagt aan!*), complemented by a pamphlet of 1933 on the attainment of

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<sup>13</sup> David Marr has written extensively on this. See: *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial 1920-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1981.

<sup>14</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, 'Local Historians and the Writing of Malaysian History in the Twentieth Century', in: Reid and Marr 1979: 301, 307.

<sup>15</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities*. New Brunswick and London 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Marr 1981: 284-286.

<sup>17</sup> William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Hyperion 2000) 251-253, 260.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Reid, 'The Nationalist Quest for an Indonesian Past' in: Reid and Marr 1979: 288-289.

Indonesian independence (*Mentjapai Indonesia Merdeka*). A recent biographer of Sukarno labelled his 1930 defence speech as a 'cogent set of Indonesian arguments, though always closely wedded to the vernacular of European and other Western sources of political thought'.<sup>19</sup> Sukarno adopted a simple but 'classic' three-stage temporal model of Indonesian history: glorious past – dark present – shining future. The glorious future of the Indonesian people was, so he argued, already contained in its great past since history showed that the Indonesian nation was on a par with any Western one.<sup>20</sup> In the 1933 brochure these ideas were continued but strengthened further by connecting the present struggle against the Dutch colonialists to a mythic past from the Ramayana repertoire, in which Ramawidjaja killed the overseas demon Dasamuka.<sup>21</sup> During the preparatory meetings for Indonesian Independence in June 1945, Sukarno came up with the idea of Pancasila and again referred to the 1933 pamphlet, stating that political independence (*kemerdekaan*) was a golden bridge (*jembatan emas*), on the far side of which the Indonesians would rebuild their own society (*kita sempurnakan kita punya masyarakat*).<sup>22</sup>

Islamic and Marxist projections of a national future were different, as both were part of a global movement set within an utopical frame of thought. The Arabo-Islamic sense of history has been based on 'tarikh', studying events or occurrences with the goal of establishing their nature and position in time.<sup>23</sup> Religion proved to be a powerful vehicle to inscribe the future of the nation and the importance of so-called Islamic movements within Malayan as well as Indonesian nationalism is well-known. The promise of eternal happiness after the day of resurrection and final judgement constitutes an essential message of salvation. The modernist religious renewal movement of the late nineteenth century propagated the idea of unity of all Muslims and the need to strip local Islam of custom that blocked progress towards an unspoiled origin. Ideas on how to accommodate Islam within the framework of independent statehood diverged, making it a political issue of critical importance. However, pre-Islamic messianism or the belief among Muslim peasants that the reappearance of al-Mahdi would signal the advent of the Day of Judgement continued to be strong. The same was true for mysticism, which allows for the immediate experience of Creator's present, transgressing time limits.

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<sup>19</sup> Bob Hering, *Soekarno. Founding Father of Indonesia 1901-1945* (Leiden: KITLV Press 2002) 190.

<sup>20</sup> Anthony Reid, 'Nationalist Quest for an Indonesian Past', in: Reid & Marr 1979: 290-291.

<sup>21</sup> Hering 2000: 227.

<sup>22</sup> *Risalah Sidang Badan Penyelidik Usaha-Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia* etc. (Jakarta: Sekretariat Negara R.I. 1995) 65; see also: Herin 2002:353.

<sup>23</sup> A.H. Johns, 'The turning image: myth and reality in Malay perceptions of the past', in: Reid & Marr 1979: 58.

The Marxist goal of studying history was in order to change it. At the same time, as argued by Tan Malaka in Indonesia, Marxism was not a dogma but a guide to action.<sup>24</sup> Communism, just like Islam, also had a global reach and a messianic message. It claimed that history was governed by material dialectics that would end in a revolutionary collapse of capitalism, leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the establishment of a stateless communist society. Teleological characteristics of history were in this manner linked to concrete expectations for the future – a highly effective mix to mobilise the poor rural masses of Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese communist party proved to be more successful in the end than the Indonesian communist party (PKI). But the hybrid ways in which they combined Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy with pre-existing popular expectations was common to both.

