# The Mandala Culture of Anarchy: The Pre-Colonial Southeast Asian International Society

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**Abstract**

*Throughout the years, study on pre-colonial Southeast Asian international relations has not garnered major attention because it had long been seen as an integral part of the China-centred tribute system. There is a need to provide greater understanding of the uniqueness of the international system as different regions have different ontologies to comprehend its dynamics and structures. This paper contributes to the pre-colonial Southeast Asian literature by examining the interplay that had existed between pre-colonial Southeast Asian empires and the hierarchical East Asian international society, in particular during the 13th-16th Century. The paper argues that Southeast Asian international relations in pre-colonial time were characterized by complex political structures with the influence of Mandala values. In that structural context, the Majapahit Empire, one of the biggest empires at that time had its own constitutional structures of an international society, albeit still sought close relations with China.*

Keywords: Pre-Colonial History, Southeast Asia, Mandala, Tributary System

## Introduction

Throughout the years, study on pre-colonial Southeast Asian international relations has not garnered major attention because it had long been seen as an integral part of the China-centred tribute system. Moreover, Southeast Asia has often been regarded as a political "backwater" compared to East Asia because Southeast Asia as a region is seen as relatively "passive", always subjected to the influence of great powers (PengEr & Teo 2012, p.2). It is often said that under the Chinese hierarchical order, Asian international relations was seen as stable and regional order had been achieved until the arrival of the Western powers in the 19th Century (Kang 2007). However, pre-colonial Southeast Asian countries were far from peaceful and stable under the tribute system. Fierce competition for survival and domination had characterized the balance of power politics throughout the pre-colonial era (Shu 2012b, p. 46).

For that reason, there is a need to provide greater understanding of the uniqueness of the international system as different regions have different ontologies to comprehend its dynamics and structures. This paper contributes to the pre-colonial Southeast Asian literature by examining the interplay that had existed between pre-colonial Southeast Asian empires and the hierarchical East Asian international society, in particular during the 13th-16th Century. The paper draws a boundary from Kang's (2007) and Suzuki's (2009) article

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that too much focus on the centrality of China-dominated regional hierarchy. Nevertheless, both articles are used to understand the nature of China's hegemonic presence in pre-colonial Southeast Asia.

The paper argues that Southeast Asian international relations in pre-colonial time were characterized by complex political structures with the influence of *Mandala* values. In that structural context, the *Majapahit* Empire, one of the biggest empires at that time had its own constitutional structures of an international society, albeit still sought close relations with China. Therefore, the paper debates the nature of hierarchical China's tributary system in pre-colonial Southeast Asia. In policy terms, the findings of the article indicate that the interactive dynamics within the subsidiary system created norms that are rooted in what Rother (2012) calls as 'the cultural memory of a region'. This helps to explain, for example the conduct of foreign policy in the Southeast Asia.

The method of this paper is cross-disciplinary studies which combine the finding of area studies and international relations theory to provide a deeper understanding of the process of socialization and mutual adaptation between the Southeast Asian and the East Asia international society. The term international society used in the article refers to Bull & Watson (1984) understanding of international system which is a society of state that is built upon inter-subjectivity through common interests and common values. This society bound themselves by a common set of rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations. Furthermore, detailed analysis of pre-colonial Southeast Asian international relations is elaborated using Reus Smit's three normative beliefs of constitutional structures of an international society (1999). These three normative beliefs are the 'moral purpose of state', the 'organizing principle of sovereignty', and the 'norm of procedural justice'.

The rest of the paper is organized in the following way. The next part elaborates some theoretical grounding to be used in the analysis. The comparative investigation of Kang's and Suzuki's article is the starting point to analyse the complex political structure that existed in the East Asian international society and further added with Wendt's conception of anarchy. The second part discusses some essential characteristics and the constitutional structure of the *Majapahit* Empire. The third part explores the interaction between the *Majapahit* Empire and hierarchical East Asian international society. The focus is to highlight the international structures that existed and how those structures shape the relationship between the *Majapahit* Empire and the China's tributary system. Lastly, the paper concludes with a summary of the main findings and discusses the implication of the study.

