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Power and paradox: Indonesia and the 'English School' concept of great powers†

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Abstract

This article uses the so-called English School of International Relations (ES) as a lens through which to examine Indonesia's trajectory as a regional power and a would-be world power. The ES approach has always emphasized the social dimensions of great-power status, which factor in, alongside material components, a mutual recognition of special rights and duties. But its scholars have not yet paid much attention to the issue of self-conceptualization as an element in that status. By examining the case of Indonesia, this article begins to fill that gap. It draws on a range of material to highlight a variety of internal narratives on Indonesia's power, which are often paradoxical, and often at odds with the external discourse. A region-theory 'dialog' on this topic therefore offers an alternative perspective on Indonesia's constraints and opportunities, while also refining ES perspectives on the topic of power and powers.

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1 Introduction

Speaking to the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2011, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono noted the resurgence of Asia, which was 'certain to redefine global affairs', and reminded his audience, 'Asia is of course more than China, Japan and India. When you think of Asia, also think Indonesia and ASEAN [the Association of Southeast Asian Nations] … Indonesia will feature prominently in Asia's renaissance' (Yudhoyono, 2011b).

These pronouncements continued a well-canvassed theme. At the end of the previous year, setting off for the G20 summit, 'SBY' predicted of Indonesia: 'If we can manage things well, then five to 10 or 15 years from now, we can really be a world power' (Anon., 2010a). He later cautioned that success was not 'preordained' (Yudhoyono, 2011a, pp. 51, 56). Nevertheless, the tone was still upbeat.

Others agree. To the Obama administration, Indonesia is 'not just a rising regional power but a rising world power' (MacLeod, 2010), 'a regional and global leader' (Clinton, 2011). To UK Prime Minister David Cameron, similarly, Indonesia is 'one of the fastest growing countries in the world with a leadership role to match' (2012). Australian experts likewise flag the need to ask 'what kind of relationship we want to have with Indonesia when it is a great power' (White, 2012), while a New Zealand foreign policy adviser avers: 'By almost any measure, Indonesia ranks among the leading nations of the contemporary world' (Wilson, 2012, p. 2).

What are we to make of this? What is a 'world power' or a 'great power'? Is Indonesia on track to be one? What is pushing it in that direction, and what is stopping it?

To look at these questions, this article uses the English School (ES) approach to International Relations, which emphasizes the role of social recognition in determining great-power status. The resulting 'region-theory dialog' has a mutual benefit, offering the region a useful alternative perspective on Indonesia's constraints and opportunities, while also advancing theoretical understandings by using the Indonesia case to illuminate the under-explored issue of *self*-conceptualization as a factor in great-power status.

The article begins by outlining the ideas that characterize the ES and discussing the level of power status that Indonesia might aspire to. The second section uses the ES's idea of the social recognition of great powers

to sample a number of *external* – and often paradoxical – accounts of Indonesia's profile as a power. The third section, by examining material from opinion polls, commentary on Indonesian social subtexts, and testimonies gathered from a range of Indonesian experts in international disciplines, makes a small initial inroad into the task of pinpointing some of the narrative threads that shape *internal* assessments of Indonesia as a power. The fourth section concludes by teasing out the implications of these narratives for policy-makers in Southeast Asia (SEA) and beyond.

2 The ES and the idea of 'great powers'

The misleadingly named ES is perhaps best known for its concept of 'international society', a metaphor that highlights the possibility of societal relations even in the context of inter-state anarchy. Unlike domestic societies, however, the society of states has no overarching government and has to rely on more complicated, less direct, mechanisms to establish and maintain international order and cooperation. One of these often unwritten patterns or 'institutions', which together help to shape inter-state socialization, is the managerial role that has consolidated around international society's most powerful players (Bull, 2002, pp. 71, 194–222).

Because the ES places state interaction in the context of a *society*, it also emphasizes the dual – social and material – dimensions of power. Material power is important, and can never be pushed aside or wished away. No state can therefore opt out of the 'game of power politics', which 'has been well described as the politics of not being *over*powered' (Manning, 1975, pp. xxx, 71, 190). But material power is very much affected by the social context in which it is exercised. Within international society, power is at least in part restrained by a 'what-would-the-neighbours-say?' syndrome (Manning, 1975, p. xxxii). The way in which it is expressed 'has to do with feelings, with respect, admiration, perhaps even love, and with interest, calculation, self-advancement' (Northedge, 1976, p. 121).

Not surprisingly, this idea permeates ES conceptualizations of great powers as well. Material power – military capability, economic strength, population size, land area, resources, and so on – is still important, as is ideational power. But great-power status is also 'a case of being recognized as a member of the club' (Butterfield, 1972, p. 341). 'The great power,' writes Manning, 'is the power great in standing, great in the eyes

of other states. It is the power deferred to as great' (1975, pp. 189–190). In ES eyes, what counts is not only what a state might have, but also the way others *talk* about what it has.

As Bull puts it: 'Great powers are powers recognised by others to have, and conceived by their leaders and peoples to have, certain special rights and duties' (2002, p. 196). This highlights a double-edged recognition. First, whether a state is a 'world power' or a 'great power' or a 'regional power' depends (at least to some extent) on whether other states *think* it is. But, second, that status is accompanied by certain expectations. International society does not expect great powers to just be bullies in the school playground. Rather, it expects them to do useful things – hence the frequent calls, in face of outbreaks of acute crisis, for the world's powers to 'do something'.