The PKI attracted a huge following in the 1951-65 period. It was not so much anti-imperialism or social justice but, as Ruth McVey argued, the idea that ‘by associating and thinking in a new way one could again gain strength and become, in the end, invincible.’ McVey adds: ‘The essential symbol in this appeal was modernity’.<sup>25</sup> In 1957 a historical analysis written by D.N. Aidit was published under the title ‘Indonesian Society and the Indonesian Revolution’ (*Masyarakat Indonesia dan Revolusi Indonesia*). Only through a ‘correct’ interpretation of history, action for the future could be determined. History was not an account of past events but a ‘pattern of organising thought. It provided a past which was a model for the future not simply in terms of recommended action but in categories of perception, presenting certain ways of looking at things and excluding others’.<sup>26</sup> The past was essentially national and the role of the Indonesian communist party was to liberate a country that was independent in name only. However, the communists in the 1920s continued to play upon local utopianism, as the Jayabaya prophecy was linked to the Soviet Union and revolution with the coming of the Ratu Adil.<sup>27</sup>

#### **4. Plotting future from the present**

In some societies, such as in Mongolia, the past is up front and the future behind because the former is visible, the latter is not.<sup>28</sup> However, in contemporary society in Southeast Asia the

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<sup>24</sup> Marr in Reid & Marr 1979: 333; H.A. Poeze, *Verguis en vergeten. Tan Malakka, de linkse beweging en de Indonesische revolutie, 1945-1949* (Leiden: KITLV 2007) 851.

<sup>25</sup> Ruth McVey, ‘History and Action in an Indonesian Communist Text’, in: Reid & Marr 1979: 344.

<sup>26</sup> McVey in Reid & Marr: 349.

<sup>27</sup> Nicolas Tarling, *Southeast Asia. A Modern History* (Oxford 2001) 374.

<sup>28</sup> Information by Ines Stolpe, a member of the SFB 640 team.

future lies ahead. In Malay it is *masa depan*, time that lies before. The connotation of *tuong lai* in Vietnamese is different, however, signifying that what one has not yet done but wants to do next.

The central idiom of post-independence national existence focussed on the future, as the present in post-World War II Southeast Asia had, at least in the beginning, not much to offer in the form of political stability and economic prosperity. Since the independent states in Southeast Asia could not immediately realise popular expectations of social and economic improvement, they had to resort to occupying the future as a tool for legitimating existing power relations. A crucial way of representing this has been through ‘development’, essentially a continuation of a central project of the late colonial state. The most obvious way was by the introduction of planning. Through planning the future could be grasped, its underpinning statistics could be presented as an orientation towards an ‘objective’ goal.

Planning, however, presupposed a certain national stability, which was lacking in Indonesia of the 1950s. Therefore, in his public speeches, President Sukarno prolonged the rhetoric of revolution. After a stage of survival (1950-55), a new period had begun, that of the social-economic revolution, with the objective of a just and prosperous society, phrased as ‘*tata-tentram-kerta-rahardja*’ alluding to the golden age announced by the puppet master (*dalang*) of the wayang.<sup>29</sup> After 1965 political stability was guaranteed by the military, so the revolutionary rhetoric was dropped. Economic progress under the Suharto regime became represented through state planning. From 1969 until 1994 in total five Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun (Five Year Development Plans) were announced, with different foci ranging from infrastructure to industry and from transmigration to education. In official language, development became the most frequently used term of the New Order, Suharto himself being hailed as its ‘father’ (*bapak pembangunan*).

Development planning in Malaysia, a relatively affluent country in the region, has had its limitations as an effective tool in fostering economic development. As Jomo K.S. has argued, post-colonial planning has provided only limited blueprints, whereas private sector activities cannot be planned. Its nature has been more political: ‘Development policies, plan allocations as well as implementation reflect the nature, role and orientation of the state’.<sup>30</sup> In 1991 Mahathir launched his Vision 2020, which was a program to turn Malaysia in a fully developed country. He stressed that this vision was not ‘merely a slogan’ but ‘a framework of

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<sup>29</sup> ‘The Rediscovery of Our Revolution’. Address by the President of the Republic of Indonesia on the seventeenth of August, 1959 (Jakarta: Ministry of Information 1959) 4.

<sup>30</sup> Jomo K.S., ‘Development Planning in Malaysia: A Critical Appraisal’, in: B.N. Ghosh & Muhammad Syukri Salleh (eds.), *Political Economy of Development in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan 1999) 86-87.

action', which included the application of science and technology but also 'attitude and value changes'.<sup>31</sup> However in the midst of the Asian crisis, during a conference in Tokyo he deplored the destructive role of the so-called new capitalists: 'So what is going to be the future, the future of Asia? Actually there is not going to be much of a future for Asia, at least a future that is distinctly Asian'.<sup>32</sup> The doom after the boom did not materialise, however.

A second way of plotting the future is through the creation of official histories, which are condensed into central representations upholding the postcolonial national social order. Collective memory is constructed through central discursive *topoi*, which are infused with temporal extensions within a demarcated territory – royalty, unity, culture, religion. History is supposed to have extended itself from a centre or core region. Also in many Southeast Asian countries myths of a golden age, decisive turning points in the form of battles, key events marking national sacrifice, heroes with exemplary character etc. play a large role. These historical representations are, however, contested by foreign professional historians, critical home historians living abroad and from below, in the form of local and regional histories that remain largely unwritten.<sup>33</sup> Also official histories are revealing in the sense of what has been 'forgotten' or silenced over, with the aim of safeguarding the future against destabilisation by remembrance of a troubled past.

