

guided and sometimes pressurised by the government but also often of their own volition, is certainly different from that of Thai lowland farmers.

An aspect of agrarian transformation that is touched upon relatively lightly in Jonathan Rigg's book are the boom-and-bust cycles of monoculture crops. While Thailand seems to be afflicted by such cycles to a lesser extent than other countries – Rigg gives the example of rubber farming in Northeast Thailand – they play a much bigger role in neighbouring countries such as Laos, and have by now generated a sizeable literature on the subject. A glimpse of Southern Thailand, where monoculture crops are more important – rubber plantations, for instance, have a much longer history in the South than in the Northeast – could have addressed the balance.

Aside from these bickerings of a stickler for regional particularity, this is a fascinating book, which I read with great pleasure and rich gain after my most recent journey through rural Thailand in February 2020. It answered so many questions that arose during the trip, and I found the complexity and dynamics of agricultural transformation in Thailand – as unravelled and re-condensed by Jonathan Rigg – a healthy antidote to the simpler narratives that I had read before. I enjoyed reading it also because of the outstanding quality of Rigg's prose. *More than Rural* is an example not only of geographical research, but also of science writing at its best.

At the very last, a comment is called for on the photograph on the book's cover, not least because, unfortunately, this is the only photograph in the entire book. A young woman in urban attire is seen striding confidently along a straight, empty and apparently new road through a setting that seems rural but not stereotypically so: illustrating the book's message that infrastructure development has led to a connecting, blending and integration of urban and rural that has benefitted women and young people in particular.

*Dietrich Schmidt-Vogt*

ANNE GRÜNE, KAI HAFEZ, SUBEKTI PRIYADHARMA, SABRINA SCHMIDT (EDS), *Media and Transformation in Germany and Indonesia: Asymmetrical Comparisons and Perspectives*. (Internationale und Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 15). Berlin: Frank and Timme, 2019. 342 pages, €59.80. ISBN 978-3-7329-0579-9

A core methodological question in comparative analysis concerns case selection. Although both are fruits, can apples and oranges be compared? In the social sciences, the structured, outcome-explaining comparison of two or more countries is traditionally informed by the logic of either the most similar sys-

tems design or the most different systems design, both of which serve to control context variables that can then be excluded from having caused a social phenomenon. While the former looks at countries that share as many variables as possible apart from the dependent variable (the outcome) under interest, the latter assembles into one data set countries that differ in as many context variables as possible but share the same dependent variable. The strength of these variable-oriented comparative studies lies in their ability to provide a clear-cut identification of relevant social elements and forces that may have caused an outcome. The downside of these approaches is that because of the limited possibilities of case selection, they follow a rather narrow perspective on what is potentially comparable, and they openly reject less structured, not outcome-explaining but empirically driven comparisons as futile.

The dominance of this variable-focused logic has also led to a narrowing of perspectives and the emergence of scientific blind spots in Area Studies. The comparison of countries located in different geographical regions or cultures remains an exception, mostly because they are considered to differ too greatly in their features and to simultaneously lack a clear common outcome. This widely diffused perception might also have contributed to the fact that in concrete research practice the classic comparative counterpart of Indonesia is its neighbour Malaysia. Including Indonesia and Malaysia within one research context is a well-established practice, but the extensive comparisons of much of the two countries over the last decades has rendered this a less innovative endeavour. It is safe to argue that the persistent lack of scientific engagement with more open-ended, alternative, transregional comparisons has prevented a great deal of knowledge production, and only recently has the emerging field of Comparative Area Studies begun to address this deficit from different methodological angles.

The edited volume at hand – *Media and Transformation in Germany and Indonesia: Asymmetrical Comparisons and Perspectives* – links up to the currently unfolding debate that critically questions the institutionalised rejection of uncommon, non-variable-based case selections by presenting an insightful and much needed comparison of Indonesia’s and Germany’s media systems. Moreover, the book stands out in a sympathetic way as it is the product of a collaborative intercultural project between Indonesian and German academics working in the discipline of media and communication studies, enabling each research team to gain deeper comprehension of the other’s society. The German Academic Exchange Service-funded project “Media Systems and Communication Cultures – Germany and Indonesia in Comparative Perspective” was a collaboration between the University of Erfurt in Germany and Padjajaran University in Bandung, Indonesia, and ran from 2015 to 2017.

