Social control from below

In *The Entangled State: Sorcery, State Control, and Violence in Indonesia*, Nicholas Herriman draws on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in East Java and as a result calls into question the common scholarly understanding of the Indonesian state.

Herriman draws on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in East Java and as a result the book provides both a case study of sorcery killings in contemporary Indonesia as well as an in-depth ethnographic study of the ways in which sorcery is used as a means of social control.

In his engaging examination of the 'entangled state', Herriman concludes that local 'communities thus exert control over state officials, resulting in a breakdown of state control at the local level' (147). However, exactly what constitutes the local for Herriman? The book's fifth chapter provides a brief sketch of local village officials who reside in their constituencies versus 'supralocal' career bureaucrats who reside in towns, but beyond the implication that villages are synonymous with the local, Herriman does not explore what constitutes the term.

In order to make his argument about 'the entangled state' more persuasive, the book calls for a more detailed exploration of the mechanisms by which state power did exert itself, especially in the legal realm, in relationship to sorcery.

Despite the above-mentioned criticism, Nicholas Herriman's ethnographic study of sorcery in East Java provides both a nuanced glimpse into a fascinating moment in recent Indonesian history and contributes an important voice to the ongoing scholarly discussion over state power in Indonesia. Filled with intriguing details of village politics, it thereby enriches our understanding of contemporary East Java, of sorcery, and of the relationship between violence and the Indonesian state.

Liu describes how leading Indonesians during the Sukarno years were invited to China as part of Beijing's efforts to win Indonesia's friendship amidst heightened Cold War tension in the region. These Indonesians returned with generally positive accounts of the country they saw. They found among the Chinese a sense of purposefulness, discipline and willingness to make sacrifices for the new nation. They saw cities that were clean and public space was well-used. Entering China from Hong Kong, Indonesian visitors encountered a way of life they judged as less decadent. Liu sums up that China, to admiring Indonesia, was a society that was in economic growth with equitable sharing of wealth, of a populist regime supported by the people, and of intellectuals actively participating in nation-building.

For Pramoedya, it was universal humanism expressed by Chinese intellectuals that attracted his attention and on this he had much to say during his trips to China in the late 1950s. Pramoedya was impressed too by the productive output of intellectuals and the higher rewards and status they were accorded compared to those in Indonesia.

Idealized image

Liu suggests that Indonesia's idealized image of China differed greatly from Western observers who viewed the country as a repressive, totalitarian communist state. Indonesians disassociated the China they admired from its communist ideology and instead credited the creation of a disciplined, cohesive and harmonious society to Chinese national unity and the new democracy. Sukarno saw no incompatibilities between the ideas driving China and his own views, and his interpretation of China's political experience served as a key rationale for the introduction of Guided Democracy that greatly concentrated power in the president's hands. Disenchanted with Western-style democracy, China as a model appealed to Sukarno.

In setting the discussion of the China metaphor within Indonesia's efforts at nation-building and entering China from Hong Kong, Indonesian visitors encountered a way of life they judged as less decadent. Liu sums up that China, to admiring Indonesia, was a society that was in economic growth with equitable sharing of wealth, of a populist regime supported by the people, and of intellectuals actively participating in nation-building.

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