Abstract

Words can turn into powerful concepts shaping the course of history. Nusantara, a word of Sanskrit origin, turns up in Javanese and Malay manuscripts of the 14th century and is used to define the realm of the Majapahit Empire and the Malay world. The paper will trace the origin of the concept and its reappearance in the Indonesian struggle for independence. Subsequently the sudden reflowering of the concept in the 1970s will be explained and its current relevance for the conflicts surrounding the South China Sea will be demonstrated.

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