

SPORT, POLITICS AND ETHNICITY:
PLAYING BADMINTON FOR INDONESIA¹

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The scholarly study of sport – in which ‘sports are viewed as cultural products that develop within sociohistorical contexts’³ -- is now well-established. However, the literature suffers from two important and related defects. One of these defects is its geographical focus. As van Bottenburg notes in his study *Global Games* the scholarly literature on sport: ‘is mainly limited to developments in the Western world. Information on the other continents is at best fragmentary, often collected in wide-ranging surveys’.⁴ In particular, relatively little has been written on sport and politics in the Asian context. South Asia is perhaps best served, for reasons which are mentioned below, but even here the coverage is slight compared with that of Europe and North America.

The second defect is that the sports which have been studied are overwhelmingly those of European/North American origin, and in which peoples from these two traditions are still dominant. Very little has been written on sports where Europeans and Americans are not dominant, or at least major participants. In part, this undoubtedly reflects the cultural and ethnic origins of most sports scholars. But there also seems to be an assumption operating here that the important sports are the

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² I gratefully acknowledge the comments made on an earlier draft of this paper by Dr Philip Moore, Department of Social Sciences, Curtin University of Technology. I have also benefited greatly from discussions with Guy Gibson, an Australian men’s badminton player who has trained with the club Suryanaga in Surabaya, and at the Indonesian National Training Centre in Jakarta. Nevertheless, I am responsible for all the errors of fact and judgement which remain.

³ Maarten van Bottenburg, *Global games*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2001, p 13

⁴ van Bottenburg, *Global games*, p 13

‘universal’ ones, and that the processes of globalisation are reinforcing their position at the expense of those with a narrower or more specific appeal. The description of the series *Sport in the Global Society* notes that:

the interest in sports studies around the world is growing and will continue to do so...[Sport] will continue to grow in importance into the new millennium as the world develops into a ‘global village’ sharing the English language, technology and sport.⁵

This series reflects this ‘global village’ idea by focusing largely – but not, admittedly, entirely – on sports created by, and dominated by, Europeans. One significant exception to this pattern is *Soccer in South Asia. Empire, Nation, Diaspora*.⁶

Van Bottenburg makes the same point when he argues:

Buoyed by Western international expansion sports spread fast to all corners of the world. Wherever traders, migrants, and colonial officials settled, they set up sports clubs in order to meet other Westerners in foreign parts, to sustain cultural ties with their mother country, and to relax after the day’s work.⁷

In the Asian context, most of the work that has been done follows this pattern by focusing on sports that derived from the Anglo-American tradition, and often in the context of the impact of colonialism on sporting practice. In South Asian sports studies, the field is dominated by games developed by and dominated by the British. Cricket and soccer of course have dominated.⁸

This combination of the neglect of Asia and of non-European dominated sports comes together in the case of Indonesia. Sport is as significant to Indonesia and Indonesians as it is to most other societies. Yet the paucity of studies of sport in Indonesia is striking. The only such scholarly studies located so far are by Pauker and Sie, focussing on the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEFO)⁹ – an episode in Indonesian history that itself hardly rates a mention in most standard histories – Adams’

⁵ See the general description of the series, edited by J A Mangan, facing the title page of Paul Dimeo and James Mills, eds, *Soccer in South Asia. Empire, Nation, Diaspora*, Frank Cass, London, 2001

⁶ Dimeo and Mills, *Soccer in South Asia*

⁷ Van Bottenburg, *Global games*, p 164

⁸ See, for instance, Dimeo and Mills and the items listed in their bibliography, especially M Bose, *The History of Indian cricket*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1990, R Cashman, *Patrons, players and the crowd: the phenomenon of Indian cricket*, Longman, Delhi, 1980 and E Docker, *History of Indian Cricket*, Macmillan, Delhi, 1977

⁹ Ewa T Pauker, ‘Ganefo I: Sport and Politics in Djakarta’, *Asian Survey*, vol 5, no 4, April 1965, pp 171-185; S Sie, ‘Sport and politics: the case of the Asian Games and the GANEFO’ in B Lowe, et al, eds, *Sports and International Relations*, Stipes, Champaign, 1978, pp 279-295

ambitious but ultimately not very successful study of sport and *Pancasila*¹⁰ and Colombijn's recent, and excellent, study of soccer.¹¹

One commentator wrote recently in *The Jakarta Post* that internationally, Indonesia was known for few things – plantation crops, corruption and badminton.¹² Yet while there are many studies of plantation crops, and many more of corruption, badminton is virtually invisible in scholarly writing on Indonesia. Cribb's excellent *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia* has no entry for badminton; indeed, no entry for sport, games, football or tennis. A search of the main histories of modern Indonesia reveals a similar lack of attention to sport generally, and badminton particularly.

Yet badminton is second only to soccer in sporting popularity in Indonesia. It is, one Indonesian commentator asserts, like football in Brazil: it is 'part of life and identity, and also a "religion".... [It] eliminates sadness, suffering, poverty, powerlessness and injustice.'¹³ Moreover, it is a game where Indonesians excel internationally – the only such game.

Colombijn concludes his study of Indonesian soccer by making 'a plea to pay more scientific attention to sport in Indonesia and to football in particular'.¹⁴ Here I want to begin to take up the first part of this plea, but using badminton rather than soccer as the exemplar.

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the role that badminton has played in Indonesia. It will focus in particular on the ethnic aspect of the sport: ethnic Chinese are represented at the top levels of the game way out of proportion to their presence in the general population. It also seeks to examine the political context of badminton, both in terms of its contribution to Indonesian nationalism and a sense of nation, and the ways in which it might have impinged on Indonesia's domestic and foreign politics.

Origins in Indonesia

It is still unclear to me when badminton began to be played in Indonesia, and the circumstances of its introduction to the archipelago.

¹⁰ Iain Adams, 'Pancasila: Sport and the building of Indonesia – ambitions and obstacles', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 19, 2-3, 2002, pp 295-318

¹¹ Freek Colombijn, 'The politics of Indonesian football', *Archipel*, 59, 2000, pp 171-199

¹² Lin Che Wei 'Prioritizing plantation bill's aim', *Jakarta Post*, 11 February 2004

¹³ Ignatius Sunito, 'Birmingham Menanti Ukiran Prestasi Bulutangkis Indonesia', *Bola Sportsline*, 18 July 2003

¹⁴ Colombijn, 'Football', p 197

The website of the PBSI, the national badminton organisation, suggests: ‘It was the activities of Dutch or Eurasian boys¹⁵ who brought the game to Indonesia, and of Indonesian students returning to Indonesia, who quickly made the game popular.’¹⁶ No evidence is offered in support of this argument, nor the names of any players offered. Further research might give weight to this argument, but for the present it is difficult to see it as being very persuasive, primarily because the evidence so far available is that in its early days the game was dominated by players of ethnic Chinese, not Dutch or indigenous Indonesian, origin.

I suspect that the key to the introduction of badminton to the archipelago lies in Medan, and the cross-Straits connections it had with Pinang and to a lesser extent Singapore.¹⁷ Ethnic Chinese clubs, by the early 1930s, seem to have been inviting badminton players from Pinang to Medan, initially to play exhibition games, but subsequently for competitions. Yan Eng Hoo, for instance, is cited as a particularly influential Pinang player who frequently visited Indonesia.¹⁸

One measure of the popularity of the game in Medan can be seen in the advertisements for badminton equipment placed by local sporting goods shops in the Medan press. A survey of *Pewarta Deli* shows that by January 1932, at least two such shops – Hari Bros and Liang You – were advertising such equipment.¹⁹ And interestingly, these advertisements frequently offered badminton sets, including six shuttlecocks, one net, two posts for the net and four rackets.²⁰ This suggests that the equipment was likely to be used for entertainment, perhaps amongst members of a family, as much as for competition.

