

A portrait of Tun Hussein Onn, the 4th Prime Minister of Malaysia, wearing glasses and a suit, set against a dark background with a subtle geometric pattern.

**TUN HUSSEIN ONN CHAIR  
IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**



**INSTITUTE OF  
STRATEGIC AND  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

# **Nation Making in Asia**

**From Ethnic to Civic Nations?**

**Muthiah Alagappa**

# **NATION MAKING IN ASIA:** *From Ethnic to Civic Nations?*

**Muthiah Alagappa**

*The Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies  
Inaugural Lecture*

28 March 2012  
Kuala Lumpur



Institute of Strategic and International Studies  
(ISIS) Malaysia

© 2012 Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia  
1 Persiaran Sultan Salahuddin  
PO Box 2424  
50778 Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia  
<http://www.isis.org.my>

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

The views and opinions expressed in this monograph are those of the author and may not necessarily reflect those of ISIS Malaysia.

ISBN: 978-967-947-310-0

Printed by Aura Productions Sdn Bhd  
10 Jalan SS13/3F  
Kawasan Perindustrian Subang Jaya  
47500 Selangor

## Preface

I would like to begin by expressing my deep appreciation to everyone in the audience for taking the time to participate in the inauguration of the Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies at ISIS Malaysia. It is a great honour and pleasure, but also a daunting and humbling task to address an august audience such as this one. I consider it a deep honour and privilege to be the first holder of the Tun Hussein Onn chair and will do my utmost to promote the purposes of the Chair and to advance its domestic and international profile. Along with the Chairman of ISIS Malaysia, Tan Sri Dato' Seri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, and Chief Executive Dato' Dr Mahani Zainal Abidin, I will endeavour to establish firm intellectual and programmatic foundations for the Chair.

It is a pleasure and privilege to make this inaugural address in the presence of Yang Berhormat Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussien Onn, the son of the late Tun. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Noah Foundation for its invaluable support in establishing the Tun Hussein Onn Chair at ISIS Malaysia. Over the last 30 years, the Noah Foundation has supported numerous important intellectual and charitable causes. Without the support of the Foundation, this Chair would not have been possible. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to HRH Raja Nazrin Shah ibni Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah, the Crown Prince of Perak Darul Ridzuan. His Royal Highness has been an inspiration, and was very supportive of my return to Malaysia.

The late Tun Hussein Onn was a man of great honesty, integrity, conviction, and steely courage, who put service to country ahead of self. He is a leader to be admired and emulated. Coming from a family that played central, administrative and political roles in Johor and in the formation of Malaya, Tun was deeply committed to the unity of the Malaysian nation. Recognizing the complexities of building a multi-ethnic nation, Tun Hussein took firm action on key issues in education, finance, trade, and industry. His warnings and actions against corruption in public life, however stern and unpopular they may have been at that time, were prophetic. They reflected his deep conviction that uplifting of the Malay community and building of a united Malaysian nation would be undermined by

---

a lack of integrity, and by corruption in public institutions. Even at the risk of being labelled politically incorrect, Tun Hussein Onn did not hesitate to act against these vices.

Believing that a stable and secure regional environment was crucial for the attainment of domestic goals, Tun was actively engaged as well on the regional and international stages. He actively sought a settlement of the Cambodian conflict. Concerned about the national security of the country, Tun Hussein authorized a big build-up of the Malaysian Armed Forces during his tenure as Prime Minister. At that time I was a serving military officer, working in the defence planning department in the Ministry of Defence. In that capacity I had the privilege of interacting with and observing first-hand Tun's methodological and meticulous approach to problems, that have become his hallmark.

Subsequently I also had the pleasure of working with Tun Hussein when he became Chairman of ISIS Malaysia. Having taken early retirement from the Malaysian Armed Forces, I was then a Senior Fellow at ISIS. While authorizing a big military build-up, Tun recognized that Malaysia's national security hinged even more on national unity and resilience at home. Building a united and strong Malaysian nation was very much at the heart of the endeavours of Tun Hussein Onn and his father Dato' Onn. The topic of my inaugural lecture on nation making stems from that concern. Tun Hussein's deep commitment to the nation and his selflessness were reflected both in his decision to rejoin UMNO over the objections of some of his family members, and by his decision to hand over power as soon as he realized that the state of his health would not permit him to carry the burden of the duties of Prime Minister.

My second reason for accepting the Chair was the opportunity to return to Malaysia after more than twenty years in the United States. My wife and I have a special fondness for Malaysia and for ISIS Malaysia where I began my second career. The Chair provides a strong platform from which I hope to make a contribution to the development of international studies in Malaysian universities, and research institutes like ISIS Malaysia and MIDAS.

I look forward to initiating a signature project to review the state of international studies in Malaysia, and to assess demand and supply, with the ultimate goal of developing a world-renowned School of

International Studies in Malaysia, comparable to the Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs at Princeton University, the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) at Columbia University, or the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Based on the visiting positions I have held in highly reputed schools and universities in the United States, United Kingdom, Japan and other countries, I am convinced that with commitment, resources, and flexibility, Malaysia can become a centre of excellence in international studies.

Malaysia is a trading nation that has made a mark in international affairs. Sri Vijaya and the Malacca Sultanate were important players on the regional stage during the periods of their dominion. Malaysia today is an important player in ASEAN and regional affairs, as well as in global affairs. We should develop dynamic ideas and intellectual frameworks to support our engagement in the region and the world, as well as develop a strong human resource base to pursue our interests and contribute to regional and international peace, security, and prosperity. Government departments, the private sector, and civil society all require suitably educated and trained personnel in international studies. Although we have some training programmes, we do not appear to have strong international studies programmes. Our goal should not only be numbers and paper qualifications but also excellence, honesty and integrity – all qualities well exemplified by Tun Hussein Onn.

Before moving on to my lecture, I would like to express my deep appreciation to my wife Kalyani Swaminathan who has been the most important pillar of support in both my careers, first in the Malaysian Armed Forces, and subsequently in my academic career. I will now proceed with my lecture which is titled “Nation-Making in Asia: From Ethnic to Civic Nations?”



# **Nation Making in Asia: From Ethnic to Civic Nations?**

**Muthiah Alagappa** *Ph.D.*

*Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies*

## **Introduction**

The nation state is the fundamental building block of domestic and international politics. The power and influence of countries rest not just on material power (economic and military) but also on ideational power, and legitimacy of the nation-state. A country that is weak in ideational and nation-state dimensions cannot be a great power for long, as demonstrated by the experience of the Soviet Union. The state of the nation-state is thus crucial. Yet international relations scholarship has largely ignored it. Most analysts in the scholarly, political, and think tank communities often take the sovereign nation-state for granted and speak blithely of China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and other countries. Originating in Europe, the idea of the nation-state has a much longer history in that continent.

Although many countries in Asia have long histories as political entities (hundreds if not thousands of years) their emergence as modern nation-states is a relatively recent occurrence. Except for Japan and Thailand, all other Asian countries emerged as modern nation-states after World War II. It is possible to date China's emergence as a modern state from the 1911 nationalist overthrow of the Qing dynasty. However, its contemporary form dates from the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. All other countries became independent states after World War II. Their territorial boundaries and populations were inherited from colonial rule, with successor state elites seeking to fashion the basis for nationhood, type of political system, and to develop credible and effective state institutions.

Many Asian nation-states are still aspirational and in the making. Nation-state making involves constructing nations, building state institutions, developing political systems, and constructing a constitutional-legal framework for regulating government and its interaction with political society, civil society, market, and other states. One or more dimensions of the nation-state have been, and



continue to be contested in many Asian countries. Legitimacy of political systems and governments, for example, has been the object of contention, conflict, and dramatic change over the last fifty years (Alagappa 1995). Some countries like Pakistan, Burma and Thailand have continuously experienced conflict over their political systems. Even established systems like those in India, Malaysia and Singapore have come under stress. It is possible that political systems in China, Vietnam, and Burma will undergo change in the years ahead.

Changes in political systems and governments have a substantial impact on the foreign, economic, and security policies of countries, with important implications for domestic, regional and international politics. Change from the Guided Democracy of Sukarno to the New Order of Suharto, for example, brought about a dramatic change in Indonesia's international orientation and foreign policy, with far reaching consequences for relations with Malaysia and the Southeast Asian region. Political transition from an authoritarian political system to democracy brought about substantial change in Indonesia's international orientation as well. Political system and government change in South Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, and Thailand also had significant international consequences.