## Anarchy, Hierarchy and the East Asian International Society

Anarchy is a crucial yet highly contentious concept in international relations. In its formal sense, Anarchy means that there is no supreme authority above states. In the classical texts of international relations theory, anarchy is often became the central theoretical debate. On the one hand are proponents of the realist theory who accept the condition of anarchy but argue that this does not necessarily preclude order, society, and community beyond the nation state. The other hand are liberalists who assert that anarchy is incompatible with order and the realization is only possible once anarchy is replaced by governance of one sort of another (Evans & Newnham 1998, p. 19).

In the development stage of the debate, Kenneth Waltz with his influential Theory of International Politics employed anarchy and power as central analytical concepts to the balance of power theory. Waltz (1979) argued that the international system functions like a market which is 'interposed between the economic actors and the results they produce. It conditions their calculations, their behaviour and their interactions' (pp. 90-91). By this, Waltz asserted that it is 'structure' that shapes and constrains the political relationship of the component units. In an anarchical world, states need to rely only on self-help and balance of power is created through balancing behaviour by weaker states towards the potential hegemon (Shu 2012a, p. 4). Moreover, Waltz and other neorealist proponents have sought to contrast the concept of anarchy with the idea of hierarchy. According to neorealist, because the system is anarchy it cannot be a hierarchy (Evans & Newnham 1998, p. 224).

Several IR scholars have made surpassing arguments to reject the exclusiveness of anarchy and hierarchy. For example, Lake (2009) uses the notion of 'degrees of hierarchy' along a single-dimensional continuum between total anarchy and complete hierarchy to identify different forms of hierarchical relations. However, not many scholars have specifically examined the relationship between anarchy and hierarchy from an Asian international relations' perspective. David Kang (2007) and Shogo Suzuki (2009) are among those who have analysed from an Asian perspective.

Kang's (2007) article explains that Asian international relations have historically been hierarchical order under Chinese domination prior to the intervention of Western powers (p. 164). Nevertheless, it was the hierarchical order that had created stability in the region as there was no evidence of external balancing or other coordinated efforts to constrain China. Kang derives the hierarchic model from assumptions that states are the main unit of analysis and anarchy is the prevailing condition for international system. Although he draws on his argument from realist assumptions, Kang rejects the neo-realist notion that 'hierarchy' cannot coexist with anarchy in the international system, and instead uses 'hierarchy' as "shorthand for unequal relations amongst states, but short of hegemony or empire" (Goh 2009, p. 107). In short, Kang tries to combine the logic of anarchy and hierarchy in the sense of realist understanding.

The main premise for Kang's argument is that the region more comfortable with a strong China because of "the cultural prominence of Confucianism, the disparity in economic and military strength, and the long-standing influences of the tribute system" (Kang 2010). In contrast with neo-realist that emphasizes balancing against the predominant power, Kang believes that lesser states will most likely bandwagon for profit (Kang 2007, p. 167). Some of the benefits are security protection, bigger opportunities for market and trade, and external arbitration. The hierarchical order itself is preserved through a combination of benefits and sanctions that the central power provides to the lesser power.

Kang's article provides a new analytical framework for Asian international relations. His elaboration shows that Eurocentric's international relations theories "do poor jobs as they are applied to Asia" (Rother 2012, p. 53). Nonetheless, his conclusion with the focus on *bandwagoning* and the absence of *balancing* in Asian international relations is not convincing and tends to be reductionist realism (Rother 2012, p. 53). Kang's claim neglected the fact that Southeast Asia as part of the China's tribute system was also dominated by competition for survival and domination throughout the pre-colonial time (Lieberman 1993).

Furthermore, states are in no position to choose black and white between balancing and *bandwagoning*. In the real world, states opt for other options such as hedging, containment, neutrality, engagement, and non-alignment. Therefore, Kang's argument is not able to decode the complexity of interaction between the pre-colonial Southeast Asian and the Chinese empires.

