

from Multiple Disciplines”. This last chapter once again stresses what most authors emphasised in their chapters, namely the importance of a multi- and interdisciplinary approach to arrive at a better understanding of interactions between local cultures. The reader is also informed about paleoclimate and sea-level data, learning that many parts of what is now island Southeast Asia once belonged to a more or less coherent land mass. A table provides an overview of the linguistic terminology in different regions for the words “boat”, “iron” and “knife”, and is taken by the author into aspects of comparative iconography, archaeology and genetics in the region.

To summarise, the volume is densely filled with a great deal of information on Taiwan’s maritime environment, covering many aspects of Taiwan’s early history (pre-1600). The volume is basically designed as a publication for specialists, but it will also attract readers interested, for example, in the history of maritime environments, in ocean currents, winds and monsoons, or in early archaeology and migration history. The book is an essential volume for any library with a section on Asian maritime history. Although focusing primarily on the early history of Taiwan, it goes far beyond and informs readers about manifold aspects of early East and Southeast Asian maritime history. The numerous maps and illustrations, the extensive bibliography and the comprehensive index are an added bonus. It is therefore a must for any specialist.

*Angela Schottenhammer*

KEN M. P. SETIAWAN / DIRK TOMSA, *Politics in Contemporary Indonesia: Institutional Change, Policy Challenges, and Democratic Decline*. London: Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group), 2022. 240 pages, 1 map, £120. ISBN: 978-1-138-62606-5 (hb)

Once renowned for its promising progress towards the consolidation of its democracy, Indonesia has recently entered a declining trend. Less than a decade after dismantling the autocratic New Order, which had stayed in power for more than three decades, Indonesia achieved a remarkably successful transition with the so-called *Reformasi* (reform) movement. From recalibrating the proportional strengths of check-and-balance mechanisms to attempting extensive corruption prevention and eradication measures, Indonesia became the most promising democracy in Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, the success has recently shown signs of decay, particular in the country’s democratic institutions.

The stagnation of democracy during the second term of the Yudhoyono Administration (2009–2014) revealed the vulnerability of the reforms, which became an avenue for the subsequent regression of the quality of the democracy.

Even worse, the Joko Widodo (Jokowi) Administration that followed (2014–2019 & 2019–present), lauded as the landmark of new hope for democratic resilience based on President Jokowi's humble background, without ties to existing oligarchs, has caused the level of democracy to plummet. Not only has President Jokowi formed a grand political coalition by co-opting political opponents with political transactions, but he has also used democratic institutions for autocratic purposes.

In this book, Ken M. P. Setiawan and Dirk Tomsa examine the political dynamics of contemporary Indonesia by navigating its distinctive features. These include the prominence of the technocratic approach used by President Jokowi to cope with complex political circumstances, the surging rate of political corruption and the use of local politics as leverage for vertical mobilisation to a political career at the national level. The technocratic approach seeks viable solutions to problems through the use of scientific or technical expertise or similar merit-based credentials, regardless of their relevance to the conventional ways of addressing the issues. Jokowi's approach has included undertaking infrastructure projects to combat socio-economic underdevelopment, assigning a businessman to the Ministry of Health and seeking to consolidate disharmonious business and investment regulations. Not only has such meritocracy been undertaken by the Yudhoyono and Jokowi Administrations as part of mainstream bureaucratic reform, but Jokowi himself also used a technocratic approach when he served as Mayor of Surakarta City and subsequently Governor of Jakarta Greater Capital Territory prior to becoming president. The book also contains intriguing metrics comparing Indonesian democracy in Southeast Asia to that of its counterpart nations.

Setiawan and Tomsa examine multiple assessments of the post-authoritarian Indonesian political transformation from different but complementary, rather than contradictory, analytical viewpoints that explain why democracy has begun to decline instead of reaching consolidation. Their examinations in this book craft various viewpoints into an analytical framework that comprises the ideational, institutional and structural determinants that shape political dynamics in contemporary Indonesia. Methodologically, the newly crafted analytical framework proves powerful in addressing the interplay between those determinants and various public policy issues that involve liberal democratic ideals perceived as global values. These include human rights, environmental conservation, gender equality, freedom of speech and public health. Within this framework, it is paramount to argue that factors behind the decline of Indonesia's democracy go beyond the deficit in the quality of democracy. What has prompted the decline is the combination of resurging nationalist and religious populism rather than the appeal of democracy narratives, the decrease in public spaces for making safe and constructive discourses, and the increasing capture of democratic institutions by predatory interests.