Building credible, transparent, accountable, and effective state institutions like the judiciary, bureaucracy, police force, and armed forces continue to pose fundamental challenges in many Asian countries. Many states still do not have a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence and compulsory jurisdiction within all their territories. These are hallmarks of a modern state. The roles and division of labour between state, society and the market, between police and military forces, and the relationship of the military with the state and the government of the day for example, have not been worked out in many countries. The state of the state and its institutions vary widely across Asia and within Asian countries. Their legitimacy, especially of institutions relating to the exercise of state coercion and public administration, is contested, and their reputations tarnished. My point is that building credible and effective state institutions is a major unfinished task in many Asian countries.

Likewise the construction of nations is an on-going process. Nations are being continually made and unmade. Competing narratives have been advanced in the making of nations. Quite often they lead to bitter struggles and the unmaking of nations. For example, Singapore leaders contested the basis for nationhood in Malaysia leading to the separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965. East Pakistan leaders contested the basis for the Pakistani nation and state

as well as their position within that nation state leading to civil war and ultimately, the formation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Today, Tibetans and Uighurs contest their inclusion in the Chinese nation. The Moro-Muslims contest their inclusion in the Philippines. The Malay-Muslims in southern Thailand contest their inclusion in the Thai nation and state. Until recently the Acehnese did not identify with the Indonesian nation and contested their inclusion in the Indonesian state. The Papuans still do not identify with Indonesia. The Karen, Chin, Kachin, Shan and other nationality groups contest their inclusion in the Burman nation and state. The Tamils contest the basis for nationhood in Sri Lanka. The Kashmiris seek a separate nation and state, free of Pakistan and India. Several minority groups in Northeast India contest their inclusion in the Indian nation and state. Some Baluchis and Sindhis imagine their own nations and contest their inclusion in the Pakistani nation and state.

For the most part, these communities seek separate states based on their ethnic communities. The demand for new nation-states is not restricted to "minority" ethnic communities. To complete their nations, some countries seek to unify divided nations and states. North Vietnam forcibly absorbed South Vietnam to create a unified Vietnamese nation-state. North and South Korea seek to create a unified Korean nation-state, if necessary through the use of force. In the name of a united Chinese nation, Beijing seeks to unify Taiwan with the mainland.

Nation making and unmaking have broad political and geostrategic ramifications. For example, the Soviet collapse dramatically reconfigured political space in Central and Eastern Europe. It led to the creation of many "new" nation-states including Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Moldavia. The breakup of Yugoslavia gave birth to Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Kosovo. Czechoslovakia split to form the Czech Republic and Slovakia. East and West Germany unified to create the German Democratic Republic.

More than factors like change in the distribution of power, these reconfigurations of political units along ethno-national lines had a dramatic impact on the European geostrategic environment. The dissolution of the Soviet Union effectively terminated the Cold War, affecting not only Europe but also the world. Unification of the two Germanies altered the political, security and economic dynamics of Europe. Reconfiguration of political units had another major

impact. It effectively arrested the move away from sovereign states to a single Europe. Based on the European experience in regional integration and community-building it was not uncommon in the 1980s and 1990s to pronounce the death of the sovereign nation-state. However, as indicated by the developments in the 1990s, the sovereign nation-state has reasserted itself with a vengeance.

In contrast to Europe, the post-World War II Asian political map has been relatively stable but not without change. The formation of Malaysia in 1965 and the subsequent separation of Singapore altered the political landscape in maritime Southeast Asia. The breakaway of East Pakistan in 1971 altered the political and geostrategic landscape of South Asia. Unification of North and South Vietnam in 1976 altered the geostrategic landscape in continental Southeast Asia. Since then, there has been no change to the Asian political map. However, we cannot assume that this will continue. Reconfiguration of political space is a constant in history. Take Malaysia for example. It dates only from 1965. Before that, the Federation of Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak all existed as separate entities. Prior to the formation of the Federation of Malaya, its constituent units existed as part of the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States or as unfederated Malay states. Before the colonial period these kingdoms and sultanates existed as separate entities. In still earlier times, these territories were part of empires that straddled present day Indonesia and Malaysia. Political space in our own backyard has undergone several reconfigurations.

The tendency is to freeze the political status quo but the political map of Asia like those in other parts of the world will continue to change. Present day political units may or may not exist in the coming decades. Aspirations for separate states are strong in so-called minority communities in China, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Burma, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, and several central Asian countries. If successful, they will substantially alter the political, economic, and geostrategic space. For example, if Tibet and Xinjiang were to separate from China, that would dramatically alter the territorial and political configuration of that country as well as the Asian geostrategic landscape. Likewise, if China's claim to Taiwan is successful, or if North and South Korea unify under a common political system, that would dramatically alter the political, economic, and geostrategic landscapes in Northeast Asia and Asia as a whole.

My point is that the political configuration of countries could alter, sometimes in a dramatic fashion, with far reaching domestic and international consequences. Despite its origins elsewhere, the

idea of a sovereign state for a national community has become strongly embedded in the Asian political lexicon. It has been a key driver of domestic and international politics in Asia since 1945 (Alagappa 2011). The nation-state is not going away. The task at hand is to review the bases and strengthen the legitimacy and capacity of nations and states in Asia. We should not take them for granted, wish them away, or curtail their sovereign rights and responsibilities in the name of larger regional communities. Those who envision single political and economic communities in Southeast and East Asia, for example, must take this reality into account and rethink their visions, goals, and strategies for the region. I will not elaborate on this, as it will take me too far afield. That is a lecture for another day.

Permit me to make another point. Throughout history, the survival of states was not only a function of international anarchy or change in the distribution of power as propounded by realist theories and scholars. Contestation over legitimacy of nations and states has been a key driver as well of state survival and extinction. The reconfiguration of European political and geostrategic space in the 1990s, for example, was brought about not by change in the distribution of power, but by the dissolution and unification of states in Europe in the 1990s. Dissolution and unification were driven largely by domestic developments focused on the legitimacy of nations and states. The state of the political unit continues to be critical but has been largely ignored by scholars of international politics, and by policy makers who manage international interaction of states.

To rectify that shortcoming, my lecture today is about the political unit in Asia, focusing specifically on nation making and unmaking and their consequences for international politics.<sup>1</sup> The nation has become the primary basis for imagining contemporary political communities and constructing modern states. There can be no contemporary state without a nation. In situations where there is no coherent nation, the state sets about constructing one. Nation and state have become fused such that the only legitimate contemporary political unit is the nation-state. In my lecture I will explore different approaches to nation making, identify approaches that have been more conflict-prone, and indicate how alternative approaches to nation making may ameliorate certain conflicts. Specifically I will sketch my thoughts on the following questions. On what basis did political leaders or entrepreneurs imagine their nations? How did that

---

<sup>1</sup>This lecture is a first cut. The views offered here are tentative, and subject to further development and refinement.

change over time? Which types of imaginations were more productive of conflict? Would alternative imaginations ameliorate conflict and advance regional stability? Where do we go from here? I should emphasize here that my thoughts on these questions are tentative. I hope to further develop and refine them over time.

## Argument

Ethnicity has dominated nation making in Asia. And, ethnic nation-making has been productive of domestic and international conflict in several ways.

- First, in multi-ethnic countries, constructing nations on the basis of majority communities implicitly or explicitly led to the formation of minority communities and their destruction or marginalization. Disadvantaged or marginalized groups became apprehensive about their futures, stimulating alternative conceptions of nation as well as imagination of new states in which minority communities would become the *staatsvolk* or state-bearing nations. That in turn created apprehensions among new minority communities setting a vicious cycle in motion. The demand for new nations and states frequently led to violence and war. In a few cases, such domestic conflicts invited international military intervention.

- Second, ethno-national imaginations in homogenous populations were non-accepting of divided nations and of the idea that one nation may support more than one state. The quest for unification of divided nations and the effort to achieve congruence between nation and state were primary causes of several inter-state wars including irredentism in Asia since 1945.

- Third, ethnic-nation making challenged, modified, and in some cases undermined civic nation-making, fostering internal conflict in those states.

- Fourth, ethnic-nation making polarised populations making them intolerant and unaccepting of plurality and diversity. The forging of a cohesive national community became much more difficult if not impossible.

- Finally, it made societies intolerant of migration (international flow of labour in a globalized world) and exacerbated racially-based animosities between certain exclusive ethnic nation-states.

In sum, nation making on the basis of ethno-nationalism has been the cause of numerous domestic and international conflicts in post-World War II Asia. Some of these conflicts continue to define domestic and international politics in Asia.

Vigorous pursuit of ethno-nationalism can further exacerbate domestic and international strife, leading to even more violence as well as the proliferation of new states. On-going domestic and international conflicts will not be resolved. In fact, some may be exacerbated and new conflicts may arise. Further, if ethnicity continues to dominate nation making, nations will not command the loyalty of all their citizens and national political communities will remain divided and brittle. Asian countries would remain weak as modern nation-states, and unable to realize their full potential. And despite the growing material power of Asian countries the dream of an Asian century will remain just that — a dream.

