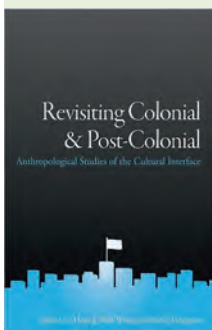


Wonderland of 1001 prospects

It is like a marriage: when you are in touch and even after divorce, you keep influencing each other, albeit that the logic of it is screwed, unpredictable and rather surprising. If the book under review has a message, it is that contact between cultures results in a process of mutual influencing that shouldn't and can't be settled through sticking simple labels to it, such as 'localization', 'hybridization', 'creolization', 'Japanization', or what have you. Influences are two-sided, influences live on and it is the dialectics of the contact that should be in focus. This insight directs the attention to minute details that cannot be meaningfully reduced to grand ideas and is amply illustrated by the exploits of some ten Japanese fieldworkers and two Hong-Kong Chinese anthropologists, resulting in the description and analysis of the "Dynamics of Culture in Interface".

Niels Mulder



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THE PRESENT COLLECTION of original essays is based on the papers presented at an international conference titled *Anthropology of Cultural Interface* convened at the University of Hong Kong in February 2011. The conference and the essays should bring Marshall Sahlins' insights to the fore, such as the assumption that culture cannot be studied in isolation, as it develops in relation to its encompassing contexts at the same time that it shows itself in distinctively local patterns. This is to say that the social process is ordered by culture and takes place in the conference's 'cultural interface'. The latter is a conceptual space where the local culture mediates with foreign cultural elements to produce social effects that cannot be specified by either the local culture or the foreign cultural element/s but by the mediation between them. Consequently, a cultural encounter is an extremely complex and unpredictable affair that calls for a highly refined description, which also holds for the internal dynamics within a given culture. As such, the unit of analysis cannot be determined *a priori* but is specified by the ever-changing boundary of the cultural interface (Preface, pp. 15-17).

This Wonderland of the all-possible is then given shape in often wonderful Japanese English prose that shows that the parties involved in the intercultural or intra-cultural encounters – each equipped with their own means and motivated by their own ends – reciprocally engage each other in a dynamic, emergent relationship. Through thorough reporting, it is hoped to shed light on the open question of how the cultural interface can be theorized.

It is a baffling array of observations and experiences that the reader is presented inside ten empirical essays, ranging from reflections on the cross-cultural migration of Japanese popular culture to Hong Kong to the colonial whiteness introduced in the New Guinea Highlands; the bungling of good order after independence; and the remaining yet changing desirability of acquiring whiteness through Christianity. In post-Mao China, the Hui Muslims have been become more and more conscious of themselves and their Islamic identity as pragmatic responses to two shifting worldviews, i.e., that of the state they live in and of the faith they devoutly believe in. Buddhism among the former untouchables in India and the pull of certain Hindu ideas among those who experience their religion as faith and who do not draw a rigid ideological line that excludes the others are at the center of a dynamic yet complex religious scene in Nagpur city. And so it goes on, as festivals change meaning, as Ainu identity blurs, as rice noodles stimulate appetite and friendly relationships, as pigs are de-animalized as pork, as multicultural workplaces become contested spaces, and as the understanding of Western medical technology and its pharmaceuticals offers a perspective on traditional and modernized African thinking.

Generally speaking, the very aim of developing a theory is to reduce complexity by subsuming a variety of elements or phenomena, by bringing them under a common denominator and placing them in an inner-connected framework. Here, however, through insisting that dynamic cultural interface should be regarded as the unit of analysis, it is complexity galore. It is like *tutti frutti*; one can discern the various components, but there are no connections. Accordingly, I doubt whether said interface with its flabbergasting potential can be theorized. It can be smashed to smithereens, to fragments that can be individually described, even as this procedure results in tortuous images while leaving the reader perplexed in the wonderland of 1001 possibilities.

