

A unique feature of this book that could be used in a classroom is the author's use of Korean and Japanese words and phrases. There are over 100 italicized words and phrases that Lee chooses not to translate for the reader. Having students define unfamiliar words from their context is always a worthwhile exercise. However, many of the untranslated Korean words deal with names for family relations. Students could analyze these words and how they are used to express Korean family structure. This could also lead to a deeper discussion of the influence of Confucianism on Korean culture, even when they are living in a foreign land. Many of the Japanese words in the novel tend to deal with unique places or aspects of Japanese life. Interesting research projects could be done on both groups of words to help students learn more about a foreign culture.

This book begins with the memorable phrase "History has failed us, but no matter." This is true. The *zainichi* living in Japan are a forgotten people. Lee shines a light on the struggles of a group of people that most of the world did not realize existed. However, this novel, like any great work of literature, goes beyond that narrow focus. The characters' searches for love, success, and a sense of home and belonging are universal themes that transcend time and place. No one wants to be the pachinko ball that drops out of the bottom of the machine to be lost and forgotten by the rest of the world. ■

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## A Brief History of Indonesia: Sultans, Spices, and Tsunamis

*The Incredible Story of Southeast Asia's  
Largest Nation*

By TIM HANNIGAN

TOKYO: TUTTLE PUBLISHING, 2015

288 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0804844765, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Paul A. Rodell



When planning my fall 2017 Modern Southeast Asia course, an introductory survey intended for undergraduates with no prior background, I decided to explore new textbook options. On a whim, I looked through Tim Hannigan's *A Brief History of Indonesia* and was immediately taken with this highly accessible volume with its decent font size for easy reading and even a centerpiece of colorful plates of historical significance. While there are more detailed and academically sophisticated books out there, I was struck by the author's engaging writing style and his ability to explain

complex issues clearly with engaging "hooks," such as the life of a minor historical actor whose personal story links otherwise-disparate events. I was also impressed that the author could tell Indonesia's complex story in under 300 pages.

Part of Hannigan's not-so-secret "secret" is that he is an award-winning novelist and writer of articles for newspapers and magazines, many on travel. It is his job to communicate with large audiences who have a wide range of knowledge and interests rather than writing for academe. This means that his book should be useful to educators and students at the university and high school levels as a resource on Indonesia in global survey courses such as world history or human geography. Another part of his success comes from the heart. Hannigan first came to Indonesia as a young backpacker, landing in Bali after having spent a year in India. His youthful experiences and love for both countries have continued, and he lived in Indonesia for almost twenty years. This close association with the country and its people infuses his writing with cultural sensitivity and affection.

For students whose grade depends in part on their textbook reading, this task is made easier by the volume's organization into ten brief chapters of roughly equal length that are further divided by lines separating subsections that seem to drift effortlessly from one topic to the next. In addition to the book's organization, the author also has a wonderful sense of humor. One example is the chapter title "Spice Invaders" to describe the arrival of Europeans desperate for the pungent products that would make them rich back home, while "Rust en Orde" is the title for the chapter detailing the creation of the Dutch East Indies. "Saints and Winners" serves as the title for the arrival of Islam into the archipelago. This chapter places strong emphasis on preexisting folk beliefs that combined with Islam to smooth the world religion's emergence in the region. The role of early indigenous belief systems is continued in the fifth chapter, which discusses the Dutch entry into the archipelago and is supplemented by an intriguing discussion of how the Dutch used the Enlightenment as a justification for their colonial expansion.

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I mentioned the author's use of hooks in his writing style; usually, the hook is a representative character of an era and at least one of the chapter's interpretative themes. One example is found in the book's prehistory opening chapter "From Hobbits to Hinduism." Here, readers join some early Melanesians who stop at a cave for the night and one of their group has a chance encounter with a now-extinct "hobbit," the early half-human, half-animalistic creature *Homo floresiensis*. This sudden chance encounter sends each humanoid screaming into the night, and the reader is hooked into a discussion of early man in the islands. Hannigan frequently repeats this writing strategy, sometimes with odd characters such as the American Frank Carpenter, an early twentieth-century writer of travel literature, who starts chapter 7, which details the rise of Indonesian nationalism.

