

OBITUARY

SOEDJATMOKO—AN APPRECIATION

Apart from Siamese, Soedjatmoko was the first and only Asian to be elected an Honorary Member of the Siam Society.

His passing away at the age of 67 on 21 December 1989 was not only a loss for us in Asia, but throughout the world of learning, for he was also the first Asian to be appointed Rector of the United Nations University despite the fact that he never finished his formal undergraduate studies in his own country.

Soedjatmoko was born in Sumatra in 1922. His father was very religious but not in the formal sense. In fact, he was a mystic whose son had the benefit of an ecumenical religious upbringing. Although he remained a Muslim, he was interested in Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. Indeed, he even invited the present Pope to address the United Nations University when he was the Rector and he inaugurated a project on the relevance of religion in the creation of desirable societies in the future. He appointed me to be the coordinator of the Buddhist segment of this imaginative project.

In his youth, he studied medical sciences but he relinquished his university studies to join the clandestine movement against the Japanese occupation during the Second World War. This group became the nucleus of the forces demanding full independence for Indonesia. Among the younger generation, Soedjatmoko became a favored intellectual close to Sukarno. In 1950, he represented the Father of Indonesia at the United Nations in a New York debate against the Dutch in the fight for the destiny of his own country. Again in 1955, he played a crucial role in the Bandung Conference on non-alliance in Asia at which H.R.H. Prince Wan represented the Thai government.

When Sukarno became better known for his dictatorship at the expense of democracy and for his corruption at the expense of socialism, Soedjatmoko left a bright career in the government at the early age of 30. Unlike his peers who actively opposed the Father of the Nation, such as Mochtar Lubis, he was never put in gaol.

When President Suharto toppled Sukarno in 1965, Soedjatmoko was asked to rejoin the government and was sent to negotiate with the United States to improve diplomatic relations and to obtain economic aid.

Soedjatmoko was Indonesian Ambassador in Washington, D.C. from 1969-1971. He did so much for his country diplomatically, economically, and culturally. He was popular

at the White House as well as on Capitol Hill, and in business as well as academic circles. He received quite a number of honorary degrees, e.g. from Yale to the University of Hawaii (just one year before he died). Cornell published his work on South East Asian historians and U.C. Berkeley published his collected articles on religion, edited by Bellah.

I first met Soedjatmoko at Princeton University when he was Indonesian Ambassador. We both attended a symposium on the Vietnam War organized by the International Association for Cultural Freedom, and we quickly became friends.

He was asked by the Edward Hazen Foundation in New Haven, Connecticut to formulate a new education policy to influence U.S. philanthropic organizations as well as the American Government so that cultural relations would not be only one-way traffic from North to South or West to East. He proposed that the Hazen Foundation set up various autonomous committees in different parts of the world, with nominal financial backing so that each region would define cultural relations for the future—within its own region and vis-à-vis other regions, beyond the context of only the North-South dilemma. I was then asked to be the first chairman of the South-East Asian group. I was later succeeded by a Singaporean and a Filipino, but remained a member of the group until the very end in 1979. After his return to Indonesia, Soedjatmoko regularly attended the group's meetings which took place in every South-East Asian country.

Despite his great service abroad, at home no position of distinction was offered to him. Soedjatmoko remained popular in the U.S.A. He became the first Asian trustee of the Ford Foundation. It is interesting to note that when he was asked to join the Foundation, he said, "It was a great honour for me, but as you know, I am no longer in America. Besides, I may be offered a cabinet post or be put in gaol in Indonesia any time." The reply was, "We will, of course, give you first-class airfares to attend our Board meetings. If you become a cabinet minister, then you will have to resign from our Foundation, but if you are in gaol, we will still regard you as our trustee."

Later, Soedjatmoko joined the Executive Board of the Aspen Institute and other prestigious philanthropic organizations in North America. In Europe, he was elected a member of the Club of Rome. In Asia, he received the Magsaysay award from the Philippines. Although busy with many intellectual pursuits, Soedjatmoko always had the time to listen to mem-

bers of the younger generation. He inspired young idealists. Indeed, he was Chairman of the Pacific Youth Forum of which I was Executive Secretary for many years. He also took his family to visit many Thai temples so that his daughters could have the opportunity to learn Buddhism and Siamese culture at first hand.

Soedjatmoko was known to most leading intellectuals in the world. He was often invited to make keynote addresses at important gatherings. In January, 1989, he was elected an Honorary President of the World Conference on Religion and Peace at its meeting in Australia.

His last, alas unfinished, task was to be at a seminar in Jokjakarta, where he was scheduled to give a lecture on the survival of humankind in the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, on 21 December 1989, he had a sudden stroke at the meeting and was rushed to the hospital. On arrival, the doctor pronounced him dead.

Although he did not write much, he read a great deal and followed the shifts in development paradigms with great interest. His thought was deep and penetrating. He was very much concerned with the welfare of humankind and the environment in which we exist. As both a mystic and an intellectual, he was sensitive to the spiritual growth of man.

He was survived by a charming wife and three lovely daughters. He will certainly be long remembered by those who knew him. And even those of the generation to come, if they care for the survival of humanity and social justice and a harmonious natural environment, i.e. human development at its best, will no doubt have much to learn from Soedjatmoko.

SULAK SIVARAKSA

Santipracha Dhamma Institute