

*Jakarta-Batavia: Socio-Cultural Essays*. Edited by Kees Grijns and Peter J.M. Nas. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000. 349 pp.

*Jakarta-Batavia* is an attempt to examine current socio-cultural research on Jakarta. Jakarta has developed significantly, from the provincial capital of Jayakarta, part of which was a swamp, to the capital city of Indonesia, where the swamp has been covered over by buildings. The development in Jakarta has attracted many people to work there, making it a multiracial, multicultural, and multireligious city. But life in Jakarta is not always as easy as it is portrayed in the movies. Lately, riots have disrupted political and economic life not only in Jakarta, but also in other parts of Indonesia, and even in neighbouring countries. So the song “*Siapa suruh datang Jakarta?*” (Who asked you to come to Jakarta?) is very popular in the capital city where citizens struggle to make a living, especially in the current turbulent time. As it happens, Jakarta has long been a dynamic and vibrant city and scholars from disciplines as varied as history, sociology, anthropology, geography, linguistics, architecture, and literature have observed significant changes in Jakarta from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.

The book is a collection of seventeen articles. Those concerning the development of the city’s healthcare system, social life, and multiracial community provide readers with a broad understanding of Jakarta. The essays centre on a theme proposed by one of the editors, Nas, in 1986: Jakarta’s development can be understood by first examining its natural environment and physical structure, then by looking at socio-cultural forces and, finally, by studying the development of a repressive government. Thus, the collection is of interest not only to anthropologists and historians, but also to geographers, psychologists, and those in technological fields. Read together, the collection shows that a multi-disciplinary approach to a site is extremely useful and meaningful in understanding a particular place.

The writers of the essays know Jakarta very well. Most have worked in Jakarta or Batavia in connection with their Master theses or Ph.D. dissertations. The book contains substantial and detailed data about the capital city but falls short of the deep analyses required of the topics it

engages. Nevertheless, the editors have included a helpful bibliography, which has enhanced the quality of the collection.

In the “Introduction”, Grijns and Nas outline the development of Jakarta from early times, and focus on the development of Jakarta-Batavia following the decline of the VOC (Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie, the Dutch East India Company). This outline helps readers to follow the essays, even when the essays straddle different fields. An essay by Blusse explains the changing life-style of bureaucrats while Van der Brug’s article discusses how the poorly planned physical layout of the city had rendered its inhabitants susceptible to epidemics of typhoid, malaria, and dysentery. The articles add to the body of knowledge contained in works by Swaving (1878), Taylor (1983), Blusse (1986), and Abeyasekere (1989).

There are also essays on the multiracial community of Jakarta-Batavia. Nijmeijer’s observations on the “new” Asian Christian community are included, along with Raben’s explanation of the difficulty the Dutch colonialists had in controlling different ethnic groups. Lohanda (formerly used name: Abeyasekere) describes the Indische Komandant of Batavia; Blackburn’s essay concerns the role of women in Batavia.

Ethnic minorities are also discussed in the collection. De Jong writes on the history of the Arab community in Batavia and provides an in-depth discussion of how different Arab groups have been viewed over time. In addition, the question of aristocracy among the Betawi and its relationship to Shahab is considered. Termorshuizen writes about the personal life of a colonial journalist and novelist Daum, also known as Maurits. Termorshuizene explains how Maurits’s novels illustrate the more informal life-style of the Dutch abroad. A slice of Chinese life is portrayed by Myra Sidharta in her description of a comic strip that appeared in the *Sin Po* daily. Finally, there is an essay on how the Chinese adopted the Melayu language and clothing, yet maintained many of their own traditions.

Nas and Malo also examine the development of Jakarta’s governmental structure by examining the policies of mayors and governors of Jakarta from the emergence of the capital city. Grijns describes the policies of the modern JABOTABEK (that is, the area surrounding Jakarta

city. It consists of Jakarta (city), BOgor, TAngerang, and BEKasi). These essays complement one by Dorleans on residential development of the city in general and one by Nas and Schenk on Penjarangan. Nagtegaal and Nas also write on the greenery of Jakarta. The roots of this modern cosmopolitan city have not been forgotten: Tinia's essay describes the features of a traditional Batawi house.

European and Indonesian scholars were involved in this project. The writings are thorough and the detailed data demonstrate the breadth and scope of the research conducted. However, not all of the writers have updated the use of terminology and the editors have not standardized the spelling of some words. Some essays use the obsolete *Tjiliwung* instead of *Ciliwung*, *Bantam* instead of *Banten*, and *panghoeloe* instead of *penghulu*. Moreover, Lohanda's spelling of proper names is very confusing; for example, is "Tjing's father was Nata Naija Wijaya" meant to be read as "Cing's father was Nata Naiya Wijaya", or "Tjing's father was Nata Naidja Widjaja'." Other variations in spelling such as *Jelan Jaiya Abdul Kadier* and *Djelan Djaija (Djaja?) Abdul Kadier* may be a problem for some readers.

This minor problem aside, the book is a very rich source of interesting information about Jakarta. Life in Jakarta has changed significantly over time, often for reasons that the citizens of the city have been unaware of. The book uncovers the forces behind these changes, and for that reason should be of interest to many people. This book should challenge scholars to look more deeply at Jakarta and its historical sites. Further research on the Betawi, Chinese, Arab, and possibly Indian communities is needed to balance the data contained in the Dutch archives, lest people assume that Jakarta was a place where only Dutch colonialists lived.

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