One way to mitigate the negative consequences of ethnicity in nation making is to overlay ethnic conceptions with features of civic nation that emphasizes territory, citizenship, and equality. Although not a panacea, civic nation making appears better placed to cope with diversity and the challenges of modernization as well as manage and resolve several domestic and international conflicts. It does not destroy or marginalize groups and nations in the interest of building *staatsvolk* nations. The civic nation approach thus has the potential to enhance the legitimacy of the nation and state in the eyes of disadvantaged groups without negating them in the eyes of the ethnic core. It can help realise the full potential of all citizens. Increased legitimacy of nation and state will help ameliorate domestic and international conflict, making for increased regional stability.

Strengthening civic nation features may seem a tall order or pie in the sky as ethnicity is deeply embedded in political organization, mobilization and governance in Asian countries. I recognize ethnicity is not easily dislodged. Attempts to do so could also provoke counter reaction and violence. And ethnicity is not all evil. However, when it becomes the primary basis for nationalism and national identity it does produce the negative consequences set out earlier. Civic nation making, on the other hand, despite its difficulties is on the uptick in Asia. Political creed (liberal democracy) and citizenship are becoming more significant than ethnicity in countries like Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, that are ethnically homogenous. It also has developed strong roots in multi-ethnic states like India and Indonesia. National communities in these countries are held together not only by ethnic consciousness but also by political loyalty to a higher ideal, obligations, and rights. Strengthening civic nation features would foster peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and help make Asia the core region of the world. Before developing this thesis, it is necessary to make clear what I mean by nation and elaborate on the two basic approaches to nation making.

## **Nation: What and How?**

The definition of nation like many social science concepts is contested. Precise definition is extremely difficult if not impossible. Consequently there are many definitions. An objective criterion definition would suggest nations are out there waiting to be discovered. Subjective definitions would suggest we know nations only in *post hoc* terms. Notwithstanding these polar opposites, it is important to have a sense of what we mean by nation. According to Ernest Renan (1970), two things help constitute a nation: One is the common possession of a rich heritage of memories; the other is the desire to live together and preserve the inheritance that has been handed down. The nation is an outcome of a long-past of efforts and belief in a shared or common destiny. In a similar but distinct vein Benedict Anderson (1991) asserts that a nation is an imagined community that is limited and sovereign. The nation is imagined because even the members of the smallest community may not know each other. Yet the image of such a community lives in the minds of its members. A nation is limited in that it cannot comprise all of humanity or even broad segments of it. It refers to a specific group. A nation is sovereign as it is the ultimate source of authority for all those who belong to it. Finally the nation is a community "because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." It is that fraternity that makes it possible for members to die willingly for the nation.

In my view, common history, shared destiny, and a set of beliefs are crucial in the making of a nation. I subscribe to the idea that nations are imagined and constructed, and that nationalism precedes and constructs nations. However, nations cannot be imagined at will. Cultural and political history and circumstances are crucial. Often, nationalism selectively deploys mytho-history and culture in the construction of persuasive narratives for a nation.

Although nation is a distinct concept and entity, the rise of nationalism fused the nation with the state giving rise to the concept of nation-state in which the territorial and juridical boundaries of the state are congruent with the cultural boundaries of a nation. The nation has become the primary basis for political community and constructing states. The state is viewed as for a particular nation. States cannot exist without nations. States without coherent nations seek to create them. So deep is the fusion that nation and state are now used interchangeably as in the appellation of the United Nations. The UN

Charter speaks of states and nations as though they are one and the same. However, less than ten per cent of the countries in the world can claim to be true nation-states. Most are plural or multi-ethnic states. A few are divided nation-states. Despite that reality, the nation-state has become the ideal. It is the prime lever for imagining and organizing political space. Political elites seek to make nations out of their multi-ethnic populations or seek to unify divided nations on the understanding that the nation is the primary basis for political community and state (Smith 1983). How have political elites or entrepreneurs attempted to make nations?

### **Approaches to Nation Making**

Nation making may take several forms but at base there are two approaches. One is on the basis of ethnic or religious community and the other on the basis of citizenship, equality, and commitment to a political creed. The first may be called ethnic nation making and the second civic nation making. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive. They share some common elements like historic territory and common culture but they also have distinct features. Citizens' interests take centre stage in a civic nation. Group beliefs and interests dominate an ethnic nation. As ethnic nation making is most common in Asia, I will deal with that approach first.

### ***Ethnic Nation Making***

In this approach, nations and states are constructed on the basis of ethnic cores. The main attributes of an ethnic nation are: a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, differentiating common culture, association with a specific homeland, and a sense of solidarity among significant segments of the population (Smith 1991). These characteristics are not preordained but constructed over time. Such construction, however, is on the basis of common roots, emotional attachment, group loyalty, and rule by ethnic majority. Community unity is achieved through birth, common descent, or cultural and religious assimilation. To be assimilated into an ethnic community, a new member has to lose his/her previous identity. The ethnic nation is supreme. It constructs the individual who is subordinate to the group.



Ethnic cores were the basis for many kingdoms and traditional states in an earlier era. With the rise of nationalism, ethnic groups came to be viewed as the proper basis for national political communities in Central and Eastern Europe. Germany, Poland, and Russia are all ethnic nation states. Ethnicity is also the most common basis for nation-state-making in Asia. However, it is important to distinguish between ethnic group and nation. Many in academia, policy circles and amongst the lay public conflate the two. Such conflation has led some to term Malaysia a multinational state. That is incorrect. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic nation or state but it is not a multinational state. There is a Malay nation of recent vintage. Malaysian Chinese, Indians, Kadazans, and Dayaks have not envisaged separate nations at least thus far. Their national aspirations are captured in their articulations of a Malaysian nation. My point is that not all ethnic groups are nations. Hence it is incorrect to term Malaysia a multinational state. Why and how certain groups become nations and others do not is an important question to explore but is beyond the scope of my lecture. Nation making on the basis of ethnicity has followed several paths, including constructing exclusive nations and plural nations.

### *Exclusive Ethnic Nations*

Exclusive ethnic national political communities may be constructed both by “majority” and “minority” ethnic communities. Projecting itself as the state-bearing nation, a core ethnic group claims ownership of territory and government. It engages in constructing a nation rooted in its characteristics and sharply differentiated from other populations permanently residing in that territory. The core ethnic group develops and deploys state power to protect, remedy, and promote its values and interests including language, culture, demographic predominance, economic welfare, and political dominance. Political and other mobilization, state institutions, and non-governmental organizations are developed to sustain and reinforce the national imagination of the core ethnic group and its domination of the state.

State-seeking “minority” ethnic groups also seek to create exclusive national political communities. Dissatisfied with their political, economic and cultural situation or unaccepting of their incorporation into existing states, minority ethnic groups envision themselves as national communities in their own right. They define themselves as separate nations and seek to become the ethnic core of new states. If and when they succeed in attaining statehood, they too

would seek to deploy the state to enhance their dominance, as has been the case in the successor states of the Soviet Union.

### *Bi-national and Plural Nations*

Where there is more than one ethnic core and each core sees itself as a separate nation, then nation making may take the form of a plural ethnic nation. New Zealand is a bi-national state. The Maori envision themselves as a distinct ethnic nation separate from the majority Caucasian population. The Soviet Union was a prime example of a multinational state in which territories were associated with specific ethnic nations. Though their approach to nation making differs substantially, China and India are contemporary examples of multinational states.

### ***Civic Nation Making***

Unlike ethnic nation making which is grounded in common descent, language, and customs, civic nation making emphasizes political ideology, historic territory, and social-legal-political community on the basis of citizenship, equality of all citizens, and a common culture (Smith 1991, Brubaker 1996, Phadnis and Ganguly 2001). Originating in Western Europe and North America, the civic approach is predominantly a spatial or territorial conception, with each nation possessing a well-defined ideology and historic territory. The civic nation is based on a community of laws, institutions, and a common political will. All community members have equal civil, political, and legal rights and duties. All are bound by the rule of law. The population in a civic nation is bound together by a "common culture, a civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, as well as sentiments and ideas." Membership is through citizenship, not birth or descent. Ethnicity is not a hallmark of this approach. The emphasis is on individuals, not groups. There is no state-bearing ethnic nation. Nations are forged by the state out of all people living in the defined land.

I would like to reiterate that ethnic nation making and civic nation making are not mutually exclusive. They overlap in certain ways but each has its own distinctive characteristics. These can be and often are combined.

