

Asia

Strangers next door? Indonesia and Australia in the Asian Century

Edited by TIM LINDSEY and DAVE MCRAE

Oxford: Hart, 2018. Pp. 548. Terminology, Glossary, Index.

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This volume begins with Tim Lindsey and Dave McRae's lucid and well-informed appraisal of Australia–Indonesia relations (chapter 1). The book is theoretically sophisticated but also accessibly written and should appeal to a broad audience. *Strangers next door* surveys nearly all critical aspects of this important bilateral relationship and offers balanced evidence-based insights that are valuable for students, scholars and practitioners, and as such is a highly recommended read. Lindsey and McRae are experts on Indonesian law and foreign policy with decades of experience, and together show the strength of Indonesian Studies at the University of Melbourne. This strength is, at the same time, a minor weakness of the book project featuring 29 contributors who all hail from or live in Australia and Indonesia, and arguably the edited volume could have benefited from the detached analysis of a few experts from third countries not directly implicated in the bilateral relationship.

As stated on page 4, basically everything that can be done has been done (diplomacy, trade, exchange, cooperation) to foster bilateral cooperation across all sectors, formally and informally, but one of the main problems is scale. The impact of collaborative projects is limited by scale, shrinking resources and cuts in aid budgets, and this complex challenge could have been explored more systematically by the editors and contributors. In addition to the problem of scale, John McCarthy introduces the confounding challenge of the cultural divide between Australia and Indonesia, among other things, in his well-written and engaging chapter 3. In chapter 22 Robin Davies makes a compelling case for the need to reimagine the nature of the aid relationship between Australia and Indonesia, where attitudes toward aid do not always follow conventional wisdom, and where targeting and priorities are problematised (p. 451), which is made all the more prescient by the COVID-19 pandemic. With hindsight the public health sector and health diplomacy are missing features of this edited book. We know, for instance, that since at least 2018 the Australia Indonesia Health Security Partnership has been jointly developed by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in conjunction with Indonesian government officials to manage the spread of infectious diseases. Climate cooperation and environmentalism is another feature of the bilateral relationship that is underexplored by the book's contributors.

The subtitle of the book frames Australia–Indonesia relations within the contentious context of the 'Asian Century'. The idea of the Asian Century, first popularised by a US Foreign Relations Committee hearing in the 1980s, is assumed but not really explained in the Introduction, and only on page 7 does it become clear that this is largely code for the rise of China. For all of the antagonisms identified by the editors in the Introduction, the prospect for Australia and Indonesia to find common ground in their mutual concern about the rise of China is underexplored, with the

possible exception of chapter 7 about defence by Peter Jennings. In chapter 10 Catherine Renshaw examines regional dynamics and the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), but does not focus on the implications of the rise of China, leaving a partial gap in the book's analytical contributions.

Regarding the problem of perceptions and reputations (p. 4), and the tensions surrounding East Timor and Papua indirectly linked to neocolonialism, the editors could have added the truth and justice campaigns (or interventions, depending on where one sits) involving numerous Australian academics and organisations with concerns about the legacy of the 1965–66 mass violence in Indonesia. This is where aspects of the cultural divide examined by McCarthy in chapter 3 really come into focus, and relates to another branch of research (not included in this edited volume) about the military and politics carried out by Jess Melvin, who completed her PhD at Melbourne and is now based at the University of Sydney.

The latest Lowy Institute polling data reaffirms the public opinion and perception trends examined by Dave McRae and Diane Zhang in chapter 5, providing another indicator of the quality, durability and broad appeal of the analysis found in *Strangers next door*. As summarised by Evi Fitriani in chapter 4, Australia–Indonesia relations are influenced by leaders in office, particularly those in Jakarta, because the Indonesian public takes little notice of Australian prime ministers. This is indicative of the power shift observed by the editors in chapter 1. Whereas former Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–14) was regarded as a ‘best friend’ to Australia, President Joko Widodo’s first term in office got off to a rocky start after the execution of two Australian drug traffickers in Bali in 2015, resulting in his rating as one of the ‘least admired’ foreign leaders by a sample of the Australian public (p. 31). It is telling that Indonesia’s pragmatic president pays little attention to this negative press, and hints at a continued shift in the balance of power; in this context the challenge for Australian diplomats and leaders to show why they ‘matter’ (p. 1) to Indonesia will continue to grow in significance and urgency in the coming years.

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Southeast Asia

COVID-19 in Southeast Asia: Insights for a post-pandemic world

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The Covid-19 pandemic has presented major challenges to societies around the globe, disrupting economies, raising obstacles to human mobility, and contributing to political upheaval on a scale that finds few parallels in living memory. Though scholarship has not been exempted from these disruptions, Hyun Bang Shin, Murray McKenzie and Do Young Oh have succeeded in putting together a diverse