

As the authors point out, the ethnic Chinese majority are often oblivious to their own advantages. I can therefore see the book opening the eyes and shaping discussions in university classrooms. Barr and Skrbiš have also paved the way for future research by showing the gaps in our understanding of how inequality is reproduced and the costs that are borne by all Singaporeans.

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SURVIVING AGAINST THE ODDS: Village Industry in Indonesia. *By S. Ann Dunham; Edited and with a preface by Alice G. Dewey and Nancy I. Cooper; with a foreword by Maya Soetoro-Ng and an afterword by Robert W. Hefner.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009. xxxiii, 374 pp. (Tables, maps, B&W photos, coloured photos.) US\$27.95, cloth. ISBN 978-0-8223-4687-6.

When American friends invited me to join them on a visit to an anthropologist doing research on copper smiths during my fieldwork in Indonesia in the late 1970s, I was happy to have a day's outing in the beautiful, leafy uplands of Central Java. Something the woman we went to visit said that day stayed with me for a long time. She recounted how, learning that smiths hired labourers and paid them starvation wages, she had gotten funding from USAID to lend small amounts of capital to some of those workers so that they could set up their own workshops. It worked: several of them took loans, set up coppersmith workshops and hired labourers—and paid them starvation wages.

I have repeated that story many times over the years, since it warns so concisely against romanticizing people who suffer oppression and assuming that experiencing hardship generates compassion and virtue. But it was only when I read a *New York Times* article during the 2008 presidential campaign that I realized that the woman who told that story was Barack Obama's mother. Now that her teacher, Alice Dewey, and a colleague from grad school, Nancy Cooper, have edited a manuscript that Ann Dunham was unable to finish before her untimely death, it becomes clear how that one story fits into the larger context of her several years of anthropological research and the work she went on to do as a development consultant in Indonesia (and briefly in Pakistan).

Dunham's field was economic anthropology, a relatively unglamorous corner of anthropology that has begun to regain some prominence with the rise of environmental studies and of critiques of neo-liberal economics. The field's obscurity is not mysterious. Doing economic anthropology well, as Dunham certainly did, requires painstaking, detailed work counting up tiny sums of money, looking at extremely small enterprises, considering minuscule expansions and contractions of markets—in a word, dealing with conditions and events on the Lilliputian scale at which most people acting as economic

agents in poor countries operate. Economists could hardly be bothered with these kinds of data: What could they possibly amount to? Yet Dunham's work makes clear that failing to attend to these matters at the humblest level runs the risk of overlooking everything essential about people's economic behaviour, including all the ways that such behaviour, to be understood, must be connected to a great many other social and cultural concerns.

The most vivid part of the book is the third chapter, in which Dunham describes the history and sociology of the village where she did her most intensive fieldwork, a village with a relatively large number of iron-working blacksmiths situated in a poor area of southeast Central Java. Her portraits of specific individuals and their relationships show a keen eye for character and its social and material consequences. She also did enough research to learn a fair amount about the site's history, even in an area where historical records are not very rich. A reader comes away with a sense of just how complicated the "economics" of any local industry is, since material activity takes place in a setting where families, received wisdom, status competition, ritual practices, and long memories make for motivations to act in certain ways that outsiders rarely appreciate. Yet this should not suggest that villagers do not make "rational" decisions: Dunham shows that they can usually see clearly what will follow from bureaucratic decisions concerning their livelihoods, and that they act accordingly.

Other chapters address more general questions, particularly those that preoccupied anthropologists and development specialists in the 1970s and 1980s, when Dunham was working in Indonesia. Difficulties surrounding appropriate use of the Indonesian government's constantly shifting data-gathering require considerable explanation, especially when Dunham wants to use those statistics to venture some policy suggestions. Whether the Indonesian government hurts or hinders entrepreneurs by protectionist measures brings careful, nuanced responses: Dunham shows how some import taxes simply raise smiths' costs, whereas others probably do help insulate their jobs from foreign competition. Perhaps the matter of greatest salience at the time, and still of concern, is whether government policy should be directed primarily toward promoting maximal growth, or whether it should on the contrary be used to counteract increasing social stratification. Dunham points out that growth has usually generated greater disparities in wealth among villagers, whereas economic downturns tend to bring people closer to some generalized mean. Characteristically, she avoids adopting an ideological position and does not commit herself as to whether she favours one side or the other in this debate.

Robert Hefner contributes a useful afterword, outlining the historical and academic contexts within which Dunham worked. Like the co-editors, he scrupulously avoids mentioning the name of Dunham's illustrious son: it appears only on the book's dust jacket. It would be politically incorrect, if in an unusual way, to make much of a woman's scholarly contributions

in light of her son's fame. Yet it is hard to avoid inferring that that fame explains Duke's decision to produce the book as though it were intended for a wide readership, one far larger than a serious, judicious, and fine-grained contribution to the economic anthropology of Indonesian smiths would normally attract.

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REFRACTED VISIONS: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java. *Objects/Histories*. By Karen Strassler. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010. xx, 375 pp. (Coloured photos, illus.) US\$24.95, paper. ISBN 978-0-8223-4611-1.

Analyses of cultural nationalism in Southeast Asia have tended to privilege state and elite discourse and representation. Strassler's book marks a significant shift by examining "popular photography," where popular is defined as being not "*opposed* to (outside of or in resistance to) the 'official' or the 'elite,'" but as "mediat[ing] between widely shared representational forms and visual logics and more intimate concerns" (23, original emphasis). Put simply, this study is concerned with photographs of ordinary Indonesians taken by accidental, amateur and commercial photographers and belonging mostly to personal collections, rather than with the images by professional photographers and photojournalists that are circulated in the media and exhibited in art galleries.

A revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation, the beautifully produced *Refracted Visions* brings the ethnographic method and the conceptual toolbox of visual studies to bear upon a historically situated analysis of what Strassler argues are the double and somewhat contradictory functions that popular photography has served in postcolonial Indonesia: conveying the material as well as political aspirations of individuals within the unitary ideological frame of national modernity during the three decades of Suharto's New Order on the one hand; and transcending such a frame by ascribing memorial value to the intimate, everyday dimension of personal lives on the other hand. Strassler's core argument is encapsulated in the following lines: "Popular photographs yield both a history *of* vision and a history *through* vision. They reveal the larger currents of Indonesian history as they are refracted through the prism of the intimate and the everyday. At the same time, they show the visual to be a domain crucial to the very making of history itself" (28, original emphasis).

Accordingly, the book's six chapters, framed by an introduction and epilogue, examine different photographic genres whereby "people in urban Java constitute themselves and are constituted as Indonesian subjects" (22): amateur photographs of rural landscapes and dwellers, studio portraits,