More precisely, the book under review here builds on the findings and outcomes of a joint conference held in Bandung in 2017 (“Media and Trans-

formation in Germany and Indonesia: Dynamics and Regressions in Global Perspective”) as well as on several preceding workshops and student projects connected to the bilateral project. Accordingly, the volume’s structure is organised along the analytical matrix that guided these meetings: Section I looks at “Media and Political Transformation”, Section II elaborates on “Media Representation and Racism”, Section III discusses “Internet and Counter Public Sphere” and Section IV engages with “Popular Culture and Democracy”. Each section is opened by a short introduction and closed by a summary of the respective conference roundtable discussion.

In the volume’s general introduction, Kai Hafez and Subekti Priyadharma convincingly defend their asymmetrical research design by arguing that such an undertaking can lead to new academic knowledge and that it can serve as a tool for seeing things from a different perspective. For them, “there is nothing worse than a rejected comparison” (p. 17) and they posit that “comparison is a real adventure and an experiment with unsure results” (p. 18). They also engage in a critical reflection on the issue of whether Indonesia and Germany really are apples and oranges and come to the conclusion that despite structural differences, they do indeed share several crucial aspects. The shared historical legacy of an ethnic genocide and current tendencies towards political radicalisation, populism, hate speech and fake news are particularly singled out, as well as both countries’ multi-ethnic and multi-religious societal fabrics.

Furthermore, in the introduction the editors criticise the established understanding of what constitutes the world’s centre and periphery and the hegemonic political and academic discourses that undergird these rigid concepts. Instead, they propose the application of contextual, relational and interdependent thinking, and they hold that there is indeed a “plurality of centrality and periphery” (p. 21) that is waiting to be studied. They illustrate this claim by pointing out the heavy use of US-developed social media in Indonesia, which makes it a “Facebook country” and thus, in this particular concern, somehow more Western than Europe or North America (p. 17).

The book’s four sections present empirically rich descriptive analyses of different aspects of the countries’ media systems, mostly concluding that the systems differ to a great extent, especially in terms of media ownership, media regulation and data protection awareness. In some instances, as an asset, a perspective on and from Egypt is added to the volume.

Of particular empirical density and informative value is the contribution of Ratna Noviani in Section II (Racism) on the representation of the ethnic Chinese minority in Indonesian cinema; the reader would have wished for more chapters of such a clear and illustrative nature. In “Negotiating Stereotypes, Re-imagining Differences: Chinese Indonesians and the Burden of Cinematic Representation in Post New Order Indonesia” Noviani shows how in contemporary Indonesia the former New Order’s open discrimination against Chinese

people and their culture is broken by a growing number of ethnic Chinese Indonesian film-makers who mediate Chineseness from their own perspective. On the other hand, Chineseness remains a problematic issue in cinema, as in most films it is predominantly exoticised and fetishised, as well as submerged and absorbed by a narrative on Islamic moralism. It would have been interesting to concretely compare this discussion on Indonesian cinema with representations of the Turkish or Greek communities in German films, as there has also been a shift towards growing self-representation – the work of Fatih Akin being a case in point. Due to the persisting centrality of the issue of ethnic identity and discrimination in Indonesia, in this section a treatment of the contemporary media representation of the Papuan ethnicity and its alleged blackness would have been interesting, as well as the issue of whiteness as an ideal of beauty and how it is mediated through advertising.

In sum, the volume stands out through its brave explorative nature, its intercultural collaborative approach and its descriptive thickness. It succeeds in presenting an alternative way of comparing societies and carves out surprising similarities and structural differences – insights that contribute to intercultural understanding between Indonesia and Germany and that provide manifold starting points for future comparative projects.

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SOE TJEN MARCHING, *The End of Silence. Accounts of the 1965 Genocide in Indonesia*. With original photography by Angus Nicholls. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017. 220 pages, €99.00. ISBN 978-9-4629-8390-8

Coping with the past is a sensitive topic in many countries, and Indonesia is one of them. While some countries have been quite pro-active in breaking the walls of silence and bringing to light atrocities, massacres and torture committed either on their own soil or in other lands, others are reluctant to openly admit crimes against humanity. In Asia, Japan is well known for circumventing an admission of the forced prostitution of women – “comfort women” as they used to be called – during World War II. Cambodia, too, is still grappling with the cruel period of Khmer Rouge rule. The suffering that resulted from the partition in South Asia (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) might also be a case in point.

Among the worst massacres in the second half of the twentieth century, however, is the genocide in Indonesia, which peaked between 1965 and 1966. Conservative estimates count about 500,000 killed; in unofficial accounts, the