By the mid-1930s, the game was also being played in major cities in Java including Jakarta and Bandung. One observer writes:

In the 1930s badminton also spread to various regions including Bandung (West Java), Semarang, Solo (Central Java), and Surabaya (East Java). In 1934, Central Java held a championship tournament. This speedy development of badminton was primarily the result of visits undertaken by a player from Jakarta, Oei Kok Tjoan. He visited cities in East Java on a number of occasions, raising the popularity of badminton. The game even began to penetrate the small towns such as Tuban, Bojonegoro, Malang, and Jember which soon followed

¹⁵ The phrase used is ‘sinyo-sinyo Belanda’

¹⁶ See http://www.koni.or.id/koni_pb_pbsi.htm, accessed 13 February 2004

¹⁷ Much of the discussion that follows is drawn from Max Karundeng, *Pasang surut supremasi bulu tangkis Indonesia*, Sinar Harapan, Jakarta, 1980. An essentially similar story, often told in the same words, is contained in *Perkumpulan Bulu Tangkis Tangkas: 50 tahun mencetak juara*, PB. Tangkas, Jakarta, 2001.

¹⁸ *Tangkas*, p 4. No confirmation of the existence of this player or visits to Indonesia has yet been discovered.

¹⁹ See, for instance, *Pewarta Deli* 7 January 1932 p 8 and 8 January 1932, p 7.

²⁰ See the advertisement for Hari Bros in *Pewarta Deli* 7 January 1932 p 8. The cost of the set was f.18,-

Surabaya in playing the game. The 1930s, it could be said, was the period when badminton spread through Java.²¹

It would seem that at this early stage of its history, the game in Java was also seen as being as much about entertainment as about physical exercise or participation. The game was apparently popularised through being played as entertainment at night markets (*pasar malam*) in major towns and cities: by the late 1930s, as one observer puts it: ‘there was no pasar malam [in Java] which did not stage a badminton tournament’.²²

To the extent that the game was played competitively, perhaps not surprisingly Jakarta appears to have been most organised. In the early 1930s, a group of Jakarta-based clubs formed the Bataviasche Badminton Bond; rival clubs then set up the Bataviasche Badminton League (BBL). The teams in these two groupings seem to have been primarily ethnic Chinese. The BBB for instance was, for at least part of the 1930s, under the leadership of Oh Sien Hong, and the BBL under Ong Tian Biau. These two groups were apparently in competition with each other, but were brought together around 1940 by Tjoa Seng Tiang to form the Bataviasche Badminton Unie (BBU) with headquarters at Molenvliet West (now Jl Gadjah Mada) 175.²³ Other leading members of the BBU included Ang Bock Sun, who was to continue to play a prominent role in Indonesian badminton until his death in 1985 and Lauw Tjoan Sioe.²⁴

An organisation similar to the BBB also existed in Surabaya: the Soerabaiasche Badminton Bond. I have little evidence about this organisation, though it seems to have been formed in 1936, and – like its Jakarta counter-part – had significant ethnic Chinese connections.²⁵

In Semarang, there was a Heerenstraat Badminton Club in operation by the end of the 1930s, with an active competition for both men and women. The results of a competition held in December 1939 suggest that the club was primarily for ethnic Chinese: all the winners and runners-up listed in the local newspaper were of ethnic Chinese background.²⁶

²¹ *Tangkas*, p 4

²² *Tangkas*, p 4. The term ‘night market’ does not really give an adequate picture of these events, which would have, in addition to food and produce stalls, a wide variety of entertainments. Located typically in the central square of the town and held over several days annually, they would typically include everything from theatre to displays of people with unusual physical characteristics.

²³ ‘Tjoa Seng Tiang’ in Sabaruddin Sa, *Apa & Siapa. Sejumlah orang bulutangkis Indonesia*, Jurnalindo Aksara Grafika, Jakarta, 1994, pp 343-344

²⁴ See ‘Ang Bock Sun’ and ‘Lauw Tjoan Sioe’ in *Apa & Siapa*, pp 5-6; 141-142

²⁵ I know of the existence of, but have not yet had a chance to access, *S.B.B. Creatie dari Soerabaiasche Badminton Bond, 1936-1939, [di] Gedong Hua Chiao Tsing Nien Hui, 3 Juni 1939*, SBB, Surabaya, 1939, annotated as the Jubileumnummer 3 jr. bestaan and held in the KITLV library.

²⁶ See ‘Badminton Wedstrijden’, *Locomotief*, 16 December 1939, p 9

It seems unlikely that badminton was a major game played by Dutch people. There is no mention of badminton in the *Encyclopaedia van Nederlandsche Indië*. In *Sport in Indië* (undated, but apparently published in the late 1930s), the author notes there were 20 sports associations in Java, extending from tennis, athletics and football to yachting and motor racing. Even cricket was noted, and of course golf. But badminton is not mentioned.²⁷

I still have little idea of the extent to which indigenous Indonesians were playing the game. In Medan, there seem to have been at least two clubs for indigenous players in operation by 1939: Signal Silver Badminton Party and Antara Badminton Party.²⁸ Although not entirely clear, it seems that the players were overwhelmingly, and perhaps exclusively, male. The *Pasang surut* history lists a number of players as being prominent immediately before the Japanese invasion. These included such ethnic Chinese players as Njoo Kiem Bie, Tan Po Siang, Oey Hok Tjoan, Gan Kai Ho, Then Giok Soei, Liem Soei Liong, but also indigenous Indonesians including Sudirman, Sayoto, Ali Imbran, Jasin, Kisno, Surono, Basrul Djamal and Nafsirin.²⁹ Of the latter, Sudirman was to be the most prominent, though primarily as an administrator rather than a player. Referred to frequently as the ‘father’ of Indonesian badminton, he was the first vice president of the Indonesian Badminton Federation (in 1951) and then its President for two terms, 1952-1963 and 1968-1981. He was also Vice President of the International Badminton Federation, and gave his name to the Sudirman Cup, the world mixed teams championships. In Surakarta (Solo), RMS Tri Tjondrokoesoemo established the IBIS (Ikatan Badminton Indonesia Surakarta) immediately before the Japanese occupation; under the Japanese, it continued to operate under the name Genki. Amongst its prominent players were Soerono, Busro, Suroto and Harto. Soerono was probably the most prominent of these, becoming Greater East Asia champion in 1942 and 1943. He was later a coach for the Indonesian Thomas Cup and Uber Cup teams.³⁰

The ethnic division of social life in the pre-war Indies was of course firmly established. Columbijn suggests that to some extent football bridged the ethnic divides,³¹ but there is no strong evidence that badminton did too. This seems to be illustrated with respect to the connection between badminton and the Indonesian nationalist movement.

²⁷ Jan Feith, *Sport in Indië*, van Hoeve, Deventer, nd. See, eg, pp 49-50. This book is hardly an exhaustive treatment of the subject, being intended chiefly for a juvenile audience, but if the game were played to any great extent, it is likely that it would have been mentioned.

²⁸ See *Pewarta Deli*, 4 February 1936, p 6. The names were given in English.

²⁹ *Pasang surut*, p 6. Virtually the same list, but with the addition of Kusumajadi in place of Nafsirin, is recorded in *Tangkas*, p 5.

³⁰ ‘Tjondrokoesoemo, RM Soedjirin Tri’ and ‘Soerono’ in *Apa & Siapa*, pp 345-346 and 245-246. I have as yet no further information about the IBIS league.

³¹ Colombijn, ‘Football’, p 182

Adams argues that ‘in some ways the independence and nationalistic fervour of Indonesian youth was kindled through sport’.³² This is something of an exaggeration. Nonetheless, sport and politics did mix in the nationalist movement. Columbijn argues firmly that football was an important element in the nationalist struggle. He notes that ‘the dividing line between the moderate nationalist movement playing football and a football association supporting nationalism was blurred’.³³

The first three Indonesian nationalist sporting associations formed, in the early 1930s, were the Persatuan Bola Keranjang Seluruh Indonesia (PBKSI -- All Indonesian Basketball Union), the Persatuan Sepak Bola Seluruh Indonesia (PSSI – All Indonesian Football Union) and the Persatuan Lawn Tennis Indonesia (Pelti – Indonesian Lawn Tennis Union).³⁴ Then in 1938, the Ikatan Sport Indonesia (ISI – Sports League of Indonesia) was formed, to act as a nationalist counter-weight to Dutch sporting organisations. It held a Sports Week in 1938 at which badminton was played.³⁵

But there was no badminton nationalist organisation to parallel the others noted here. In fact, it might be speculated that badminton – and probably tennis too -- was a much less significant reflection of nationalist sentiment than football, for a number of reasons.

First, the substantial presence of ethnic Chinese players – who at least stereotypically would have been unlikely to have been prominent supporters of the nationalist cause -- would have diluted the nationalist element of the game.