Shogo Suzuki's (2009) article tries to elaborate more deeply in the East Asian international society. It helps to comprehend the complexity of the deep constitutive values that define the social identity of the state and brings discursive mechanism that link intersubjective ideas of legitimate statehood and rightful state action to the constitution of fundamental institution.

In elaborating his arguments, Suzuki adopts Hedley Bull's view on international system. Bull asserted that international system is a society of states and this society is built upon inter-subjectivity through common interests and common values which they bound themselves by a common set of rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations (Bull & Watson 1984). Any given international system does not exist because of unchallengeable structures, but rather "the very structures are dependent for their reproduction on the practices of the actors" (Koslowski & Kratochwil 1994, p. 216). Therefore, Suzuki recognizes that the identity of state is grounded in a larger complex of values and these values provide states with substantive reasons for action.

Suzuki accepts the notion of hierarchical order in the East Asian international society. However, quite different from Kang's arguments, Suzuki uses Reus-Smit's (1999) conceptualization of 'the constitutional structure of international society' to help understand the dynamics of interaction in the East Asian international society. Reus Smit offers three primary normative elements that constitute the structure of international society, which are:

1) *A hegemonic belief about the moral purpose of centralized, autonomous political organization*. Such purposes are "moral" because they always entail a conception of the individual or social "good" served by autonomous political organization, and are "hegemonic" because they constitute the prevailing, socially sanctioned justification for sovereign rights.
2) *An organizing principle of sovereignty* that differentiates political units on the basis of particularity and exclusivity, creating a system of territorially demarcated.
3) 3) *A norm of procedural justice*. These norms specify the correct procedures that "legitimate" or "good" states employ, internally and externally, to formulate basic rules of internal and external conduct. (Reus Smit 1999, pp. 30-33)

Grounding on Reus Smit's three normative belief, Suzuki explains that the 'moral purpose of the state' within the East Asian international society was derived from Confucianism that aimed "the support and maintenance of the moral, social, and cultural order of social peace and harmony" (Suzuki 2009, p. 34). As a consequence, the justificatory foundations for the principle of sovereignty within the order were to maintain the social hierarchy that would promote cosmic harmony. Moreover, drawing his analysis from the time of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911), Suzuki (2009) claims that the systemic norm of procedural justice were the Tribute System that prescribed 'rightful' state action (p. 37-38).

Both Kang's and Suzuki's article are giving insights into an Asian international relations. Nevertheless, the position of other non-Chinese states within the hierarchical order has not been really elaborated. In Suzuki's (2009) article, he admits that the

position of non-Chinese states depended on the degree to which the Chinese judged them to have been assimilated into Chinese culture and their geographical proximity to China (pp. 37-38). Hence, it is necessary to explores pre-colonial Southeast Asia as there are evidences of interactive dynamics that constitute international structure within that region.

Having been comparing and contrasting Kang's and Suzuki's article, this paper tries to synthesize their arguments to understand the dynamic of interaction between the pre-colonial Southeast Asian Empires and the hierarchical East Asian international society. The paper explores the pre-colonial Southeast Asian empires using Reus Smit's three normative beliefs of constitutional structure and draws on Wendtian constructivism to explain the logic of anarchy that shaping the interaction.

Wendt (1992) makes his famous claim on the logic of anarchy that 'anarchy is what states make of it'. He asserts that the absence of hierarchic authority in the international system does not inevitably equate to perpetual interstate conflict in a self-help environment, as neo-realists contend. Moreover, Wendt argues that anarchy is only a permissive cause of conflict and not an efficient cause.

In relation to Kang's article, Wendt is taking different position as he argues that it is the social and ideational, rather than material aspect of international politics which determines how actors behave. Furthermore, Wendt also asserts that states have the ability to transform the social structure within which they operate. From this understanding, Wendt creates the concept of 'culture of anarchy' which is the bodies of norms and institutions that make up an international social structure (Flawith 2011, p.266).

