Cultural Immersion in Indonesia through Pancasila: State Ideology

Robert M. Fitch
The University of Iowa

Sheila Anne Webb
Humboldt State University

Indonesia's President Suharto has accented Pancasila, state ideology, as a sustaining and supportive force of harmony and cyclical time. The five principles of Pancasila are elaborated through education and nation-building programs and expanded in the daily lives of the Indonesian people. Westerners, striving for consonance and productive work relationships and results, can utilize Pancasila as a guideline. The effectiveness of Pancasila stems from its reflection of indigenous values, making it the main contemporary factor in maintaining both the unity and diversity in Indonesia.

Le président Suharto d'Indonésie a mis l'accent sur *Pancasila*, l'idéologie d'état, comme facteur d'harmonie culturelle. Les cinq principes de *Pancasila* inspirent l'éducation et les programmes destinés à l'édification de la nation; on les trouve aussi sous-tendant toute la vie quotidienne du peuple indonésien. Pour les Occidentaux désireux de promouvoir l'harmonie sociale et les bonnes relations de travail dans cette culture, les principes de *Pancasila* pourraient servir de guides. Les valeurs qui font l'objet de l'idéologie d'état reflètent l'âme du peuple; de là son efficacité à maintenir à la fois l'unité et las diversité en Indonésie.

Introduction

Expatriate consultants often face cultural schizophrenia as they work simultaneously within the framework of their own background and a new cultural environment. Levine and Wolff (1983) indicate that "When people of different cultures interact, the potential for misunderstanding exists on many levels" (p. 32). They discuss "social time" as the heartbeat of society, a type of societal metronome that exacts a foreigner's attention and insists on synchronization to execute the flow of successful cultural interlinking.

For Indonesia, social time is one spoke under the umbrella of Pancasila, the state ideology. Phillips and Owens (1986) discuss the fluctuations between optimism and pessimism facing long term project effects in Indonesia when they state, "Then come the small insights into cultural forces, the glimmerings of how deeply rooted are the customary ways of doing things and the subsequent tempering of expectations" (p. 6). The sources of those customary ways are as diverse as

the 14,000 island archipelago and over 200 inherent languages and dialects. As Indonesia seeks to strengthen nationalism under Pancasila, the Western expatriate must also try fitting diversity into unity to understand the umbrella that the government envisions as a reflection of, and not an opposition to life in Indonesia.

Guidelines to enhance a cultural exchange may appear both reasonable and simple and thus easily accommodated by a Westerner. Some examples for Indonesia follow:

- Modesty and humility are desirable characteristics when meeting people;
- Crossing legs while sitting is not considered appropriate;
- Pointing with a foot or showing the bottom of a sole is offensive;
- Keeping both hands on the table and not on the lap is polite;
- Placing hands in pockets in public indicates displeasure;
- Touching the head of another is considered disrespectful;
- Using the left hand, which is considered unclean, to shake hands, touch people, point, give or receive things is unacceptable.

These guidelines arise from deep rooted cultural traditions that are logical in their origins and meaningful in their continued execution. Pancasila attempts to embrace these cultural traditions under an energetic, static umbrella that is rooted in the Preamble to the Constitution but also embedded in other long-term island traditions.

Pancasila: State Ideology

Cultural understanding can be achieved through a judicious mix of reading, introspection and cultural immersion. Naturally, what one reads is crucial. Although many Westerners may dismiss Pancasila as mere window dressing in its vagueness that appears to allow, according to Morfit (1981), such contradictions as "hierarchy as equality; private ownership . . . as collective ownership; abrupt revolutionary upheaval; incremental change or no change at all" (p. 843), understanding modern Indonesia requires realizing that Pancasila is the most crucial document to read.

At first, its generality seems to have a pervasive effect on all segments of Indonesian society through a "maybe yes/maybe no" philosophy that simultaneously contains all and yet excludes some. Specificity may elude and frustrate the Westerner trying to conduct business while Indonesians seek a balanced harmony through containment and exclusion. In an effort to avoid situations that may cause displeasure or personal embarrassment, no action becomes superior to some action. Time is viewed as cyclical rather than sequential.

