

Review: *The Real and Imagined Role of Culture in Development: Case Studies From Indonesia*. Michael R. Dove, ed. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988. xiii. 289 pp.

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It comes as no surprise to anthropologists and other students of culture that indigenous knowledge systems embody dynamic wisdom and a logic for dealing with social and natural environments. Nor is it unusual that people of other cultures—conquerors, repressors, benevolent patrons, or friendly neighbors—can and do derive benefits from the knowledge of other groups.

The last few years have witnessed the blossoming of this awareness among non-anthropologist Development professionals. "Culture" and "indigenous knowledge" have become important buzzwords in project documents previously dominated by calls for high internal rates of return and favorable cost-benefit ratios. Strategies for "sustainable development," another contemporary (and elusive) development goal, often draw on local culture and knowledge to design appropriate and politically correct futures for Third World people. Whether or not these latest development fads benefit the people targeted for bootstrap-lifting depends on the context, the power, and the motives of institutions and individuals administering the programs. Indeed, the distribution of benefits depends on the likelihood that external interests with different agendas will appropriate useful pieces of indigenous knowledge. External appropriation of indigenous knowledge is nearly impossible to prevent, however, unless knowledge is allowed to slip away altogether and culture is destroyed. Thus the importance of recording and applying traditional knowledge in local development. This last notion is the theme of most of the articles in Michael Dove's latest book, *The Real and Imagined Role of Culture in Development*.

Although the various corners of Java remain the most popular sites for research and development in Indonesia, Dove has managed to compile nine case studies representing a wide range of Indonesian islands and cultures. All of them challenge the Indonesian state's contention that traditional cultures and lifestyles are backward; all of them attempt to illustrate culture's integrative role in the structures and processes of various societies.

The selections represent many of the themes Dove has written about during nearly a decade of living and working in Indonesia. The case studies cover ideology and the perceptions of various actors in the development process, influences of land and tree tenure on interactions between social groups or between villagers and the state, the economic functions of ritual practices, the individual objectives underlying seemingly communal endeavors, the political-economy of resource development, and the potential value of traditional practices in modern development institutions. Many cases illustrate the resilience of traditional approaches to problem solving compared to those introduced by the government; some show how broad structural processes affect local communities without direct intervention; each illustrates the polarity of perceptions between those who plan and those who are to act on those plans.

Unlike many edited volumes, most of the essays in this book are well-written and convincingly argued. The nine case studies are divided into four sections: ideology, eco-

nomics, ecology, and social relations/social change. In a skillfully written introduction, Dove addresses all of the themes and the substantive cases. George Appell ponders their theoretical significance in a concluding chapter.

Ideology is defined as religion or traditional belief systems; it is discussed here in terms of Indonesian policy regarding the legitimacy of traditional religions and of traditional healing practices. Jane Atkinson does a wonderful job of examining religious policy from the perspective of the Wana of Sulawesi. The Wana publicly profess world religions as a political survival strategy but adhere to their own, much older "religion" in the course of everyday life. Adrian Rienks and Purwanta Iskandar suggest that traditional healers and their traditional "science" be integrated into the government's approach to rural health care programs. In the section on economics, Carl Hoffman elaborates an intriguing hypothesis that the Punan hunters and gatherers of Borneo are less a distinct ethnic group inhabiting the island than an occupation group that chooses to specialize in gathering forest products for trade with sedentary agricultural groups. Jeffrey Brewer, the other author of an "economic" article, examines changes in patterns of land control through five state systems in Bima, illustrating how each period of external control eroded village sovereignty.

Each of the three articles in the "ecology" section defines ecology differently. Departing from a functional cultural ecology perspective, Dove describes the economic role of intoxication in Kantu' society, using the case to refute Marxist critiques of functionalist theory. P.M. Laksono writes in the tradition of hazards theory, describing the perceptions and response of residents of a Javanese mountain village to the dangers of volcanic disaster and transmigration, concluding that the latter is the riskier of the two. Reimar Schefold uses human ecological notions of equilibrium and disequilibrium to analyze the potential for Mentawai development.