What is so striking about Carpenter is how seemingly oblivious he was to the changes in Indonesian society happening all around him—"tectonic rumblings," Hannigan calls them (163). In fact, these rumblings are the real story. In the early twentieth century, the major Islamic organizations, the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama, are founded; the secular

Sarekat Islam rises; and the *Indische Partij* (Indies Party) is formed by mixed-race Indonesians who feel excluded by both sides of their genetic heritage.

A rumbling of special importance was the rise of the young, charismatic Sukarno, who realized that neither Islam nor Marxism would rid the archipelago of Dutch colonialism. He favored, instead, a secular nationalism that championed a transcendent Indonesia. By 1929, his Nationalist Party of Indonesia had more than 10,000 members, which led to the young leader's first arrest.

Chapter 8 begins with the introduction of another obscure character, a young Dutch boy, Ernest Hillen, who remembers the day Japanese troops arrived to put his family into a concentration camp. In this case, the character was on the wrong side of history as an inheritor of a collapsing colonial order. While the old order crumbled, the better part of the chapter focuses on the inheritors of the future, the Indonesian nationalists led by Sukarno and his close ally, Mohammad Hatta. Hannigan's sensitivity to Indonesian culture is also evident here in his discussion of the prophecies relating to the return of the Ratu Adil, which both the Indonesians and the Dutch seem to believe, albeit with very different takes on this Javanese mystical tale (189–193).

Every good tale needs a villain, and Dutchman Raymond “Turk” Westerling fits the character mold perfectly. In Hannigan's telling of Indonesian resistance to Dutch efforts to reestablish colonial control after World War II, Westerling's viciousness should have gained him a Nuremberg-style Class-A war crimes indictment. Even after The Netherlands ceded sovereignty in December 1949, Westerling and his 800-man-strong Legion of the Ratu Adil fought on in a terrorist campaign, and he claimed to be the

divine savior of Java. You can't make this stuff up, and my students were amazed that such a character could exist.

Instead of a vignette about an obscure individual, chapter 9 starts (208–210) by describing the arch of the Sukarno years from his height of power and prestige at the 1955 Bandung Conference to a bleak foreshadowing of the next decade, which ended in a horrific nationwide bloodbath. The remainder of the chapter details the country's shocking economic descent, Sukarno's thinly veiled authoritarianism of “Guided Democracy,” and the seizing of Dutch properties and expulsions of Dutch citizens. But especially important for students is his telling of the failed coup attempt and brutal murders of many of the country's top generals during the early morning of October 1st, 1965. This shocking event was followed by a bloody aftermath that extended into the next year and left hundreds of thousands of people dead, many butchered in horrific ways. At this point, another bizarre and ruthless character emerges, General Sarwo Edhie Wibowo, whose army units recruited, trained, and directed civilian murder units around the country.

The opening of chapter 10 on the Suharto era is also unique. While the territory of East Timor is very different from the rest of the nation, Hannigan includes a discussion of that tiny and tragic state as both chapter opening and closing coda. This forlorn former Portuguese colony was set free and existed for only a few months until Indonesia invaded in December 1975. The Timorese never accepted Jakarta's control, and they conducted a gruesome guerrilla resistance until the end of the Suharto era some fourteen years later.

The chapter narrative then shifts to the thirty-year Suharto era that ended with his resignation from office in 1998, while the country went through an earthquake-like economic meltdown. Wisely, Hannigan lightly passes over the Suharto regime's early years, which were filled with hope and stability, and goes quickly to the major factors that led to his departure and brought more trouble to his island nation. These factors included massive endemic corruption and an authoritarian political control tighter than ever seen under Sukarno.

The final chapter is an “epilogue” of ten short pages where the author covers the impact of the 2004 tsunami on the state of Aceh and Indonesia, plus the country's political development through the 2014 election that brings the current president, Joko Widodo, or “Jokowi,” into office.

Was my decision to adopt this book a good idea or not? What did my students think? To address these questions, I gave my students an anonymous survey after their final exam. The survey was voluntary, so not all participated, and the survey only required a brief written statement. Also, I told the students about the survey in advance so they could think about it. Out of the sixteen students in this small course, eleven responded, of whom eight clearly liked the book, some very strongly so. Of these, some said the book was a good supplement to class lectures plus our discussions. They all found the book far better than most textbooks. Only a couple of students said the book was too long, a generic student criticism. But one student's thoughtful suggestion asked for more parallels between the chapters. No one said they didn't like the book or thought that it was boring, which I consider something of a minor triumph. ■

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