Regional versions of international society, among them SEA's, have drawn ES scholars' attention only comparatively recently (see, for example, Narine, 2006; Chong, 2011; Quayle, 2012). While there are always difficulties in applying a theoretical perspective originating in Europe to a very different cultural and historical setting, ES ideas do serve the purpose of foregrounding similarities in the experiences of states as they attempt to establish bases for cooperation by identifying common interests and values, and consolidating common institutions.

Societal perspectives certainly shed a usefully different light on several areas of SEA's politics. When ASEAN, for example, is seen as the *organizational superstructure* of such a society – reflecting rather than driving its underlying relationships – its constraints and slow rate of change become much easier to understand and accommodate theoretically.

When Indonesia, similarly, is seen through an ES lens as a regional 'great power', various aspects both of its achievements and its frustrations come into clearer focus. As noted above, two elements of Bull's characterization of entitlement to enhanced status are at least partially apparent in Indonesia's case, since other states, as well as the country's leaders, regard it as some sort of power, with special rights and duties.

But this recognition is never unproblematic. There is also significant regional *resistance* to the idea of Indonesia as a great power. As ES scholarship makes clear, there is an inherent tension between two key institutions of international society – sovereign equality and great-power managerialism. This is why, Bull notes, great powers 'have a permanent problem of securing and preserving the consent of other states to the

special role they play in the system' (2002, p. 221). This dilemma is clearly mirrored in ASEAN's perennial struggle between *de jure* equality and *de facto* hierarchy. Created in a post-colonial, Cold War environment, ASEAN has a built-in leveling dynamic, which resists internal and external hegemony (Leviter, 2010, p. 170). Yet Indonesia, even under the 'unambitious and solid leadership' of Suharto (Elson, 2001, p. 254), always managed to project a sense of 'regional entitlement' (Leifer, 2005a, p. 594) that carried much weight within ASEAN. Both protagonists are still working out how to most effectively balance this inherent international-society tension in the context of today's evolving hard- and soft-power environment. The various storylines fueling both assertion and resistance will be briefly unpacked in the next section.

The key focus of this article, however, is the *third* element of Bull's statement, which has to date received little attention from ES scholars: Do Indonesia's *people* think it is a great power, with special rights and duties? This is an important factor in societal recognition, and deserves greater emphasis.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify the level of power Indonesia's cheerleaders are envisaging for it, since even the most enthusiastic are unlikely to be putting it in the same category as the United States, or even China.

Levels of power are notoriously difficult to assess and compare, but scholars generally agree that the United States is still very much in a league of its own (Buzan, 2011, pp. 5–6), even though its ultimate trajectory, particularly in comparison with China, is causing much debate as to global power configurations in the future.

From there on, however, the rankings diverge. Buzan defines a 'great power' (as opposed to a 'superpower') as 'one whose reach extends only across more than one region' (for example, Japan, China, or India) (2011, pp. 3, 16). Morris has a more inclusive view of great powers, arguing that they are states that are 'sufficiently powerful to pursue foreign policies that would be wholly untenable for other, far less powerful, states … sufficiently powerful to be categorically distinct from the vast majority of the membership of international society' (2011, p. 335).

Following in the wake of such prominent powers, however, are 'a number of substantial industrializing regional powers such as Brazil, South Africa and Turkey' (Buzan, 2011, pp. 3, 16). These powers, though *anchored* in their particular regions, are clearly acquiring a much

more significant role on a much broader stage. There may not be as great a distance from the rest of the pack as Morris stipulates – but it is difficult to deny that there *is* a distance.

Bell sees the world developing into

> a landscape with giants: six obvious great powers (the United States, the European Union, China, India, Russia and Japan), but also several formidable emerging powers that are *important enough, strategically or economically, to affect the relationships among the great powers* … Pakistan, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico, Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and maybe Vietnam, South Africa, and Korea. (2007, p. 13; italics added)

In the short to medium term, therefore, Indonesia – which Anwar suggests is already 'regarded as a global swing state that will have increasing influence in international affairs' (2012, p. 2) – might be aiming for a role as a *regionally based power with significant global influence* – a global regional power, for short. The next section considers the external social-recognition components of that power.

3 Indonesia's power profile: narratives and counter-narratives

When Indonesia's power is talked about – either by its own leaders or by those outside – material factors are often the first to be cited. As the fourth most populous country in the world, with a total area of over five million square kilometers, a GDP of US$707 billion in 2010 (World Bank, 2011a), an annual percentage GDP growth rate ranging from 4.6 to 6.3 between 2006 and 2010 (World Bank, n.d.), and significant mineral, forest, and marine resources, it cannot fail to impress.

These material factors are important not only in concrete terms, but also in terms of the global conversation they generate. Indonesia is already a member of the actually existing G20. But from BRICS (Klomegah, 2012) and CHIIPS (McArthur, 2012), to an 'Asian G6' (Soesastro and Drysdale, 2009) and the 'Next 11' (Goldman Sachs, n.d.), and on through the 'E-7', the 'EAGLEs' (Wassener, 2010), the 'CIVETS' (Greenwood, 2011), and the '3G' nations (Buiter and Rahbari, 2011), no acronym-endowed grouping of emerging economies, actual or potential, is apparently complete without Indonesia. In this capacity, the rights and

duties imagined for Indonesia clearly have to do with its capacity for growth generation on a scale that goes a long way beyond its immediate region.

