Preface

THE EXOTIC CHARMS and cultural mysteries of Indonesia have long fascinated the Western imagination. Since independence, Indonesia has asserted a claim to world attention because of its leadership potential in Southeast Asia and among Third World countries, its status as the largest Islamic country in the world, and its wealth of natural resources, including oil. One would have thought that this combination of intrinsic interest and political and economic importance would have guaranteed extensive and sustained scholarly research. The story of Indonesia’s struggle for independence from Holland, the initial halting attempts at parliamentary rule and economic development, and the period of flamboyant rule by Sukarno did produce a shelf of books. But now for more than a decade there has been relative silence about this important country, reflecting in part the faddishness of academic curiosity, and in part a somewhat repressive political climate which has increasingly restricted research.

Among specialists on Southeast Asia and the developing world, there should be continuous discussion as to what theories best explain Indonesian developments. Our theoretical contention is that there have been remarkably enduring qualities in Indonesian politics, and the change from the ideologically verbose Sukarno era to the more austere Suharto period is more apparent than real. By concentrating attention on the basic structural, cultural, and institutional framework of Indonesian politics, we have sought to reveal the distinctive character of power and social communication in a society which has been experiencing both change and cultural reaffirmation. Though at different times Indonesia may seemingly present different faces to the world, it is the scholar’s duty to delineate the country’s enduring dimensions.

In Part I we present our theory of the “bureaucratic polity” which we feel best explains the persistence of the Indonesian political system. We then examine the general structural and cultural factors that shape it. Finally, from more objective, sociological, and even geographic considerations, we move to interpretations of the subjective, psychological dimensions of power in Indonesia.

Part II deals with the principal institutions of government, with each chapter examining a different key element in the “bureaucratic polity” in light of recent empirical research by mainly younger scholars with extensive field research experience. Because of the commanding role of the military we begin with Ulf Sundhaussen, who has had a unique opportunity to observe and study the Indonesian army. The next key element of power in the Indonesian system is
the civilian bureaucracy, analyzed by Donald K. Emmerson, who on two occasions has studied its operations. Although not a separate "institution," the small group of Western-trained economists who have guided much of public policy for the Suharto regime deserve special attention; their policies are evaluated by Bruce Glassburner, who has worked closely with them on a professional basis.

Among Indonesian specialists there is some question as to the actual role of the political parties and the degree to which they represent fully mobilized, enduring social cleavages. In our introductory analysis of the "bureaucratic polity" we tend to discount the influence of the parties, but R. William Liddle, who has studied them firsthand in both Sumatra and Java, assigns them considerably more importance. This is a difference in views which the editors welcome, because at this stage the advancement of Indonesian studies demands not consensus but greater richness in theories and more tolerance for ambiguities. The final chapter in Part II by Allan A. Samson deals with the concept of power in Islamic ideology, and thus provides an appropriate bridge for leaving the study of the power processes in the formal "institutions" of government to enter the area of more general social and communications processes.

To understand Indonesia as a "bureaucratic polity" it is necessary to appreciate the limited influence on politics of general social processes. The Indonesian bureaucratic polity is stable but weak, easy to rule but difficult to modernize. Isolating the peasantry from party politics and fostering a one-way communication system ensures the short-term survival of the regime but substantially inhibits the government's ability to mobilize the peasantry for economic and social development. This is why we have chosen to juxtapose power and communications in the quest for understanding how interests are advanced in the Indonesian political process.

Therefore, Part III is devoted to communications and integration, and appropriately begins with two chapters by Indonesian authors: Astrid Susanto analyzes the structure and the general characteristics of the mass media of Indonesia, and Nono Anwar Markarim provides an intimate, firsthand report of the problems of being an editor in Jakarta. Although the mass media may have limited political influence, this does not mean that there is any lack of political subtlety, as Benedict R. O'G. Anderson demonstrates in his analysis of cartoons and monuments.

The evolution of organizational forms and the mobilization process are confronted in the final two chapters. Gary E. Hansen presents a case study of the Jakarta government's limited ability to mobilize the peasantry even for a program designed to advance their self-interest as rice-growers. Finally, Karl D. Jackson reports data which show how urbanization has altered traditional authority relations toward more self-interest-oriented patron-client ties, a change that helps to explain why urban growth has not been a threat to the system of "bureaucratic polity."

In sum, the picture of Indonesia which emerges from this study is devoid of the optimism that characterized so much of the earlier literature on that country and the rest of the developing world. At the same time the authors give
little support to the extreme pessimists who would forecast increasing decay and disintegration. Instead we strive for a better understanding of the forces underlying the durability of Indonesia and its political culture. Forces of change are at work, though their rhythm is not that of the ideological pronouncements or the military directives that have provided the surface drama of recent years.

Only if we revive and sustain scholarly research will we be able in time to understand the processes of change and continuity in a society as complex as Indonesia's. Sound insight into the political and social processes in the Third World requires that our theorizing not be unduly shaped by crisis cases or those countries which at any particular moment may, for one reason or another, be commanding the attention of the headlines. Analysis of the character of the dual phenomena of power and communications in developing countries provides a solid basis for building knowledge.

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