Wendt argues that there are at least three configurations that the international society may take, the '*Hobbesian'*, *'Lockean'*, and, '*Kantian'* anarchies. A *Hobbesian* anarchy refers to the true 'self-help' system where there are constant existential threats of warfare between states (Wendt 1999, pp. 259-260). *Lockean* anarchy is characterised by a rivalry and as a consequence, states will form 'status-quoism' towards each other. Moreover, violence is recognised as a legitimate way to settle disagreements and warfare is one way to form a balance of power (Wendt 1999, pp. 279). Whereas *Kantian* anarchy is the most cooperative culture of anarchy in which states identify the other as friends and collective security is the dominant norm (Wendt 1999, p. 297). However, these three configurations are not mutually exclusive. As Rother pointed out, in the above Wendt's argument, there are still rooms for different configurations based on different identities because states have the ability to transform the social structure within which they operate (Rother 2012, p. 57)

Before elaborating the dynamics of interaction between the two regions, there has to be an understanding of what constitute the pre-colonial Southeast Asian international structures in which is discussed in the following section.

## The *Majapahit* Empire and The Southeast Asian International Society

In the course of Asian studies prior to the European intrusion in the Indian archipelago in mid-19th Century, the traditional international order is often considered consisted of civilized (China) and barbarians (Southeast Asian states). As Kang (2007) points out in his article, the Chinese emperor required the barbarians to demonstrate formal obedience in the form of *kowtow* in order not to be invaded (p. 169). In Kang's view, Southeast Asia was a peripheral region, a part of the "rim land". The minimal role of Southeast Asia

continued to play until well into the twentieth century where both the US and the Soviet Union, superpowers at that time, were vitally interested in the politics and the economic potential of the region.

Despite very few studies have specifically examined pre-colonial Southeast Asian region from an IR perspective, this region was in fact interesting to examine due to its unique structures. The Southeast Asian region is not a unit in the religious, historical, geographical, or ethnic senses. There are at least four different religions in Southeast Asia, which are Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Historically, the whole Southeast Asia never came under the rule of a single state or empire. On the mainland, the Khmers created a large empire, which at its height in the 9th to the 13th Centuries embraced the region from Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam (SarDesai 2010, p. 2). There were other large polities in pre-colonial Southeast Asia, but they did not cover the entire region. However, during the golden era of the *Majapahit* Empire notably under the Prime Minister, Gajah Mada (1331-1364), large area of Southeast Asia was under the *Majapahit* Empire.

Therefore, in the pre-colonial Southeast Asia era, the greatness of the *Majapahit* Empire could not be neglected. The *Majapahit,* literally means the bitter fruit, was an empire of 98 tributaries stretching from Sumatra to New Guinea which consists of present day Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Southern Thailand, the Philippines, and East Timor (SarDesai 2010). Moreover, the capital of *Majapahit* was situated in Trowulan, East Java. It was one of the last major empires of the region and considered to be one of the greatest and most powerful empires in the history of Southeast Asia due to its political, economic, and social influences.

Scholars who study the *Majapahit* Empire are mostly interested in the course of history, the matter of structure, foreign relations, and how the *Majapahit* shape international relations in the region unfortunately have been neglected for many decades. In this part, an attempt has been made to examine the structure of the *Majapahit,* the type of order, and the sources of legitimacy that bounded the empire.

The constitutional structures of the Southeast Asian international society were primarily derived from ancient Indian political discourse based on the book of *Arthasastra* by Mauryan Chief Minister, Kautilya in the 4th Century (Boesche 2003, p. 9). Furthermore, Kautilya's concept, the *Mandala* was then adopted by Wolters (1968) to denote pre-colonial Southeast Asian political formations. The regional system was built of larger political unit, in which the dependencies preserved a great deal of internal autonomy in exchange for acknowledging the pole's spiritual authority (Gesick 1983, p. 3). Southeast Asian polities did not conform to the Chinese view as the polity defined by its centre rather than its boundaries, and it could be composed of numerous other tributary polities without undergoing administrative integration (Dellios 2003).

The *Mandala* displayed the cosmopological characteristics of Hindu-Buddhist persuasion prior to the expansion of European international society. *Mandala* is a Sanskrit word for 'sacred circle' in which humans become 'centred' and diffuse that state of being outwards into action (Grey 2001, p. 2). Therefore, the *Mandala* highlights the importance of charismatic leadership in a political system that fluctuates. Moreover, whoever can claim the centre of this system, can claim the title of universal emperor, 'the *cakravartin'*.