The Five Principles or Silas of Pancasila are general statements which take on meaning as they are elaborated and expanded in the daily lives of the Indonesian people. They are:

1. The Principle of One Lordship or the belief in one supreme being;
2. Humanitarianism (Just and Civilized Humanity) or a commitment to internationalism;
3. Nationhood/Nationalism (Unity of Indonesia);

4. Peoplehood (Wisdom in deliberation/representation);
5. Social Justice.

These principles are virtually both a national ideology and civil religion. Main issues facing modern Indonesia are nation building, maintenance of order, development, and reconciling traditional and modern elements. According to *Asiaweek* (1986), Indonesia has demonstrated a basically stable social order and has received top marks in economic management by the International Monetary Fund. While social and political stability has been achieved at a cost to some human rights, the communal harmony that does exist can be attributed to the official state ideology of Pancasila. Few developing nations can claim such success.

In its simplest interpretation, Sila One means that all religions are contained and rightfully justified in Indonesia — Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Animism, and a variety of mystic sects that show aspects of syncretism. The exclusion factor eliminates any one religion from a position of dominance. Although Indonesia is 87% Muslim, with some forms subjected to Hindu influences, Islam is not the official state religion of Indonesia.

Sila Two offers an open-minded forum for discussion and a willingness toward fair play for all. Discussants are initially freed from negative judgements. Exclusion here means that the political left and right are equally advantaged as well as disadvantaged.

Sila Three is the energetic enterprise of uniting, and with some difficulty, 350 distinct ethnic groups spread across 3,500 miles in an archipelago between the Indian and Pacific oceans at the Equator. This fifth most populous country in the world has 6,000 habitable islands that the government tries to reach through social order, literacy programs, health education, and instruction in Bahasa Indonesia, the national language, and Pancasila. A segment of the nationalism ambition encourages residents of a highly populated island like Java to transmigrate to less populated regions. Limitations on nationalism in Sila Three will be discussed later as related to Sila Five.

Sila Four is immediately visible in the structure of the Indonesian government. The president and vice president are elected by a majority vote of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) and the president is responsible only to that Assembly. The Assembly consists of 364 members of the House, delegates representing the three officially recognized political parties. Another 96 delegates are appointed by the government and represent regions, functional groups, and political parties in proportions to the result of general elections. The idea of group deliberations and group wisdom and its exclusions will be seen in other segments of society in the next two sections.

Sila Five is an equity principle that ideally surfaces in fair judicial treatment but is more readily seen in the elementary school system. The multilingual nature of Indonesia is preserved as students in grades 1-3 receive instruction in their native tongue while they learn the national language Bahasa Indonesia, which becomes an instructional tool after grade three. This equity concept protects

cultural diversity as long as that diversity synchronizes with nationalism in Sila Three. Established as a free and sovereign state, Indonesia's symbolic shield contains the coat of arms, is supported by the Garuda, the golden eagle of Indonesian mythology, and bears the motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," unity in diversity.

Some critics have qualified the motto. As noted by Legge (1980), "The republic's motto...has so far expressed an aspiration rather than a solid reality" (p. 3). That aspiration is possible because the fundamental factor in the success of Pancasila is that its principles are found in traditional Javanese culture and have long been a part of Indonesian thought.

Other Sources of Values

According to Darmaputera (1982), there are three layers forming the traditional system of values in Indonesia:

1. Indigenous layer (common people of indigenous origin), giving rise to the Abangan tradition.
2. Indic layer (the Priyayi or upper class), a sophisticated culture and the philosophy of Hinduism.
3. Islamic layer (Moslems, the Santri), devoutly religious and the trading elements of the society.

Among the elements of the Abangan tradition are "desa" or "Kampung," small villages based on wet rice cultivation with basic values of "musyawarah," or people participating in decision-making in the "desa." Another influential value is "gotong-royong," or voluntary, spontaneous and active cooperative spirit. These three layers existed prior to Western intervention, which served as a unifying element on territory, but did not substantially affect social structures. In comparison, it appears that contemporary Indonesian political nonalignment neither fully accepts nor rejects Western influence.

Considering the geographic dispersal of Indonesia and its ethnic diversity, one might ask whether it is possible to speak of an Indonesian culture. Darmaputera contends that the Javanese culture is the primary "common culture of Indonesia" (1982, p. 302).