Second, although not easy to measure, it seems highly likely that badminton was not as popular a game as football anyway and perhaps seen by many indigenous Indonesians more as an entertainment than as a sport in which to participate. Thus its capacity to mobilise the population, the capacity for it to serve as an attractor of support for the nationalist cause, would have been much less than that of football.

Third, football and badminton were sports which represented different things for Indonesians and Dutch people, differences which complicated the relationship between sport and nationalism. Football has a much longer history in Indonesia, and was closely associated with the Netherlands. There was patriotic, nationalist value for Indonesians in taking on the Dutch at football. In badminton, though,

³² Adams, ‘*Pancasila*’, p 297

³³ Columbijn, ‘Football’, p 183

³⁴ Columbijn notes (‘Football’, p 183) the ‘confident use of the word “Indonesia” in the title of the football association, with its nationalist connotations, rather than “Hindia Belanda”’. In fact, as can be seen all three federations used this term, strengthening the idea of the link between these sport and nationalism.

Indonesians had a game in which the Dutch had never played a significant role. Before the Second World War, England dominated the All England men's and women's championships, the unofficial world championships. Indeed, in a way badminton was not even a European game.³⁶ Its origins are debateable – it might be able to trace its beginnings back more than a thousand years to China and India. But the origins of the modern game go back to the 19th century and to India, where a game called Poona (after the Indian city) developed and acquired popularity amongst British officers in the India Army. Thus even if Indonesian players had been able to defeat Dutch ones, this would have had limited symbolic importance – to play badminton was to play a game which meant little to the Dutch, and was clearly not Dutch, and indeed one whose local origins might well have been traceable to Malaya and to Malayans of ethnic Chinese origins.³⁷

Against this, though, it could be noted that by playing football, Indonesians were – quite literally – playing the Dutch game, under rules the Dutch (or at least other Europeans) determined. In other words, they were replicating the colonial relationship. In a sense, it could be argued that the act of playing badminton was itself nationalist – or at the very least non-colonial. Badminton was played outside the colonial realm; it was an activity in which Dutch people played no significant role, and one where any international connections were primarily with other colonial subjects, from Malaya.³⁸ But to the extent that the realm within which badminton was played was ethnic Chinese, then clearly nationalism in the generally accepted sense of the term was not reflected in the game.

During the Japanese occupation, Dutch-based sporting clubs were closed down. The nationalist football association, PSSI, was also closed.³⁹ Although no evidence on this matter has yet been found, it might be assumed that the same fate befell the other sporting associations. The ISI, though, seems to have survived, at least until 1942, when its badminton section headed by RMS Tri Tjondrokusumo took up the challenge posed by the organisation's Chair, Widodo Sastradiningrat, to find an Indonesian word to replace the Dutch (and English, of course) word 'badminton'. This was the point at which the modern word 'bulutangkis' was developed.⁴⁰ Badminton was one of the sports included

³⁵ *Pasang surut*, pp 5-6. Columbijn does not mention this organisation, although *Pasang surut* says the PSSI was a member.

³⁶ For a contrary view, see Adams, '*Pancasila*', p 301

³⁷ Even in Malaya, badminton may well have been introduced not by the British but rather by Indian immigrants. See Stephen A Douglas, 'Sport in Malaysia' in Eric A Wagner, ed, *Sport in Asia and Africa*, Greenwood, New York, 1989, p 167

³⁸ Dimeo and Mills note that this contradiction can be present in the one sport. Writing about soccer in India, they say: 'The urge to reject British systems and the desire to take the colonizer on and beat him at his own game are contradictory responses that are nevertheless born of the same emotion to resist.' Paul Dimeo and James Mills, 'Conclusion: soccer in South Asia – past, present and future' in Dimeo and Mills, *Soccer*, p 163

³⁹ Columbijn, 'Football', p 185

⁴⁰ 'Tjondrokoesoemo, RM Soedjirin Tri', *Apa & Siapa*, pp 345-347

in the Gerakan Latihan Olahraga Rakjat (Gelora – People’s Sports Exercise Movement), later replaced by the sports section (Tai Iku Kai) of Putera.

After the proclamation of independence in 1945, badminton’s relationship to Indonesian nationalism became more complicated still. Soedirman was instrumental in forming the Persatuan Olahraga Republik Indonesia (PORI – Indonesian Sports Union) after the holding of the first post-war sports congress, in Solo on 18-20 January 1947. Like many organisations of this time, PORI was intended to be the sole vehicle for national sporting activities, and was inaugurated as such by President Sukarno himself. The organisation was dominated by indigenous Indonesians: aside from Soedirman, its leadership included Syamsuddin Saat, Jusuf Said, Ramli Rikin, Sarmada, Djaswadi and Soemantri.⁴¹ So far as I have been able to determine, no ethnic Chinese played prominent roles in the organisation. The badminton division of PORI was headed by RMS Tri Tjondrokusumo.⁴² Branches of the badminton division of PORI were established in around twenty residencies in Java and Madura, and the first inter-provincial team championships were commenced in July 1947. Plans for the finals of these championships to be held in Yogyakarta on 17 August 1947, however, had to be cancelled because of the political situation.

In Jakarta the BBU was reformed after the proclamation of independence; probably in 1946. In light of the changed circumstances it faced, though, its members determined to change its name to Persatuan Badminton Djakarta (PERBAD) – the literal Indonesian version of its Dutch language name, and still using the term ‘badminton’ rather than ‘bulutangkis’. However, the organisation retained its essentially ethnic Chinese character, which then brought it into conflict with the nationalist badminton movement as it was starting to emerge.

At much the same time as PERBAD was being formed, a group of Indonesian former sailors in the Dutch merchant marine had formed a club called Bukti (Badan Usaha Kesatuan Tenaga Indonesia), whose leadership included Suripto, Ramli Rikin, MA Sjarifudin, M Zaer and Sutan Hamid Tahar.⁴³ PORI, however, consistent with its claim to be the single national sports organisation, wanted to see a single badminton organisation established in Jakarta – with its own badminton section headed by Djaswadi as that organisation. But PERBAD was clearly the best-established Jakarta league. However many of its members were not only ethnic Chinese, but not Indonesian citizens. PORI insisted that citizenship was an essential component of membership, and thus would not recognise all members of

⁴¹ ‘Tjoa Seng Tiang’, *Apa & Siapa*, p 344

⁴² *Pasang surut*, p 8

⁴³ *Pasang surut*, p 10

PERBAD as it was then constituted.⁴⁴ Negotiations between PORI and PERBAD over a merger reached a stalemate.

At this point Soedirman, from the Bakti club (which counted Ferry Sonneville amongst its members), took over as head of the PORI negotiating team. I am as yet unable to say exactly what transpired, except that on 15 July 1950 PERBAD and PORI merged, though – and confusingly – the new organisation used the old name PERBAD until the formation of the All-Indonesian Badminton Federation (PBSI) in Bandung on 5 May 1951, at which time it became the Jakarta branch of the PBSI. Sudirman was the Chair of the new organisation, and Tjoa Seng Tiang the Vice Chair.⁴⁵ It seems probable that the condition of citizenship was retained; but the new organisation was clearly one in which ethnic Chinese had a major role to play. Sudirman retired as chair in 1955, and was replaced by Oei Soen Eng (1955-1957) and then Lauw Tjoan Sioe (1957-1958)⁴⁶. Habiboellah Halim (1958-1962), Naziruddin Naib (1963-1965) and J C Tambunan (1966-1982) led the organisation until 1982 when Justian Suhandinata (of ethnic Chinese decent) took over. Until 1961 the headquarters of PBSI Jakarta was in the Tjandra Naja building, at Jl Gajah Mada no. 188 – which was also the headquarters of the Sin Ming Hui, the ethnic Chinese social and educational association.

International prominence

The late 1950s was the start of the golden era in Indonesian men's badminton. Tan Joe Hok won the men's all-England championship in 1959, defeating Ferry Sonneville in an all-Indonesia final. In the 15 years from 1968 and 1982, Indonesians won the title 11 times and were the runners up on the other four occasions. One player, Rudy Hartono, completely dominated the game from 1968 winning eight all-England titles, seven of them consecutively. Either Rudy Hartono or Liem Swie King played in all 15 finals between 1968 and 1982. Rarely in any sport played at the international level have two players from one country so dominated competition for a decade and a half.⁴⁷

Indonesia won the Thomas Cup for the first time in 1957; between then and 1998, the Cup was played for on 17 occasions, Indonesia winning 11 times and being runner up 4 times.

