

## Reviews

Anders Uhlin, *Indonesia and The 'Third Wave of Democratisation': The Indonesian Pro-democracy Movement in a Changing World*, Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, Democracy in Asia Series no. 1, Curzon Press, Richmond, 1997. 289 pp.

Anders Uhlin has performed a valuable service for anyone interested in modern Indonesian politics by producing an extraordinarily readable and comprehensive overview of the thinking of different segments of the pro-democracy movement in that country. His primary interest is in the process by which ideas about democratization from elsewhere in the world are 'diffused' in Indonesia. He wants to explore the extent to which experiences in other countries swept up in what Samuel Huntington has termed the 'third wave of democratization' are adopted and adapted by pro-democracy groups in Indonesia.

This is a book which grows out of a Ph.D. dissertation. After a brief general discussion of some of the theoretical and methodological problems associated with the study of democratization, the book quickly divides into two parts. The first is an extensive empirical account of the major pro-democracy groups in Indonesia and the second a more analytical discussion of the selective adoption of international ideas about democratization.

In my view, the first section is the more valuable of the two. It begins with two quick chapters surveying the evolution of Indonesia's modern political history and the key institutional features of authoritarian rule under Suharto's New Order regime. These chapters are essentially digests of the existing literature on the subject. The next several chapters are the most interesting. The author describes and discusses four broad discourses on democratization: Radical, Liberal, Conservative, and Islamic, which are explored in more detail as ten distinguishable sub-discourses (Marxism, Left Populism, Feminism, Social Democracy, Political Liberalism, Economic Liberalism, Conservatism, Islamic Modernism, Islamic Neo-modernism, Islamic Transformism). In some cases the distinctions seem a little artificial, but Uhlin is clearly on to something interesting in highlighting the (re-)emergence of a diverse spectrum of political ideologies in Indonesian political life.

The most illuminating discussions are those of the various radical and particularly the Islamic pro-democracy discourses. We are provided with a concise yet richly textured overview of the main currents of thought within these various ideological clusters. The material in these chapters is drawn from other studies and secondary sources as well as a substantial number of well-chosen interviews with political activists of various sorts. The treatment of the more elite-centred discourses - what Uhlin calls Political Liberalism, Economic Liberalism and Conservatism - is much less penetrating. But this is perhaps understandable as it is clearly the case that there is less scope for adding value in these areas since we know a good deal more about these groups, both from other studies and journalistic accounts.

The second part of the book examines the processes of the selective absorption of experiences and ideas from elsewhere in the democratizing world. The author sets himself several questions: How do these ideas and experiences reach Indonesia? Which ones are taken up? What are the effects of the ideas that are taken up? His answer to the first question is that the mechanisms for the diffusion of ideas are personal contacts between like-minded activists in Indonesia and other countries, the mass media, and the new communications technologies. In the case of the second question, he concludes that ideas are adopted, adapted or rejected - but rarely just taken up in an uncritical way. More concretely, he argues that not all ideas from Western experiences with democratization are deemed relevant by pro-democracy groups in Indonesia. And finally, on the third of his questions, the author tells us that while it is unclear that ideas from abroad have yet had a direct impact on political outcomes in Indonesia, they have certainly influenced the thinking of activists and encouraged them to intensify their struggle. These are all good and sensible findings, but few will consider them especially surprising.

The notion that at least some ideas and experiences from democratization movements in other parts of the world, and even from other times, should be adapted and absorbed by pro-democracy groups in Indonesia seems completely reasonable. Moreover, a focus on ideas is a welcome alternative to the heavy bias towards materialist and institutionalist approaches of so many of the rest of us who work on Southeast Asian politics. Ideas are important. And yet the obvious analytical limitation to this approach is that it is

extremely difficult to isolate the relative importance of ideas as distinct from other possible causal factors. It might, however, be possible at least to reflect upon the counterfactual possibilities: in what ways might the pro-democracy movement in Indonesia have been very different if the flow of ideas from abroad had been more limited - as it presumably was with the prior waves of democratization this century, and even perhaps, some other earlier cases in this most recent wave?

The strengths of this book are its synoptic and synthetic qualities: it brings together much of the recent literature and material on democratization in Indonesia. Rather than adding value by bringing substantial new empirical material to light or breaking major new theoretical ground, its contribution is to combine a broad digest of the secondary literature, a nice mix of anecdotes from interviews with many of the players themselves, and a fresh focus on ideas as a key variable. Uhlin's style and approach are wonderfully clear, concise and self-confident. This book will be of value to any reader with a general interest in contemporary Indonesian politics.

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