The *Mandala* in its sacred dimensions is a centring device for spiritual purposes. When this idea was applied to the political

field within religiously oriented society, it permits a political leader to claim a degree of divinity. Such was the case in the *Majapahit* Empire, particularly when its Prime Minister Gajah Mada took his famous oath 'SumpahPalapa'. Gajah Mada said that he would not taste "palapa" (fruits / spices) until he could unify external territories under the *Majapahit* (Purwadi 2004, p. 157). It can be seen that Gajah Mada's oath was based on the *Mandala* philosophy that requires recognition of the emptiness. The notion of centre consisted of power that is personal and devotional rather than institutional. It was the ability of Gajah Mada to tap into 'cosmic power' through virtuous behaviour that created the power of conquest. Thus, Gajah Mada represented the charismatic centre of a *Mandala* and is considered a person of 'prowess' (Wolters 1968, pp. 94-95).

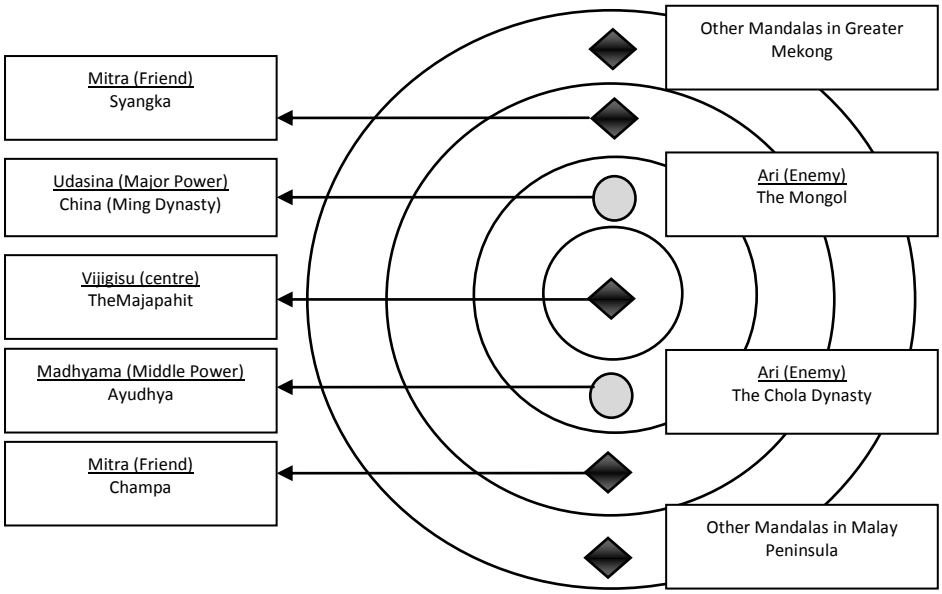
With the *Mandala* being a significant tradition of knowledge in pre-colonial Southeast Asia, the fundamental interests of states, the *Majapahit* and other polities became those of enhancing and protecting the society and its values. The *Mandala* became the moral purpose of the *Majapahit* that spoke universality through moral conquest (Dellios 2003).

The organizing principle of sovereignty within the Southeast Asian international society was thus along the networks of loyalties. The *Majapahit* integrated vertically with the divinity as well as horizontally across a territory of people, land, and resources organised in the form of 'vassal loyalties' (Tucci 1961, p. 25). In regards to this, the principle was applied in the geopolitical term. Geopolitical *Mandala*, as mentioned by Kautilya was about how the *cakravartin* being able to deploy his friends to contain his enemies. As such, the *Mandala* consists of circles of *mitra* (friends), *ari* (enemies), *madhyama*(medium power) and *udasina* (major powers) with the *Vijigisu*as the centre.