⁴⁴ Though the leadership of the badminton section of PORI did have some ethnic Chinese members: Sie Kok Tie, Gwie Kwat Kong, Lie Po An and Njoo Kim Bie in the period 1947 to 1951. See the list of committee members in *Pasang surut*, p 193

⁴⁵ This discussion is based on *Tangkas*, pp 10-11

⁴⁶ Lauw had played a leadership role in the BBU before the war. See 'Lauw Tjoan Sioe', *Apa & Siapa*, p 141

⁴⁷ In fact the dominance of these two players was even greater than these data show, given that on two occasions during these years, they played each other in the finals, the championship going to Rudy Hartono in 1976 and Liem Swie King in 1978.

Indonesia's women players, though, fared much less well. At the All-England championships, Minarni was the runner up in 1968, but it was not until Susi Susanti's win in 1990 that an Indonesian took the title. Through to 2004, Susi Susanti has been the only Indonesian to win the title, three times, though Verawaty, Sarwendah and Susi herself have been runners up. In the Uber Cup, Indonesia first won in 1974, though it had been runner up on the previous two occasions. Between 1968 and 1998, of 13 competitions, Indonesia won three times and was runner up on another seven occasions. The reasons for this substantial disparity in success between male and female players remains to be explored. Religion might be thought to be a relevant factor, but given the ethnicity of most of the players this seems unlikely. In any event it did not stop Verawaty Fadjarin, an ethnic Chinese convert to Islam, from reaching the top levels of international competition.

The success of Rudy Hartono and Liem Swie King was particularly significant, in that it was the only occasion, certainly until the Barcelona Olympics of 1992, where Indonesians dominated any sport played internationally. As Columbijn points out, in the modern world 'to project a sense of national unity and identity on the world stage, (nations) must adjust to an increasingly uniform set of strategies, including a good performance in dominant sports'.⁴⁸ Indonesia was meeting part of this requirement – but of course badminton was not a major sport in the places where this counts: chiefly Europe and North America, and thus Indonesia was missing out on the international status that its performance might otherwise have been expected to produce.

Nationally, though, the successes Indonesian badminton players had in international competition has been the source of enormous national pride and a confirmation of Indonesia's significance in at least one international arena. The irony here of course is that those responsible for this national pride came overwhelmingly from an ethnic group excluded from, or at the least frequently rendered marginal to, Indonesian nationalism: the ethnic Chinese.⁴⁹ Yet from the sources which I have been able to examine thus far, this fact attracted little comment. The reception these players received at home, and that accorded victorious Thomas Cup teams, suggests clearly that they were seen as Indonesian and not Chinese.⁵⁰

Some players in fact have argued that the way badminton was organised and played actively encouraged national integration and rejects ethnic or racial discrimination. Ferry Sonneville – himself

⁴⁸ Columbijn, 'Football', p 172

⁴⁹ There is a fleeting parallel here with soccer. The mid-1950s represented the high point of Indonesia's international soccer prowess. At the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, for instance, the Indonesian soccer team held the Soviet Union to a 0-0 draw. At this time, about half the major league soccer players in Indonesia were reportedly ethnic Chinese. See Alwi Shahab, 'Sketsa Jakarta: Uang Saku PSSI Hanya 50 Perak', *Republika*, 30 June 1998

of Eurasian descent -- went to far as to argue this was one of the reasons Indonesia was successful in the sport. He wrote:

From the beginning, badminton in Indonesia was characterised by a tradition of non-discrimination. So you can understand why badminton here is so strong. The tradition of non-discrimination and having particular goals to be reached are specific examples of how you can reach high levels of performance, and are reasons for the continued significance of our game. In my opinion, if these conditions are responsible for our success in badminton, why can't we apply the same approach to other sports, such as chess, volleyball, basketball, bridge? I think that the success of badminton should be born in mind by other sports.⁵¹

The only exception I have found so far to this general rule of accepting ethnic Chinese players as Indonesians, contributing to Indonesia's national prestige is to be found – surprisingly perhaps -- in the *New York Times*, where a commentator said of Rudy Hartono that 'As a national hero, he is something of an anomaly because [he] is not really an Indonesian. He's mostly ethnic Chinese and his Chinese name is Nio Hap Liang.'⁵² The writer did, though, go on to note: 'Maybe that bothers a few ardent Indonesian nationalists, who tend to berate the 3,000,000 other ethnic Chinese of Indonesia, but for the majority, ethnic origins are irrelevant.'⁵³

But whether the successes of these players contributed positively to the position of ethnic Chinese in the broader Indonesian community is more difficult to say. A recent book *Perspectives on the Chinese Indonesians* addressed this question, albeit only peripherally referring to badminton. One author, Didik J Rachbini, argued that Rudy Hartono, Liem Swie King and Verawaty Fadjin were examples of 'prominent figures from the Chinese community that [sic] contributed positively to improving relations' between the ethnic Chinese and *pribumi* communities.' Yet another commentator suggests the opposite: that such players and other Indonesians of ethnic Chinese origin they are seen as individuals rather than as representatives of the ethnic Chinese community.⁵⁴ In other words, the ethnic Chinese community as a whole does not benefit from the success of its individual members. This point is made by Benjamin in *Chinese Indonesians*, where he observes that there are (or were) ethnic Chinese Indonesians who were prominent in many walks of life in Indonesia, including as 'badminton heroes and heroines', but that their Chineseness was not stressed or identified.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ On this point see, for instance, S Iskandar, 'Nationalism: Suharto Stirs A Hornet's Nest' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, (hereafter *FEER*), 76, 16, 15 April 1972, p 50

⁵¹ *Tangkas*, pp 157-158

⁵² James A Sterba, 'Badminton Champion is Indonesia's Hero', *New York Times*, 29 March 1972, p 50

⁵³ Sterba, 'Badminton Champion', p 50

⁵⁴ See Didik J Rachbini, 'Democratizing the Indonesian Economy' in Michael R Godley and Grayson J Lloyd, eds, *Perspectives on the Chinese Indonesians*, Crawford House, Adelaide, 2001, p 107.

⁵⁵ Godley and Lloyd, *Perspectives*, p 115

The other test is to ask whether these players are treated as well when they do things which do not strengthen Indonesia's image abroad.

One such event would be when they lose games or tournaments. On a number of occasions, Indonesian teams have lost to China in the Thomas or Uber Cup competitions. I do not yet have much evidence on this point, but suspect that ethnicity does not really become an issue. The recent Indonesian losses in the Thomas and Uber Cups, played before hometown crowds in Jakarta, saw spectators:

happy, singing and clapping in rhythm, of course booing the opponents and cheering for their heroes, but always in a spirit of fair play. Even when their home team Indonesia lost, they didn't seem so angry and still applauded their heroes on the way out.⁵⁶

But perhaps the biggest test is when players leave Indonesia to play for other nations. Indonesia has gone through two periods when such movements have taken place in sufficient numbers as to have a potentially significant impact on the country's international standing.

The first period was in the 1960s, when a number of its best ethnic Chinese players and coaches left for China, at a time when many other ethnic Chinese were making this same journey.⁵⁷ As one Indonesian commentator put it, discussing China's rise to prominence in world badminton and thus to threaten Indonesia's position:

...the seeds (of China's rise) came from Indonesia in the 1950s, when Hou Chia Chang and Tang Hzien Hou returned to their Ancestral Homeland from Solo. Tang, who we knew as Tong Si Fu, did come back to Indonesia but because his application for citizenship was not dealt with properly, he went back (to China). And the successor to this pair of pioneers developed and perfected their (training) methods.⁵⁸

A leading Indonesian player, Mulyadi (Ang Tjin Siang), made the same point, arguing that it was Indonesians who developed badminton in China. In the 1950s, he asserted, there was no badminton in China; the sport only developed after a number of players from Indonesia went to China because of

⁵⁶ Raphael Sachetat, 'Memories of... the Thomas and Uber Cup Finals', 21 May 2004, <http://www.worldbadminton.net/Portal/desktopdefault.aspx?tabid=10&ItemID=1519W>, accessed 19 June 2004. This was of course not always the case, as the Scheele Incident shows, but here the target of the crowd's anger, Ferry Sonnevile, was attacked for his play not his ethnicity.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the issue of ethnic Chinese leaving for China, see Charles Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1983, passim