But Indonesia's international image does not rest on economic potential alone. Long hailed by the world's press as 'the new India', 'a steady democratic light in a dark Southeast Asian tunnel', and a 'regional role model' (Wehrfritz and Honorine, 2008; Anon., 2009; Manthorpe, 2009), Indonesia's 'inspirational path from dictatorship to democracy' (Cameron, 2012) is still drawing plaudits, and is a second key thread in the power-recognition discourse. The rights and duties envisaged here clearly revolve around Indonesia's role as exemplar (of Muslim democracy generally, and for countries like Egypt specifically) and as bridge (between Islam and the West) (Carothers, 2011; Vaughn, 2011).

Economic size and democratic credentials combine to make Indonesia an important strategic player in many Western eyes. Hence its specific inclusion in mooted arrangements such as former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Asia-Pacific Community (Rudd, 2008), or the Korean–Indonesian–Australian 'KIA' (Parello-Plesner, 2009). Although rarely overtly signaled as such, the rights and duties imagined here seem to involve acting as an ideological and material counterweight to China.

Lastly, the hopes pinned on Indonesia seem to cluster around its role in the region. Here, it is anticipated, for example, that Indonesia's long-standing leadership position can drive new norms within ASEAN, and set an example for Myanmar (Bellman and Vaughn, 2011; Lee, 2011). More prosaically, it is difficult to imagine any other ASEAN state that could have waded with quite so much clout into the renewed Thailand–Cambodia spat in 2011, or the debacle that followed the failure to issue a foreign ministers' communiqué in July 2012.

But every narrative has a counter-narrative. In material terms, a major lacuna is Indonesia's military. Experts describe the defense budget as 'miniscule relative to the country's size and security requirements' (Laksmana, 2011, p. 168), and there is 'general agreement' that the Indonesian military's 'force posture' is insufficient, especially in comparison with the vast maritime territory it needs to oversee (Sebastian and Iisgindarsah, 2011, p. 16). This may be changing (Supriyanto, 2012), but it will not change quickly. Similarly, large populations need to be fed and employed, and large land and sea areas administered and provided with infrastructure (Laksmana, 2011, p. 160).

Equally, the sustainability of the economic growth story can be questioned (Harvard Kennedy School, 2010). As is also the case for many emerging 'global regional powers', gross national income (GNI) per capita places Indonesia much further back in the pack – its US$2580 GNI per capita put it in 147th place in 2010 (compared with China in 121st place, and India in 160th) (World Bank, 2011b). These rankings are also reflected in the Human Development Index, where Indonesia occupies a place in the third or 'medium' tier, along with China, South Africa, and India (UNDP, 2011, pp. 127–130).

Democratic credentials also need to be kept up. Concerned at trends of increasing religious intolerance and lack of progress on Papua, Mietzner warns of 'not insignificant shadows' on Indonesia's reputation as a model transition from authoritarianism (2012, p. 125).

The last in this list of counter-narratives is the argument that Indonesia's perceived role as regional leader is often resisted within the region itself. There is seemingly an insoluble conundrum at the heart of this leadership: while Indonesia is by far ASEAN's largest member, it cannot 'force its will' on the Association without 'fatally damaging' it (Anwar, 2010). The result is that the core heartland where its regional power status should be most solidly embedded exhibits considerable friction. This dilemma – related both to the preceding criteria and to the great-power/sovereignty institutional tension noted in the first section – will be revisited later in the article.

In sum, Mietzner concludes, Indonesia 'has not managed to make the much-desired breakthrough onto the world stage' (2012, p. 120).

In gauging Indonesia's power, therefore, something of a paradox is discernible: in many areas, it is both powerful and weak *at the same time*. This paradox is interesting, because it is generalizable. The current era is one in which power is shifting not only to Asia, but also to states that are still struggling with the problems of development. Many of tomorrow's powers – whether great powers or global regional powers – are going to be rather different from today's and yesterday's. They will not necessarily always be able to feed their populations and equip their land areas with infrastructure. And they will be very aware of these paradoxes. Different strategies will therefore be called for to deal with them. A societal perspective – which signals the possibilities of accommodation,

mutuality, and adaptation, as well as the constraints of ingrained hierarchies – can be highly useful in informing such strategies.

In sum, then, there is substantial recognition – both in the Indonesian administration and externally – that Indonesia is in an elevated league of power, and has special rights and duties. There is evidence, too, of significant disruptions in that recognition. Undoubtedly, the negative storylines have the potential to gain the upper hand and change the picture completely. But at the moment, the positive side of the conversation appears to dominate – at least outside Indonesia and SEA.

4 Indonesia's power seen from within

Bull, however, it will be recalled, spoke of great powers as 'powers recognised by others to have, and conceived by their leaders *and peoples* to have, certain special rights and duties' (italics added, 2002, p. 196). Is Indonesia also recognized by its *people* to have this special status, and these special rights and duties?

The ES has up to now merely noted that popular recognition plays some role in socially determining what is and is not a great power. It has not gone much further. Looking at the case of Indonesia in this context can therefore have a two-way benefit – on the one hand, shedding a different light on the country's power aspirations; and on the other, inputting into the theory by illuminating the kinds of narratives, ideas, and concepts that flesh out the idea of a 'people's evaluation' of great-power status.

