

Culture and Customs of Indonesia

Jill Forshee

Greenwood Press

***CULTURE AND
CUSTOMS OF INDONESIA***



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*Culture and Customs
of Indonesia*



JILL FORSHEE

Culture and Customs of Asia
Hanchao Lu, Series Editor



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To the memory of my mother, Erma McMurter Forshee

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Series Foreword

Geographically, Asia encompasses the vast area from Suez, the Bosphorus, and the Ural Mountains eastward to the Bering Sea and from this line southward to the Indonesian archipelago, an expanse that covers about 30 percent of our earth. Conventionally, and especially insofar as culture and customs are concerned, Asia refers primarily to the region east of Iran and south of Russia. This area can be divided in turn into subregions commonly known as South, Southeast, and East Asia, which are the main focus of this series.

The United States has vast interests in this region. In the twentieth century the United States fought three major wars in Asia (namely the Pacific War of 1941–45, the Korean War of 1950–53, and the Vietnam War of 1965–75), and each had profound impact on life and politics in America. Today, America's major trading partners are in Asia, and in the foreseeable future the weight of Asia in American life will inevitably increase, for in Asia lie our great allies as well as our toughest competitors in virtually all arenas of global interest. Domestically, the role of Asian immigrants is more visible than at any other time in our history. In spite of these connections with Asia, however, our knowledge about this crucial region is far from adequate. For various reasons, Asia remains for most of us a relatively unfamiliar, if not stereotypical or even mysterious, "Oriental" land.

There are compelling reasons for Americans to obtain some level of concrete knowledge about Asia. It is one of the world's richest reservoirs of culture and an ever-evolving museum of human heritage. Rhoads Murphey, a prominent Asianist, once pointed out that in the part of Asia east of Afghanistan and south of Russia alone lies half the world, "half of its people and far more than half of its historical experience, for these are the oldest living civilized

traditions.” Prior to the modern era, with limited interaction and mutual influence between the East and the West, Asian civilizations developed largely independent from the West. In modern times, however, Asia and the West have come not only into close contact but also into frequent conflict: The result has been one of the most solemn and stirring dramas in world history. Today, integration and compromise are the trend in coping with cultural differences. The West—with some notable exceptions—has started to see Asian traditions not as something to fear but as something to be understood, appreciated, and even cherished. After all, Asian traditions are an indispensable part of the human legacy, a matter of global “common wealth” that few of us can afford to ignore.

As a result of Asia’s enormous economic development since World War II, we can no longer neglect the study of this vibrant region. Japan’s “economic miracle” of postwar development is no longer unique, but in various degrees has been matched by the booming economy of many other Asian countries and regions. The rise of the four “mini dragons” (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) suggests that there may be a common Asian pattern of development. At the same time, each economy in Asia has followed its own particular trajectory. Clearly, China is the next giant on the scene. Sweeping changes in China in the last two decades have already dramatically altered the world’s economic map. Furthermore, growth has also been dramatic in much of Southeast Asia. Today, war-devastated Vietnam shows great enthusiasm for joining the “club” of nations engaged in the world economy. And in South Asia, India, the world’s largest democracy, is rediscovering its role as a champion of market capitalism. The economic development of Asia presents a challenge to Americans but also provides them with unprecedented opportunities. It is largely against this background that more and more people in the United States, in particular among the younger generation, have started to pursue careers dealing with Asia.

This series is designed to meet the need for knowledge of Asia among students and the general public. Each book is written in an accessible and lively style by an expert (or experts) in the field of Asian studies. Each book focuses on the culture and customs of a country or region. However, readers should be aware that culture is fluid, not always respecting national boundaries. While every nation seeks its own path to success and struggles to maintain its own identity, in the cultural domain mutual influence and integration among Asian nations are ubiquitous.

Each volume starts with an introduction to the land and the people of a nation or region and includes a brief history and an overview of the economy. This is followed by chapters dealing with a variety of topics that piece together a cultural panorama, such as thought, religion, ethics, literature and

art, architecture and housing, cuisine, traditional dress, gender, courtship and marriage, festivals and leisure activities, music and dance, and social customs and lifestyle. In this series, we have chosen not to elaborate on elite life, ideology, or detailed questions of political structure and struggle, but instead to explore the world of common people, their sorrow and joy, their pattern of thinking, and their way of life. It is the culture and the customs of the majority of the people (rather than just the rich and powerful elite) that we seek to understand. Without such understanding, it will be difficult for all of us to live peacefully and fruitfully with each other in this increasingly interdependent world.