⁵⁸ Sunito, 'Birmingham'

PP10, the Presidential Regulation which forbade anyone holding other than Indonesian citizenship from engaging in retail trade.⁵⁹

Three leading Chinese players and coaches, members of the International Badminton Federation's Hall of Fame, who do seem to fall into this category are Tang Xianhu (known when in Indonesia as Tong Sin Fu and Thing Hian Houw), Chen Yu Niang (Tan Giok Nio) and Hou Jiachang (Houw Ka Tjong – the 'Hou Chia Chang' mentioned above?).⁶⁰ Another was Liang Chiu Sia (Leung Ca Hua), who went to China in 1966, following the rise to power of General Suharto.⁶¹ As was often the case, some of Liang's siblings went with her to China, and other stayed in Indonesia. Amongst those who stayed was her younger brother Tjun Tjun, who was to win the All England men's doubles titles for Indonesia six times between 1974 and 1980. Liang eventually left China for Hong Kong, and finally returned to Indonesia, re-acquiring Indonesian citizenship in 1986 – 'thanks to the combined efforts of the government, in this case the offices of the Ministers for Sport and Employment, the Indonesian National Olympic Committee and the Indonesian Badminton Federation.'⁶²

These movements do not appear to have aroused any anti-Chinese sentiment: I have found no evidence of any significant official or unofficial criticism of the ethnic Chinese players going to China to live and to play. It might have been perhaps because at this stage China was not a major player in world badminton, and partly also because the ethnic Chinese who went there were not the very best of Indonesia's players. Had Tan Joe Hok or Rudy Hartono gone, the situation might conceivably have been different. And it might have been different too had more people have shared Mulyadi's view that the long-term effect of this migration might well have been to build up China's badminton strength. But neither of these conditions prevailed.

The second period, though, from the mid-1990s onwards posed a greater long-term threat to Indonesia. The first players to leave Indonesia were Fung Permadi and Mia Audina. Permadi was representing Taiwan by 1996. Then Audina left for the Netherlands to join her husband, and by 2000 was representing the Netherlands internationally. By the late 1990s, the movement out was approaching a flood. By 2002, Indra Wijaya, Ronald Susilo, Hendra Wijaya, Henry Kurniawan,

⁵⁹ 'Ang Tjin Siang: PBSI Jangan Mata Duitan', *Kompas*, 19 November 2001. For a discussion of PP10 see J A C Mackie, 'Anti-Chinese outbreaks in Indonesia 1959-68' in Mackie, ed, *The Chinese in Indonesia*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1976, pp 77-138

⁶⁰ See 'Members of the Hall of Fame', <http://www.intbadfed.org/Portal/intbadfed/HoF.htm>, accessed 18 March 2004. Note that Hou is said to have been born in China 'before 1944'; if this is so, he must have moved to Indonesia at a very early age, given that according to the IBF Hall of fame website 'he was the champion of Central Java (Indonesia) under his original name of Houw Ka Tjong before he left Indonesia for China about 1964'.

⁶¹ See 'Liang Chiu Sia', *Apa & Siapa*, pp 142-144

⁶² 'Liang Chiu Sia', *Apa & Siapa*, p 143

Wandry Kurniawan and Dicky Purwotjugiono were playing in the Thomas Cup representing Singapore; Lenny Purnama had joined the Australian team; Agus Hariyanto, Albertus Susanto Njoto and Johan Hadikusuma Wiratama were representing Hong Kong. In 2004, Tony Gunawan is representing the US. Mulyo Handoyo, former Indonesian national coach went to Singapore in 2001, joining his compatriot Hadi, in charge of the men's doubles.⁶³

This was a much more worrying development for Indonesia. Mia Audina was seen as a player of enormous potential, someone who might replace Susi Susanti at the top of the women's league. The players who went to Singapore were not, by and large top flight players, although Taufik Hidayat – an indigenous Indonesian – might have been seen in that category. But the problem here was the perception by some in Indonesia that Singapore was in effect trying to 'buy' world class standing, by importing Indonesian male players (for the Thomas Cup), and Chinese women players (for the Uber Cup).

And here, so far as I have been able to determine, Indonesian ire was directed primarily at Singapore for trying to buy players, not at the players themselves for being willing to 'sell' themselves. The regionalisation – if not yet the full globalisation – of sport was starting to take its toll on Indonesia. The real concern for many in Indonesia was not that its players and coaches were now earning money overseas, or seeking safety there, but rather than they were now representing those countries in international competitions such as the Thomas and Uber Cups, against Indonesian teams. The Indonesian badminton federation (PBSI) protested at the early defections, and particularly that of Audina, arguing that players should at least represent their home countries in international tournaments.⁶⁴ Its protest against Audina's being permitted to play for the Netherlands was upheld by the IBF, and postponed her appearance for her adopted country. This would suggest clearly that the PBSI was very aware of the international prestige attaching to these tournaments – and presumably that in no other sport were Indonesian players in this position. Indonesia had much more to lose from these defections than the other country supplying significant numbers of players to other countries: China. China had much more sporting depth than Indonesia. It also protested at its badminton players being lured elsewhere – but badminton was not the be-all and end-all of China's international sporting prowess as it was for Indonesia.

⁶³ 'ABC To Mediate In RI-S'pore Badminton Dispute', *Antara*, 23 February 2002; 'Taufik Hidayat Tak Berdaya', *Bola Sportsline*, 30 October 2003, at <http://www.bolanews.com/bulutangkis/7263.php> accessed 26 January 2004; Raphael Sachetat, 'Singapore sets high target for its badminton squad', *WorldBadminton.net*, 31 January 2003, at <http://www.worldbadminton.net/Portal/desktopdefault.aspx?tabid=10&ItemID=822>, accessed 26 February 2004; <http://www.worldbadminton.net/Portal/desktopdefault.aspx?tabid=10&ItemID=1433> accessed 26 February 2004. Wiratama is the brother of Alan Budikusuma, winner of the first Olympic men's singles gold medal, at the 1992 Barcelona games.

Discrimination

None of this is to suggest that ethnic Chinese badminton players have not been subject to the same kinds of discrimination that other Indonesians of ethnic Chinese origin have been exposed. They have. As badminton players ethnic Chinese may have been accepted as Indonesians by the vast bulk of the population – win or lose. But within the bureaucracy, they remained ethnic Chinese, with all that implied. Ivana Lie, who was a leading player in the 1980s, became something of a cause célèbre in this regard. In 1976 she had been recruited to the national badminton training centre, but was prevented from going overseas to compete in the Asian Junior championships that year representing Indonesia because she was denied a passport – on the grounds that her father was not an Indonesian citizen.⁶⁵ It took four years for her to be granted the Certificate of Nationality (SBKRI) which enabled her to travel overseas – and this, she said, only because she was able to raise the matter with President Suharto personally, because she was such a prominent badminton player.⁶⁶ She was apparently asked by Suharto what reward she wanted for her performance as a badminton player: she replied that all she wanted was an identity card.⁶⁷ She officially became an Indonesian citizen in September 1982.

But Lie was, as one commentator notes, lucky:

Because, when she wanted to get her Certificate of Nationality, she was a leading athlete who had brought honour to the nation. But what about the citizenship of other ethnic Chinese who were not as prominent as she was?⁶⁸

Author and playwright Arswendo Atmowiloto raised this issue in a film he wrote and produced for television entitled ‘Ing Tak Perlu Menangis’.⁶⁹ This film was based on the experiences of Ivanna Lie, and was broadcast on the SCTV network in February 2002. Arswendo was quite clear that this was a political film, despite its apparently fictional base. For a start, it was broadcast at the time of Chinese New Year. Moreover, he is quoted as saying, ‘Badminton is not just a sport, a hobby or a business. It’s also full of political meaning’.⁷⁰ One commentator said of the film that: ‘At the least it reflects the fact that, despite discrimination, the nation’s honour can still be defended, as shown by Ivana Lie.’

71

⁶⁴ ‘ABC’, *Antara*, Feb 23, 2002

⁶⁵ See ‘Lie Eng Hwa, Ivana’ in *Apa & Siapa*, p 145. It should perhaps be noted that Lie never won a major international badminton title. The closest she came was runner up in the 1980 world championships held – fortuitously, perhaps -- in Jakarta. She was, though, a member of the Indonesian Uber Cup team in 1978, 1980 and 1986.

