

and innovative ethnographic study of the male Chinese population of Bukit Mertajam. Its strength lies in the integration of detailed ethnographic field data into the wider framework of Chinese society. Another strong point is the analysis of the neglected role of the Chinese working class and its relationship to both the Chinese upper class and the Malay-dominated bureaucracy. The significance of the study goes far beyond the ethnography of a booming but not otherwise extraordinary middle-sized Malaysian town, and Nonini certainly rectifies the cliché image of a rich Chinese business society by drawing attention to its numerically far bigger class of Chinese workers, hawkers and the self-employed. This is a book worth reading for students of Malaysian society, modern history and economic development.

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Hans-Dieter Evers

Pok Rafeah Distinguished Chair of International Studies, Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia; email: hdevers@gmail.com.

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Contemporary Malaysian Indians: History, Issues, Challenges and Prospects. Edited by Denison Jayasooria and K.S. Nathan. Selangor: Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), National University of Malaysia (UKM), 2016. xxii+640 pp.

The scholarship on the study of Indians in Malaysia has seen a number of momentous publications. Beginning with the well-documented studies of Sandhu (1969), Arasaratnam (1970), Jain (1970) and Stenson (1980), the field moved later to multidisciplinary approaches in the edited volumes of Sandhu and Mani (1993) and Kesavapany,

Mani and Ramasamy (2008). In that academic tradition, this volume is a timely publication, coinciding with the beginning of the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016–20). Just as the Malaysian government, in a major policy shift, is determined to implement inclusive development, the book is a fitting attempt to bring the deep-seated concerns of the country's Indian community to the attention of designers and implementers of policy.

With twenty-nine chapters, an introduction and a conclusion, the volume includes contributions by thirty-three authors, presented in six sections. Of the 28.3 million people in Malaysia (Population Census 2010), 8 per cent have been classified as Indians. Defining all Indians as part of a single community in Malaysia is problematic, as the political and economic strata to which they belong place individuals and groups far above or below the national average on measures like income, wealth or education.

Despite Malaysia's celebration of sixty years of state building in 2017, the "problems" of the Indian community persist in areas relating to politics, education and government policy. By advancing empirically grounded studies, this volume seeks to promote a generational change in thinking. As the Eleventh Malaysia Plan seeks to address the socio-economic challenges faced by people in the bottom 40 per cent of Malaysian households, the volume addresses what public policy makers can do to help the Indian households in those strata. Just as for all poorer Malaysian households, the volume advances the inclusion of the lower economic strata of the Indian community into the national plan. The editors of the volume believe that four significant economic outcomes can be achieved through the inclusion of economically disadvantaged Indian households: (a) narrowing the lower-than-average levels of achievement among Indians; (b) removing policy-related impediments in work, religious pursuits and schooling as these affect Indians; (c) lessening socio-structural effects on individuals; and (d) improving the socio-economic status of females.

Ramanathan's statistical interpretation of the 2010 Population census shows that of the 1.9 million Malaysian Indians, 50 per cent

live in seven districts in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor and Perak. Fully 71 per cent live in fifteen districts in which Indians form large percentages of the population. Indians make up, for instance, 22 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively, of the populations of Port Dickson and Klang. Klang District alone is home to 162,000 Indians, the largest grouping of Indians in a single district in West Malaysia.

While the volume emphasizes that higher levels of income and educational attainment will result in the eradication of inequality, it also points out that poverty, sentiments related to Hinduism and political elites isolated from issues on the ground compound the inequality suffered by Malaysian Indians. While the New Economic Policy (NEP) was successful in altering the post-colonial class structure in Malaysia, the outcomes for the Indian poor has been social exclusion, social disparity and social inequality that have led to marginalization. Mansor Mohd Noor asks whether these were intended consequences of the NEP. The volume places the blame for the marginalization of Indians and the subsequent HINDRAF (Hindu Rights Action Force) Rally of 25 November 2007 on state-led economic and political policies. That rally, while calling upon the marginalized to “awaken, rise up, stand united and persist despite the odds” produced dramatic consequences across the political landscape of Malaysia. The Malaysian government responded by setting up a cabinet-level committee under the Office of the Prime Minister to address the major grievances of the Tamils. This attention has allowed the recognition and support of non-governmental organizations like the MySkills Foundation, which addresses issues related to at-risk youths and school dropouts, and other organizations promoting the social, economic and educational advancement of disadvantaged Indians.

The volume addresses issues related to Malaysian Indians in the context of the post-colonial definition of “Malays-Chinese-Indians-Others” model in West Malaysia. The presence of documented and undocumented immigrant labour, including migrants from Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Indonesia, and its impact on Malaysian Indians is thus not discussed. As of 11 November 2014, Malaysia had

6.7 million foreign workers, of whom 2.1 million had valid work permits. A visit to any plantation in West Malaysia would show that Malaysian Indians have become a minority in the presence of migrant workers. There were more non-citizens (2.3 million people) than Malaysian Indians (1.9 million) in the country's population. Non-citizens dominate lower-level jobs. Malaysian Indians have become a minority relative to the migrant labour population, and they have also been displaced in the informal sector. The editors and contributors to the volume appear to have sidestepped the discussion of the impact of migrant labour, as the volume is intended to argue for the inclusion of the Malaysian Indian poor in policies to be implemented in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan. This raises the question of whether the papers in the volume are a mere reflection of the contemporary situation than work that anticipates future trends for Malaysian Indians. The concluding chapter of the volume, by Denison Jayasooria, advances twenty-one policy recommendations for implementation by the government and non-governmental and self-help organizations.

The book is optimistic about the future of Malaysian Indians under the Eleventh Malaysia Plan. We are unsure whether this new-found optimism will appear justified by 2020.

The sequel to this volume, however, should be an assessment of the outcomes of the initiatives now being undertaken by the Prime Minister's Office and the various social self-help organizations, non-governmental organizations and government agencies.

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Mani A.

Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, 1-1 Jumonjibaru, Beppu, Oita 874-8577, Japan; email: maniavm@apu.ac.jp.