## Post-World War II Nation Making in Asia: An Overview<sup>2</sup>

Approaches to nation making have varied across countries and over time. A key determinant in the choice of the initial approach was the ethnic makeup of each country as well as the urgency to secure independence from colonial rule. For ideological and pragmatic reasons (such as securing the support of all groups residing in a state's territory or to preserve the territorial integrity of their countries), political leaders in multi-ethnic states like the PRC, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Republic of China (ROC) initially opted for civic nation making or conceptions that embodied pluralism and substantial civic nation features. Subsequently, the PRC, Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Malaysia moved in the direction of making exclusive ethnic nations on the basis of their core ethnic communities. Pluralism and civic nation features became less prominent. Pakistan was conceived as a nation of diverse ethnic groups professing the Islamic religion. Over time, however, it came to be dominated by the Punjabi community, precipitating imagination of a Bengali ethnic nation in East Pakistan leading eventually to the creation of Bangladesh. Ethnicity also gained ground in several communities in India and Indonesia, posing fundamental challenges to civic nation making in both countries. Despite those challenges and some concessions, these two countries have persisted in the path of civic nation making.

In countries with ethnically homogenous populations like North and South Korea, North and South Vietnam, Japan, Brunei, and Bangladesh, nation making took the form of constructing exclusive ethnic nations. Imagining a single nation for all people of the same ethnicity, political leaders in these countries sought to unify divided nations and seek congruence between nation and state boundaries. Despite the strong ethnic base of their nations, over time, civic nation features also gained prominence in South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Beginning in the 1980s, Taiwan began construction of a distinctive ethnic and civic nation that would be independent of the Chinese nation on the mainland. Despite the persistence and uptick of the civic nation model, ethnicity continues to dominate nation making in Asia. Nation making on the basis of ethnicity, however, has been productive of numerous domestic and international conflicts, leading to violence and war.

---

<sup>2</sup>The categorization of countries in this section is preliminary. It will be reworked and further developed. Some countries, including those in Central Asia, have been omitted due to lack of familiarity on the part of the author. They may be included later.

### ***Nation Making in Multi-ethnic States: From Civic to Ethnic Nations***

Although ethnicity was not unimportant, political leaders in most multi-ethnic states initially opted for the civic-nation or plural model. Commitment to democratic ideals, concern with preserving the territorial wholeness of their countries, and the imperative to secure the support of all people living in the territory to speed the path to independence underscored the choice of the civic-nation or plural model. Ethnicity was subordinated to plural and civic imaginations. Over time, however, ethno imaginations of core ethnic groups came to dominate nation making in many multi-ethnic states. Core ethnic groups in control of state power engaged in constructing nations and states on the basis of their own ethnic groups. Their “nationalizing state” strategies marginalized other populations residing in the country, provoking counter imaginations of nations also based on ethnicity, leading to violence and proliferation of demands for new nation states in China, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.

#### ***China***

Chinese identity has a long history but the concept of nation (*Zhonghua Minzu*) is relatively recent and linked to resistance to foreign rule. Nationalist writings at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century warned of the danger of external invasion and annihilation (Wong 2006, Kim and Dittmer 1993). Tensions are inherent between territorial and ethnic conceptions of the Chinese nation. For example, immediately after the 1911 revolution (to overthrow the foreign Manchu “invaders”), Sun Yat Sen conceived the Chinese nation on the basis of the Han Chinese, and planned to establish a Chinese nation-state modelled after Germany and Japan. However, fearing that a restrictive ethnic base for the Chinese nation would result in a huge loss of imperial territories, Chinese nationalists discarded the Han Chinese nation as the basis for the “new” Chinese state. Subsequently Sun Yat Sen expanded the concept of the Chinese nation, not only to include the Five Races (Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan) but also other minority groups, to preserve all territories under the control of the Qing dynasty. With the founding of the PRC, the concept of the Chinese nation was influenced by the ideology of communism and the Soviet nationalities policy. Officially, the PRC is a unitary state

composed of 56 ethnic groups, of which the Han ethnic group is by far the largest. In formal terms, the Chinese nation today is projected as encompassing all peoples living within borders of the PRC.

In practice, however, the Chinese nation has increasingly approximated the Han Chinese nation in politics, language, customs, and culture. The Manchu, Mongol, Hui and Tibetan identities have been marginalized. Though officially termed autonomous, these communities do not enjoy the autonomy provided for in the Chinese constitution. Through migration, Beijing has sought to alter the demography of autonomous provinces and to assimilate minority groups. On their part, minority communities, especially the Tibetan and Uighur communities, do not identify with the Han Chinese nation. They do not accept their incorporation into the Chinese nation-state. The Tibetan and Mongolian view is that historically their allegiance was to the Qing monarch. With the abdication of the Qing monarch, they do not owe any allegiance to the new Chinese state. Tibetans envision their own nation and state, and have attempted to construct them in the diaspora (Frechette 2006). With their own distinct histories as separate peoples and states, the Tibetans and Uighurs seek autonomy or independence from the Chinese state. The ROC and the PRC reject that view. Although they have not degenerated into armed struggles, Tibetan and Uighur contestations of the Chinese nation and state have the potential to fuel them.

The conception of the Chinese nation to comprise all ethnic Chinese as well as all territories that belonged to the Qing Empire, and the goal of a single Chinese political nation and state underlies the conflict between the PRC and Taiwan as well as the difficulties China had in dealing with the issue of the overseas Chinese. China perceives the people living in Taiwan as part of the Chinese nation and Taiwan as Chinese territory. Many native Taiwanese leaders reject both claims. Independence-minded Taiwanese seek to develop a distinct Taiwanese nation and state that would be independent of the PRC. Taiwanization and democratization were/are essential ingredients of their nation building strategy (Wang 2006). Taiwanese leaders, especially those like President Ma who have connections to the PRC, accept the idea of one Chinese nation but contest the claim that Taiwan is part of the Chinese state. Contestation over the status of Taiwan as a separate nation and state underlies the conflict and military confrontation across the Taiwan Strait.

## ***Thailand***

In response to Western colonial encroachment, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) laid the foundations for a modern state in the Kingdom of Siam. The project to transform the Siamese people into a Thai nation, however, began under King Vajiravudh (Rama VI). He promoted the idea of a Thai nation as a means to unify, protect and modernize the kingdom of Siam, ensure loyalty to the king, and counter Chinese (whom he labelled the Jews of the East) domination of the Siamese economy (Wyatt 1984). The nationality act of 1911 stated that everyone born in Siam irrespective of race or religion was a national. Later, however, Vajiravudh defined a true Thai as one who spoke the Thai language and was loyal to the king, religion (Buddhism), and country. Citizenship through birth or naturalization did not constitute a true Thai. The association of nationality with race and religion (Buddhism) gave the Thai nation a strong ethnic and religious orientation.

Further, the hierarchy implicit in the idea of the Thai nation denied the political and legal equality to all people that is the hallmark of a civic nation. The ethnic basis of the Thai nation became more prominent under Marshall Phibun Songkram who carried the association of race, nationality and territory a step further by changing the name of the country from Siam to Thailand. Active pursuit of the unity of the Thai race under Phibul underscored Thai irredentism in the 1940s resulting in a war with France and collaboration with Japan to recover “Thai” territories lost to colonial powers.

Despite recent efforts to redefine the Thai nation to include all people living in Thailand, Thai race and Buddhism remain essential ingredients in definitions of the Thai nation. With no substantive religious and cultural barriers, minorities in North and Northeast Thailand as well as the minority Chinese community have been assimilated into the Thai nation. However, that has not been the case with the Malay-Muslim community in southern Thailand. A distinct community with a political and cultural history of its own, that community has not accepted its incorporation into Siam/Thailand and perceives the Thai nation-building strategy as threatening its cultural identity and political status (Alagappa 1987, Chaiwat 2009). These and other considerations underlie the armed separatism in southern Thailand that has waxed and waned over the last one hundred years. The centrality of ethnicity and religion (Buddhism) in Thai nation-building strategies, along with other considerations has been a key driver of the conflict in southern Thailand.

### ***Burma/Myanmar***

Centrality of ethnicity in building a Burmese nation also underlies the numerous conflicts between the Centre (Burman) and periphery (communities that view themselves as separate nations, but that are now referred to as minorities) in Myanmar. To speed independence for the Burman and non-Burman peoples living in the territories of British Burma, General Aung San and leaders of several frontier nationalities reached an agreement in Panglong in 1947 that laid the foundation for the Union of Burma. That agreement envisaged a federal union on the basis of equality and autonomy for all nationalities of British administered Burma.

