

*Securing a Place: Small-Scale Artisans in Modern Indonesia.* By Elizabeth Morrell. Southeast Asia Studies Program Series no. 21. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Cornell University, 2005. 220 pp.

The book under review is a study of Torajan and Bugis artisans on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. The study examines them as workers in micro-enterprises, focusing on development related issues surrounding such enterprises. It is an extremely well written work with a minimal use of jargon that reflects a depth of fieldwork experience on the part of the author. It is also a work of considerable comparative relevance for those interested in small-scale enterprises in general and efforts to promote development through the work of artisans, in particular.

The book's ten chapters are divided into four each on Bugis weavers of Wajo and Torajan artisans of Tana Toraja with an introduction and conclusion that discuss general issues arising from the two case studies. In particular, Morrell is interested in the development potential and sustainability of such small-scale enterprises, especially in the wake of the economic crisis that hit Indonesia in the late 1990s. The first chapter introduces the Bugis and Toraja and their products. The author notes that, while their products are different, both groups of producers share the fact that they are relatively poor, have few alternatives for earning money, and produce for local and external markets. The theme of different markets is an important one throughout the book. The Bugis have a long history of external trade, including the export of plaid cloth to many parts of Asia and the export of relatively plain cloth to Java remains a mainstay of the local weaving industry, while more intricate supplementary weft patterned textiles are mainly sold locally. Toraja handicrafts were mainly produced for local use in the past and, as the author notes (p. 23) their "primitiveness was formerly disparaged by lowland inhabitants". More recently, however, it is precisely this primitiveness that has made them attractive to foreign tourists, academics, and museum curators. While this has led to the creation of a large external market for

Torajan crafts, it is one in which they tend to be “relegated to the low-status realm of mass-market souvenir production” (p. 18). The author also introduces another theme that crops up throughout the work in relation to the role of the government assisting such small-scale enterprises. She comments that, while Indonesian Government policies pay more attention to small-scale and household industries than do government policies in many other countries, in practice they still leave out many micro-enterprises. She cites the figure that in 1993 only 2 per cent of south Sulawesi household enterprises received any government assistance. Elsewhere in the study she points to the fact that even when the government does get involved its work tends to be ineffective in helping local producers.

Chapters 2 through 5 focus on the Bugis. Chapter 2 provides historical and cultural background on Bugis weaving and textile trade. The author turns to a description of the modern silk industry in Wajo Regency in Chapter 3. Under government promotion efforts were made to revive the regency’s silk industry starting in the 1960s, with local community leaders hoping to emulate the modern silk industry of Thailand. Morrell distinguishes two distinct forms of production that had emerged: what she refers to as the “independent-traditional” and “entrepreneurial-modern” streams (p. 66). For a brief time the “entrepreneurial-modern” stream prospered and was responsible for a number of innovative products, but it went into decline in the early 1990s and by the early 2000s was mainly producing plain white cloth for sale to Pekalongan, Java. In contrast, the “independent-traditional” stream, in which weavers produced high quality products for the local market, did relatively well through this period, even after the collapse of the *rupiah* in 1997, which led to a sharp rise in the price of silk. There is a section in the chapter on government training schemes in which the author remarks “the few training and assistance schemes have had little success, often because the training focuses on basic skills rather than more advanced techniques and concepts. ... Many of these courses ... are conducted by public servants with little practical knowledge or experience, and participants report that the training is often of little benefit” (p. 82).

Chapter 4 includes several case studies of the lives of different weavers and enterprises.

In Chapter 5, the author continues her examination of marketing problems faced by the “entrepreneurial-modern” stream, which she compares with proto-industrial production in Europe in regard to the increased division of labour. With a note of frustration, she comments (p. 100) that despite the “relative success of those in the ‘independent-traditional’ stream in creating a place in the market and earning enough to support themselves ... independent weaving activity is still widely dismissed by industry leaders and planners as insignificant to regional and national economic development.” She sees the pro-industrial sector as unable to compete in the global market into which it has been drawn whereas independent weavers who produce elaborate textiles are able to avoid such competition. She compares this situation with Erik Cohen’s description of northern Thailand weavers, where local markets are also their mainstay. Moreover, the author cites data indicating that between 1994 and 2003, while prices for cloth and wages of weavers in the “entrepreneurial-modern” stream remained static, prices for cloth woven on backstrap looms by those in the “independent-traditional” stream increased. She concludes this chapter with the remark (p. 206) that “while weaving skills are respected, weavers and other artisans engaged in the industry are among some of the poorest members of society.”

The Toraja are discussed in Chapters 6 to 9. Chapter 6 provides cultural and historical background on Torajan carving and other forms of material culture (including textiles), noting that “Many artifacts have joint commercial and ceremonial roles” (p. 109). The commercial aspect includes both production for the tourist market and sales for local ceremonial use. There is a nice discussion about buffalo symbolism, which is important within the traditional Torajan context, but “modern carvers have found that the foreign audience not wishing to be reminded of ritualized buffalo slaughter, prefers other imagery” and the buffalo imagery “is increasingly substituted by, or supplemented with, the human figure” (p. 127).