This section uses three sets of sources. First, it examines opinion polls, both specifically on power status and also on other elements of identity that might conceivably affect the way Indonesians perceive their state and its trajectory. These are useful in sketching broad-brush trends. Second, it gathers from secondary sources, Indonesian and external, elements that elucidate, or at least suggest, some of the roots of societal subtexts that repeatedly recur in polls. Third, it draws on one-to-one, semi-structured interviews, covering a range of Indonesia-related topics, with lecturers in International Relations and other international

disciplines in Yogyakarta in 2012 (here referenced as 1–10),[1] and with Indonesian analysts (here referenced as A–B).[2] Clearly, this small sample can offer only a snapshot, whose contours will need to be filled in by further work with a broader demographic and geographic scope. It nevertheless supplies a useful adjunct source, not only giving a very specific and personal voice to the widespread domestic ambivalence about Indonesia's power status, but also drawing attention to themes that are largely absent in the external narratives.

The rest of the section is organized around three broad families of ideas, centering, respectively, on nationalism, capacity, and the vexed question of geographical reach. Inevitably, however, there is significant overlap between these areas.

4.1 Nationalism, history, leadership, decline

Polling indicates a certain popular acknowledgment of a special status for Indonesia. When asked in 2011 'about Indonesia's influence generally in the world compared to other countries', 20% of Indonesians put it among 'the top 10 most influential countries', and a further 37% put it among 'the top 20 most influential countries'. Asked to choose SEA's 'current leader' (defined as 'the country that has the most influence in this region'), 29% said China, 26% Indonesia, and 18% the United States (Hanson, 2012, p. 6). An Indonesian poll the following year indicates that no fewer than 80% of Indonesians believe their country 'can become a "superpower" nation'. But many set the bar fairly low for such a status, with 32% believing that 'sufficient supplies of food, clothing and shelter were indicators of a superpower state', and 21% asserting that 'a superpower revolved around accessible education and health care services' (Lutfia, 2012).

1 The respondents in this category were Ms Ratih Herningtyas (1), Mr Winner Agung Pribadi (2), and Dr Ali Muhammad (3), Department of International Relations, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY); Drs Riza Noer Arfani (4), Dr Eric Hiarej (5), and Drs Dafri Agussalim (6), Department of International Relations, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM); Prof. Dr Masyhuri (7), Director, Center for World Trade Studies, UGM; Dr Sigit Riyanto (8), Vice Dean, Faculty of Law, UGM; members of the Indonesian academic community who chose to remain unidentified (9) and (10).

2 These respondents were Ms Lina Alexandra (A), researcher, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta; and an Indonesian analyst (B), who chose to remain unidentified.

Where does this confidence come from? Arguably, it significantly predates the favorable international narratives quoted above and resuscitates the success of Indonesia's early nationalist narratives. National unity under the banner of 'Indonesia' was achieved surprisingly rapidly (Reid, 2011, pp. 2, 130–134), and fed at least in part on myths of *Indonesia Raya* and the glories of Majapahit (Liow, 2008, pp. 48–9, 75–76). Indonesia's independence struggle, with its 'heroes' (Reid, 2011, pp. 2, 134–136), became a badge of honor and a yardstick against which others' paths to *merdeka* were judged (Liow, 2008, p. 80). 'The major achievement of the Indonesian revolution,' notes Reid, 'was the creation of a united nation with an assured sense of its own identity and significance' (2011, p. 41).

Under the Ali Sastroamidjojo government, Indonesia began to make its mark in international affairs, becoming one of the Colombo group, and championing the unexpectedly resonant Bandung conference (Legge, 1972, pp. 262, 333; Mackie, 2010, pp. 10–12, 14, 20). Against all odds, independent Indonesia's early political convulsions served to confirm its sense of unity; and despite or because of his quixotic personality, Sukarno 'offered Indonesians something to believe in, something which many hoped would give them and their nation dignity and pride' (Ricklefs, 2008, pp. 293–294). The advent of Suharto brought a pronounced change of style, but not of substance (Elson, 2001, pp. 180–181; Leifer, 2005a, pp. 593–596). Indonesia no longer wanted to be conspicuous – but it nevertheless still saw itself as a leader. Indonesian self-confidence therefore has tenacious historical roots.

Respondents certainly testified to the salience of these roots in motivating a perception of Indonesia 'as one of the major stakeholders, the major players, in the world' (A):

> During the Sukarno era, many people got the aspiration that we were a world power. ... I think it's in the minds of average people that we are a big power, not only in the regional context but also in the global context. So if you go around villages, pictures of Sukarno – even in some of them, pictures of Sukarno with President Kennedy, with President Khrushchev – are still in their minds. So the aspiration is there. (4)

> Even though a lot of scholars criticized the corruption in the Suharto era, we have to acknowledge that in terms of international relations,

> Indonesia got much stronger international positions [at that time]. During that era we may say that Indonesia became the leader of the Asians – even wider than Southeast Asia. (2)

The way history is taught arguably contributes to this historical sense that Indonesia is set apart and special. A 'heavy national imprint' characterized textbooks under Suharto, but Reid notes little difference even in 2003 (2011, pp. 142, 148). Noor, in a fairly comprehensive study of the content of Indonesian social studies and history textbooks, exonerates them from directly inciting the rather ugly strands of street nationalism that occasionally come to the fore in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the omissions he highlights certainly help to explain the exceptionalism that often characterizes Indonesians' understandings of their country's role in the world – and particularly in the region. Because little regional comparison is offered, either of colonial experience or of anti-colonial struggle, students could be forgiven for thinking that Indonesia suffered and triumphed alone. There are also, Noor reports, few references to the shared cultural and political heritage that links Indonesia to what is now Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and the Philippines – potentially contributing to the ease with which nationalist sentiment is outraged by perceptions that Malaysia has 'stolen' aspects of Indonesia's culture (2012). The lack of a broader comparative perspective could arguably feed a sense not only of the uniqueness and specialness of Indonesia, but also of the remoteness of neighbors. Only a small step away, therefore, is a strong sense of affront whenever the rest of the region challenges this perceived special – and historically determined – status.