However, the 1947 constitution that was enacted after the assassination of Aung San reneged on these and other understandings/agreements reached in Panglong. The majority Burman community proceeded to appropriate the country and build a Burman nation and state that marginalized frontier nationalities. That nation-building project was rejected by the frontier nationalities, which have always conceived themselves as separate ethnic nations and states, laying the basis for the long-running conflicts between Yangon and the frontier communities. Demand for ethnic national states for these frontier communities and full equality among all ethnic national states have been key demands of the “minority” communities. The centrality of ethnicity in the nation making strategies of the Burman elite and demands of the frontier peoples for ethnic states make it virtually impossible to resolve the numerous conflicts in Myanmar on terms favourable to all communities.

### ***Sri Lanka***

Like Myanmar, Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Per the 1981 census, 74 per cent of the population is Sinhalese, 18 per cent Tamil (Sri Lankan and Indian), 7 per cent Muslims (mostly Tamil speaking), and 1 per cent others (Burghers, Eurasian, Javanese-Malay). Relying on mytho-history, both the Sinhalese and Tamils claim “sons of the soil” status, with the Sinhalese claiming their ancestors were the first to arrive in the island from North India (DeVotta 2004, 2007). Sinhalese and Tamil leaders maintained a united front to secure independence from British rule in 1948. Soon, however, for political and other reasons, Sinhalese leaders shifted to a Sinhala-only language policy and began to construct the nation

on the basis of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism. That nation-building strategy marginalized the Tamils and others. With growing grievances, the Tamils began to demand equality, greater autonomy, and later a separate homeland in the North and East of the island.

In 1983, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam launched a military struggle to realize the objective of a separate homeland, leading to a bitter military struggle that lasted 26 years, with the loss of 80,000 to 100,000 lives and at great cost to the government and all the people living in Sri Lanka. With Indian intervention (unilateral but also at the invitation of the Sri Lankan government), the conflict became internationalized for a substantial period. Though the government achieved military victory in 2009, the nation building problem remains unresolved with the government and most Sinhala groups committed to building a Sinhala-Buddhist nation.

### ***Pakistan***

Created as a country for Muslims upon the partition of British India, Pakistan was ethnically diverse. Its population comprised Punjabis, Bengalis, Pathans, Baluchis, Sindhis, Mohajirs (Muslims who migrated to Pakistan from all over British India) and other tribal and non-tribal peoples. Despite that diversity, Pakistani leaders in Islamabad proceeded to construct an ethno-religious nation and unitary state with the Punjabi community as its core. That project, as well as the abuses of the Pakistani military in East Pakistan, Islamabad's rejection of federalism, marginalization and reduction of East Pakistan to minority status despite the fact that the Bengalis outnumbered the Punjabis, and the unwillingness of West Pakistan leaders to cede power to East Pakistani (read Bengali) leaders in the wake of the 1971 elections, fuelled a civil war and liberation struggle that led to Indian intervention and the creation of Bangladesh. Independent Bangladesh in turn was constructed as an ethnic nation and later as an ethno-religious nation for Muslim Bengalis. Exclusive ethnic-nation making in that country in turn alienated the very small Hindu and Buddhist minority peoples.

Notwithstanding the breakaway of its eastern wing, Pakistan remains ethnically diverse. Along with other factors, the continuation of the nation building project on the basis of the Punjabi ethnic core has fuelled the sense of alienation in other ethnic communities (Pathan, Sindhi, Baluchi and others) several of whom view themselves as separate nations and states. Incipient militant movements seeking



separate nationhood and statehood for these communities have emerged. Pakistan is in danger of further fragmentation.

Nation making also underlies Pakistan's conflict with India over Kashmir. Islamabad's claim to Kashmir is underscored by its national self-conception as a nation and state for all Muslims from British India. The separation of Bangladesh severely undermines that national self-conception. Nevertheless that self-conception persists in Pakistan. India's claim is rooted in its national self-conception as a multi-ethnic nation and secular state and the consent of the Hindu ruler of Kashmir. The intractable dispute over Kashmir resulted in three wars (1947, 1965, and 1999). Over time, the conflict developed an internal dimension as well, with the Kashmiris aspiring for a separate nation and state free of both India and Pakistan. Several movements, including some militant ones, have emerged to realize that objective.

### **Malaysia**

Nationalism and the construction of nation in Malaysia are relatively recent. The beginning of indigenous nationalism is usually traced to the 1946 British Malayan Union proposal that stimulated Malay nationalism and a new sense belonging and identity among non-Malay populations. Wang (1992) posits that the communist insurgency was also a key factor in the emergence of Malayan nationalism. In the lead up to 1957, there were several competing conceptions of the Malayan nation, including that of a Malay nation, an Islamic nation, and a trans-ethnic and trans-religious Malayan nation. Focused on the Malay race, and advocated initially by Dato Onn in response to the Malayan Union proposal, the Malay nation envisaged a *Tanah Melayu* based on the Malay language, customs, and on Islam. It would have been the basis for an exclusive ethnic nation.

Focused on religion, the Islamic nation concept was advanced by the religious elite who were trained largely in, and influenced by, developments in the Middle East. Its origins in Malaya may be traced to the opposition of the religious elite to *Kerajaan* (Milner 2011). The trans-ethnic and trans-religious conception was advanced by Dato Onn after his resignation from UMNO in 1951. He envisioned a Malayan nation that transcended race and religion. I might point out here that Dato Onn is a seminal figure in the history of the nation, whose thoughts and contributions have not been accorded sufficient attention by scholars and political leaders. Waxing and waning, all three conceptions of the Malayan nation and later, the Malaysian

nation, have persisted over time. They continue to be relevant at the present time.

The formal Malayan nation, however, was grounded in the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement. Envisioning a plural nation with the Malay nation as its nucleus, that conception had ethnic as well as civic-nation dimensions. The ethnic dimension related to the special position of the Malays and Malay rulers, as well as the position of the non-Malay populations. The civic dimension emphasized citizenship by birth and naturalization, democracy, and the constitutional basis for the Malayan nation and state. That blend of ethnicity and civic features in nation making came to be characterized as a historic bargain, social compact, and so forth. Over time, however, the plural and civic-nation dimensions of nation making weakened, with ethnicity becoming paramount in the post-1969 period.

Intentionally or unintentionally, rectifying imbalances also had the effect of strengthening and solidifying the Malay base of the nation. Parallel to the growing emphasis on race and ethnicity, religion was emphasized by advocates of an Islamic nation and state. Both these streams created apprehensions and alienation among non-Malay populations who mostly profess other religions and who could not become Malay because of religious barriers. Racial mistrust and polarization became more visible and potent. Polarization has not degenerated into violence but the potential is ever-present. I am not suggesting here that homogenous and mono-religious populations would be free of polarization and violence; clearly that has not been the case in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Arab world. Only that ethnic and religious basis for nation making alienates substantial segments of the Malaysian population.

Their aspirations were/are embodied in alternative conceptions of the nation based on citizenship and equality that provides them with a sense of belonging. But for chauvinists, they were/are attracted to the trans-ethnic and trans-religious national identity. That conception has a long history in Malaysia as well and has taken three basic forms.

One approach to a trans-ethnic Malayan nation and identity was to broaden the definition of Malay. As Abdul Rahman Embong (2006) points out, "Melayu" has been given different meanings in different contexts. In the Malacca Sultanate conception, Malay was defined more in civilizational rather than racial terms. That conception of Malay was open to the recruitment of outsiders (Javanese, Indian, Chinese, Arab and so forth). A broad conception of Malay was deployed in the 1930s and 1940s by those arguing the case for a pan-archipelagic nation and state. Ibrahim Yaacob's

definition of the Malay race, for example, included Sumatran as well as peninsular Malays (cited in Milner 2011). Stretching the definition of Malay in another direction, Dr. Burhanuddin of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PMIP) was willing to consider using the concept of *Bangsa Melayu* to encompass Chinese and Indian citizens without the marker of religion (Milner 2011).

A second approach to trans-ethnic and trans-religious nation and identity was a national political community based on citizenship, irrespective of race and religion. Dato Onn's advocacy for a trans-ethnic and trans-religious nation may be classified as belonging to this approach. Lee Kuan Yew's idea of a Malaysian Malaysia in which the Malaysian nation would be based on citizenship and meritocracy also fits this mould.

A third approach was through the construction of a new *Bangsa Malaysia*. Dr. Mahathir's vision of a *Bangsa Malaysia*, articulated in 1991, seeks to create a united Malaysian nation on the basis of one Malaysian race possessing a sense of common heritage and shared destiny (Khoo 1996). The first approach is based on a broad definition of Malay that is open to recruitment of outsiders in civilizational terms rather than on the basis of descent or religion. Citizenship irrespective of race and religion would be the basis of national-political community in the second approach. The third approach would seek to create a new *Bangsa Malaysia*. Prime Minister Najib's 1Malaysia that seeks to ensure all citizens belong and take pride in the Malaysian nation while addressing imbalances across and within ethnic communities seems to seek restoration of the 1958 understanding as the renewed basis for the nation.