Wayang mythologies, the famous "shadow puppet" plays based on the Ramayana, contribute other sets of values:

- Wisdom always comes from experience;
- Change is possible, but one cannot change one's destiny;
- Duties of office are predetermined and one must accept them and act accordingly;
- Everything has its own place in the universe according to one's status and morality. One must do what is appropriate and avoid that which is inappropriate;
- People should know their place and task.

"Slametan," a neighborhood feast or celebration, adds another dimension which stresses that differences are a reality of life and must be accepted; thus, broad mindedness and tolerance are highly cherished values. Differences are

allowed and tolerated so long as they do not disturb the harmony of the whole.

The general thrust of Javanese society is to stress unity, balance, and harmony. There is recognition that all spheres of human life are interconnected and the preservation of harmony is essential. This is manifested in "neither-nor" approaches to conflict in contrast to Western confrontational style, which stresses an "either-or" approach. The Western idea of making a choice either for this or that and rejecting other alternatives is anathema to the Indonesia mentality.

In essence, there is an effort to accept all elements of truth and, if possible, to synthesize them. Self-restraint and winning without defeating are emphasized. One's values will not be forced upon others; others should not use force to impose their values. Indonesians demonstrate a remarkable confidence in their own uniqueness and ability to solve problems in their own way. In the concept of "cocok," to fit, they recognize that harmony is disturbed by change and they prefer orderly, gradual development. Abrupt change is simply not acceptable. For the Javanese, the problem of life is to live it as best as one possibly can. They implicitly believe in the concept of "narima," patience, endurance and perseverance, and "aja kesusu," do not rush. To rush is "kasar," crude or coarse, not "alus," refined. Such beliefs manifest themselves in "jam karet," rubber time, which is recognition that everything will happen in due time. There is belief in the continuity of history, a deep sense of continuity and orientation to the past. The significance of these values is that they serve as the basis for Pancasila.

Implications for Daily Living

It is an established maxim that an individual living and working in a foreign context must behave in a manner consonant with the norms of that culture. As a generalized proposition, this message can be intellectually understood and accepted by the expatriate. Yet achieving such consonancy can become a troublesome task.

The respect for all religion that is implied in Sila One results in a calendar full of religious holidays. Although some business may be conducted on any of the holidays, there generally is a slowdown in all activities regardless of the religion that is celebrated. A mixture of holidays reflecting a spectrum of religions can also produce religious sympathizers, those who do not belong to a religion, but participate in its holiday spirit. This is most commonly noted in Puasa (Ramadhan), the fasting month for Muslims. Sympathizers may fast with their Muslim friends since friendship and community spirit are often valued over the individual. Puasa and its culmination in the feasting day of Lebaran (Idul Fitri) have an impact on Indonesian business and social activities for a month or more. Fasting from sunrise to sunset in a tropical climate exacts a toll of fatigue and lack of activity. Although this is a time for purifying one's attitudes towards others, fasting, lack of sleep, and financial distress (prices rise during this time) can induce stressful reactions. Traffic jams and lack of normally available services mark the first day of Idul Fitri when relatives travel to visit, pay respects, and ask forgiveness for the past year's transgressions from elders in their families. This whole period is

both carefree and hectic with low work productivity. A good rule of thumb is that foreigners should never speak negatively about religions, Indonesian culture, or government since these are protected under Pancasila.

Humanitarianism in Sila Two may jolt a Westerner into introspection. Talks and negotiations with Indonesians may occur with bright-eyed, open-mindedness by both parties and although some agreement may be made to pursue plans, those plans may never materialize. What may appear to be a passive-resistance technique is Indonesian courtesy. Foreigners are easily tolerated and often invited to participate. An invitation to a home "some time" or other unfulfilled promises are not initially issued falsities, but rather a strike for harmony as the Indonesian says things that will offer pleasure to the foreigner. This may be viewed as a type of hedging, but the idea of hedging has larger dimensions where such apparently simple things as class schedules or regularized meetings are not published; they occur on the basis of oral communication. Foreigners expecting to attend such meetings may not be notified or be notified very late. Again, it is a type of courtesy.

This courtesy involves community mores, respect for elders, and people in power. Those who do not hold those positions willingly submit to a type of beck and call by those who do. It is not uncommon for meetings to start late with the most important person arriving last and having command over the length of the meeting and social graces of attendance such as when to sit, drink, or eat.

At times, the concept of nationalism can interrupt business. Required P4 seminars (Pancasila courses) drew government officials away from their posts for two weeks, which caused some disturbance in all segments of community life.

