

A History of Modern Indonesia

BY ADRIAN VICKERS

NEW YORK: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2005

292 PAGES, ISBN 0521834937, HARDBACK

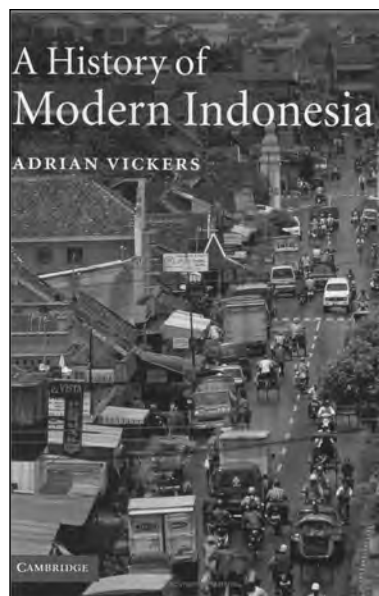
REVIEWED BY FLORENCE LAMOUREUX

Adrian Vickers uses a unique style to provide his readers with a view of twentieth-century Indonesia. Throughout this book, Vickers, a Professor of Asian Studies at Australia's University of Wollongong, references Indonesia's history to the writings of and incidents in the life of Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Pram, as his countrymen and women commonly refer to him, was a giant among Indonesian authors and well known by Indonesians and scholars of Indonesia as an outspoken critic of both colonialism and Indonesia's post-colonial governments. Pram's prolific writings chronicle life under the Dutch, the Japanese occupation, the Sukarno presidency, and Suharto's thirty-two year reign. He is best known for a series of four novels collectively titled *The Buru Quartet* (*This Earth of Mankind*, *Child of All Nations*, *Footsteps*, and *House of Glass*). These books are set in the early 1900s when Dutch colonialism was still in effect and independence was a growing issue among Indonesia's educated population. Vickers refers to events in these books and to Pram's other writings as he constructs his detailed history of modern Indonesia.

In the first three chapters of the book, Vickers concentrates on the Dutch colonial period, often presenting colonizers' personal accounts, and discusses the role of the Javanese aristocracy. In the second chapter, Vickers refers to Dutch author Louis Couperus who researched and wrote about Indonesian culture in the late nineteenth century. Couperus' novel, *The Hidden Force*, recounts the fate of a Dutch official whose failure to comprehend Indonesians' belief in the supernatural led to his ruin. Vickers notes that a deficiency in cultural awareness was a primary factor in the failure of Dutch colonialism. These beginning chapters of the book set the stage for the reader to understand how and why the policies and practices of the Dutch impacted Indonesia's government and people after independence.

A History of Modern Indonesia is a thorough and informative account of Indonesia's history and political development in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While it is not necessary that the reader be familiar with Pram's novels and writings, one who is will better grasp Vickers' concepts. This book is geared to readers who have at least a modest awareness of Indonesian history. The author presents well the complicated politics of the country right after World War II when nationalism, revolution, and Islamic concerns were crucial matters in the forming of a new government. For example, his descriptions of the September 30–October 1, 1965 coup (156), the political party GOLKAR (162), and the corruption of the oil company Pertamina (185) are all concise and insightful.

This book has twenty-five pages of notes, a twenty-page bibliography, twenty photographs, seven maps, a chronology, a section



on abbreviations, and a glossary. The introduction provides a concise summary of the book's contents and further clarifies Vicker's intent to use a well-known Indonesian author as a point of reference for important events.

A History of Modern Indonesia is an appropriate textbook for university history courses focused on Indonesia, or for those classes that cover revolution and its aftermath in once-western-colonized countries. ■

FLORENCE LAMOUREUX holds an MA in Asian Studies. She is the author of *Indonesia, A Global Studies Handbook* in ABC-CLIO's *Global Studies Asia* series. Among her translations from Indonesian into English are two books by journalist/author Mochtar Lubis—*Tiger!* and *The Indonesia Dilemma*. Lamoureux, who retired from the associate directorship of the University of Hawai'i's Center for Southeast Asian Studies in fall 2004, lived in Indonesia for extended periods from 1972–2004, and traveled extensively throughout the country.

New AAS Book Series

ASIA Past and Present

New Research from AAS

**Call For
Manuscripts**

The Board of Directors of the Association for Asian Studies recently voted to resume publication of scholarly books under the Association's own imprint in a new series—"Asia Past and Present: New Research from AAS."

This series succeeds a distinguished and successful predecessor, "AAS Monographs and Occasional Papers," which brought out fifty-nine titles between 1951 and 2000. The new enterprise will be overseen by the AAS Editorial Board and the Series Editor, Martha Ann Selby, professor of Asian Studies at the University of Texas, Austin.

The Board expects to publish two to three books a year, each of them fully refereed and selected on the basis of exemplary, original, and enduring scholarship. Although submissions in all arenas of Asian studies are welcome, the Board particularly hopes to support work in emerging or under-represented fields, such as South Asia, premodern Asia, language and literature, art history, and literary criticism. In addition to monographs, the Board will consider translations, essay collections, and other forms of scholarly research. Authors must be current members of AAS.

For further information please see —www.aasianst.org.