After more than fifty years of existence as an independent country, we are still pondering the basis for nation (Shamsul and Sity Daud 2006). I would hasten to add this is not without precedent. Nation making is a long and often bloody process that can suffer reversals. The basis for nation also changes with time. Time and circumstances cannot be frozen for ever. New circumstances and new actors will demand re-examination and the forging of new bases for nation and state in all countries. History is important. It determines heritage. At the same time we cannot submit to the tyranny of the history of specific periods. To remain viable, national compacts should be periodically re-examined and renewed. We are now in one of those moments. All three conceptions of the Malaysian nation – ethnic, religious and trans-ethnic and trans-religious — are in play. Rather than see any articulation as a threat, we should see them as articulations of insecurity, hear them out, and move forward in a balanced manner to strengthen the Malaysian nation and state.

### **Nation Making in Ethnically Homogenous States: Non-accepting of Divided Nations**

Ethnicity has played a key role in making nations in ethnically homogenous states as well. Unlike the role of ethnicity in multi-ethnic states in creating nations on the basis of ethnic cores, the emphasis on ethnicity in countries with homogenous populations has been on making nations whole and ensuring congruence between nation and state. Thus nation making in countries with homogenous populations like North and South Korea and North and South Vietnam was non-accepting of divided nations or the notion that a nation could support more than one state. Their national community imaginations were based on the ideals of unified nation and one state for one nation. Determined pursuit of such imaginations was a key driver of several wars in East Asia (the Korean War, the First Indochina War, and the Second Indochina War).

#### ***The Koreans***

Korean dynasties and states can be traced to the first century AD. However, Korean nationalism and the imagination of a single unified Korean nation are more recent. In large part, that was a reaction to Japanese colonial rule from 1910 to 1945. Anti-Japanese nationalism combined with the appeal of the Wilsonian ideal of self-determination for nations, and of the idea of nation-state, underpins Korean imaginations of a unified Korean nation (Lee 1997, Moon 1998). Despite the historical existence of several Korean kingdoms, the division of the Korean nation into North and South Korea was/is deemed temporary and unnatural. Unification is the ultimate goal of both North and South Korea. However, the two Koreas differ dramatically over how unification should be achieved as well as the political, economic, and military orientation of a unified Korea. Although the division of the Korean peninsula has its origins in the Cold War, the conflict between North and South Korea over unification, and the political and economic systems and international orientation of a unified Korean nation-state, underlies the persistence of the intractable identity conflict and military confrontation on the peninsula that has now lasted more than sixty years. Exclusive ethnic nation-making also underlies Korean antagonism towards Japan and Sino-Korean tension over the issue of Koguryo.

## ***Vietnam***

Like Korea, Vietnam has a long political history. It was both a colonized and colonizing state. Vietnam developed some key attributes of nationhood including a powerful sense of ethnic identity, community, and independent political destiny mostly in the context of its conflict prone interaction with China, spanning more than a thousand years, and its southward march that annexed Champa (central Vietnam) and parts of Cambodia (South Vietnam). Contemporary Vietnamese nationalism, however, was largely a reaction to French colonial rule (Khanh 1982). That nationalism had several hues but that espoused by the Vietnam Communist Party (VCP) became dominant.

The nationalism of the VCP is well captured by the concept of patriotism that entered its lexicon in the early 1900s. Embodying ideas of nation, fatherland, compatriots, and nation-state, that concept redefined the Vietnamese nation and state as the object of loyalty. The VCP imagined an independent, unified, modern, Vietnamese nation and state, organized on the basis of Marxism-Leninism. That imagination was non-accepting of a divided Vietnam. It viewed the division at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel by the 1954 Geneva Accords as temporary, unnatural, and forced upon Vietnam by outside powers. The quest for liberation drove the VCP's struggle against French colonial rule. The goal of unification along with communist ideology drove the subsequent struggle against South Vietnam and the United States. The drive to realise a single Vietnamese nation and a communist state, and Western perception of those quests as driven by international communism, underlie the First and Second Indochina Wars, that had a defining impact on domestic and international politics in Asia for several decades.

## ***Japan***

Nation making in Japan dates from the first two decades of the Meiji Restoration. It occurred in the context of threats from Western colonial powers, Japan's search for an international status and role on par with the colonial powers, and amidst domestic concerns over national unity that arose from the transformation of a feudal state into a centralized state, nominally unified under the Emperor (Gluck 1985). A sense of nation was deemed vital to safeguard Japan from external threats, promote commerce, advance national unity, invigorate vitality of the people and government, transition to a constitutional

system, and ensure Japan's proper place in the international system (Kuga cited in Gluck 1985: 113).

Drawing upon perceived Japanese traditions as well as Western ideas, the Meiji state laid the foundations of the Japanese nation largely along ethnic lines. Although there were contending narratives, the idea of Japan as a distinctive and homogenous nation (*Nihonjinron*) came to dominate government and public imaginations. The two key tenets of *Nihonjinron* are uniqueness of Japanese society and group orientation as the dominant cultural pattern that shapes the behaviour of individuals. Although the idea of a multicultural Japan has been articulated in recent times to counter the idea of a homogenous nation, the latter continues to dominate public and government imaginations. That imagination underlies Japanese reluctance to accept migration and integration of the minority Korean community that has resided in Japan for generations. It also underlies the uneasy relationship between Tokyo and Okinawa. The Okinawans perceive a national history of their own.

Concurrent with the ethnic base, imagination of nation and state in the Meiji era incorporated certain civic features as well. Those were focused primarily on facilitating transition to a constitutional system of government and transformation of Japanese peasants into citizens. With democracy and citizenship taking hold in the post-World War II era, civic features have become more prominent. The contemporary Japanese nation is held together, not only on the basis of ethnicity, but also by a commitment to liberal democracy. Likewise, civic-nation features (democracy, citizenship, political-legal equality of all citizens) have also become more prominent in ethnically homogenous South Korea. Democracy and ethnicity bind the South Korean population. Despite growing civic features, Japanese and South Korean populations are still hostile to migration and minority communities. That can be attributed to exclusive ethnic nation-making, which makes for a sharp divide between ethnic populations, inculcating fear and intolerance of others. It makes assimilation and integration more difficult, if not impossible.

### **Civic Nation-Making: Challenges of Ethnicity and Religion**

Despite, and because of their multi-ethnic and multi-religious make-up, nation making in India, Indonesia, and Singapore has deliberately followed the path of civic nation. This model has been challenged by groups in India and Indonesia on the basis of ethnicity and religion.

The civic nation-making approach has successfully managed some challenges. Others still persist with some becoming more potent. Setbacks suffered by countries embarked on civic nation-making, however, may be attributed in large part to narrow state construction and inconsistent policy rather than to civic nation-making itself.

## ***India***

Like China, India has a long, political and cultural history. With more than one thousand ethnic, religious and linguistic groups, it is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Despite that long history, the concept of the Indian nation dates from 19th century resistance to British rule. Contending narratives sought to define the Indian nation (Phadnis and Ganguly 2001). The narrative for a Hindu nation has persisted but not gained sufficient traction. Although more than 80 per cent of the population is of the Hindu faith, the Indian nation is not grounded in Hinduism. During the struggle for independence, some Muslim leaders depicted the nationalism of the Indian National Congress as Hindu nationalism to advance their case for the idea of two nations: One for Muslims and the other for Hindus. Notwithstanding the forging of Pakistan as a nation of Muslims, India was not constructed as a Hindu nation. It was configured as a civic nation for all peoples living within the borders of the Indian state. Despite periodic twists and turns, civic nation-making appears to be firmly embedded in Indian society. In that narrative, the Indian nation is based on citizenship, socio-political-legal equality of all citizens, civilizational unity, common culture, shared political destiny and commitment to the Indian constitution.

Civic nation-making in India has confronted several major challenges, mostly from ethnic groups that consider themselves separate nations and also from the religious Right. Resisting the imposition of Hindi as the national language, and perceiving themselves as a distinct ethno-linguistic nation with a classical language of their own, and historical existence, in the 1950s and 1960s the Tamils contested their inclusion in the Indian nation. That challenge along with other linguistic challenges, have since been overcome with the organization of Indian states along linguistic lines, and concessions on the national language issue. Recognition of Tamil as a classical language, and preservation of Tamil identity through acceptance of the idea of multiple identities has helped ease Tamil concerns. Beginning in the 1970s, Sikh ethno-religious nationalism

sought a separate state of Khalistan. With the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and the ensuing massacre of Sikhs, that movement became militant, leading to violent clashes between the Indian state and Sikh separatist movements. The latter were supported by Pakistan and the Sikh diaspora. The extremist activities of Sikh militants, however, were rejected by Sikhs in India and separatist movements lost considerable support. By early 2000, Sikh separatism had abated. Today, a Sikh is Prime Minister of India in a Congress-led government, and a Tamil party is a key component of the coalition government in New Delhi.

