unintended consequences emerging out of this humanitarian crisis of 1971 that come through most strongly in this book.

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This important study offers a constructive appraisal of ideologies informing accountability politics in Southeast Asia, with the authors asserting the primacy of morally conservative notions over liberalism and democracy in shaping demands for responsible governance. While the authors acknowledge that their principal concern is determining whose authority is advanced by accountability practices, they stress a crucial point: neoliberalism and democracy have reached a compromise, a reason for the rise of moral ideologies.

The authors further argue that both democratic and authoritarian Southeast Asian states resort to an exploitation of moral ideologies to contain burgeoning pressures for accountability. Powerful state institutions and actors are able to dictate the form and propagation of these moral ideologies because the middle class is deeply fragmented. State leaders aspire to direct this discourse in order to shape business-state relations that have taken a variety of directions in Southeast Asia and which have, in turn, precipitated differing degrees of elite fracture.

This nexus between neoliberalism and democracy, and how compromise is reached between the two functions is, unfortunately, a fundamental matter that did not secure the multifaceted analysis it merits. An interesting fact about this neoliberalism-democracy nexus is its simultaneous emergence in Southeast Asia in the mid-1980s. Meanwhile, authoritarian states, in response to flourishing democracy in the region, began to expound the idea of an Asian democracy—and values—to offset criticisms of their reluctance to liberalize their political systems.

Having broached this topic about neoliberalism and governance, the authors should have broadened their assessment of different manifestations of neoliberal rule, its effects, and state response to demands for accountable employment of authority. Neoliberal rule touts not merely the importance of freedom but also accountability, and increasingly regulation, a point the authors note. Regulation, however, stifles neoliberal market restructurings such as privatization, practiced by all Southeast Asian governments. These state claims about accountability go on to champion the idea of a belief in civil society and its greater participation in defining political processes. The
recognition of accountability under the context of neoliberal governance can thus, paradoxically, enmesh social activists within structures of power, while simultaneously empowering the state to confine accountability to manageable categories, establish the ground for re-inscribing non-accountable rent-seeking practices, and reinforce unjust local power structures that were supposed to have been dismantled with the consolidation of democracy.

Another issue in discourses about moral accountability is respect of private property, a core dimension of neoliberalism. However, private property debates serve as a mechanism to justify the securing of rents. Notions of accountability become new processes of capital accumulation. Crucially therefore, moral accountability has to be presented as a state-social formation, grounded in religion and values. The regime of governance that then emerges melds both neoliberal and democratic concerns, and in the process produces and shapes the conduct of accountability. This is imperative as new state-business alliances inform how rents are created and distributed. In the context of moral accountability, government leaders intensify political and economic pressures on state agencies to consider their interests when determining the particular parameters that accountability should take. Such pressure on the state to serve vested interests is a primary factor for growing intra-elite contestations.

While these ideas run through the book, the key problem is this: the authors provide insufficient insights into their primary query, namely where does authority lie given this compromise between neoliberalism and democracy? Answers are suggested, but not in terms of how neoliberalism works and what this means for society and the economy. Powerful states in Singapore and Cambodia can control how neoliberalism functions. The situation in authoritarian Malaysia is more complex because the government and the opposition advocate neoliberal policies while espousing Islamic-based morality to deal with the repercussions of this economic agenda. Thailand’s business elites promote neoliberalism but are deeply split and at loggerheads with each other over access to state rents, a situation that also prevails in the Philippines. Indonesia is an anomaly as business elites have failed to consolidate control over the state, partly due to the influence of (anti-corruption-based) NGOs.

Clearly, accountability-based claims rooted in morals constitute an unpredictable terrain of politics as they offer the ground not simply for empowerment but also disempowerment, as social groupings navigate through reconstituted rent-seeking-based governance systems. In spite of enabling expressions of aspirations for accountable governance, the empowerment that often accompanies the recognition of accountability has not helped transform the conduct of politics in progressive ways. The most pernicious outcome, despite these accountability debates, is the mounting monetization of politics coupled with weak political institutions. In Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, party hopping is rampant and
personality-based politics predominates, issues not expected in countries that are in the process of consolidating democracy. In these countries, strong, well-managed parties driven by ideologies or policies struggle to emerge. It is difficult to consolidate well-functioning political institutions because new oligarchs have captured power. Parties are mere tools to obtain the authority to determine forms of rent creation and distribution. Inevitably, one consequence is growing contestations between society and neoliberals using parties to capture the state, though disputes among neoliberals also disrupt the political system.

Accountability discourses are thus a response to serious and mounting state-society hostilities, with institutions incorporated ostensibly to respond to growing crises of corruption and monetized politics. But society is not convinced by these forms of accountability rhetoric. Deeply divisive protests have emerged all over Southeast Asia, most clearly manifested in recent elections.

In Malaysia, Cambodia and Indonesia, the electorate is equally split. Thailand is severely fractured, spatially, and with clear fissures over the value of elections. Dominant parties in Singapore and Vietnam, though responsible for rapid industrialization, are losing support. The fundamental point about all elections is their extreme monetization, even in exceptionally poor Cambodia, though not as much in enormously wealthy Singapore, a difference that is not discussed. The question remains: Is this democracy-neoliberalism compromise the reason why a segment of this divided middle class has created alliances with neoliberal oligarchs who have deftly deflected attention from pressures for democratic accountability reforms?

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This well-edited book consists of nine chapters focusing on Singapore-China economic relations since the October 1990 establishment of formal diplomatic recognition between the two countries until 2013.

Chapter 1 by Saw Swee-Hock provides a comprehensive background of the changes to Singapore-China economic ties since the 1970s, covering the areas of trade, investment, services, tourism, and education. The writer highlights the historic landmark visit of China’s supreme leader Deng Xiaoping to Singapore in November 1978 (2) which subsequently paved the foundation for symbiotic Singapore-China economic collaboration. Saw’s paper also analyzes the roles Singapore’s top political leadership and