

Introduction

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Southeast Asia and China have lived side-by-side for centuries, and while China has never been threatened by invasions from the south as it has from the west or the north, the Southeast Asians cannot say the same. China invaded Burma several times, occupied Vietnam for nearly a 1,000 years, during the Yuan even invaded Java in what is now Indonesia. The Chinese did not establish sustained colonies as in Western imperialism, perhaps mainly because in the preindustrial era economic exploitation had not yet become rational. In the 20th century, China gave ideological and limited logistical support to National Liberation Wars in former French Indochina, also to guerrillas in Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Nepal and parts of India. The PKI in Indonesia, then the largest communist party in the free world, had very close relations to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) before the attempted coup in 1965 that resulted in its suppression by the Suharto dictatorship. Yet at the same time Southeast Asians have admired and sent tribute to China beginning with the Tang dynasty as a source of cultivation and enlightenment. During the early 15th century the Ming eunuch Zheng He led a huge and impressive fleet in seven voyages through Southeast Asia and beyond to Africa in a conspicuous display of the achievements of that civilization. Millions of Chinese have migrated to Southeast Asia, where they have played a leading role in economic modernization. As contemporary Chinese diplomats sometimes remind