

class is not quite the same as its Western counterpart: the Thai middle class is unique in the sense that it is driven more by consumerism than democratic ideology, at least since the 1990s. Thus, one should view the role of the middle class in Thai democratization with greater scepticism. Are they then simply opportunistic? This issue is worth pondering given the current role of the middle class in the ruling Thai Rak Thai party, which appears to be diverting Thailand toward authoritarianism. Indeed, this writer could not agree more with Ockey on this. In fact, his line of argument is consistent with other cases in the developing world.

James Ockey, in all of his writings on Thai politics, shows a strong commitment to looking at Thai politics in a different way. He has consistently paid attention to what can be called “politics from below” — provincial influential people or *chaopho*, *nakleng*, or the politically marginalized slum-dwellers and women. These “data” have been neglected by most academics in the West. So, ontologically speaking, Ockey is quite unique — and his work a praiseworthy contribution.

SURIN MAISRIKROD
James Cook University, Townsville
Queensland, Australia

West Papua and Indonesia Since Suharto: Independence, Autonomy or Chaos? By Peter King. Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press, 2004. 231 pp.

Following East Timor’s secession from Indonesia in 1999, there has been a shift among activists and writers, especially in Australia, to focus on the future of Papua, often referred to as West Papua or the former Irian Jaya. The rallying cry has been to repeat what was achieved in East Timor, namely, to use international pressure and intervention to split the territory of Papua from Indonesian control. Some of the more recent writings on Papua include John Salford, *United Nations and the Indonesian Takeover of West Papua, 1962–1969: The Anatomy of a Betrayal* (2002); Richard Chauvel, *The Land of Papua and the Indonesian State: Essays on West Papua* (2003), and Elizabeth Brundige, *Indonesian Human Rights Abuses In West Papua: Application of the Law of Genocide to the History of Indonesian Control* (2004). It is in this context that Peter King’s book takes on a particular importance as it goes the furthest in proposing international military, diplomatic, economic and political intervention, especially from Australia, the United Kingdom, the United

States and eventually the United Nations, to resolve the plight of the Papuans, namely to free them from “Indonesian occupation”.

King’s book is divided into seven main chapters with a prologue providing a background to the state of politics in Papua following the fall of Soeharto. In essence, much has been written on the subject and chapters one (resistance movements), three (options), four and five (military politics and business), and six and seven (Australia and the international community) do not provide any fresh perspectives as similar themes have been covered in other books (by Robin Osborne, John Salford, and others). However, what is useful in this book is chapter two, which updates the various writings thus far through the analysis of the 2000 Papua Congress and what it has meant for Papuan politics. King is no doubt right to argue that the central government, especially President Abdurrahman Wahid’s endorsement of the Congress and its follow-up, marked a defining moment in Papuan politics. Today, one can argue rather convincingly that Jakarta has to deal with three centres of power in Papua, namely, the elected provincial government(s), the various factions of the armed resistance movements (Free Papua Movement, OPM) and the Papua Presidium Council (PDP). While the elected provincial government tends to toe Jakarta’s line, the main opposition has emanated from the PDP and the OPM.

King’s criticisms of Indonesia’s Papua policy cannot be dismissed even though they are not novel. Any analysis of Indonesia-Papuan relations has centred on a number of key issues. First, the issue of racial discrimination. Papuans, who are mostly Catholics or Protestants, feel that they have very little freedom to manage their own communities as the key and lucrative positions in government bodies and private companies are dominated by non-Papuans. They perceive themselves as being “colonized” by other Indonesians, many of whom also happened to be non-Christians. Second, the aggressive exploitation of natural resources (copper, gold, timber) irrespective of local interests and traditions has been a major source of grievance. This is best symbolized by Freeport Indonesia that dominates the Papuan economy. Not only are the interests, traditions and landownership rights of the Papuans ignored, what is worse, very little benefits have accrued to them, with Papua described as a “treasure house” but in which the locals are trapped in the “cycle of poverty”.