The combination of the three determinants mentioned above also relates to persistent political cleavages. The authors argue that these cleavages have shaped Indonesian politics since the beginning of Indonesia's proclaimed independence, although a dealignment of voters occurred during the shift of the political regime from the New Order to the Reform era. Nevertheless, the existing sociocultural underpinnings that remain prevalent, such as communalism, familism and hierarchical ties, have since caused political dynamics to become entrenched. Although, in the early phase of democratic reform, the *reformasi* narratives outpaced the heightened sociocultural tensions underlying the political cleavages between nationalist and Islamist narratives, these have recently seen a resurgence. The Jokowi Administration has even employed a leading Muslim social organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama, to support the ruling party. This leaves the question as to whether Indonesia still deserves recognition as a "model Muslim democracy" (see pp. 3, 188, 205). The authors respond to this question by comparing Indonesia to other Muslim-majority democracies and conclude that it still deserves that label despite significant signs of democratic deterioration, such as insufficient protection for minority groups.

Apart from all the compelling arguments demonstrated by Setiawan and Tomsa, their book prompts further enquiries. First, some – if not all – leading metrics indicate a slight regression of democratisation in Indonesia. This suggestion warrants further explanation, considering that qualitative examinations in some literature demonstrate instead a significant decline. Second, since Southeast Asia is not a fertile ground for democratic consolidation but is instead experiencing an authoritarian resurgence, one cannot necessarily conclude that countries in the region are suffering from a decline in democracy simply because they lack democratic traits. Aside from democratization which is solely procedural in nature, Indonesia has failed to undergo significant institutional transformation to the extent that it has prevented the country from achieving the essential goals of democracy. Third, the book pays considerable concern to the conservative turn of Islam in the recent regression of Indonesia's democracy. While several laws and regulations institutionalising these trends have emerged along with the increasing pressures on religious freedom suffered by minority groups, the latter does not necessarily correlate with the former. Meticulous examination is necessary to prove causation as well as correlation between the two.

Finally, the book addresses the interplay of ideational, institutional and structural determinants in policy issues as part of the global values mentioned earlier. It is evident not only that authoritarian practices by the executive government have garnered high support and legitimacy from the citizens in general, but also that the government has shaped narratives that misrepresent authoritarian practices as democratic. Analyses of institutional determinants in this book should account for the convention by which Asian societies typically emphasise informalities when undertaking even regulated matters. The authors mention

informality without elaborating on its crucial implication for the deteriorating effects of democratic institutions, for instance, the informal veto power that the president possesses, yet cannot effectively wield, in responding to bills passed by the legislature (p. 37), persistent informal networks of oligarchs (p. 54) and informal nondemocratic practices inherited from Suharto's autocratic New Order regime (p. 204). These informalities are rooted in sociocultural underpinnings that shape the country's historically rooted political transformation. These underpinnings prevail, along with Indonesia's fluctuating democracy – as reflected in the latest findings of the World Values Survey (WVS) (2017–2020), which indicates that the society's rational-secular values and self-expression values have been diminishing at different paces. The book thus needs to address how Indonesia's sociocultural upbringing has been diverging from those perceived global values and norms, as suggested by the WVS, when interrogating the outcomes of ideational, institutional and structural determinants.

In sum, the book provides an institutionalist perspective on contemporary Indonesian politics, comprising very recent crucial and sensitive issues, from political institutions to human society, in a comprehensive and fair manner. The authors do not leave the political dynamics of multiple sectors – such as gender equality, environmental conservation and political Islam – scattered as a wide array of complementary issues behind primary topics, such as multiparty systems and balance of power among the state institutions, but rather craft them coherently. The analysis is also fair enough to balance different metrics, perspectives and fluctuating trends, so that the authors maintain their objectivity, avoiding any tendency towards particular political views. Comparison is also a prominent feature of the book, as the authors attempt to place Indonesia among those Southeast Asian countries prone to the recent authoritarian resurgence, and among Muslim-majority countries, while also comparing the features of the current government to its early reform-era predecessors and the previously authoritarian New Order regime. In this way, Setiawan and Tomsa have cemented their authoritative voices in examining the contemporary politics of Indonesia.

*Defny Holidin*