In relations to this concentric circle, the *Majapahit* foreign relations also adopted the geopolitical of Mandala. The *Majapahit*created its concentric circle, defining its *mitra, ari, madhyama,* and, *udasina. Nagarakretagama* book by the poet Prapanca noted there were several neighbouring foreign polities that in friendly terms with the *Majapahit,* among those were Syangka, Ayudhya (Siam), Rajapura, Champa, Kamboja and Yawana (Slametmuljana 2006).

Three important friendly polities of the *Majapahit*, Champa, Syangka, and Ayudhya are worth to be observed. The *Majapahit*attempted to build a friendly relations with the Champa in particular because the Champa was perceived as rear-friend of the *Majapahit* as it had also refused to allow the Mongol to use its harbor for embarking logistics during the great invasion of Kublai Khan upon Java in the end of 13th Century. The similar case applied to the Syangka that had been seen opposed the Chola's domination in Indian sub-continent, in which the *Majapahit*also refused to accept. The *Majapahit* maintained a good relations with the Syangka because it adopted the doctrine "my enemy's enemy is my friend". While for the Ayudhya, the *Majapahit* maintained relations with the Ayudhya because it had established over the populations of the Central Indo Chinese Peninsula where there was no record of the influence of the Majapahit Empire (Slametmuljana 1976, pp. 144-146). The observation shows that in the first two cases, the *Majapahit* tried to assure that his *ari*(The Mongol and Chola) was accordingly counterbalanced by his *mitra*(the Champa and Syangka). Whereas the latter case shows that the *Majapahit* foreign relations also tried to accommodate the interests of its empire as well as the *madhyama* (the Ayudhya).The following diagram tries to illustrate the way geopolitical Mandala being contextualize by the *Majapahit*:

**Diagram 1. The *Majapahit's* Geopolitical *Mandala***




Adopted from Rosita Dellios' (2003) description of the statal circle

The third normative belief, which is the systemic norms of procedural justice, laid in the conduct of diplomacy within the structures. There were two distinguished forms of diplomacy that the *Majapahit* exercised, which were through small tributary system and marriage. The tributary system, although it was a small annual tribute, had a role as a 'ritual justice' within the Southeast Asian international society. The *Majapahit* required only a small amount of tribute from the ruler of any country to be recognized as the *Majapahit's* suzerainty and to be classified as a 'dependency' (Slametmuljana 1976, p. 136). By giving a small tribute, dependencies were promised effective protection against potential threats. However, unlike the China's tribute system, the *Majapahit's* dependencies were required to make substantive contribution to the wealth of their suzerain (Shu 2012b, 50). To be more specific, the highly regarded substantive contribution was to present valuable local products as their tributes annually.

The other form of diplomacy was forming alliance through marriage. One prominent example of this was when Hayam Wuruk, the *Majapahit's* king during its golden era, decided to marry a princess of Sunda named DyahPitaloka as an effort to obtain the Kingdom of *Sunda* in 1357. Unfortunately, the effort failed because of the *Maharaja* of *Sunda* rejected Gajah Mada's request to delineate the marriage as a tribute to the *Majapahit.*

From the above exploration of the constitutional structures of Southeast Asian international society with the Majapahit as a focus, one remaining question lies: "how did the structures shape the *Majapahit*'s interaction with the East Asian international society?" The next part discusses how the *Majapahit* identities informed fundamental

interest in its interaction with the China's tributary system and its implication to the anarchy-hierarchy understanding within the region.

## The *Majapahit* and the China's Tributary System: The *Mandala* Culture of Anarchy

The previous part has informed that the pre-colonial Southeast Asian international society had different constitutional structures to the East Asian. There was also a Southeast Asian Empire, the *Majapahit* that ruled over large area of Southeast Asia. The interaction between the Chinese empire and pre-colonial Southeast Asian polities was relatively limited in the early imperial period. The historical interactions of China and pre-colonial Southeast Asia were started from 6th Century onwards, predominantly constructed by merchants, traders, and missionaries passing through the region (PengEr & Teo 2012, p. 4).

Trade in the form of tributary system was therefore the dominant practices in the interaction. The narrative of the Chinese world order has been grand to examine the pattern of interaction. It has been said that the vassal states had to pay tribute to the Chinese Emperor confirming the superiority of the Chinese culture and civilization (PengEr & Teo 2012, p. 5).