Wisdom in deliberation in Sila Four as shown in government structures has its origins in local communities, villages, kampungs, families, and neighborhoods. The community, which knows best, comes first and an independent individual only second. Being different from others makes a person "malu," ashamed. And making someone else "malu" in front of others is highly disapproved. Within the family, younger people defer to their elders, evidenced in the popular saying "asal bapak senang," whatever makes the father happy. Community decisions are made through "musyawarah" and "mufakat," by discussion and consensus. This ultimately ends in the custom of mutual assistance seen in every aspect of daily life. Indonesians help each other with chores, school work, etc. and prefer to be part of a group. Group spirit means simple things like shopping with friends rather than alone and results in a tight social space, friends holding hands, leaning on each other, speaking and acting within close physical range of one another.

Social justice in Sila Five may not seem apparent with some people overemployed, and others underemployed and unemployed. As noted in *The World Bank Report* (1985), the richest 10% of Indonesians receive 40.7% of the national income while the poorest 40% receive 17.3%. But people are aware of their status and often do not try to change it since that would be presumptuous and tempt fate.

Harmony can be achieved only by maintaining secular cultures under their community deliberations and under a unity from the national government.

The idea of these individual societies making one, big, happy family has tempted some to new aspirations induced by increased education and dreams of larger incomes. Often, those who seek city jobs as household staff maintain a dual existence. Spouses and sometimes children are left in the village as recipients of income derived from the city worker.

Implications for the Educational System

Pancasila is a cornerstone of the educational system of Indonesia. Curricula in elementary and secondary schools include Pancasila Moral Education. Beginning in 1978, the New Order Government of President Suharto accented Pancasila as a sustaining and supportive force of harmony and cyclical time through P4 courses, translated as "Upgrading Course on the Directives for Realization and Implementation of Pancasila." All civil servants below the rank of cabinet member were required to attend two week compulsory courses. Also required to take the courses were all Indonesian students planning to study abroad. According to Morfit (1986), other groups found it advisable or prudent to organize their own Pancasila courses, and the government let it be known that it intended to extend the courses to "diverse functional and political groups of the society." Then, in 1982, President Suharto stated that all mass organizations would be required to accept Pancasila as their single basic principle.

Isman (1986) reports that lately there has been a strong effort to relate education to development needs. Considerable debate has gone on about economic policies and the kind of economic system which is appropriate for Indonesia. Pancasila has been a key element of this debate with focus upon Indonesia aiming for a Pancasila economy as it aims for a Pancasila democracy. Also there has been continuing discussion of the government's plans to rewrite school textbooks which deal with Pancasila. The role of Pancasila Moral Education has also been the focus of national concern. Morfit (1986) concludes that the New Order Government is committed to the concept of national development which envisions no fundamental change in the social order.

Conclusion

The effectiveness of Pancasila stems from its reflection of indigenous values making it the main contemporary factor in maintaining both the unity and diversity in Indonesia. Westerners seeking consonance among the diversity will experience a common denominator espoused as the pursuit for harmony and unity within cyclical time. Pancasila provides the umbrella for the continuation of such values as tolerance, patience and endurance.

References

Darmaputera, E. (1982). *Pancasila and the search for identity and modernity in Indonesian society: A cultural and ethical analysis.* Newton Center, MA: Boston College and Andover Newton Theological School.

Isman, J. (1986). *Recent trends and issues in Indonesian education.* (Monograph). Washington, D.C.: Education and Cultural Division, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia.

Legge, J.D. (1980). *Indonesia: Unity in diversity* (p. 3). Australia: Prentice Hall.

Levine R. & Wolff, E. (1983). Social time: The heartbeat of culture. *Psychology Today*, March, 32.

Morfit, M. (1981). Pancasila: The Indonesian state ideology according to the new order government. *Asian Survey, 21*, 843.

Morfit, M. (1986). *Pancasila: Orthodoxy and the New Order Government.* (unpublished paper).

Phillips, R.D. & Owens, L.D. (1986). The transfer of teaching and classroom observation skills across cultures: A case study from Indonesia. *International Journal of Educational Development, 6*, 227.

Phillips, R.D. & Owens, L.D. (1986). The Indonesians. *Asiaweek, 12*, 30.