An extreme example of national history as tool for regime justification has been Indonesia under Suharto rule. The key theme of Sukarno's version of the past was progression towards a brighter future. During the New Order, a new vision of history was promulgated, with Nugroho Notosusanto as its main composer. It turned the armed forces into the main historical player defending the nation at critical junctures in the past, notably during the Indonesian independence struggle and in 1965 during the supposed communist coup attempt. According to Katharine McGregor, history was taken from the Indonesian people to become a story of military triumphs, representing the New Order as the apex of history.<sup>34</sup> Now more than nine years after the fall of Suharto, a new official version of Indonesian history has yet to appear.

How persistent official historical myths are is shown by the official representations in Vietnam of the Nhan Van-Giai Pham affair of the middle of 1956, when a number of

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<sup>31</sup> Razali Kidam, Amidah Hamim (compilers), *Collection of Mahathir's Speeches. January-December 1998* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia 1999) 339.

<sup>32</sup> Kidam & Hamim 1999: 155.

<sup>33</sup> Vincent Houben, 'Historische Repräsentationen des Eigenen und Nationenbildungsprozesse in Südostasien', in: Jörg Baberowski et al. (Hrsgs.), *Selbstbilder und Fremdbilder. Repräsentationen sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus 2007) forthc.

<sup>34</sup> Katharine E. McGregor, *History in Uniform. Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia's Past* (Singapore: NUS Press 2007) passim, esp. 217.

intellectuals and writers openly addressed the contemporary domestic problems of the DRV. Dissenting views were briefly tolerated by the party leadership, to be suppressed later on. In official historiography these events were then turned into an anti-socialist conspiracy, a myth that has been prolonged until today, although after the beginning of *Doi Moi* those who had participated in this movement were unofficially rehabilitated. Dissenting private memories are tolerated as long as they do not enter the public sphere and official renderings now display more variation than they did before.<sup>35</sup>

These examples show how the future is configured both in a forward direction (planning) and backwards through establishing dominance over public memory. Numbers are used to designate how the future will be; and historical myths as a guide to understanding the collective past. Such devices are used as the means to extend state control beyond the confines of the contemporary social order. These kinds of control are neither uncontested nor stable in and of themselves, but they have proven to be socially effective and enduring in character.

## **5. Concluding remarks: controlled pasts, contingent futures?**

This short paper has attempted to make a few statements on how the future is represented in history-writing in Southeast Asia. The question has been raised how past and future interact in this region and what it means for the establishment, maintenance or contestation of a social order. Past and future are not neutral mental landscapes; on the contrary they are loaded with meaning for those who are living consciously in the here and now. Distinguishing between colonial, national and postcolonial social orders has offered some general clues as to how representations of past and future are entangled. Indigenous history texts during the colonial era frequently also addressed the future as did millenarian traditions, but both past and future were not framed within an overall decontextualised time structure. Modernity allowed linear national pasts and futures to emerge, with chronology and direction towards the future being essential characteristics. Future orientations combined with control over history in the form of planning and official historiographies aimed at regime legitimation, have been the dominant modes of representation during the postcolonial period.

So far this paper may have created the impression that it supports the received view that modernity, transferred directly or indirectly from the West, has overtaken pre-colonial, culturally specific notions of how past and future are intertwined. This kind of argument does

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<sup>35</sup> Martin Grossheim, 'The Year 1956 in Vietnamese Historiography and Popular Discourse: the Resilience of Myths'. Unpublished Paper Humboldt University 2007.

not suffice, however. First, this kind of generalisation would ignore the intricacies of transfer. Let me illustrate this with a notion from Javanese culture that while the contents (*isi*) may change the vessel (*wadhah*) remains as it is. Western notions of modernity were selectively transferred and fused with indigenous figurations, giving rise to distinct Indonesian, Malaysian and Vietnamese representations of the modern, an intermediate space in which the boundaries between source and outcome, between indigenous and modern have become indistinguishable.

Secondly, the incorporation of the future into a present that is a continuation of the past is not wholly a function of modernity. Writing, talking or knowing about the past has always been a way of inscribing the future. Although the possibilities of the state to establish and control a dominant version of the entanglements of past and future have gained in strength, alternative representations on how past events open up possible futures have been and still continue to be there. Thirdly, stabilising the future through myth making concerning the past produces representations that anchor the existing social order making it resistant to change. Recurrent crises of disjuncture between past-future representations and social orders caught up in processes of transformation heighten contingency, a phenomenon that can hardly be interpreted as a function of modernity only.