As the world shrinks, modern technologies have made all nations on earth “virtual” neighbors. The expression “global village” not only reveals the nature and the scope of the world in which we live but also, more importantly, highlights the serious need for mutual understanding of all peoples on our planet. If this series serves to help the reader obtain a better understanding of the “half of the world” that is Asia, the authors and I will be well rewarded.

Hanchao Lu
Georgia Institute of Technology

Preface

Indonesian cultures include those of forest-dwelling hunters and foragers, rice growers, fisher folk, village artisans, urban office and factory workers, intellectuals, artists, wealthy industrialists, street vendors, and homeless people. They involve villagers in customary societies, sophisticated and cosmopolitan urbanites, as well as people who struggle to survive on city streets: beggars, peddlers, prostitutes, and pedicab drivers. Moreover, waters engulfing all Indonesian islands support seafaring peoples in contrast to societies of the lands.

An extraordinary range of belief systems, material culture, and arts enliven these thousands of islands—composing one of the most ethnographically rich and diverse countries in the world. Majestic temples, complex poetry and literature, lavish theatrical performances, rich mythologies, sophisticated thinking, and splendid visual arts have distinguished Indonesia for centuries and continue into the present. By the seventh century, people were creating exquisite gold jewelry, elaborately detailed stone carving, and intricately beautiful textiles that rival anything in the world today. Indonesians carry on an artistic genius, constantly reinterpreting and refining their cultures in the modern world. Yet, aside from Bali's exotic reputation as an "island paradise," many Westerners (and most Americans) are almost unaware of this country of 242 million people, the fourth most populous nation in the world.

Indonesia has suffered a tumultuous past in stages: under the oppression of local rulers, European colonists, Japanese invaders, corrupt military dictatorships, and currently multinational corporations. This history produced a permanent underclass of people, but also instilled strength of spirit and skill at survival in most ordinary Indonesians. In this new century, the future of

Indonesia, as of much of the world, remains problematic and uncertain. This book attempts to give glimpses of some of the marvels, ingenuities, dilemmas, social realities, diverse cultures and customs, and complex pasts and presents of the Indonesian people.

Europeans have produced most of the modern written histories of this region, although Indonesians have contributed much. Most general literature about Indonesia focuses upon the central islands of Bali and Java. This book will expand the scope to other islands of the world's largest archipelago, revealing something of the rich diversity of this nation.

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Because of the immense scope of this book and the limitations on space within it, I have had to selectively include information, while leaving much out. I regret that I could not include more topics and pictures from a number of places. Thus, this book is a necessarily partial portrayal of Indonesia, but one that I hope will inspire the reader to further exploration of the culture and customs of this marvelous country.

Chronology

1.3 to 1.8 million years from present	<i>Homo erectus</i> (“Java Man”) fossils discovered in East Java in 1891. Whether the fossil represents an ancestor of <i>Homo sapiens</i> in Java remains uncertain.
40,000 years from present	First traces of <i>Homo sapiens</i> in Indonesia, as people were able to migrate back and forth from the Asian mainland. The islands of western Indonesia formed a peninsula with mainland Southeast Asia, some call Sundaland. Papua New Guinea and neighboring islands formed an extension of Australia.
17,000 years from present	The Ice Age began to subside and sea levels gradually rose to cover landmasses and form islands of the Indonesian archipelago.
5,000–3,000 B.C.	Austronesian migrations from Southern China began to move through Indonesia.
100 A.D.	Rulers of the archipelago opened trade routes between China and India, creating great wealth in some local regions and permitting foreign influences. Indians arrived in Sumatra, Java, and Bali.
Third century	The area of southern Sumatra near Jambi and probably western Java became main entrepots linking the Java sea region with China.
Fourth century	First known inscriptions of South Indian <i>Pallawa</i> script used in announcements by King Mulavarman in East Kalimantan.
Fifth century	Based on Chinese chronicles, Indonesian ships controlled most trade in the archipelago and were sailing as far as China.

