

Indonesia: The Great Transition. Edited by John Bresnan. New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005. Softcover: 318pp.

This book is an ambitious academic volume written by a group of Indonesianists based in the United States. Its editor is John Bresnan, an Indonesia specialist based at Columbia University. The book is aimed at helping all of us to understand the phenomenon of, to use the editor's term, "the great transition" experienced by Indonesia. Using a multi-dimensional approach, it encompasses history, anthropology, politics, economics, and international relations to examine the causes, consequences, complexities and challenges of Indonesia's path to democracy. A range of issues including the process of nation-state building, modernity, political Islam, centralization, regionalism, political parties, military, leadership, economic reform, and globalization are critically examined by the authors. Theoretically, this book does not offer an alternative to the existing approaches to the study of contemporary Indonesian politics/political economy, but it does give us grounded views on Indonesia beyond the views which are often found in the media or are given by "instant" Indonesia experts.

In the prologue, John Bresnan sets out some concerns regarding the lack of understanding about the struggles and the dynamics of Indonesia's historical and political trajectories and the consequent strong need to educate the general public on this very important country. He outlines the magnitude of the problems faced by Indonesia after the fall of Suharto in 1998. He also worries about the ability of leaders in the post-Suharto period to hold the country together in the midst of a seemingly unending series of crises, and he poses questions that are answered by the contributors of this book.

Chapter 1 is about Indonesia at the "big picture" level. It is written by Donald Emmerson from Stanford University who works on Indonesian politics. He examines critically the view that the state has been in total control over the archipelago and its people. He argues that as the process of nation-state building in Indonesia is ongoing, the pursuit of knowing the identity of Indonesia is important. He highlights four important areas of identity that could help us to understand Indonesia (p. 8): *spatial* Indonesia (physical, social and political lines); *centrifugal* Indonesia (causes for disintegration); *historical* Indonesia (from pre-colonial, colonial to post-colonial periods); and *personal* Indonesia (which can be found among individuals). By integrating these identities into a comprehensive analysis, he argues that events and developments

such as the breakaway of East Timor, the struggles in Aceh and Papua, the process of decentralization, and elite rivalries during the post-Suharto period are issues that Indonesia has to face. By saying that we can also expect that anything can happen in Indonesia in the future including the emergence of “new” Indonesia, the one that differs from what we have seen right now. With the rise of localities and of local power combined with the weakening of the centre, the break-up of Indonesia is still possible.

Chapter 2 examines the historical genealogy of religious plurality and social diversity in Indonesia. It is written by Robert Hefner, an anthropologist from Boston University who has researched widely on Islam and modernity in Indonesia. Among his provocative works are *Civil Islam, Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (2000) and *Remaking Muslim Politics* (2005). He argues the importance of acknowledging the religious and social diversities inherited from the past and making them useful in providing “social capital” that can enhance the consolidation of democracy in Indonesia in the future. In doing so, he traces back the inter-religious engagements that helped establish the religious plurality that spread out through the Indonesian archipelago. He also points out that Dutch efforts to contain the spread of Islam in the past not only failed, but created “unintended” consequences which were the expansion of Islamic organizations and religious civic organizations to counter those established by the Dutch (pp. 90–91). These organizations were influential in shaping the relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Hefner argues that despite the fact that the legacies of the past showed the seeds of religious pluralism and cultural diversity, Indonesia faces “an unfinished project” in this respect, especially after the fall of Suharto, that is, dealing with the other side of the picture which is using religion to commit acts of violence against each other. These acts are often committed by ordinary citizens, producing an “uncivil society” (p. 121). This latest trend is worrying and I do agree with Hefner’s views on it. He argues that this unfinished project requires serious attention, and it is important that both the leaders and citizens renew the spirit of religious pluralism and of social diversity in years to come.

Chapter 3 discusses the trajectory of Indonesian politics by using an institutional point of view. It is written by Annette Clear, a newcomer in the field of Indonesian politics who is attached to the University of California at Santa Cruz. Clear focuses primarily on “the rules, procedures and practices” which affect the relationship

between the state and the Indonesian people (p. 139). In doing this, she examines the strengths and weaknesses of institutions such as the parliament, military, civil society, electoral bodies, judiciary and regional bodies. Overall, she argues that there is both continuity and change in Indonesian politics. Some institutions have been able to adapt to the new political environment, while others have been wiped out by the changes. She argues that Indonesia has struggled since independence with different political systems including Parliamentary democracy, Guided democracy, *Pancasila* democracy, and Presidential democracy. To a large extent, all of these have been through adjustment and consolidation periods which have produced both failures and successes among state and non-state institutions. In my view, there is nothing new about it because politics is not merely about institutions but also about those who ultimately control and have power over them. For instance, if those who dominated the state and non-state institutions during the Suharto period are still in control of those institutions in the post-Suharto period, then we should not hope much for the improvement of Indonesian politics.

Chapter 4 examines the dynamics of the Indonesian economy since the 1997/98 economic crisis, focusing primarily on the issues of recovery and reform. It is written by the editor of this book, who has also written widely on Indonesia and Southeast Asia. In this chapter, Bresnan looks at how the 1997/98 economic crisis occurred and how the Indonesian Government responded to it which paved the way for the taking over of the large conglomerates who were on the brink of bankruptcy, making Indonesia as “one of the most highly nationalized economies in the world” (p. 190). He argues, however, that the domination of government in the Indonesian economy cannot continue in the long run without jeopardizing economic recovery and the return of foreign investors to Indonesia. Since he uses a political economy approach, Bresnan examines the politics of economic reform during the post-Suharto period in a critical manner, touching on the role of the Suharto family, the widespread corruption within the government and the private sector and the role of the IMF in deepening the economic crisis. However, he holds the view, which I share as well, that economic recovery will come very soon and therefore he argues that reform efforts must continue. The willingness of Indonesian leaders to look for economic opportunities available in the global arena will be essential in this respect.

Chapter 5 examines the ups and downs of Indonesian foreign policy in different periods — from the Sukarno, the Suharto, to the *reformasi* period (1998–2005). It is written by Ann Marie Murphy,

an international relations specialist from Seton Hall University and who is another newcomer to the field of Indonesian studies. In this examination, she traces back contending views on Indonesian foreign policy. She applies the *perjuangan/diplomasi* dichotomy to assess the struggles and contests over the formulation of foreign policy adopted by Indonesian leaders (Sukarno, Suharto, Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati, and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono). She also argues that in spite of changes to and inconsistencies in foreign policy, there are bold patterns which reflect Indonesia's domestic and international considerations that will eventually shape the way in which Indonesian leaders make Indonesia an important player in the global arena. My view is that the *perjuangan/diplomasi* dichotomy has to be revitalized in the sense that more creative ideas are needed to make foreign policy more relevant to the strategic interests of Indonesia in the future. Among these interests are dealing with the rise of China and India in the years to come.

The Epilogue aptly sums up the main issues addressed in this volume. The editor ably highlights some of the issues which deserve further attention and points out that the future of Indonesia lies in the hands of both the Indonesian people and their leaders. Has this ambitious book achieved its objective? I would say "yes" without hesitation. The use of a multi-disciplinary approach is commendable. It is well-written and it is easy to read. The chapters written by Emmerson and Hefner, in particular, are excellent and informative. Without any doubt, it adds to the growing number of academic works on Indonesian politics and it will be useful to both specialists and generalists who are keen to study the evolving political dynamics of post-Suharto Indonesia.

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