⁶⁶ See Sella Wangkar and Rafael Setyo ‘Ivana Lie Optimistis Soal SKBRI’, *Liputan 6*, 23 January 2004, <http://www.liputan6.com/fullnews/70723.html>, accessed 13 February 2004

⁶⁷ See ‘Hendrawan Masih Dipusingkan Pengurusan Kewarganegaraannya’, *Kompas*, 1 May 2002

⁶⁸ ‘Ivana Lie Optimistis’

⁶⁹ ‘Ing, There’s No Need to Cry’

⁷⁰ Agus Muttaqin, ‘Visualisasi Perjuangan Ivana Lie Meraih Kewarganegaraan (1)’, *Jawa Pos*, 7 February 2002

⁷¹ Sucipto Hadi Purnomo, ‘Menepis “Cina Wurung, Jawa Tanggung”’, *Suara Merdeka*, 10 February 2002

But although Lie's case was perhaps the most celebrated one – perhaps because by her own acknowledgement she could be a 'difficult' person to deal with⁷² -- she was by no means the only ethnic Chinese player to suffer such humiliation. Tan Joe Hok – first Indonesian winner of the men's singles at the All-England championships and with Ferry Sonneville perhaps Indonesia's greatest player of the 1950s and early 1960s – suffered a similar fate.⁷³ And at the other end of the time spectrum Hendrawan, silver medallist at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, as recently as May 2002 was reported to be unable to secure his citizenship certificate. 'What more could or should I have done in defence of my country?' he is reported to have said:

When I will get my certificate, I have no idea. The official told me: 'that's difficult to say, it could be a month, three months or a year or two years'....They say they will tell me when it is ready, but when will that be? My older sister has been waiting for 20 years and still has not got it. All I can do is wait, and follow the rules.⁷⁴

This discrimination did not, though, bring any public protests during the New Order period. From 1965 to 1998, badminton players, and ethnic Chinese ones in particular, were politically invisible – as were sports stars generally. However since the fall of Suharto, as restrictions on political activity by Indonesians have begun to crumble, the issue has been taken up publicly and vigorously. On 24 June 2002 the newly-formed *Komunitas Bulutangkis Indonesia* (Indonesian Badminton Community) wrote to President Megawati to request the removal of the requirement on ethnic Chinese Indonesians to produce the Certificate of Nationality (SBKRI) as proof of citizenship. The letter was signed by 36 current and retired players, mostly ethnic Chinese but also including Ferry Sonneville and Icu Sugiarto.⁷⁵ This move was followed up by meeting with leading politicians, including Amien Rais, the Speaker of the Parliament, Hamzah Haz (Vice President) and Yusril Ihza Mahendra (Minister for Justice and Human Rights).⁷⁶

Two years after the original letter had been written, on 15 March 2004, the Vice President's office issued instructions to state officials including the Attorney General, the Chief of Police and territorial administrators indicating that the President had determined that the SBKRI was no longer to be

⁷² 'Lie Eng Hwa, Ivana', *Apa & Siapa*, p 145

⁷³ In 1980 Sitor Situmorang, a leading Indonesian poet, published a poem entitled *Untuk Ivanna dan Tan Joe Hok*. See *Kompas*, 20 June 1980 and reproduced in Junus Jahya, ed, *Nonpri di mata pribumi*, Yayasan Tunas Bangsa, Jakarta, nd, pp 118-119

⁷⁴ 'Hendrawan'

⁷⁵ See *Sinar Harapan* and *Bisnis Indonesia*, 3 July 2002 for reports of the letter, a copy of which is in the author's possession.

⁷⁶ See, for instance, '“KTP” Diskriminasi Itu Bernama SBKRI', *Sinar Harapan*, 13 March 2003; 'Indon Gov't Urged To Abolish Discriminatory Policies On Citizens Of Chinese Descent' *Antara*, 6 May 2003

used.⁷⁷ Whether this will indeed be the end of the matter remains to be seen. Past experience would suggest that eliminating this kind of discrimination at the local level requires more than letters from Ministers. But for this paper the significant point to be drawn from the issue is that for the first time badminton players are using their national prominence to pursue a political issue. And – perhaps equally significantly – although ethnic Chinese players led the issue, other players have joined in too. Thus former world champion Ick Sugiharto – not of Chinese ethnicity -- said last year:

Indonesian Chinese had sufficiently shown their patriotism and their capability to achieve something for Indonesia so that it was ironical if there were people who still doubted their nationality.⁷⁸

Prominence of ethnic Chinese

Why ethnic Chinese are so prominent in the game at this stage is difficult to answer; my response must at this stage be largely speculative. Van Bottenburg examines a number of hypotheses which seek to explain why the prominence of particular games in particular communities.⁷⁹ These include natural characteristics of a region such as climate, the physical build or ‘temperament’ of different ethnic groups, facilities, cost and the influence of television. But each of these factors, he argues, is ‘wholly inadequate’: their principle shortcoming being ‘that they reify sports and detach them from their social context’.⁸⁰ Examination of the popularity of badminton in Indonesia provides some support for this view.

A starting point needs to be the way in which badminton was brought to Indonesia. As noted above, it seems highly likely that it came from Malaysia, and in particular from Pinang, directly across the Straits of Melaka from Medan. And the Malaysian players who visited Indonesia seem to have been overwhelmingly ethnic Chinese.

Badminton was also picked up by several of the ethnic Chinese social-cum-sporting clubs which were prominent features of the urban scene in many parts of pre-independence Indonesia. These clubs tended to have the financial resources to bring in leading players for exhibition matches, either from the major urban centres of Indonesia or from Malaysia. There were no – or at least very few – such clubs for indigenous Indonesians.

As noted earlier, the first Jakarta headquarters of the post-war badminton federation was in the building owned by the Sin Ming Hui, which itself had formed a badminton group in March 1946, only

⁷⁷ Copy of the letter in the author’s possession.

⁷⁸ ‘Veteran Shuttlers: “Stop Discrimination Against Indon Chinese”’ *Jakarta Post*, 12 March 2003

⁷⁹ See especially ‘The popularity of sports: measurement and interpretation’ in *Global Games*, pp 15-44

⁸⁰ van Bottenburg, *Global Games*, pp 21 and 40

weeks after the group's foundation on 20 January of that year.⁸¹ Sin Ming Hui's players at this time may not have been particularly good, but its facilities were: they were frequently loaned out to other clubs, and to the PBSI.⁸²

By the 1960s these clubs had, at least formally, lost their ethnic exclusivity, but their identities were still clear, either from their names or their addresses. *Tangkas* lists 28 clubs which were members of the Jakarta branch of the PBSI in 1962, together with the addresses of their playing facilities.⁸³ Amongst the clubs were ones which were clearly directed primarily towards the ethnic Chinese community, including Chung Hua TNH, Im Gak Hwee, Luu Ching Duey, Persatuan Warga and Tjandra Naja; their addresses were clustered in the region north of Medan Merdeka, in Mangga Besar, Kemakmuran and the like – all locations with heavy concentrations of ethnic Chinese populations.

Economic considerations cannot be over-looked either. On the one hand, badminton has been sponsored by a number of powerful ethnic-Chinese owned businesses, most curiously perhaps by *kretek* cigarette companies such as Djarum of Kudus. The Jakarta club Tangkas, one of the most powerful and wealthy in the country, has effectively been run since the early 1950s by the Suhandinata family, a wealthy business family in its own right, and sponsored variously by the Tunas Sakti Group in which both Suhardi Suhandinata (Souw Han Seng) and his son Justian Suhandinata have been prominent, Bimantara and Bogasari the flour milling company. Ciputra and Bimantara have also been major sponsors of badminton more generally, at least until the onset of the financial crisis in 1997.