These successes notwithstanding, India still confronts ethnic and religious challenges from Kashmiris, Assamese, Mizora, Manipuris, and Nagas (Baruah 1999). Many of these conflicts have become violent. With distinctive histories and envisioning themselves as separate ethnic nations, these groups seek a high degree of autonomy, confederal status, or separation from India. Several separatist movements receive external support. The civic-nation approach to nation making and secularism of the Indian state continue to be challenged by Hindu nationalists who seek to create a Hindu nation and state. All these challenges have waxed and waned. Inconsistent and bad government policies have in some cases exacerbated conflicts. Despite some continuing conflicts, civic nation-making in India appears to have been successful in creating a sense of belonging and common identity among the vast majority of that country's inhabitants. That model of nation making has not only survived, it is slowly but surely gaining ground in that country.

## ***Indonesia***

Although earlier indigenous empires (Sri Vijaya from the seventh to the thirteenth century and Majapahit from the late thirteenth to the early sixteenth century) encompassed substantial parts of contemporary Indonesia, it is essentially a construction of Indonesian anti-colonial nationalists who imagined a nation of nations encompassing all territories and peoples under Dutch rule, in what was known as Netherlands East Indies. Stirrings of nationalism in Indonesia may be traced to the brutal Dutch suppression of national awakening organizations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ricklefs 1993). The 1928 *Sumpah Pemuda*, frequently cited as a defining moment in the development of the Indonesian nation, states: "We the sons and daughters of Indonesia acknowledge one nation, the nation of Indonesia." Several contending narratives (Islamist, Marxist, and



nationalist) were articulated in the effort to define the Indonesian nation, making for bitter struggles. Eventually, the nationalist narrative that sought to subordinate all other ethnic, religious, linguistic, and regional identities to the Indonesian national identity prevailed. That narrative, articulated by Sukarno, and subsequently embodied in the 1945 constitution after modification by the Investigation Committee for Independence Preparation Efforts, enunciated five principles as the basis for the nation. These were: Belief in the one and only God, just and civilized humanity, unity of Indonesia, democracy on the basis of consultation and representation, and social justice for all. Sukarno's philosophy found justification for nationalism not in Islam, class struggle, or a particular ethnic group but in an identity that subsumed all these. It was a blend of religious and political ideologies, with roots in Islam, Marxism, Hinduism, Christianity, and indigenous traditions.

Collectively, the five principles approximate a civic nation although individual principles have been deployed to justify other constructions as well. For example, the first principle has been deployed by those desiring to make Indonesia an Islamic nation and state. The effort to make a civic nation, however, was undercut by the concurrent construction of Indonesia as a unitary state, with power and authority centralized in Jakarta. The consequent rejection of federalism and autonomy as policy options considerably eviscerated civic nation making in Indonesia. Such evisceration was even deeper under illiberal regimes like that of Sukarno's Guided Democracy and Suharto's New Order. Deprived of some critical features, civic nationalism in Indonesia became violent, especially in dealing with the ethno-religious nationalisms of the Acehnese and Papuans (Kreuzer 2006). With distinct histories, these groups considered themselves as separate nations (Aspinall 2009, Chauvel 2005).

Eventually, Acehnese separatism was "resolved" through negotiation of far-reaching autonomy that required amendment of the Indonesian constitution (Aspinall 2005). The Papuans view their incorporation into Indonesia as unjust, and carried out without their consent. Their demands for political dialogue, autonomy and secession met with state suppression and violence. Jakarta has been reluctant to negotiate autonomy with the Papuans. That struggle continues with the Papuans demanding separation. Apart from ethno-religious nationalist challenges at the provincial level, civic nation-making has also come under challenge from religious nationalism that seeks to transform Indonesia into an Islamic nation.

Despite the limitations and challenges discussed above, Indonesia has been relatively successful in creating a sense of belonging and pride in the nation amongst the vast majority of its inhabitants. Worthy of particular note here is that there is little support for the only viable alternative – that of an Islamic nation. There has also been no effort to construct Indonesia as an ethnic nation. Although Javanese are in the majority and Javanese leaders dominate the political scene, they have not attempted to make Indonesia a Javanese nation.

### **The Future: What if Ethnicity Continues as the Dominant Paradigm?**

Despite the merits of civic nation making, ethnic nation making appears likely to continue as the dominant approach in Asian countries. Individual and group identities have become deeply bound with ethnicity. Ethnic group loyalty and identity takes precedence over individual and other civic identities. In Malaysia, for example, ethnic identity has become paramount. Ethnic politics and discourse have become naturalized in our political, economic, and social interactions. Hence, I will spend a few minutes exploring the consequence of continuing the ethnic nation-making paradigm in Asia.

First, existing domestic and international conflicts rooted in considerations of ethnicity are unlikely to be resolved. Several conflicts may be exacerbated and new ones may arise. Continuation and the possible increase in the number of nation and state making conflicts will have a negative impact on domestic and regional stability.

Second, if the right to self-determination continues to be exercised on the basis of ethnic nations, then there will be no end to the proliferation of new nations and states. Trapped minorities in new states will demand secession or seek to join states in which their ethnic group constitutes the majority nation. Ethnicity will be the basis for breaking existing states, the formation of new ones, and irredentism. Forced migration in large numbers may also become necessary. Asia will be populated by tens if not hundreds more nations and states. The political map of Asia can change in dramatic fashion.

Third, privileging certain groups creates several classes of citizens. Some individuals and groups will forever be relegated to second class status as their groups will not be on par with the core ethnic group. The only way to elevate themselves would be

through conflict, secession and formation of new states or joining other states. In the eyes of disadvantaged groups, the nation and state will be illegitimate. National unity will be extremely difficult if not impossible to achieve, except through violent, forceful assimilation, which will be bloody and prolonged.

Fourth, ethnic nation-making will impede regional cooperation and integration. Leaders in contested nations and states would be more interested in protecting the existing political status quo within countries and, by extension, in the region. They will not engage in regional activities that undermine that status quo. With even greater attachment to norms like sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs, regional cooperation, and especially integration, will be hampered.

Finally, despite aspirations to the contrary, ethnic nation-making will hinder competition, hamper participation in a regionalized and globalised economy, and prevent countries from realizing their full potential. States and nations will remain contested and weak. The much vaunted Asian century may not come to pass.

I do not want to sound unduly pessimistic and alarmist but we must comprehend the challenges and consequences of ethnic nation-making and address them. The strength and durability of a country hinges on cohesive national political communities and effective states that deliver.

## **Conclusion: Mitigating the Negative Consequences**

The challenge of nation making is to create a sense of belonging for all citizens, creating pride in the nation, a common national identity amongst all peoples living in the country, and a shared destiny. The sense of belonging and common identity would minimize tension and conflict, release the full potential of all citizens, make for more coherent and effective nations and states, advance regional community building, and generally enhance national and regional security. Civic nation-making appears to have greater potential, and arguably, has had more success than ethnic nation-making in building cohesive national political communities in multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries like India and Indonesia. It also appears to have contributed to strengthening national political communities in countries with homogenous populations like Japan and South Korea. Realization of the potential of civic nation-making, however, hinges not only on abstract conceptions of civic nation but also on the

nature of the state, political system, policies, and practices. A narrow construction of the state and illiberal regimes like those in Indonesia from 1959 to 1998 can negate the potential of civic nation-making. Civic nation-making has made advances but also suffered setbacks. It is not a panacea. However, in the abstract, it appears better-placed to make cohesive nations in diverse societies as well as in homogenous ones.

Ethnic nation-making in Asia appears to have run its course. Persistence in that mode could have the negative consequences discussed earlier. When pushed to the extreme, ethnic nation-making would beget violence and exact a high toll from the people and state. However, it will not be easy to jettison. The goal should not be to eliminate ethnic nation-making altogether. However, measures should be taken to mitigate its negative consequences. The way forward is to strengthen the civic foundations of all nations, including ethnic ones. Citizenship, political, legal, and socio-economic equality among all peoples, and commitment to common ideals should become the long-term goals of nation-building. Strengthening civic foundations can help correct the excessive tilt toward ethnic nation-making and make for more cohesive nations. The blend of ethnic and civic nation-making may not be able to deal with all grievances especially those of groups bent on separation. However, it can address the concerns of the bulk of the population and even alter the course of separatist movements as in Aceh, Indonesia.

