

Chapters 5 and 6 address the differing ways in which photographic practice and history-making come together in Java. “Witnessing History” analyzes the role of student activist photographs of the tumultuous events of 1998–1999 that formed the larger backdrop to Strassler’s fieldwork. Indeed, the book is dedicated to one of these photographer activists, Agus Muliawan, a friend of the author’s murdered in the violence after East Timor’s referendum calling for independence from Indonesia, and the source of some of the most haunting photographs in the book. The powerful status ascribed to these photographs as both witnesses of and documents of “history-in-the-making,” and the moral agency and vision attributed to their student makers, meant that they were seen as capable of extending the original act of witnessing beyond this charged if singular moment, thereby collectivizing the experience and historical potency of Indonesia’s dramatic “Reform.” The book’s last chapter, “Revelatory Signs,” shows how the general “culture of documentation,” where photographs act as “authentic proofs” of official history, meshes with a different strand of Javanese history-making linked to a tradition of popular messianism within the fascinating project of a veteran of the Indonesian revolution. Personal and national history blend on the walls of Noorman’s home, forming an immense, expanding collage of photographs and clippings from official media, auratic photographs purchased in Java’s streets of mythic figures and charismatic leaders, family portraits, and photocopies of miscellaneous documents that, taken together, offer a counter-history and dramatic “personalization” of the nation’s official historiography. Following Strassler, this alternative vision relies on and thus also bears testimony to the larger media ecology in which photographs operate as well as the multiple means of technological reproducibility in which Noorman’s project is grounded. It also epitomizes, albeit in a highly idiosyncratic fashion, the double gesture explored across the different chapters of the book in which circulating imageries suffuse the realm of the personal and persons and collectivities insert themselves into and are taken up within wider circulations.

It is difficult to do justice to such an original and finely crafted book in a review as short as this one. Besides *Refracted Visions’* many compelling arguments, including the one that lays out the centrality of Chinese-Indonesians to the historical process of imagining Indonesia, Strassler expresses herself in clear, nuanced language that combines subtle analysis with vivid description and an acute eye for historically situated, ethnographic detail.

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*Wives, Slaves, and Concubines: A History of the Female Underclass in Dutch Asia.*

By Eric Jones. Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010. Pp. 204.

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**Reviewed by Barbara Watson Andaya, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa**

E-mail [bandaya@hawaii.edu](mailto:bandaya@hawaii.edu)

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The richness of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) archives remains a continual source of amazement, and Eric Jones has provided us with another example of the unique avenues through which these records illuminate the human experience. Focusing on late eighteenth-century Batavia, *Wives, Slaves, and Concubines* brings to light intriguing and little-known aspects of underclass life in one of Southeast Asia’s most important early modern cities. The book argues that as administrative practices were transposed from The Netherlands into the ethnically diverse environment of Dutch Asia, legal rulings were reshaped to deal with a situation where those associated with the VOC – employees and their dependants – were differentiated from those who were not. In particular, Roman-Dutch law introduced new ideas of slaves as “immovable property” (*vaste goederen*) to societies where the complex gradations of “slavery” ranged from permanent servitude to temporary debt-

bondage and even freedom-like status. Through a careful analysis of primary and secondary sources, Jones demonstrates that the application of law in Batavia created a separate category for VOC officials, their wives (typically local Christians descended from Asian-Portuguese unions, and sometimes themselves former slaves) and household members, including slaves. Judicial matters pertaining to this group were brought before the VOC's Council of Justice. By contrast, jurisdiction over free Asians and Europeans and their slaves was assigned to the *schepenbank* (the Court of Aldermen), the members (*schepenen*) of which were not necessarily equipped with any legal training. In other words, VOC connections rather than race became the basis for determining the kind of judicial hearing that an individual could anticipate. Here Batavia represents a special case, not only because so many wives of Company employees were themselves of lower socio-economic origins, but because such a substantial percentage of its population consisted of slaves and former slaves. In an environment where slave "ownership" was common even at lower social levels, the distinction between a female slave and concubine was vague in the extreme. In this context, Jones argues, VOC enforcement of a legal division between "slave" and "free" meant that *schepenbank* decisions virtually always favored the "free" in cases where a slave was accused of violence, especially against an owner, regardless of the physical abuse to which he or she had been subject. In turn, the distinction between owner and property led to an ossification of previously fluid boundaries that had allowed for a degree of social mobility, creating a situation where mistreated or aggrieved slaves had little recourse but to retaliate or abscond.

The primary sources used to support this argument are drawn from the records of Batavia's *schepenbank*, which have attracted the attention of several scholars in recent years. Established in 1620 and disbanded in 1809, the members of the *schepenbank* (variously seven to nine) were appointed annually by the VOC's Council of the Indies. They included free citizens (burghers) as well as VOC officials, and in the seventeenth century the Chinese Captain also participated. The responsibilities of the *schepenbank* were varied and changed over time, ranging from supervision of the fish, vegetable, and meat markets to oversight of the town midwives. For a social historian, however, the *schepenbank's* most important function was to pass judgment on civil disputes and on serious criminal cases that often involved runaway slaves and thus raised the issue of ownership, property rights, and "immovable" goods. In this capacity the *schepenbank* acted as a body of magistrates, and the documentation it generated is a rich field for the exploration of the lives of Batavia's underclass, especially in an environment where growing numbers of female slaves and ex-slaves were contributing to the feminization of poverty.