- Eighth century Srivijaya emerged in Sumatra as the first great power in the region. Inscriptions reveal teaching of Tantric Mahayana Buddhism. Srivijaya controlled trade in the Melaka Straits through providing a safe upriver port base at Palembang. Sailendra dynasty developed a great rice plane polity in Central Java. They ruled for 200 years, constructing the giant Buddhist monument Borobudur.
- Tenth century Most Javanese rulers, for reasons unclear (but perhaps through wars with Srivijaya of Sumatra) lost power. Airlangga became the founder of Java's first great empire, bringing central and eastern Java and Bali under some semblance of a united kingdom.
- Thirteenth century Kertanegara began a reign of rapid development in Javanese culture and expansion beyond Java. After his death, his son-in-law founded the most powerful kingdom ever to arise in Java: Majapahit.
- 1292 Italian explorer Marco Polo wrote of Islamic sultanate in Aceh, northern Sumatra.
- Fourteenth century Majapahit's fleets sailed to outer islands, in an expansive plan by its prime minister Gajah Mada. A chronicle written at this time, *The Nagarakertagama*, claimed that the empire held sovereignty from Sumatra to Papua New Guinea. Srivijaya had declined after losing control of maritime commerce to Chinese shipping.
- Fifteenth century Majapahit went into decline after losing control of island shipping trade and the opposition of the expanding Muslim kingdom of Demak.
- Sixteenth century The Islamic Mataram kingdom rose to power, subjugating most of Java and invading the formerly Hindu-Buddhist interior.
- 1511 Portuguese conquered the city of Melaka, thus controlling the Straits. Months later they sailed to eastern Indonesia seeking spices.
- Seventeenth century The seafaring Makasar from South Sulawesi reached northern Australia, on coastal Arnhem Land, in search of *trepang* (sea cucumbers) to sell to Chinese. They interacted with Aboriginal people, leaving Makasar descendants and terminology.
- 1641 The Dutch took Melaka from the Portuguese and began to establish factories and plantations in Sumatra and Java. Jan Pieterszoon Coen, Governor General of the Dutch East Indies, took control of the spice trade in the Banda Islands and other parts of eastern Maluku.

- 1664 Atrocities in the Indies and ongoing trade battles with the Dutch led to an unexpected invasion of Manhattan (then a Dutch colony) by a British armada. This resulted in Holland's forced swap of Manhattan Island to the English in exchange for the small Banda island of Run—a major turn in American history.
- 1799 The Dutch East India Company began to lose money. The Netherlands government took over its enterprise in the future Indonesia.
- 1811 Java fell under control of the British East India Company. Thomas Stamford Raffles, as lieutenant governor, rediscovered Borobudur, buried under centuries of volcanic soil. He arranged for excavation.
- 1815 Mt. Tambora erupted on Sumbawa Island, obliterating an entire language group.
- 1825–1830 A period called the “Java Wars” raged against the Dutch. The Netherlands also faced resistance in western Sumatra from Islamic leaders of the Minangkabau.
- 1830 A great commercial expansion of Dutch colonialism under “The Cultivation System” demanded a percentage of crops from all farmers. This period secured position and wealth for the elite *priyayi* Javanese in complicity with Dutch colonists.
- 1860 Publication of the novel *Max Havelaar*, written by a former Dutch official, Douwes Dekker (under the pen name Multatuli) describing the abuses of combined Dutch and Javanese elite rule toward peasants.
- 1883 The volcano Krakatoa erupted in the sea west of Java.
- 1901 The Dutch created a more liberal Ethical Policy, in response to criticism within Holland and other European nations. At this point, the Netherlands controlled most of Indonesia.
- 1906 On September 20 the Dutch advanced upon Denpasar, Bali. The entire royal family and entourage marched toward them, carrying only daggers. All were shot or committed suicide. This day is remembered as *Puputan* (Ending).
- 1907–1911 Borobudur excavation and restoration was completed under Dutch administration.
- 1911 Publication of Raden Kartini's letters as a book in Holland. In 1920, it was published in English as *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, telling of a young Javanese woman's struggles with traditional values and European modern ideas.