Nationalist historical narratives that fan pride and expectation with regard to Indonesia's international status also inevitably contain within them seeds of disappointment as well. Respondents' perceptions of historical decline and leadership failures are highly ironic in view of the international accolades noted in the previous section, but none the less potent for that:

> Our problem … is still that we need a leader. (1)

> Nowadays, the bargaining position of Indonesia over other countries, particularly in Southeast Asia, is relatively quite weak, or weaker compared to the conditions of the Suharto era. … We need strong leadership. (2)

Again, the memory of Sukarno was invoked – not for his aggressiveness, but as an example of the need for people 'who really think about what is the main Indonesian interest … [and] put the interests of the state first, before their own or their groups' interests' (2).

Complicating challenges of leadership is the reality – not generally noted in the international power narratives – that world-power aspirations are difficult to separate from party-political rivalries and 'personal ambition' on the part of the leader (5). President Yudhoyono is widely perceived in Indonesia to be too image-conscious, and, as another respondent noted, 'image-building' is resented by other politicians (6). Even though 'the aspiration [for world-power status] seems pretty much in the minds of many Indonesians', key elements in parties other than the president's 'seem not to really like this idea, because they're not involved in such a process' (4).

Not surprisingly, relations with Malaysia – Indonesia's long-time rival in a complex 'prestige dilemma' (Liow, 2008) – particularly complicate Indonesia's self-image as a power and Indonesians' perceptions of their leaders' capabilities (see, for example, Satriastanti, 2010). It is revealing that 74.8% of Indonesian students surveyed in a poll in 2010 thought Malaysia was a threat to Indonesia; 48% thought Malaysia was Indonesia's greatest security threat; and 69.6% judged it to be a competitor (Anon., 2010b). This wholly disproportionate assessment points to an extremely skewed relationship.

As with many family and neighborhood relationships, the closer one is to home, the harder it is to gain credibility, and in their relations with Malaysia, many Indonesians are conscious less of a rising global profile than of a diminishing regional one. The last 30 years in Malaysia, one respondent noted, have brought economic achievements, political stability, and social wealth: 'So we have an inferiority complex in that sense – average Indonesians – towards Malaysia' (4). Another agreed:

> [Relations with Malaysia are] getting worse. It's very contradictory to what happened in the Suharto era. It's also because … this is the weakest era of Indonesia in the international arena. During the Suharto era, Indonesia was the leader of ASEAN. Even Mahathir Mohamad openly said that Indonesia is Malaysia's big brother; we learn much from Indonesia; we are the little brother of Indonesia. … But during the reformation era, when Indonesia has got a bad economic condition …,

> Indonesia has a 'weak' power over others. Then Malaysia … had an economic condition that was getting better and better than Indonesia. (2)

The loss of Sipadan and Ligitan still rankle in this context (2, 4). And other areas corroborate the perception of decline. One academic pointed out, 'Malaysian lecturers were sent to Indonesia to learn – about education, about Indonesia. And now it's vice versa' (1). Making exactly the same point, another added, 'It's painful, isn't it, psychologically?', and diagnosed a syndrome where allegations that 'Malaysia is stealing our cultural heritage' are 'more about ourselves being desperate – big, but not that big' (5).

Malaysia therefore challenges Indonesian perceptions of national self-worth not only because it does not appear to duly defer, but also because its reasons for not deferring are perceived to be rooted in the shortcomings of *Indonesian* responses.

4.2 Capacity, economy, threat

The complications of the history narrative partly explain why alongside polls that express a distinctly gung-ho attitude to Indonesia's great-power status sit others that present a rather more mixed picture of Indonesians' views of their nation. In surveys of satisfaction with the country's direction, the largest percentage since 2002 answering 'satisfied' is 41, recorded in 2010, and dropping back to 36 in 2011 (marking a sharp contrast with the figures for China, for example, which have consistently registered in the 80s since 2007) (Pew Research Center, 2012a). In a corresponding survey where interviewees are asked whether the country's economic situation is good or bad, the largest percentage answering 'good' is 50, in 2010, dropping back to 38 in 2011 (Pew Research Center, 2012b). This is a somewhat underwhelming domestic verdict, in comparison with the international fanfare noted above, and is doubly significant in a nation where almost 78% of the population chose 'a high level of economic growth' as their preferred answer to a question asking what 'the aims of the country' should be (World Values Survey, 2006).

The need to bolster deserved status with economic achievement has been apparent at least since Suharto's time. Writing in 2000, a couple of years after the beginning of *reformasi*, Leifer argued that to reclaim its regional diplomatic role, 'Indonesia would need to demonstrate

substantive evidence of economic recovery, which requires an interdependence with the global economy and its institutions'; its leadership would therefore need to emulate Suharto's August 1969 pronouncement that an effective role is possible only 'if we ourselves are possessed of a great national vitality' (Leifer, 2005b, p. 564).

An acknowledgment of the validity of Suharto's pragmatism is still very apparent. More than a decade later, Syailendra similarly argues that to fulfill its potential even as 'an emerging medium power', Indonesia will need to 'capitalise on its current growth trajectory to leap into the future' (2012). But this recognition is complicated by two factors: capacity shortfalls and a constant perception of exploitation.