Having examined the different constitutional structures of Southeast Asian international society, this section debates the nature of the act of paying tribute to the Chinese Emperor. The tribute was actually the practice of 'trade strategy' for a better market access to the major Kingdoms in East Asia, rather than acknowledgement of their superiority. It debates Kang's (2010) argument that China for most of the time had been culturally, economically, and military dominated the region. Moreover, the paper also debates Shu's (2012a) argument that Southeast Asian polities were keen to be involved in the hierarchical East Asian international society to seek imperial recognition (Shu 2012a, p. 15-16). The *Majapahit* apparently did not seek recognition when it "paid" tribute to the Chinese emperor as many scholars have suggested.

From the interpretation of its geopolitical *Mandala,* the *Majapahit* was always perceived its interaction with the Chinese Empire as engaging with the *udasina*(major powers) in order to build a favourable regional architecture. It is without doubt that the *Majapahit*had regularly dispatched its own envoys to the Ming Dynasty, but it was carried out to manage the constantly changing and evolving regional challenges (Pramono 2010). Moreover, the fundamental interest of the *Majapahit* was to benefit from the highly profitable trade, to open access to the China's market and products.

Furthermore, unlike Suzuki's (2009) claim that the lesser states never challenged the *constitutive norms* of the order (p. 35), the *Majapahit* had challenged the system several times. For instance, when the Ming envoy went to Brunei in 1370 to demand the polity to acknowledge the Chinese power for a return of full protection (Laichen 2010, 46), The *Majapahit* soon warned the Brunei not to pay tribute to China. Had the *Majapahit* was considered itself to be in the same structure with the hierarchical East Asian international society, the *Majapahit* would not have interfered to the Ming Envoy's request.

Furthermore, the immediate reaction from the *Majapahit* was because Brunei had been one of the vassal polities of the *Majapahit.* Hence, Brunei conformed to the *Majapahit*order and thus only sent one mission to China and continued to pay annual tribute to the *Majapahit*(Wang 1968, p. 51). The best analysis on why Brunei decided to act in favour of the *Majapahit*was because the geopolitical *Mandala* made

Southeast Asian polities to perceive their intensified security threats came from their neighbours, rather than from China. At that time, Brunei saw the *Majapahit*as the one that could give better protection than anyone else.

The other analysis for Brunei behaviour can be scrutinized by examining the different values and norms that both the Brunei and the China held. Confucianism was of little significance to the pre-colonial Southeast Asian polities. As Wolters (1999) points out, most of the pre-colonial Southeast Asian Empires practiced the *Mandala's* knowledge. Due to lack of shared cultural understanding and a common value system, China's intention towards Brunei was misunderstood and resisted (Shu 2012b, pp. 50-51). China, therefore, had failed to generate desired outcomes on pre-colonial Southeast Asia.

Nonetheless, there had also been several moves from China to balance the power of the *Majapahit*in the region. One example was when the Ming Dynasty created new alignments of power in pre-colonial Southeast Asia with the Kingdom of Melaka in the 15th Century. The move had great effects on the political topography as the support provide by the Ming helped Melaka to experience a rapid rise during the early of 15th Century (Wade 2010, p. 31). The rise of Melaka, which was an Islamic Kingdom, squeezed the *Majapahit*influence in the first quarter of the 16th Century (SarDesai 2010, pp. 53-54).

As the *Majapahit*declined because of its bad governance following the demise of Prime Minister Gajah Mada and the death of the charismatic leader HayamWuruk in 1389, the Chinese trading fleets started to dominate most of the trading activities in pre-colonial Southeast Asia. As Reid suggested, it was the starting point for the 'Age of Commerce' to emerge in the region, introducing spices to the world (Wade 2010, p. 4).

