

Book reviews

Tim Lindsey and Helen Pausacker, eds, *Chinese Indonesians: Remembering, Distorting, Forgetting*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005, 215 pp.

Reviewed by *Konstantinos Retsikas*

This edited volume is a tribute to the work of Charles Coppel, the Australian Indonesianist, whose work for more than three decades now has been dedicated to researching varied aspects of the lives of the Chinese in Indonesia, ranging from politics and legal issues to history and religion. The volume's contributors consist of former PhD supervisees, colleagues and friends of Coppel, drawn mainly from Australia, but also from Indonesia, Singapore and Europe, all acknowledging their intellectual debts and closely following and reflecting on his many writings.

The collection is loosely based on the theme of 'remembering, distorting, forgetting', a theme that is used to draw attention to what Coppel describes as the 'marginalization' and 'alienation' of Chinese Indonesians from the surrounding society, while setting the record straight with regard to the largely unacknowledged contributions the Chinese 'community' has made to the religious, cultural, artistic and political life of the country. All in all, there are some nine articles making up the volume, plus an introduction by Coppel, in which he provides a summary of his academic life and work. The first four articles, written by Purdey, Lindsey, Suryadinata and Budiman, are basically concerned with charting and evaluating the changes that the fall of Soeharto from power in 1998 brought about with respect to the position the Chinese occupy in Indonesia. The remaining five articles, written by Somers Heidhues, Salmon, Gelman Taylor, Pitt and Pausacker, are of a more historical nature, examining the pre-modern and colonial periods – the impact of Chinese trading networks on Islamization (Gelman Taylor), the revival of Confucianism in late nineteenth century Surabaya (Salmon), the dilemmas that modernity forced on young Chinese with respect to courtship and marriage (Pitt), their involvement with *wayang* performances in Java (Pausacker), and the politics of remembering

Chinese victims of Japanese massacres in West Kalimantan (Somers Heidhues).

The articles are of varying quality, ranging from well researched, analytically sophisticated and challenging works to less accomplished ones that at times merely repeat well rehearsed arguments and are often somewhat deficient in supporting the claims they make. Purdey's article is an excellent example of the first category, a thoughtful and provoking assessment of approaches to (anti-Chinese) violence that see it as either state-orchestrated or narrowly linked to economic and class antagonisms. Purdey rightly points to violence as a 'justice-seeking' form of political action, and describes the set of memories and discourses that legitimate it. Similarly, Lindsey's contribution provides a succinct summary and realistic assessment of the changes in the legal sphere that the *reformasi* has brought about with respect to the status of Indonesian citizens and aliens of Chinese descent, while highlighting the far-reaching potential of new legislation concerned with human rights. In the same vein, Gelman Taylor's paper provides a vivid account of the archipelago's coastal towns in the pre-modern period and, through attempting a unified analysis of Chinese and Arab trading networks, she brilliantly suggests that Chinese traders were instrumental, albeit in an indirect fashion, in the Islamization of Java and Sumatra. On the other hand, papers such as those offered by Suryadinata and Budiman are less original and thought-provoking, while still others, such as Pausacker's, are far less convincing. Both Suryadinata and Budiman's accounts cover material that is well known among social scientists working on Indonesia, while their consideration of the policies that have provided the frameworks within which Chinese identity is created and negotiated fails to take into account the colonial period and its long-lasting effects. This is coupled with the rather impressionistic nature of evidence that is brought to bear with regard to changes in the inter-ethnic relations and perceptions in post-Soeharto Indonesia, especially in Budiman's case. Similarly, Pausacker's treatment of *peranakan* Chinese's involvement in the production of *wayang* performances is rather thin in terms of the evidence provided to support the claim of intense exchanges culminating in the syncretism of 'Javanese' and 'Chinese' cultures up to the 1960s.

Taken as a whole, the most important criticism to be made of the volume is that, with a couple of exceptions, it suffers from taking 'Chinese Indonesians' too much for granted as a category of thought and action. In other words, it does not sufficiently scrutinize the Other(s)

in relation to whom 'Chinese Indonesians' are defined and re-defined at different historical periods and who maintain a rather ghostly presence throughout. Moreover, it does not adequately question the diversity of those hetero-categorized as 'Chinese', a diversity that is furthermore only partially grasped by the distinction between *peranakan* and *tokok* Chinese, and involves additional differences of religion, as well as of class. These two issues taken together have the ironic effect on the volume of solidifying and perpetuating the very separateness that it sees as the basis of the 'marginalization' and 'alienation' of 'Chinese Indonesians'. A possible way out of this methodological 'trap' could well be that of investigating 'Chinese Indonesians' within the contexts of transnationalism and diaspora. Alternatively, it might also be worth considering their 'marginality' within the context of other Indonesian cases of political and economic marginality, such as those of peoples labelled as *suku terasing* (isolated tribes) by the Indonesian state.

John Strauss, Kathleen Beegle, Agus Dwiyanto, Yulia Herawati, Daan Pattinasarany, Elan Satriawa, Bondan Sikoki, Sukamdi and Firman Witoelar, *Indonesian Living Standards Before and After the Financial Crisis: Evidence from the Indonesia Family Life Survey*, Santa Monica: Rand Corporation; and Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004, xxi + 402 pp.

Reviewed by *Anne Booth*

The financial crisis that affected the Indonesian economy in the latter part of 1997 led to a severe growth collapse in 1998; gross domestic product contracted by over 13%. A decline of this magnitude was unprecedented in Indonesia's post-independence history and there was much concern about its implications for poverty and living standards. The three decades of Soeharto's rule had led to a considerable decline in poverty in Indonesia, together with a rapid growth in educational enrolments, decreases in infant and child mortality rates and improved access to healthcare facilities for most Indonesians, both in densely settled Java and in other parts of the country. What would the impact of the crisis be on poverty, and access to health and educational facilities?