The lack of capacity to realize potential is an important theme, as interview respondents testify (9):

> The key is governance. … I believe that Indonesians are really proud of Indonesia. They believe that Indonesia is a great nation. They know that we are rich in resources, population, geography, everything. But they are very critical of their government. They say, yes, we can't do this because we face a lot of problems – how to manage this big country. We face too much corruption. And how will we be a great power in the future if we cannot solve this? So the problem is internal rather than external. We do not blame other countries, but we blame ourselves – why we cannot manage this potential powerful nation in the future. … We still continue exporting persons to other countries, because we cannot provide jobs. … You cannot be a respected state or country if you send unskilled workers to other countries. (3)

> I would say that there is a kind of gap between the way we want to be a big power, a major actor in the region, and the fact that we don't have enough resources for doing that. … So we want to say something, but we cannot amplify it. The US can always say something because they have the power to amplify it. We don't have this kind of amplifier. (5)

In the search for the causes of this gap between historically driven aspiration and contemporary performance, many look inward – again often alighting on the problem of weak leadership.

In results that continue trends already apparent in polls in 2008 (Mietzner, 2009, pp. 111–112), a 2011 Indobarometer poll indicated that a majority of Indonesians did not think 'conditions' had improved since

1998, when reform began. Fully 55% thought things had stayed the same or deteriorated, and just over 40% specifically thought conditions were better in the New Order period. The most headline-grabbing aspect of the poll at the time was that more than 36% of those surveyed chose Suharto as 'most liked' president, and more than 40% as most effective president (the equivalent figures for SBY were just over 20 and 22%). But the survey also registered that more than 55% were not satisfied with the implementation of reform. The demands judged to have been fulfilled the least came under the headings of the economy and the investigation of corruption (Indobarometer, 2011). It is not that Indonesians do not value their democratic gains. Other surveys repeatedly show that they do (Diamond, 2010, pp. 35–46; LSI, 2010). But sliding perceptions of SBY's capabilities (Anon., 2012a), coupled with an impression of rampant corruption and never quite subdued chaos, have caused many Indonesians to long for strong leadership.

But a feeling of external exploitation also contributes to this dis-ease. In some of the discussions of globalization examined by Noor, 'emphasis is laid on the protection of Indonesian culture, territory and society from aggressive and rapacious foreign agents and interests' (2012, p. 16). Certainly, the 'pretty girl analogy' (Weinstein, 2007, pp. 42–45; Novotny, 2010, pp. 216–217, 305) – in which Indonesia is likened to a vulnerable young woman beset by predatory men – is still very present in the minds of Indonesians. Indonesia is a 'follower', 'still under the control of others', such as the United States or the World Trade Organization, and still 'under the shadow of international power' (1). External actors, 'whose vision of their aim is to get as much profit as possible', are only secondarily to blame, however: 'The big mistake is … why the Indonesian government allows it' (2).

Though generalized, Indonesians' ambivalence about external forces finds a particular focal point in the United States, as is regularly borne out in surveys over a number of years. A Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA) study, for example, showed 64% of Indonesians lacking trust in the United States 'to act responsibly' in the world, and 68% agreeing that the United States 'acts as world policeman too often' (2007, pp. 77–84). The CCGA's 'Soft Power Index' showed that 48% of respondents in Indonesia saw overall US influence in Asia as somewhat or very negative, while over 83% were at least somewhat worried about a future military threat from the United States (Whitney and Shambaugh,

2008, pp. 3–6). World Public Opinion found 63% agreeing that 'the US abuses its greater power to get Indonesia to do what it wants' (2009, p. 11), while a BBC poll found only 36% of Indonesians – the election of Obama notwithstanding – positive about US influence (2010). Gallup had only 32% of Indonesians approving of US leadership in the region, 12 percentage points below the median (Cynkar, 2011).

Is the complex amalgam of recognition and insecurity with which the United States is regarded attributable, at least in part, to the way the superpower complicates an already very delicate corporate sense of self-esteem? This is a theme that is hardly detectable in external discourse about Indonesia's power status. Yet the connection suggested by respondents' comments is potentially an extremely important one:

> My students think, why always America? … My students sometimes get bored talking about Indonesia under the influence of America. Why isn't Indonesia trying to find another [partner] – or just become independent, become a true nation that has the right to decide? This is too straightforward maybe. But this is the reflection of how the students talk about this: Why do we always have to talk about Indonesia in relation with America? (1)

> Rather than seeing them [the US] as an enemy, we should be much more confident – seeing them as a partner, who has the same interests. So we should start from that. (5)

Overall, the argument went, Indonesia has not been able to gain the initiative in this relationship:

> In the Suharto era Indonesia got much help – funds – from the United States. … Nowadays, the position of Indonesia vis-à-vis the United States is weaker and weaker … because Indonesia has no important aspect to the United States any more. (2)

> [Obama] talked about so many things – promising ones – but not so many of them appear to be implemented, and not so many Muslims in Indonesia feel that America is getting close to the Muslim world. In terms of nationalists also, there are not so many changes happening, especially in terms of, for example, military relations. So what nationalists really want is a kind of total commitment of the US to Indonesia, in backing our military power. (4)

There is also an ideological element in this strand, reminiscent of the ideals of the Sukarno era:

> By global powers, what is in average people's mind is opposing – especially the capitalist countries, especially the US. So when we are in there with the US, we have a problem, because this image [of opposition] is still in Indonesians' minds. (4)

From his studies of threat perceptions among Indonesian practitioner elites in 2003–08, Novotny postulates the existence of a love–hate attitude to the United States, but concludes that the negative element is 'superficial and issue-based' (2010, p. 160). The lens of power status, rather than threat, offers a slightly different perspective. It does not show up extremes, such as loving and hating would imply, but it does point to more than a merely transitory negative undertone, suggesting a chronic frustration both with self and other in this relationship.