Other Torajan groups, such as the Mamasa, rather than the Sa'dan more commonly used human figures in the past, but modern market forces are changing this. Morrell discusses other ways in which the tourist market has influenced carving in regard to specific features as well as through an appreciation of primitiveness, something that is not valued within the Javanese and Balinese aesthetic tradition that is dominant in Indonesia — primitive being contrasted with *halus* (refined, delicate). The author comments that many young Torajans have been exposed to foreign tourists who value primitiveness and this has allowed these Torajans to establish this aesthetic in the contemporary world. However, the tourist market's value of primitiveness combines with local conservatism to serve as a constraint on artistic expression (p. 136).

The emergent Torajan art industry is the focus of Chapter 7. Morrell's discussion in this chapter draws upon the categories of tribal art in Graburn's pioneering work. While a few carvers have been successful in producing works for fine art dealers and thereby achieved a degree of independence in what they produce, most must work within the constraints of the local ceremonial and tourist markets. In discussing the economics of small-scale production by Torajan artisans, Morrell indicates (p. 144) that for many of them it is the only viable income source, while others derive over half of household income from this source. This is of particular concern because of the uncertain viability of the tourist market. Unlike the Bugis of Wajo, the Torajans have a history of limited external trade. The author associates this with the relative absence of entrepreneurial activity by Torajans. Only entrepreneur-led workshops existed in 1993, and three of these had closed by 2003. The chapter discusses the different types of crafts workers, including bead workers, weavers, and carvers. Of particular interest here is the extent to which Sa'dan products have little appeal to foreign tourists in contrast to the works of neighbouring Toraja from Mamasa, Kalumpang, and Rongkong. For example, the brightly colored supplementary weft patterned textiles woven by the Sa'dan do not conform to tourist expectations of Torajan primitiveness; unlike the ochre colored warp *ikat* patterned

Kalumpang textiles. There is also a discussion about local sales outlets, which are owned or controlled by local elites, and of the importance of sales to Torajan expatriates living elsewhere in Indonesia and of the role of shops selling Torajan handicrafts in Bali and Java that are owned by Torajan expatriates.

Chapter 8 examines the artisans themselves and includes biographical sketches of several of them, focusing on how they have adapted to the decline in tourist arrivals and new areas of creativity. There is an interesting look at female carvers (most carvers are men), who “represent the lowest socio-economic level of Torajan artisans” and who are “among the poorest members of Torajan society” (p. 172). They tend to carve bamboo into such things as key rings and coffee containers to keep raw material costs down. There is also a look at an entrepreneur from one of the leading Torajan noble families and a section on the woodcarver as artist. Their work has been influenced by Balinese watercolors and carvings and by Western notions of art, “especially those that define art as pictorial narrative” (p. 176).

The final chapter on the Toraja focuses on innovation and transformation within the Torajan tourist art field. A section on supporting artisans (pp. 180–81) is especially interesting. The author points out that the growth of the industry has been largely unassisted and reflects a lack of alternative forms of income generation. A group of artisans largely without government assistance established the only successful cooperative. In contrast a government-sponsored cooperative failed, hampered by poor planning and corruption. Morrell comments that Indonesian tourists have not been particularly interested in Torajan handicrafts since they do not fit within Muslim dictates concerning representation. Thus, it is non-Indonesian tourists who have been the dominant external influence. In this regard, the author notes that foreigners “value reproduction more highly than invention” (p. 185). She cites the example of an innovative ceremonial gate that foreign consumers considered to be hybridization and that remained unsold even though Torajans themselves thought that it represented a good work of art. To the extent that there has been innovation Morrell says that merchants often play an important role

in promoting innovation and that innovations usually need to be approved of by figures in authority.

The concluding chapter returns to several of the main themes in the earlier chapters and reflects the author's critical views concerning government support for small-scale artisans. "Even though artisanal income assists some of the poorest people move beyond subsistence levels" (p. 191), artisans have been largely left out of the development process. Government officials have shown little interest in nurturing small-scale artisans, preferring bigger schemes. She is also critical of the NGO sector, commenting that national and local arts bodies tend to view handicraft production as a commercial rather than an aesthetic or communicative undertaking. The author also returns to the theme that during the crisis period local markets have proven to be more reliable than external markets, in part because they are easier to understand and to plan for. In addition, she remarks that in post-Suharto Indonesia regionalism has become increasingly important with handicrafts playing a role in regional identity, including among such groups as the Bugis and Torajan diasporas. Regionalism has been less important to the Bugis, however, who have more influenced by pan-Indonesian influences, while such influences have been resisted to a greater extent by Torajans, in part because of foreign tourism and its association with maintaining a unique identity. The chapter concludes with the notion that "whereas craft production may not be appropriate for larger scale mainstream development, it is significant as a specialist field and offers many as yet unrealized opportunities" (p. 200).

Michael HOWARD