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Indonesia

Identity and pleasure: The politics of Indonesian screen culture
by ARIEL HERYANTO
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Ariel Heryanto has once again approached the subject of Indonesian popular culture in his new book, Identity and pleasure: The politics of Indonesian screen culture. This book further analyses the relationship between Indonesian politics, gender issues and popular culture he briefly discussed in an earlier edited volume (Popular culture in Indonesia).

Heryanto focuses here on the relationship between popular culture and the development of Indonesian national identity, as well as forgotten or ignored aspects of the history that went into its making, using the concept of public ‘amnesia’ as a theme (p. 4). This book applies cultural and ethnographic approaches to the analysis of local cinema and audience responses and the development of national identity. Heryanto elaborates how popular culture is used by both the government and the people in the development of hegemonic values and national ideology, but at the cost of forgetting or dismissing parts of Indonesia’s modern history.

Islamisation in Indonesian films is the topic of the second, third and fourth chapters of the book. Heryanto points out how popular films such as ‘Ayat-ayat cinta’ (Love verses) reflect public interest in both piety and modernity, allowing the public, especially young Muslims, to enjoy the pleasures of the modern world without abandoning their faith (p. 30). The synchronisation of religious values and cultural tastes is a recurring characteristic of the Indonesian public, and it is actively shown through audience acceptance of local films with protagonists who represent both Islamic values and material desires.

The fourth chapter of the book then connects the spread of Islamisation with Suharto-era film and media propaganda. This chapter not only describes how the 1984 film ‘Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI’ (The treason of G30S/PKI) successfully spread the New Order government’s agenda of demonising communism and leftists (pp. 80, 81), but also discusses the negative outcome for Indonesian viewers of accepting this movie as the only source of information on the events of 1965 (p. 85). Heryanto analyses the public’s lack of awareness of the facts of the 1965 massacres and failure to pursue the truth. He also mentions that Joshua Oppenheimer’s 2012 ‘The act of killing’ was aimed at those with limited or no knowledge of the 1965 events (pp. 118, 119). These films respectively represent official and private expressions about the massacres, but they also open up public discussion which can help build national understanding if used to confront one of the darkest episodes of modern Indonesian history.

The sixth and seventh chapters explore the changes in Indonesian perceptions of Northeast Asian (especially Chinese) ethnicity and culture before and after the New Order. Heryanto describes how the New Order created films that presented the Chinese as a ‘politically dangerous race’ (p. 139), which fuelled inter-ethnic divisions
and animosity. Against this backdrop he describes another post-Suharto era phenomenon, involving the synchronisation of Islamisation and modernisation among young Muslim women. Here, he shows how Taiwanese, Japanese and Korean popular cultures have opened up the acceptance of and even idealisation of Northeast Asian popular cultures among young Indonesians (p. 165). Several images show young women in hijab participating in K-pop-related activities, supporting Heryanto’s argument that young Muslim women are able to express both their faith and modernity as part of their identity. Heryanto’s analysis and images of these young pop fans opens up further discussion on how Indonesian women are expressing their gender, religious and national identities through appropriating elements of non-Indonesian popular culture.

The book concludes with a discussion of the impact of the Internet and new media as negative influences that add to public ‘amnesia’ (p. 189). Heryanto’s analysis of Indonesia’s creative industries development and popular culture consumption during and after the New Order shows the public’s growing need to define a hegemonic identity as a nation, even at the cost of forgetting or dismissing foreign contributions to its foundation. This argument, made through the author’s analysis of Indonesian films and audience reactions to them, is very compelling. This new study adds significantly to an important topic which has not received much scholarly attention. In addition, Heryanto’s book will serve as a broad introduction to Indonesian popular culture and politics which would make it suitable for undergraduate courses.

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Malaysia

The Hakkas of Sarawak: Sacrificial gifts in Cold War era Malaysia
By KEE HOWE YONG
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Readers who expect a conventional ethnography of ‘The Hakkas of Sarawak’ (à la Ju-K’ang Tien’s The Chinese of Sarawak) will be disappointed by this monograph, but anthropologists, historians, and political scientists interested in the intersections of global, national and local histories, in the historical memory of ethnic minorities marginalised and victimised by the nation-state, and in how such communities cope with collective trauma should focus on its subtitle (Sacrificial gifts in Cold War era Malaysia) and will find this an intellectually engaging — and politically engaged — ethnography that combines committed scholarship with deep, reflective analysis.

The Hakkas have a long history of social exclusion and resistance to state authority. Sometimes mislabelled as the ‘gypsies of China’, they are believed to have migrated from northern China into the south where they were regarded as outsiders (their name means ‘guest families’) and played a leading role in the nineteenth-century Taiping