The dynamic interactions between the pre-colonial Southeast Asian Empire with the China's tributary system have enlightened the nature of order in pre-colonial Southeast Asian region. The above exploration demonstrates that hierarchical China's tributary system was not embedded in pre-colonial Southeast Asian region. As suggested above, the relations between the *Majapahit*and Chinese Empires in particular the Ming Dynasty was merely trade relations and the *Majapahit*did not consent to the hierarchical China's tributary system. In regards to the pre-colonial Southeast Asian region, the hierarchical structure of East Asian international society came to be replaced by the geopolitical *Mandala.* The *Majapahit*transformed the social structure within which it operate under the logic of *Mandala.* Therefore, adopting Wendt's famous quote, '*hierarchical tributary system is what Chinese Empires made of it*'.

Furthermore, the pre-colonial Southeast Asian international society had been defining its own approaches to the cultures of anarchy. The pre-colonial Southeast Asian international society positioned its logic of anarchy in between the *Lockean*rivalry and the *Kantian* peace. There were still rivalries in the region as the *Majapahit*had been striving for the 'centrality' of its political position in the regional political landscape. However, the principal way to form a balance of power was not through warfare but instead through cooperation. The geopolitical *Mandala* advised that strategic grouping, manifested in deploying as many friends for the *vijigisu*remains vital in preserving peace, common stability, and common security. From this understanding, states and norms in the pre-colonial Southeast Asian international society had worked to produce their own logic of anarchy.

## Conclusion

This paper proposed a model based on area studies and IR theories to challenge the view that pre-colonial Southeast Asia had long been dominated by China under the tribute system. Many scholars have suggested that China influence through the tributary system was so prominent for both the Northeast and Southeast Asian regions. However as this paper has examined, international relations in the pre-colonial Southeast Asia featured a complex political structures. The region had developed its own culture of anarchy under the *Mandala* values.

The paper has elaborated the constitutional structures of international society in the pre-colonial Southeast Asia, drawing upon the *Majapahit* Empire. In the case ofthe pre-colonial Southeast Asian Empire, the legitimate state was expected to preserve the *Mandala* values as a sacred circle and a cosmic power. It is designed for the protection of society and its values In contrast with the Confucianism; the *Mandala* was not so much about territory, but about the relationship between the leader and his/her people. The polity was defined by its centre rather than its boundaries and it could be composed of numerous other tributary polities without undergoing administrative integration (Dellios 2003). Hence, the geopolitical *Mandala* as the organizing principle of sovereignty was materialized. The *Majapahit*maintained its relationship with other polities based on the concentric circle approach. Accordingly, the conduct of diplomacy in the form of small tributary system and building alliance through marriage occurred as the systemic norms of procedural justice.

In addition, the investigation of the pre-colonial Southeast Asian international society has help to understand the interplay between the *Majapahit* Empire and the China-centred tribute system. The paper questioned the view that pre-colonial Southeast Asian polities were willing to submit to the hierarchical order in East Asia by taking part in the China-centred tribute system. Politically, the pre-colonial Southeast Asian Empire, particularly the *Majapahit* had never been under China's control. The *Majapahit* managed to assert strategic partnership with China as the *udasina* in its geopolitical *Mandala.* Hence, the relationship was merely a trade relations with the Chinese Empire and not a form of tribute trade.

Theoretically, this paper has suggested that the Southeast Asian international society had built their own logic of anarchy based on the region ideas and culture. The - pre-colonial Southeast Asian international society had successfully implemented the *Mandala* from ancient Indian political discourse origin with the Southeast Asian elaboration, building the *Mandala* culture of anarchy that focus on cooperation.

Lastly, theory-guided historical analysis can also sheds light on the understanding of contemporary international relations. Even though there is no straight line leading from the *Majapahit* Empire to the modern day of Southeast Asia, there has to be resonances as norms are rooted in the cultural memory of a region (Rother 2012, p. 63). The geopolitical *Mandala* remains vital for Southeast Asian states in conducting their foreign policy. For instance, the priorities of Indonesian foreign policy are still determined using the concentric circle perspective. Moreover, the way ASEAN manages its regional architecture by building strategic grouping from ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6 to East Asia Summit could be the illustration of ASEAN asserting the *Mandala* culture of anarchy.

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