There is another economic side too. Rudy Hartono, asked why ethnic Chinese dominated the sport, said: 'I'd say it's because badminton is a sport that not every family can afford to play. Playing outdoors costs little, but indoors can be expensive.'⁸⁴ Against this, though, must be set Ferry Sonnevile's view that: 'It was particularly fortunate for Indonesia and Malaya, and for other Asian countries such as India and Thailand, that their climates allowed badminton to be played on outdoor courts the whole year around.'⁸⁵ But here the difference between these two opinions may be that between everyday players and those who have the chance to develop their skills to higher levels. Very few players whose sole experience of the game was on an outdoor court, subject to the vagaries of wind, light and rain, would have had the chance to move into the latter category. Anecdotal evidence of this fact comes from Christian Hadinata, winner of All-England men's and mixed doubles

⁸¹ *Buku Peringatan Sin Ming Hui 1946-1956 10 Tahun*, np, Jakarta, 1956, p 93

⁸² *Buku Peringatan*, p 93-94

⁸³ *Tangkas*, pp 15-16

⁸⁴ Quoted in Christopher Clarey, 'This is no picnic: In Southeast Asia, respect rides on a shuttlecock', *New York Times*, 25 June 1996, p B14

⁸⁵ Ferry Sonnevile, *Bulutangkis Bermutu*, Kinta, Jakarta, 1962, p 10

championships. He says that he started out playing badminton on an outside court, but that he got his real break when he was invited by an opponent, Oey Hwie Kian, to practice on the court of a hotel owned by his father.⁸⁶

Some observers have suggested to me that there are cultural factors at work here too. The Chinese cultural background is said to encourage persistence in tasks undertaken, determination to succeed, and refusal to be satisfied with second best. I am generally suspicious of this kind of explanation, whether of ethnic Chinese prominence in badminton or in business. For one thing, it provides no explanation for failure, unless it is to argue that ethnic Chinese failures are somehow less culturally ‘Chinese’ than winners. It assumes that the cultural qualities referred to are to be found in the ethnic Chinese community rather than the indigenous one. This is despite the fact that the vast majority of Indonesia’s leading ethnic Chinese badminton players are *peranakan*: people who are most acculturated to the indigenous community. It might be the case though that, as with minorities in other societies, ethnic Chinese in Indonesia historically had limited fields of endeavour open to them on a basis of equality with the majority community, and that badminton was one where they could compete on their own merits without formal discrimination. Sport generally is inherently meritocratic, at least when played at the international level.

Politics and badminton

The political profile of badminton, at least up until the start of the Suharto period, was low. And again, it seems reasonable to assume that ethnicity had something to do with this. Nonetheless, Sukarno took considerable public interest in the game, welcoming victorious players home, granting them medals – and of course making speeches to them and being photographed with them.

The one field in which national politics did impinge on badminton, albeit peripherally, was in terms of Sukarno’s view on Indonesia’s standing in the world. It is now largely forgotten, but in 1963 Indonesia had become the first nation to have been suspended from the Olympic Games by the IOC for its failure to issue visas to enable athletes from Israel and National China to compete in the Asian games, held in Jakarta. As Pauker notes:

Indonesia was furious at the International Olympic Committee. Its anger was directed particularly towards the American President of the IOC, Avery Brundage. A few days later, the idea of GANEFO -- Indonesia’s answer to the Olympics – was announced.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ See ‘Makcomblang Pelatnas’, *Matra*, June 1997, pp 107-109. Christian is of course himself ethnic Chinese.

⁸⁷ Pauker, ‘Ganefo I’, p 173

Sukarno made it quite clear in talking about Ganefo that sport and politics were deeply inter-twined: the possibility that they could be separated was not considered. The move to establish GANEFO was part of Sukarno's bid for leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement.⁸⁸ Ultimately the IOC, probably realising the danger to its own position from the success of Ganefo, quietly re-admitted Indonesia to membership. Ganefo then folded.

Badminton was one of the sports contested at Ganefo.

When Suharto came to power, Indonesia drew back from involvement with the non-aligned world. But the significance of badminton as a symbol of Indonesia's international standing remained.

One measure of the national political significance being given to badminton by the 1970s can be seen in the circumstances surrounding the victory of Rudy Hartono over fellow-Indonesians Liem Swie King in the All-England final in 1976, thereby setting a record of eight championships for Rudy, one more than Erland Kops.

There were those who argued that Rudy's victory had been set up; that in fact King should have won, given his performance in earlier games and the fact that Rudy was suffering from an injured foot.⁸⁹ But of greater moment was the fact that at the end of 1975 it looked as if Indonesia would not be sending any players to the championships at all. In June of that year the International Badminton Federation, meeting in London, had determined it would not admit China to membership. In retaliation the Asian Badminton Confederation (ABC), led by Thailand, decided it would boycott the All-England games in protest. This stand greatly concerned Indonesian officials.

On the one hand, they were strong supporters of the ABC, and wanted China admitted to the IBF. There was clearly a feeling in Jakarta that Asia was now the dominant badminton-playing region, and Indonesia was dominant in Asia. But the IBF was still controlled by the Europeans. Boycotting All-England would have demonstrated these points, because the quality of the games would be evidently lower than would be the case if the Asian teams competed. And there is some evidence that the Indonesian government had been thinking of using badminton as a means of re-establishing some links with China, frozen in the aftermath of the 30 September 1965 affair. In 1971, for instance, Vice

⁸⁸ Cf Barrie Houlihan, *Sport and international politics*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1994, p 13 citing Sie. Houlihan also argues that it was an attempt to divert the attention of the Indonesian people away from domestic problems: this is the standard explanation offered for virtually all of Sukarno's actions which seemed to be illogical or extravagant in the eyes of the observer. It is generally too bland an explanation, and one which tends to deny the possibility that there were, in Sukarno's eyes, significant issues to do with Indonesia's standing in the world.

President Adam Malik is reported to have said that Jakarta might send Rudy Hartono to China on a goodwill mission, though nothing came of the proposal.⁹⁰

But on the other hand, precisely because it was the premier badminton-playing nation, Indonesia had most to lose if Asian nations boycotted the championships – in particular it stood to lose the opportunity for Rudy Hartono to move ahead of Dane Erland Kops as the most successful player ever. And ultimately it was this consideration which was to win out.

The PBSI sent Suharso Suhandinata and J C Tambunan to negotiate with ABC members to persuade them not to oppose their sending players, including Rudy, to the championships. Suharso apparently stressed the enormous importance Indonesians placed on Rudy's participation: '130 million Indonesians have a burning desire to see Rudy Hartono win the All-England championship 8 times. This burning desire is something which simply cannot be denied'.⁹¹ Members relented, and allowed Indonesia to compete.

Early the following year, the issue came up again when Herbert Scheele of the IBF was reported to have said:

If other Asian nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia boycott All-England, the championships will go on and I will not be the slightest bit bothered, because there are many good badminton players from outside the Asian region.⁹²

Needless to say, this reignited the debate in the ABC, and Suharso and Tambunan had to engage in another round of shuttle diplomacy to try to prevent a reimposition of the boycott. Suharso took the line that there might be an element of intent here, the Europeans trying to discourage the Asians from competing. If Rudy Hartono played and won, thus setting a new performance record, then 'a son of the Asian continent would have become 'king' in the continent of the white people'.⁹³

For a second and final time, Suharso prevailed, and Hartono played. But then, so the argument goes, he had to win in order to show that it had all been worthwhile – thus the debate about whether the match with King was in any sense fixed.

⁸⁹ This debate is captured well in Teguh Budiarto, *Maestro. Menyingkap Rahasia Sukses Rudy Hartono*, Pustaka Merdeka, Jakarta, 1987, pp 199-206

⁹⁰ O G Roeder, 'Djakarta: Still on ice', *FEER*, 74, 44, 30 October 1971, p 21. Budiarto does not mention this incident in *Maestro*, his biography of Rudy.

⁹¹ Budiarto, *Maestro*, p 204

⁹² Budiarto, *Maestro*, p 205

⁹³ Budiarto, *Maestro*, p 206

Domestically, badminton became much more politicised under Suharto. At the public level, Suharto missed few opportunities to be associated with Indonesian successes at badminton. He farewelled Thomas and Uber Cup teams, wishing them well and assuring them that all Indonesians stood behind them.⁹⁴ And he showed a pre-Howardian predilection to be photographed with successful players.⁹⁵

I have found some slight evidence of the use of badminton for domestic vote-getting purposes by Golkar.⁹⁶ However I am as yet unable to say how widespread this phenomenon was.

But there was a harder political edge to Suharto's involvement with the game too. As it did with so many other civic organisations, the New Order government moved to take control of the PBSI, albeit at a fairly slow pace, perhaps recognising the strength of the organisation. Established badminton figures such as Ferry Sonneville, Suharso Suhandinata, J C Tambunan and Sudirman remained, formally anyway, in control of the organisation at least until the late 1970s.