People cannot be held together by mere force and instrumental considerations for extensive periods. Association should be voluntary and based on ideational commitments. Policy options such as federalism, autonomy, and protection of minority rights should be explored to address concerns of various communities. The ultimate goal, however, is to create nations and states in which there are no majorities and minorities. The majority-minority distinction works against building cohesive nations.

Enlightened intellectuals and policy-makers who have the long-term interest of their countries at heart should begin to alter their intellectual frameworks to go beyond ethnicity. Communal frameworks may have been appropriate in the past, but may not work in the future. We have to change our thinking, or circumstances will compel us to do so. In the latter situation, those in positions of authority will lose the ability to steer. As Prime Minister Najib has argued, we should transform or we will be transformed. The need to go beyond race and ethnicity was recognized by Dato Onn some seventy years ago. He was a man well ahead of his time. It is now

## Nation Making in Asia: From Ethnic to Civic Nations?

opportune for us to engage in such rethinking and reframing. In this regard, I think the idea of 1Malaysia, conceptualized to take account of the sensitivities of all ethnic groups while transitioning to a national community based on citizenship, has great potential to strengthen the foundations of the Malaysian nation.

Thank you.

## Bibliography

- Abdul Rahman Embong. 2006. *Negara-bangsa: Proses dan Perbahasan*. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Alagappa, Muthiah. 1987. *The National Security of Developing States: Lessons from Thailand*. Dover, MA: Auburn House Publishing Company.
- Alagappa, Muthiah. 1995. *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Alagappa, Muthiah. 2011. "A changing Asia: prospects for war, peace, cooperation and order." *Political Science* 63, no. 2: 155-85.
- Anderson, Benedict O'G. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 2d ed., revised and extended. London: Verso.
- Aspinall, Edward. 2005. *The Helsinki Agreement: A More Promising for Peace in Aceh?* Policy Studies No. 20. Washington, DC: East-West Center.
- Aspinall, Edward. 2009. *Islam and Nation: Separatist Rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Also published by the National University of Singapore Press in Singapore.
- Baruah, Sanjib. 1999. *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Baruah, Sanjib. 2007. *Postfrontier Blues: Toward a New Policy Framework for Northeast India*. Washington, DC: East-West Center.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chaiwat Satha-Anand. 2009. "Introduction: Imagined Land? The state and southern violence in Thailand." In Chaiwat Satha-Anand, *Imagined Land? The State and Southern Violence in Thailand*. Tokyo: ILCAA.
- Chauvel, Richard. 2005. *Constructing Papuan Nationalism: History, Ethnicity, and Adaptation*. Washington DC: East-West Center.
- DeVotta, Neil. 2004. *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

## Bibliography

DeVotta, Neil. 2007. *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka*. Washington DC: East-West Center.

Frechette, Ann. 2006. "Constructing the state in the Tibetan diaspora." In Richard Boyd and Tak-Wing Ngo, eds., *State Making in Asia*. London: Routledge.

Gluck, Carol. 1985. *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Khanh, Huynh Kim. 1982. *Vietnamese Communism 1925-1945*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. .

Kim, Samuel S. and Lowell Dittmer. 1993. *China's Quest for National Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Khoo, Boo Teik. 1996. *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir Mohamad*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

Kreuzer, Peter. 2006. "Violent civic nationalism versus civil ethnic nationalism: contrasting Indonesia and Malay(s)i-a, *National Identities* 8, no. 1: 41-59.

Lee, Jung-Hoon. 1997. "East Asian nationalism and its contemporary implications." In Dalchoong Kim and Chung-in Moon, eds., *History, Cognition and Peace in East Asia*. Seoul: Yonsei University Press.

Milner, Anthony. 2011. *Malaysia's Dominant Societal Paradigm: Invented, Embedded, Contested*. Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The 7th Pok Rafeah Chair Public Lecture.

Moon, Chung-in. 1998. "South Korea: recasting security paradigms." In Muthiah Alagappa, ed., *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Phadnis, Urmila and Rajat Ganguly. 2001. *Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Renan, Ernest. 1970. "What is a nation?" In Robert A. Goldwin, ed., *Readings in World Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ricklefs. M.C. 1993. *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1300*. 2d ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

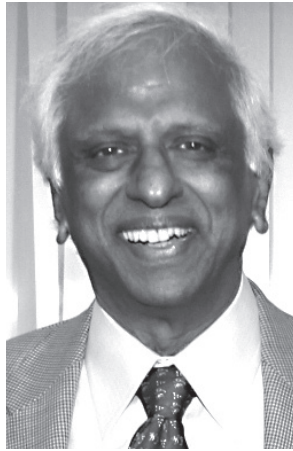
Shamsul A.B. and Sity Daud. 2006. "Nation, ethnicity, and contending discourse in the Malaysian state." In Richard Boyd and Tak-Wing Ngo, eds., *State Making in Asia*. London: Routledge.

## Bibliography

- Smith, Anthony. 1983. *State and Nation in the Third World*. Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Smith, Anthony. 1991. *National Identity*. Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press.
- Wang, Gungwu. 1992. *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia*. Kensington: Allen & Unwin.
- Wang, Jenn-Hwan. 2006. "Sovereignty, survival, and the transformation of the Taiwan state." In Richard Boyd and Tak-Wing Ngo, eds., *State Making in Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Wong, R. Bin. 2006. "Citizen, state and nation in China." In Richard Boyd and Tak-Wing Ngo, eds., *State Making in Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Wyatt, David K. 1984. *Thailand: A Short History*. New Haven: Yale University Press.







## **Dato' Dr Muthiah Alagappa**

Dato' Dr Muthiah Alagappa holds the Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Concurrently he is a non-resident Senior Associate with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C. From 2006 to 2010 he was a Distinguished Senior Fellow at the East-West Center. Prior to that he was the founding director of East-West Center Washington (2001-2006), and director of the integrated research program in East-West Center Honolulu, (1999-2001). He has been a senior fellow at the East-West Center since 1989 and was a Senior Fellow at ISIS Malaysia from 1985-1988.

Dato' Dr Muthiah is a senior researcher in comparative and international politics. His research includes political legitimacy of governments, civil society and political change, political role of the military, democratic change, role of force in domestic and international politics, conceptualization of security, Asian practice of security, security order in Asia, nuclear weapons and security, and international governance. He has had extensive experience in research management.

Dato' Dr Muthiah has held visiting professorships at Columbia University, Stanford University, Keio University, and the Nanyang

Technological University. He was Leverhulme Visiting Professor at the University of Bristol in the fall of 2008 and Sir Howard Kippenberger Visiting Chair in the School of Government in Victoria University of Wellington in summer 2010-11.

Prior to his academic career, Dato' Dr Muthiah served as a career officer in the Malaysian Armed Forces (1962-82) holding field, command, and staff positions, including that of senior army member of the defence planning staff in the Ministry of Defence and command of three signals regiments.

Dato' Dr Muthiah has published widely in highly reputed university presses and international journals. His recent publications include 'A Changing Asia: Prospects for War, Peace, Cooperation, and Order,' *Political Science*, 63, 2 (December 2011): 155-185; 'International Relations Studies in Asia: Distinctive Trajectories,' *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 11, 2 (2011): 193-230; *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21st Century Asia*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008; *Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Change*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004; and *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Dato' Dr Muthiah has a PhD (International Affairs), from Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, and an MA (Politics) from the University of Lancaster.



## **Institute Of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia**

The Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia was established on 8 April 1983, in realization of a decision made by the Malaysian Government to set up an autonomous, not-for-profit research organization, to act as the nation's think-tank. ISIS Malaysia was envisioned to contribute towards sound public policy formulation and discourse. It includes economics, foreign policy, security studies, nation building, social policy, technology, innovation, environment and sustainable development.

ISIS has been at the forefront of some of the most significant nation-building initiatives in Malaysian history, such as in contributing to the Vision 2020 concept and being consultant to the Knowledge-Based Economy Master Plan initiative.

ISIS Malaysia today fosters dialogue and promotes the exchange of views and opinions at both national and international levels. It undertakes research in collaboration with national and international organizations, in important areas such as national development and international affairs.

ISIS Malaysia also engages actively in Track Two diplomacy, fostering high-level dialogues at national, bilateral and regional levels, through discussions with influential policymakers and thought leaders. Its network links include ASEAN-ISIS network of policy research institutes; Council for Security and Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific (CSCAP); Network of East Asian Think-Tanks (NEAT); Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) and Agora Asia-Europe.