- 1900–1930 Indonesian nationalism began to spread among a variety of organized groups, from Muslims to Communists. Many became organized under the Indonesian Nationalist Party, formed by future President Sukarno.
- 1941–1942 World War II broke out and the Japanese conquered Indonesia.
- 1945 After news of Japanese surrender, Sukarno proclaimed Indonesia an Independent nation on August 17, 1945.
- 1949 Holland had attempted to regain control of Indonesia, but ceded it under international pressure, retaining only West Papua. Indonesia gained full sovereignty in 1949. Sukarno and Muhammad Hatta became the first president and vice-president, respectively, and developed a policy called Guided Democracy.
- 1963 Mt. Gunung Agung erupted in Bali killing more than 1,000 people.
- 1965 An attempted coup occurred on September 30, leaving six military generals and one child murdered. General Suharto, senior surviving officer, seized command, becoming the new leader of Indonesia. The full reality behind this coup remains a mystery.
- 1965–1967 Rumors circulated widely after the failed coups that a communist women’s group had also mutilated the murdered generals. A violent frenzy swept Indonesia as the army and citizens killed communists and others. In Bali up to 80,000 were murdered. Tens of thousands died in North Sumatra and Java. The total number of deaths over these years is estimated at more than a half million people.
- 1966 In March Sukarno officially handed the Presidency over to Suharto, and then went into exile. Suharto rapidly centralized power in a tight system of military control. Under his absolute authority, New Order Indonesia began.
- 1967 Indonesia joined the United Nations. A new Indonesian foreign investment law began a wave of international capital in the country. Oil exports brought much revenue into Indonesia, and a program of economic development began. Achievements were phenomenal, involving infrastructure, industry, healthcare, and schools.
- 1969 The Dutch ceded its last outpost, West Papua New Guinea to Indonesia. The region was then renamed Irian Jaya (Victorious Papua).
- 1975 Indonesian forces invaded East Timor, recently independent from Portugal, with acquiescence (if not prompting) of the United States and Australia. A battle ensued lasting almost 25 years, as people resisted occupation and Indonesian forces killed many thousands of East Timorese.

- 1980 A book of political dissident, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *This Earth of Mankind*, was published in Indonesian in Jakarta. Three more novels followed, written while Toer was in a prison camp on the island of Buru, called the *Buru Quartet*. Suharto banned the books in Indonesia.
- 1980s–1997 The New Order under Suharto retained power and political repression and corruption progressed. Simultaneously, economic growth continued, producing a growing Indonesian middle class.
- 1997 The Asian financial crisis hit after the dramatic fall of the Thai baht. Currencies of Southeast Asia plummeted. The Indonesian rupiah lost 80 percent of its former value. Suharto failed to comply with reforms demanded by International Monetary fund and continued “crony capitalism.” This caused further economic woes and massive public disgust with Suharto.
- 1998 Suharto was re-elected unopposed to his seventh presidential term. Security forces shot four protesting university students in Jakarta, and the “May Riots” swept the city. Rioters attacked mostly government and commercial buildings as the city ignited in flames. Thugs targeted the Chinese community, looting, raping, killing, and burning their homes and businesses. Three thousand buildings were razed. On May 21, having lost support of the military, Suharto passed the Presidency to his Vice-President, B. J. Habibie.
- 1998–1999 Violence raged across Indonesia: Kalimantan Dayaks murdered transmigrants from Madura; religious war between Christians and Muslims created death and devastation in Ambon; gangs controlled streets of provincial cities; and a war between clans left many dead in Sumba. Much of Indonesia was in anarchy.
- 1999 In January President Habibie announced publicly that East Timor could vote for autonomy or independence. This fueled a wave of separatist movements across Indonesia and upset the military. Losing a vote of confidence in parliament, Habibie resigned from upcoming elections. In national elections, after much delay, debate, and confusion, on October 19 Abdurrachman Wahid became fourth Indonesian President and Sukarno’s daughter, Megawati Sukarnoputri became Vice-President. Under the auspices of the occupying United Nations, East Timor voted overwhelmingly for national independence on August 30. Upon exiting the new nation, the Indonesian army and pro-Indonesian Timorese incinerated much of the region and forcibly evacuated thousands across the border to Indonesian West Timor.