Niels Mulder (1935; Dutch) has devoted most of his professional life to research on the mental world of members of the urban middle classes on Java, in Thailand and the Philippines. His latest work is *Life in the Philippines: Contextual Essays on Filipino Being* (forthcoming with University of the Philippines Press). (niels_mulder201935@yahoo.com.ph)

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Sahlins, M. 1999. "Two or three things that I know about culture", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 5:399-421.

and one *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school). Through this strategy, Raihani obtains a sample that roughly represents the types of schools in Indonesia (secular-religious, state-private, general-vocational). Interestingly, despite the wide range of schools studied, there is insignificant difference between them with regard to multicultural education. As each subsequent chapter shows, the formation of multicultural attitudes is not a priority in the Indonesian education.

One of the key issues is the neglect of multiculturalism in the national policy. The Education Law 2003 reflects the process of democratization in Indonesia. It mandates that every citizen has an equal right to education, and ensures greater involvement from the community. However, according to Raihani, the Law does not contain articles on multicultural education. Multiculturalism is weakly implied in references to education as a human right, and the role of education in creating democratic citizens. A strategic implementation of the law, the Ministerial Decree of 23/2006 that outlines the expected outcome for primary and secondary education, shows that multicultural attitude is not one of the competencies targeted by school subjects, with the exception of anthropology. Only anthropology provides a platform for discussions on tolerance and respect for cultural and religious diversity, but the course is only available for students in the low-prestige language stream.

Without a clear mandate from the government, the extent to which multiculturalism is aspired to depends on individual school principals and teachers. In chapter five, Raihani shares his findings on leadership styles of the school principals and their policies. Although all the principals are aware of and appreciate diversity, they do not have clearly articulated strategies to cultivate multiculturalism. Some of the policies are outright contradictions to multiculturalism. Thus for

instance, in the vocational state school, all Muslim female students are obliged to wear *jilbab*, in the general school owned by Muhammadiyah, all female students, including those who are not Muslims, have to wear *jilbab*, and in the general state school, the minority religions are not given dedicated rooms for their religion classes. Accusations of ethnic or religion-based favoritism have also been made towards principals, for instance, when sending teachers to professional development programs.

The practices related to the teaching of the subject 'Religion' are discussed further in chapter six. Despite the potential of the subject to build mutual understanding among people of different religions, Raihani finds that the confessional framework does not fully accommodate this. The confessional approach of religious teaching emphasizes truth claims and doctrines. There is little room for new and contextual interpretation, let alone comparative discussions with other religions. Here too, very much depends on the teachers' initiatives. While some teachers engage in a comparative approach, many are reluctant to do so.

In chapters seven and eight, Raihani focuses on the students and their points of view. Based on interviews and observations of extra-curricular activities, Raihani argues that one of the unintended consequences of these activities is the interaction with fellow students from different religious or ethnic backgrounds. Although this is undoubtedly positive, the fact that it is unintended, once again, highlights the lack of systematic cultivation of multicultural ideas in the students' learning activities. In the subsequent chapter, Raihani presents the results of his focus group discussion with students regarding their ideal community. Most students are in favor of diversity, although a small number

of students would rather live in a homogeneous society. In terms of personal relationships, interethnic marriages are more acceptable than inter-religious marriages. Differences between religions are perceived to be more unsurmountable. Given the confessional approach in religious teaching, this stance is unsurprising.

In chapters nine and ten, Raihani ventures to other types of inequality in the school setting. Thus in chapter nine, he discusses injustices based on economic class, and the discrimination against students that do not take the natural science stream. Chapter ten looks closer into an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) and shows that the hierarchies are based on economic class as well as family lineage, the latter giving a higher status to offspring from religious leaders. In comparison to the discussion of multicultural attitudes in relation to ethnic and religious diversity that are five chapters long, the discussions in these two chapters are too cursory, and lack clear connection with the other chapters. The issues explored in these two chapters might be better served if they are presented as separate studies.

Overall, the book shows that the education system does not aim to transform Indonesians into multicultural citizens. This alone should be a warning for the future of the nation. Based on Raihani's study, there is a great possibility that the next cohort of leaders will consist of people who are not critical of systemic inequalities and majoritarian discourses. Therefore, this book should not only be of great interest to scholars in Indonesian studies, but also to educators and policy makers in Indonesia.

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