Third, the growing demographic imbalance between “transmigrants” and the locals, with the former being given all the privileges and access, very often at the expense of the latter. The Papuans fear becoming minorities in their own land, especially to the more aggressive and capable ethnic groups from other parts of Indonesia

such as the Bugis and Balinese. Fourth, the growing unhappiness in the manner Papua became part of Indonesia with the Act of Free Choice being described as nothing more than the “Act of No Choice”, thereby challenging the legal basis of Papua’s integration or restoration into Indonesia. Fifth and finally, the gross violations of human rights by the security apparatus, especially the military, when conducting operations against the OPM and other groups opposing Indonesia’s political and economic presence in the province.

However, where King’s book tries to break new ground is also where he is most controversial and probably, vulnerable. King views Papua as the “next East Timor”. There is no doubt that there are socially constructed similarities in the mind of political activists that would like to sever Papua from Indonesia, namely, the issue of constitutional illegality, political injustice, economic exploitation, environmental degradation, social-cultural unfairness, military repression and gross violations of human rights. Yet, supporting separatism could be interpreted by Jakarta as not merely interfering in another country’s affairs, albeit an important neighbour in this case, but could also be a dangerous prescription for solving Papua’s problems. Dismembering Indonesia is unlikely to benefit the Papuans, Indonesia, Southeast Asia or for that matter, Australia. Moreover, the Papuans are highly fractious and inter-tribal conflicts are likely to break out, leading to a possible bloodbath in the country. Also unlike East Timor, Papua is strategically and economically vital to the great powers with the United States and China heavily involved in the territory’s economy, especially in the extraction of various strategic resources. Thus, an independent Papua or the East Timor option is definitely not viable for the time being.

The only alternative that exists is dialogue and this is something that has borne fruit for the Papuans. Since the fall of Soeharto, dialogue has been the main bargaining mechanism between Jakarta and the Papuan opposition even though many abuses have continued. At the same time, the Papuan opposition, especially the OPM, is also to be blamed for many of the attacks on the security apparatus and civilians. Looking at the historical trajectory, the progress made by the Papuans in the last four to five years has been indeed phenomenal. Not only was the Papua Congress held in 2000 and the various follow-up meetings held ever since, but there have also been various structures and institutions put in place to express and channel the aspirations of the Papuans. The Papua Presidium Council and the Papua Task Force are two such examples. In December 2004, newly elected President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, through presidential regulations, sanctioned the

establishment of the long-awaited Papua People's Assembly, a cultural body to express the aspirations and wishes of all Papuans.

While dividing the province into three has been controversial, it must also be admitted that it is a logistical nightmare to administer the far-flung territory. For administrative efficiency and representation, smaller units are definitely needed. The Dutch had seven and even the three proposed by the Indonesian government might need further modifications. As such, unlike East Timor, where Jakarta was in denial about the existence of a "problem", since the fall of Soeharto the political leadership in Indonesia has been trying to find ways and means to solve the Papuan problem. While various concessions, including the granting of wide-ranging special autonomy, have been acceded to, many issues remain unresolved. As long as Papuans are prepared to remain as part of Indonesia, it is likely that Jakarta would be prepared to accommodate, as far as possible, including the possibility of troop withdrawals and key political positions being given to locals.

However, any attempt at secession is likely to meet stiff resistance from Jakarta's political and military leadership. Here, King's diagnosis of the way forward is rather unrealistic as Papua is not East Timor, and as long as the political will exists in Jakarta to ensure there are "no more East Timors", Indonesia is unlikely to give up Papua without a fight regardless of pressure from outside.

BILVEER SINGH

*Department of Political Science
National University of Singapore*

***China: Is Rapid Growth Sustainable?* Edited by Ross Garnaut and Ligang Song. Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2004. Softcover: 249pp.**

By 2004 China had become the sixth largest economy and the fourth largest trading nation in the world. Its trade volume is about to reach a trillion U.S. dollars. To achieve this status China has undergone concerted reform since the late 1970s. This has led to considerable interest among professionals and policy-makers across the globe. While some view China's rise and integration in the global economic system in terms of offering potential opportunities for trade, others view the phenomenon as a collapsing system that jeopardizes the security and stability of the region. The book under review broadly fits into the first category.