Through five chapters – "Gender, Bondage, and the Law in Early Dutch Asia," "Asia Trade and Limits of the Possible," "Courts and Courtship: Legal Practice in Dutch Asia," "Batavia and Its Runaway *Slavinnen*," and "Gender, Abuse, and the Modern World System: Female Violence in Eighteenth-century Jakarta" – Jones provides the historical and theoretical framework for his study, drawing attention to previous studies of gender in Southeast Asia, especially as they relate to Batavia, and to the manner in which several well-known historians have read documents "against the grain." This sets the stage for the heart of the book, which provides case studies of the protracted legal procedures that enmeshed those accused of serious crimes, so frequently fugitive slaves and former slaves. The individuals whose lives take center stage – women like Sitie from Makassar, Sinliang and Tjindra from Bali, and the murdered twelve-year-old slave Tompel – are brought to life in a way that no historian of Southeast Asia has previously attempted. Their testimony and confessions (often obtained through harsh interrogation and even torture) provide humanized and historically informative vignettes that are certain to arouse student interest and stimulate discussion. Jones offers a persuasive context for his argument that the "networks and contacts" of Batavia's urban environment could allow runaways to escape into a new life, but that the perception of the slaves as simple property also helped to create the very problems from which they were fleeing. *Wives, Slaves, and Concubines* is thus a significant contribution to Southeast Asian studies, especially for those interested in the fraught history of cross-cultural contact and in the origins of the inequities on which colonialism was based.

Inevitably, however, there are caveats. Additions such as a list of abbreviations, a glossary, more detail as to the provenance and specific context of the nineteenth-century illustrations – normally included in a historical work – would have been helpful in this case as well. Although the book is clearly written and very “student-friendly,” some may find the occasional stylistic breeziness disconcerting in prose that is otherwise more formal (for example pp. 111–12 “fleeced her own home,” “in the con,” “pull off her spending spree”). More significantly, despite the title, we are not dealing here with “Dutch Asia” and those expecting a comparison of the position of slaves and concubines in other VOC towns such as Melaka, Makassar, or further afield in Sri Lanka or Capetown will be disappointed. In generalizing across “Dutch Asia” we also need to be made aware of the shortcomings of the sources as well as their strengths. Given that Jones worked primarily in the Dutch National Archives in The Hague and relies on records from selected years (notably 1775, 1777, 1778, 1787, 1791, 1792, and 1793) it would have been useful to have a historiographical reckoning of the surviving *schepenbank* documents to indicate any gaps in the material consulted. This is especially relevant because the seventeenth-century *schepenbank* records are only available in Indonesia’s National Archives.<sup>1</sup> Although Jones concentrates on the late eighteenth century it would have been interesting to examine earlier cases to see if decisions, legal interpretations, and punishments changed over the two-hundred-year period in which Batavia’s *schepenbank* operated. Some comparative thinking would also have served as a reminder that domestic violence, cruelty, and disregard to suffering were by no means confined to Dutch Asia, and that it was not only Europeans who were concerned with maintaining social categorization. A primary concern of the Royal Orders of Burma, for instance, is to prevent or minimize movement from one occupational group to another. Indeed, throughout Southeast Asia indigenous legal codes from the early modern period appear to be preoccupied with issues relating to slave ownership.

In sum, however, this study provides a valuable exploration of the ways in which the legalities of early colonialism penetrated the lives of the underclass in Batavia, and specifically the effects on poor women. Although Jones does provide examples of a few individuals who were able to seize opportunities and advance their interests by melting into Batavia’s transient and anonymous population, the overall impression is bleak in the extreme. In the end, therefore, we have to question the extent to which this grim picture of cruelty and exploitation reflects the lives of “ordinary” Asian women (pp. 3, 23), since the *schepenbank* dealt with only the most serious cases of violence and property theft. As Jones himself notes (p. 25), the successful runaway will not appear in court records. Certainly, *Wives, Slaves, and Concubines* allows us to hear voices that have previously been silenced, but the court records from which Jones has extracted so much, by their very nature, reveal virtually nothing of the happiness and warm relationships which, then as now, remain central to human existence.

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*Ideology and Christianity in Japan.*

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**Reviewed by Reinier H. Hesselink, The University of Northern Iowa**

E-mail reinier.hesselink@uni.edu

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“Why did Japan reject Christianity?” is a question that has been debated for more than four hundred years, and the end of the debate is not yet in sight by any means. In fact, this new book under review

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<sup>1</sup> The *schepenbank* records in Jakarta are described in G. L. Balk, F. van Dijk and D. J. Kortlang (with contributions by F. S. Gaastra, Hendrik E. Niemeijer, and P. Koenders), *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 121–23.