The two case studies on social relations/change provide interesting views of frequently treated theoretical ideas which still require further documentation for Asia. Victor King discusses the breakdown of traditional Maloh stratification systems, arguing that stratification is at a transitional stage of almost leveled social relations. Hans Daeng examines ritual feasting in Flores, analyzing its function not only as a prestige mechanism, but also as a means of validating claims to scarce and disputed lands. This latent function serves to adjust the distribution of resources when the population has changed dramatically.

Though generally an outstanding selection of essays, there are some minor problems. Perhaps because of the complexity of the circumstances they describe, many authors offer no concrete alternatives for development with or without government intervention. Brewer, for example, painstakingly traces the policy decisions affecting land control through numerous extra-local governing structures, suggesting that a lack of communication with local farmers led to the current problems. He might have commented on the kinds of structural changes that would mitigate these problems and the likelihood of their realization. Laksono illustrates clearly that the government's perception of hazards is clouded by the political economy of transmigration. Though government subjectivity is obvious in the case of his selected research village, the villages not chosen might put his position into question—they were devastated by volcanic eruptions. Some articles are inconsistent or selective in their references to the broader literature. Hoffman, for example, argues both that the Punan moved out of agriculture and that sedentary Dayaks depend on the Punan for forest products because of the time constraints of swidden agriculture. However, he cites no measurements of labor allocation

in agriculture, nor does he refer to others' measurements—notably the exhaustive work of the volume's editor on swiddens in West Kalimantan.¹ Other research in the region, conducted at approximately the same time, came to quite different conclusions about the cycles of forest product collection by various Dayak groups, yet Hoffman makes no mention of these findings.²

It is also unclear why the articles in the "Social Change" section were not included under "Ecology," as they treat related themes. Finally, Appell's theoretical discussion would have been more potent had he woven some of the specific concerns of the case study authors into his projections for future research and development.

Curiously in the main body of the book neither the authors nor the editor discuss the usefulness of indigenous knowledge to states and other external organizations—such as multinational pharmaceutical companies—attempting to control broad social or natural environments. However, Appell in his concluding evaluation does address the issue, and argues optimistically that indigenous botanical knowledge may contain secrets useful to the entire world: cures for dread diseases, little known varieties of food, products needed for some future form of society. While this is true, the potentially skewed benefit distribution and manipulation raise important ethical questions. Ostensibly benevolent efforts to preserve traditional systems may mask the intent of the powerful to appropriate indigenous knowledge for the profit or power of external groups. As Schefold observes for the Mentawai, external influences often cause people to choose Western ways of living over their own traditions. Why should a people preserve a custom or a resource which has lost value as the context of their lives has changed? Dove's own article shows that capitalism changed the values of even the remotely situated Kantu'. Is it realistic to expect Punan children to return to gathering in the rainforest after earning a high school degree? The contributors to this book stop short of answering concretely the question underlying their presentations: Given the inevitability of externally imposed social and environmental change, exactly how does tradition fit into the future?

These critiques are minor quibbles, however, perhaps treading ground the authors intended not to traverse. They do not detract from the general excellence of all the essays. This volume is an important addition to the documentation of indigenous systems and the adverse effects of development and modernization on them. The editor and authors are to be commended for presenting interesting and timely analyses of some lesser known cultures of Indonesia. As such, the book provides useful material for students and teachers of anthropology, rural sociology, or development studies.

¹ Michael R. Dove. *Swidden Agriculture in Indonesia: The Subsistence Strategies of the Kalimantan Kantu'* (Berlin: Mouton, 1985).

² See, for example, Carol Colfer, "Kenyah Dayak Tree Cutting: In Context," in *Final Report: Interactions between People and Forests in East Kalimantan*. (Washington, D.C.: Indonesia-US Man and Biosphere Project No. 1, 1982); Timothy Jessup, "Why Do Shifting Cultivators Move?" *Borneo Research Bulletin* 13, 1 (1981): 16-32; Timothy Jessup and Nancy Lee Peluso, "Minor Forest Products as Common Property Resources in East Kalimantan, Indonesia," in *Common Property Resources*, ed. Panel on Common Property (Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 1986); also the classic F. L. Dunn, *Rainforest Collectors and Traders: A Study of Resource Utilization in Modern and Ancient Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS Monograph No. 5, 1975).