Melaka revisited

Based on a wide range of unexplored contemporary Portuguese sources, this ambitious study aims to reconsider and to expound the Portuguese expansion at the heart of political, social and economic structures in Asia. In doing so, it expects to open new paths in the study of contact between civilisations that began at the end of the 15th century. This is all the more promising as the fog of ideologies and of the nagging aftermath of colonialism has, according to Pinto, been dispelled (xxii).

Niels Mulder

Shaping Indonesia

This well-researched and cogently presented study shows how images of an idealized China came to occupy a central place in Indonesia's post-independence political discourse. Indonesian leaders during the Sukarno era, Liu contends, admired Mao's China and sought from it "conceptual and practical inspiration" for their nation-building efforts.

Lee Kam Hing

The Review

The Newsletter

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Megan Brankley Abbas

In **The Entangled State: Sorcery, State Control, and Violence in Indonesia**, Nicholas Herriman draws on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in East Java and as a result calls into question the common scholarly understanding of the Indonesian state.

Megan Brankley Abbas


**SPECIFICALLY, HERRIMAN INVESTIGATES:** community-instigated killings of alleged sorcerers in the East Javanese regency of Banyuwangi, a region which, in the wake of Sukarno’s failed PKI-inspired coup in 1965 and the over-throw of Sukarno’s New Order for being largely unsubstantiated and overly simplistic. Instead, he underscores the persistence of local participatory and even initiative in Reformasi-era violence (from the East Javanese sorcery killings anti-sorcery to riots in Jakarta) as well as in the 1965-66 anti-communist massacres. While not denying oppressive behaviors on the part of the Indonesian state in either period, Herriman exposes locally planned and popular violence, thereby breaking down the false dichotomy between the state as an oppressive force and the passive Indonesian. Herriman therefore rejects the ‘overly sentimental’ moral outrage which many academics have directed against the Indonesian state in the name of democracy and against violence. On the sorcery killings in particular, Herriman writes: “my research indicates that local residents were not passive and peaceful Indonesians provoked into violence. They were not ‘faced’ with horror or which many academics have directed against the Indonesian state in the name of democracy and against violence. On the sorcery killings in particular, Herriman writes: “my research indicates that local residents were not passive and peaceful Indonesians provoked into violence. They were not ‘faced’ with horror or...”

In **The Entangled State**, Herriman notes that local officials “cave in to pressure from below” and therefore, to varying degrees, compromise the state’s absolute control over violence (99). For Herriman, this phenomenon of “social control from below” exemplifies the entangled nature of the state. In Herriman’s words, “such entanglement produces a hybrid society in which local residents seek the state, rather than avoid it, adopting it into their lives on their own terms. In other words, the state is appropriated to local ends” (114). Therefore, the state is not separate and opposed to civil society; rather, the two are mutually constitutive with overlapping interests and claims to power.

Although Herriman grounds his analysis in the specific case of East Javanese sorcery killings, his concept of the ‘entangled state’ has broader implications for how to understand governance in modern Indonesia. In this sense, the book serves as a welcome challenge to dominant academic accounts of the New Order as a violent, authoritarian regime capable of control and control at nearly every level of Indonesian life. Herriman criticizes such depictions of the New Order for being largely unsubstantiated and overly simplistic. Instead, he underscores the persistence of local participatory and even initiative in Reformasi-era violence (from the East Javanese sorcery killings anti-sorcery to riots in Jakarta) as well as in the 1965-66 anti-communist massacres. While not denying oppressive behaviors on the part of the Indonesian state in either period, Herriman exposes locally planned and popular violence, thereby breaking down the false dichotomy between the state as an oppressive force and the passive Indonesians. Herriman therefore rejects the ‘overly sentimental’ moral outrage which many academics have directed against the Indonesian state in the name of democracy and against violence. On the sorcery killings in particular, Herriman writes: “my research indicates that local residents were not passive and peaceful Indonesians provoked into violence. They were not ‘faced’ with horror or...”

Despite the aforementioned critique, Nicholas Herriman's ethnographic study of sorcery in East Java provides both a nuanced glimpse into a fascinating moment in recent Indonesian history and contributes an important voice to the on-going scholarly discussion over state power in Indonesia. Filled with intriguing details of village politics, it thereby enriches our understanding of contemporary East Java, of sorcery, and of the relationship between violence and the Indonesian state.

For Premoodya, it was universal humanism expressed by Chinese intellectuals that attracted his attention and on this he had much to say during his brief visits to China in the late 1950s. Premoodya was impressed too by the productive output of intellectuals and the higher rewards and status they were accorded compared to those in Indonesia.

**Idealized image**

Liu suggests that Indonesia’s idealized image of China differed greatly from Western observers who viewed the country as a repressive, totalitarian communist state. Indonesians disassociated the China they admired from its communist ideology and instead credited the creation of a disciplined, cohesive and harmonious society to Chinese nationalism and the new democracy. Sukarno saw no incompatibilities between the ideas driving China and his own views, and his interpretation of China’s political experience served as a key rationale for the introduction of Guided Democracy that greatly concentrated power in the president’s hands. Disenchanted with Western-style democracy, China as a model appealed to Sukarno.

In setting the discussion of the China metaphor within the broader context of Indonesia’s efforts at nation-building and entering China from Hong Kong, Indonesian visitors encountered a way of life that they judged as less decadent. Liu sums up that China, to admiring Indonesia, was a symbol of economic growth with equitable sharing of wealth, of a populist regime supported by the people, and of intellectuals actively participating in nation-building.

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