The danger of becoming an 'object' also affects relations with China, at least with regard to its economic strength: 'The image of China is like a giant who can eat everything', noted one (1). But China does not seem to challenge Indonesia's self-image in quite the painful way that the United States does. Although the effects of China's prolific economic output raise fears for Indonesian industry (3, 6, 9),

> in terms of military, no, we never think about this Chinese military threat. If you talk about the South China Sea problem, yes, we talk about the threat of China. But in general, people in the street, or people in general, we don't think much about the military threat of China. We don't care about this. Also I don't think that China will ever be a military threat to Indonesia. … But we're more concerned about economic relations with China. (3)

Historical memory complicates perceptions here, channeling them in several different directions. Some view China as an opportunity, respondents noted, but only a few view it as a threat (2, 5) – perhaps because the idea of a 'China threat' seems part of a New Order mindset, and therefore incompatible with the reorientation that has taken place under *reformasi*. Others, however, still detect the influence of 1960s animosity toward communism and the Partai Komunis Indonesia on sentiments of distrust toward China's trade practices (6).

Generally, however, the discursive prominence of China detectable in many parts of the world is not wholly replicated here (Anwar, 2012). Indeed, China has a power of attraction for a number of constituencies. 'The potential of China has the prospect to balance American influence in Indonesia', noted one academic (1), while another opined that some nationalist generals, still nostalgic for the 1950s and 1960s, aspire to install China (or even Russia) as 'counter-allies' to a United States that they see as lacking in genuine commitment to Indonesia (4).

Gallup certainly finds Indonesians even less at ease with Chinese than with US leadership (Cynkar, 2011). But Pew Research Center data show that China has gained a higher favorability score than the United States in most of the surveyed years since 2002 (2011, pp. 3, 37).

While the relationship with the US suffers from *known* frustrations and ambiguities, which often appear to counter or complicate Indonesia's power destiny, the relationship with China is still possibly benefiting from the *unknown* – the sense that it represents an important opportunity, counter-weight, or alternative, which may enlarge Indonesia's scope for action on the world stage. Equally, it is not yet as all-pervasive as the United States. How long China can continue to draw that dividend will depend on its diplomatic aptitude, and the success with which it cooperates in building the closer political relations and communications that analysts stress are essential (A, B).

4.3 Finding an appropriate arena

There is an unmistakable 'light on a hill' quality about Indonesia's self-identification. Perhaps because of the tendency to exceptionalism noted earlier, Indonesia clearly considers that its own performance – anti-colonial, developmental, or democratic, depending on the era – has important demonstration effects for the region and beyond.

But any policy that is subject to pressure from values- or identity-driven agendas – whatever their origin – is also subject to shifts. Religion, for example, can influence foreign-policy decisions, and Iisgindarsah paradoxically fears a dilution of Indonesia's influence precisely because its foreign policy is increasingly subject to public pressure (2012, pp. 23–24). The aspiration for a larger role undoubtedly drives the impetus to wield influence – but on issues where powerful states line up on the other side of

the table, Indonesia is likely to experience yet further frustrations as it tastes the limits of its power.

Respondents certainly saw Indonesia's leadership in normative, soft-power terms (1, 6). One respondent noted with irony a cycle, as this self-perception is generated internally and then reinforced externally:

> It's a good combination, isn't it? Big, Muslim, and democracy. You don't have it in the last 100 years. … You have countries such as Australia and the US, that really want to promote Indonesia as the biggest Muslim democratic country in the world. So, I guess we are preoccupied by this kind of promotion. (5)

Indonesia's home region, however, does not always appear appreciative, leading to an ongoing debate within Indonesia about whether SEA and ASEAN are still the most appropriate arena in which to realize its multiple aspirations, or whether its ambitions should be focused further afield (see the discussion in Anwar, 2010). Paradoxically, SEA is Indonesia's springboard – but also its restraint, its 'cage' (Anon., 2011).

The perception that Indonesia has not been able to gain sufficient support or respect in its own backyard was clearly articulated in respondents' comments. 'We have an economy problem', noted one lecturer, 'and many countries in Southeast Asia and East Asia look down at Indonesia because of this condition' (3). This is again highly ironic, given the international razzmatazz noted earlier. But it is a perception that recurred repeatedly:

> We try to develop ASEAN, we nurture ASEAN, we try to be a leader in ASEAN, but we know for sure, behind our back, you have Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and even the Philippines, that [say] OK, you want to be the leader, but how much is your national income? (5)

> Indonesia was the leader [ASEAN Chair] last year. … But in reality I think it's no different whether it's a leader or a follower. … From the economy, it seems no different, maybe because we cannot act – we cannot exploit well what is our advantage. (7)

> So many things [in ASEAN] make Indonesia a bit unhappy. (6)

> [It is necessary to strengthen the ASEAN Secretariat on the grounds that] if a programme is initiated by Indonesia, maybe Malaysia and

> the Philippines would be reluctant to support it, because they think there is a disguised agenda in it from Indonesia. (8)

But Indonesia's regional influence also increases its global significance (10). One analyst summed up the potentially symbiotic relationship as follows:

> I think it's about time for Indonesia to somehow elevate itself to a higher level than regional – although … the region is very much still important for the country, because I see that Indonesia's role in the region, particularly in Southeast Asia, is a nesting-ground for nurturing its bigger role in the global context. … Rather than promoting itself alone, Indonesia is trying to bring the whole institution, which is ASEAN, to play a bigger role. (A)

Given Indonesia's global weakness, analysts note, prioritizing ASEAN is still smart policy (B). But it is not an easy task to leverage these synergies in a region where mistrust and rivalry still thrive, where Indonesia's core values are not universally shared, and where responses to its leadership role are still ambivalent.