But gradually they lost control. The first clear evidence of military intervention into the PBSI that I have been able to identify is the appointment of then-commander of the Siliwangi Division, Lt Col Emon Suparman, as Deputy Chair of the PBSI for the period 1971-1974.⁹⁷ From then on, more and more military men are appointed to senior positions in the PBSI and its regional arms. In 1985, a Dewan Kehormatan was formed, headed by the Minister for Youth and Sport. The Dewan Penyantun was headed by Gen Soepardjo Rustam, the former Minister for Home Affairs, with Suharto's son Bambang Trihatmojo as the deputy chair and Probosutedjo and Ponco Sutowo as members. Gen Try Sutrisno was chair of the PBSI for two terms, 1985-1989 and 1989-1993. When first appointed, he was Vice Chief of Staff of the Army; his successor – in both positions -- was Soerjadi.⁹⁸

There is no doubt that these appointments were effectively being made by the government. Military Police Colonel Sumaryono was appointed Deputy Chair of the PBSI in 1993; speaking later of this appointment he said, commendable honesty:

⁹⁴ See, eg, *Antara*, 8 May 1996

⁹⁵ See, for instance, the picture of Suharto chatting with players in *Pasang*, p 172; with players and holding a racket in *Maestro* p 150; shaking hands with Icuk Sugiarto and Wisnu Subagyo in *Ferry Sonneville. Karya dan Pengabdianannya*, p 66

⁹⁶ *FEER*, 70, 44, 31 October 1970, p 20

⁹⁷ 'Suparman, Emon, Letkol (CPM), *Apa & Siapa*, p 290. Gen Sajidiman Soekamto was Chair of the PBSI in the period 1961-1965. However he had a history of involvement with the sport going back at least to 1948 when he represented East Java at the First National Sports Week (PON 1) competition held in Solo. See 'Sajidiman, Soekamto, Mayjen (Purn), Bc Hk' in *Apa & Siapa*, pp 204-206

⁹⁸ See 'Daftar Nama-nama Pengurus Besar PBSI Periode 1951-1997', *Apa & Siapa*, pp 385-393. Sutrisno went on, of course, to be Vice President of Indonesia in the period 1993-1998.

I had absolutely no background in badminton. As a military man, who was always prepared to follow any orders he is given, I accepted the appointment as Deputy Chair and Ketua Harian of the PBSI.⁹⁹

As early as 1967, Suharto is reported to have directly played a role in the selection of the Thomas Cup team – and then, when over-ruled and told by the Director General of Sport Sukamto that the revised team was likely to lose, declared he would not go to the Senayan stadium to watch the game because he did not think he could control his emotions if Indonesia lost.¹⁰⁰ This story has elements of the apocryphal about it. Suharto is supposed to have chosen a team omitting Ferry Sonneville, on the grounds of his age: he was then 36. Sonneville was eventually chosen for the team, and lost both his games. On both occasions he was roundly jeered by Indonesian spectators. Eventually, the situation in the stadium became so tense that Herbert Scheele, an Honorary Referee with the IBF who happened to be present, called the tie off, precipitating what became known as the Scheele Incident. The IBF ruled that the remaining games in the tie had to be played in a neutral location, and chose New Zealand. Indonesia refused to accept this decision, and by default the Cup went to the Malaysians.¹⁰¹

Following the fall of the Suharto government in 1998, opportunities for Indonesians to participate in political events expanded considerably. Political actions by badminton players in support of citizenship rights have already been noted. And some players went beyond this issue. A number of leading players, led by Rudy Hartono and Susi Susanti, protested to the Legal Aid Foundation about the anti-Chinese riots, rapes and murders which took place in Jakarta in May 1998, just prior to Suharto's resignation.¹⁰² To some extent, this could be seen in a similar vein to the citizenship issue: using sporting prowess to promote an issue which has particular significance for the ethnic Chinese community, although as a number of commentators have observed, the rapes and murders did arouse a strong degree of revulsion from virtually all quarters of Indonesian society. Nonetheless, what we have not seen to date is the use of sporting prominence to promote political causes which might be regarded as more politically mainstream.¹⁰³ Badminton players are far more likely to appear on television screens advertising shampoo than political parties or leaders.

Conclusions

⁹⁹ 'Sumaryono, Kol (CPM)' in *Apa & Siapa*, p 284

¹⁰⁰ Budiarto, *Maestro*, pp 3-4

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of these events, see Budiarto, *Maestro*, pp 1-13

¹⁰² See 'Rudy Hartono, Susi Susanti, dan Kawan-kawan ke LBH', *Republika*, 6 June 1998. To add to the painful irony of these events, they took place while Indonesia's top players, including some of ethnic Chinese origin, were playing for the Thomas and Uber Cups in Hong Kong.

¹⁰³ I do not wish to appear to downgrade the significance of the May riots. The events of that month in many ways encapsulated many of the ways that Indonesian society had been perverted during the New Order period. And criticism of the riots and murders was widespread. But I believe that for many and perhaps most Indonesians, the issue is seen chiefly in ethnic rather than systemic terms.

This study is clearly preliminary in its scope, and thus also in its conclusions. I offer the following tentative observations.

The study shows that badminton – and sport generally, perhaps – deserves closer attention by students of Indonesian social history than has been the case thus far. In badminton, Indonesians had an activity in which for most of the past half century they were world leaders. Closer examination of the meaning of badminton to Indonesians is necessary for confirmation, but the evidence from this study is that this was important in terms of reinforcing a sense of Indonesian national identity, and sense of worth in the world. It was certainly used by political leaders such as Suharto in this way.

The capacity of sport to bring together a diverse population is well-established in other national contexts. This was perhaps easier to do in the case of badminton in Indonesia because, unlike soccer, there is no hotly contested national inter-club competition, which excites ethnic, regional or religious rivalries. There are no riots at inter-club badminton games; Indonesian crowds reserve their anger for international matches, where their targets are usually opposition teams – though not always, as Ferry Sonnevile discovered in the ‘Scheele Incident’ discussed above.

Badminton was an activity in which virtually all Indonesians could take part. But it was one which was dominated, at the top level, by players of ethnic Chinese background. Ethnic Chinese have of course played important roles in other aspects of Indonesian society, including the arts and education. This study suggests, though, that their role in badminton was more significant and visible than in those other areas, and certainly brought them to national prominence much more consistently. The irony here of course is that in contributing to a sense of Indonesian national identity, ethnic Chinese players were contributing to something which in some senses actually excluded or marginalised them. The paradox of being a national sporting hero on the one hand but not being able to secure proof of citizenship on the other can hardly have been lost on any of the players discussed above.

But badminton was also an activity in which women played a far less prominent role than men. One might speculate whether this had any impact on, or perhaps reflected, the broader role of women in Indonesian society. This is clearly an area which requires further study.

For most of the period under review, badminton in Indonesia also benefited from the fact that the game was not dominated by Europeans (except Danes) or North Americans. This did mean that there was less money available for players and administrators. But it probably also meant that talented Indonesian players were not attracted away from the country by the lure of a better living elsewhere. Only very recently has this become a problem for Indonesia, and then primarily in the case of a neighbouring country, Singapore, rather than a European or North American one.

Various efforts have been made to promote badminton more widely internationally, but it is difficult to see these efforts being particularly successful in the short term. Globalisation has not yet substantially affected badminton. Indeed, it is difficult to think of any sport which has been globalised – if that is the correct term – in recent years in which non-Europeans/Americans have dominated.¹⁰⁴ The challenge to their dominance that Indonesia and Indonesian players face is not competition from the big money of Europe; it is from the clear, well-resourced and politically informed (and perhaps politically driven) desire of the Chinese to dominate this game as they are coming to dominate other sporting contests. Indonesian governments have in the past been prepared to benefit internationally from the success of their badminton players, but they have not been prepared to invest in the game in the way that the Chinese government has done. Perhaps there was previously an assumption that as the game was dominated by ethnic Chinese players, it needed no government financial support. To some extent, this would have been a correct assumption: business, and individual ethnic Chinese businesspeople, did financially support the game. But the collapse of so many businesses in Indonesia following the onset of the financial crisis in 1997 suggests that this is unlikely to continue to be the case. The immediate international future of Indonesian badminton thus looks bleak.

¹⁰⁴ Cricket might be argued to be an exception here, given the prominence of teams from south Asia and the West Indies.