Rizal Sukma recommends a focus on East Asia as a target arena, given that ASEAN is 'too small' but the world 'too large' (Anon., 2012b). Here, too, however, some point to a tendency for Indonesia to overestimate its own diplomatic clout (Jemadu, 2012).

It may indeed be politic to downplay the potential scope of Indonesia's influence. But the longstanding sense of specialness and destiny that has become a residual part of Indonesians' perception of their nation may not simply be turned off. Unless carefully managed by governmental, societal, and external forces alike, any recalibration threatens to only exacerbate latent perceptions of frustration and victimization.

This section has used surveys, commentary, and interview material to highlight narratives that affect Indonesians' perceptions of their country's power profile. Together, the data point to disparities between ideals and implementation that are likely to have significant impact on perceptions of national status. The raft of jostling positives and negatives they present are likely to complicate, for some considerable time to come, internal perceptions of Indonesia's potential as a global regional power. If Bull's dictum on popular conceptions of power status holds true, then Indonesia still has some way to go.

5 Conclusion

This article has argued that ES perspectives can shed useful light on Indonesia's rising power trajectory by foregrounding *societal* recognition – the external and internal acknowledgment of special status, rights, and duties – as a constitutive element of great-power status. In the other direction of the dialogue, the Indonesian case usefully inputs into ES theory by illustrating the complexity of the narratives that contribute to determining whether states can be conceived – not only by their leaders but also by their peoples – to have the qualities of great-powerdom.

In Indonesia's case, external actors and current leaders at home have consistently proclaimed their conviction that Indonesia has a future not only as a purely regional power but also as an *enhanced* regional power with a role on the global stage. This narrative enjoys considerable traction, especially outside SEA. But it is opposed – or at least moderated – by a range of significant counter-narratives.

In terms of the domestic perceptions presented and discussed in this article, however, the outlook is even more ambivalent. The narratives suggested by polls, commentary, and interview responses, while clearly pointing to a sense of Indonesia's difference, potential, and historical mission, introduce counter-narratives that differ somewhat from those in play externally. The idea of gaps – between aspiration, on the one hand, and governance capacity and means for power projection, on the other – is common to both sets of discourse. But internal narratives also introduce elements that do not figure prominently in their external counterparts, weaving in complex threads of historical decline, disappointing leaders, ambivalent relations with the current superpower, and a sense of unreliable support from the 'base' region of SEA.

This mixed picture indicates a potentially uncomfortable clash of expectations and rewards and suggests that facilitating and accommodating the rise of Indonesia will require much greater understanding on all sides.

This is particularly the case within the region. Squaring ASEAN's need to curb hegemony with an appropriate recognition of Indonesia's longstanding – and now growing – special status has always been testing, and will become even more so. But the continued diplomatic effort is essential, since these deep-rooted ambitions are not going to simply fade from the Indonesian scene. If the prize remains too stubbornly

inaccessible, it will be easy for future leaders, who may be less scrupulous than Yudhoyono about eschewing the nationalist card, to mobilize the kind of discontent that could result in a cooling of interest in ASEAN. It would need only a slight disengagement on Indonesia's part to put a large spanner in the works of regional integration. On the other hand, an Indonesia that senses more of the respect to which it feels entitled may be less prone to counter-productive episodes of economic nationalism and other forms of prickliness. An effort of imagination is necessary here on both sides – while Indonesia needs a better appreciation of the difficulties that its developing role presents to its neighbors, they also need to strive for a better understanding of the growing pains that make Indonesia a sometimes uncomfortable neighbor.

Extra-regional players should also be more conscious of these difficult dynamics. Initiatives that overtly focus on Indonesia, to the detriment of the rest of the region (the early iterations of Kevin Rudd's Asia-Pacific Community, for example, 2008), actually do both a disservice, detaching Indonesia from the regional bedrock that needs to be the mainstay of its influence.

The United States, too, needs to tread carefully in this arena, given the longstanding sensitivities that surround the relationship. Particularly, it should beware of giving the impression that it is simply using Indonesia in a power struggle with China.

Insofar as Indonesia's case is typical of many up-and-coming regional powers, these understandings can be usefully applied on a global level. A new genre of powers is on the rise, and their need for space combines uncomfortably with their continued awareness of inadequacy. A societally oriented recognition of their special characteristics can go some way toward easing the transition to a new global power environment.

Empirically, this article represents only a small beginning in the task of more fully cataloguing and assessing the domestic component of power status in Indonesia. Much more work, qualitative and quantitative, is needed to round out the picture. What already seems clear, however, is that the successful progression from passive object to active subject that many Indonesians desire is one that is crucially dependent on external and internal factors that are essentially *societal*. By offering a theoretical framework for these processes, the ES has both much to offer and much to gain.

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