

***Ideological Innovation Under Monarchy: Aspects of Legitimation Activity in Contemporary Brunei.* By G. Braighlinn. Amsterdam: VU University Press, Comparative Asian Studies Series, No. 9, 1992. 105 pp.**

The book under review examines how ideology serves as a legitimating tool for maintaining monarchical rule in Brunei. It shows how the legitimating function of ideology in Brunei involves a strategy of subjecting the ideological contents to continual change. The reason for the changes is simple: to defend against challenges that might affect the perpetuity of monarchical rule in Brunei.

In this monograph, the author examines in detail this process of continuous change in ideological content. The monograph is divided into fifteen short sections of several pages each. Each section is geared towards the author's aim of providing "new information on a new subject — Brunei ruling-elite ideology". The author states at the onset that changes in the ideological content are initiated by different individuals of the Brunei ruling élite. Thus, the changes are not a unified and co-ordinated process.

The origin of this ideology is said to lie in *konsep Melayu Islam Berjaya* (MIB), the principle tenets of the ideology being: a single national identity based on a dominant Malay culture, loyalty to an absolute Malay monarch, and the observance of Islam. The initial formulation of the ideology is accredited to the Director of Information Ustaz Badaruddin, the year before independence in 1983.

After outlining the initial ideological position, the author takes the reader through the various changes in ideological content and explains why these changes took place. He points out that the ideology, in its early form, recognized the period of British Residency, but later compositions disregarded this point. Instead, the different ideologues try to anchor legitimation for monarchical rule in terms of continuity and not in terms of nationalist struggle. By disregarding the period of British rule and stressing continuity, the ideologues want to show that any form of nationalist struggle, by the citizenry, is illogical as they will actually be going against their own monarch.

The writer also records how questions on absolute monarchical rule are counteracted through a social contract theory. The Bruneian ideologues state that a social contract was established between the ruler and the people as far back as the Malacca sultanate. However, the author points out that this claim is historically unverifiable. Furthermore, the existence of such a contract indicates at best only a contract with the people of Malay stock. This raises a problem, as issues of Islam and the non-Malay communities are not easily accommodated within the

ideology. Islam, in particular, is difficult to reconcile with the social contract theory, given the historical discrepancy. Yet, Islam is increasingly being incorporated into the ideology. The reason: to counteract the fundamentalists' criticism that the regime is becoming more secular.

Apart from Islam, the author notes the need for ideology in Brunei to be reconciled with the aspirations of the younger generation to be future leaders. The author, however, explains that this reconciliation is effortlessly achieved in Brunei by the presence of an "ingrained docility" that prevents the younger generation from questioning monarchical rule. The problem of royal monopoly of state revenues and reserves is also conciliated within the ideology by describing the usage of these monies as coming from the public purse. The author ends the book by speculating on the future of this ideology. He states that current circumstances are such that the ruling élite will continue to manipulate ideological content to ensure regime stability and continuity.

This monograph is critical of the ideological manipulations of the Brunei ruling élite. The author (although he uses a pseudonym) is a well-informed person, very close to the source of the above ideological activity. Besides the critical position and the dense writing style of the author, his monograph is a seminal piece of work on Brunei. However, one noted absence in the monograph is a discussion on the theoretical aspects of ideology. The author does not evaluate how the Bruneian case can be used to raise certain theoretical concerns for the study of ideology.

In particular, it would have been helpful if the author had touched on the structural reasons why ideological hold has been so successful in Brunei. For instance, there is an absence of a free press, non-existence of a civil society, tight state control over foreign publications, and strict immigration laws in Brunei. The presence of these structural constraints demonstrates that ideology as a set of ideas on its own does not guarantee success. Instead, it needs to be combined with supportive policies in order for ideas to be translated into deeds and practices at the ground level. By ignoring the material dimension of ideology, in favour of the metaphysics of ideology as a system of ideas, the author fails to provide a full exposition of the ideological workings in Brunei. An insight into the material aspect of ideological propagation is necessary if the reader is to grasp, more clearly, the strength of ideological hold in Brunei.

The author also does not communicate clearly to the reader how this ideology is actually propagated and, in particular, how it maintains its hold over the Malay-Muslim citizenry. For example, through the footnotes we learn that the ideology is taught as a course at the

university. The reader can also deduce from the footnotes that the mosque plays a certain role, and so does the media. On the issue of the early stages of socialization, the author remains silent. For instance, how does the ideology reinforce itself at the family level, at the lower levels of the educational system and within the general social discourse? He mentions the Chinese and other non-Malays as being part of Brunei's population. What is the effect of the ideology on them even though the immigration laws do not accord many of them citizenship status? Can they escape this ideological influence?

What about the Malay-Muslims? There is a fair-sized cohort that studies abroad on state scholarships in the United Kingdom. Are they affected by the external socialization process? How is external influence minimized? The author says that there is an ideological hold over this cohort as they are dependent on the regime for employment. However, it is quite plausible that those who do not question the regime are just ignoring the issues and being silent. This is because it is probably more advantageous for them to do so. Thus, in this sense, the success of the ideology as a system of ideas that shape day-to-day practices of the citizenry can be doubted, even though at the practical level, the ideology may still manage to guide the people along the desired political and social behaviour. None the less, this subtle distinction between successful ideological influence and the meeting of ideological objectives by default needs to be made.

Apart from the theoretical dimensions of ideology, one other issue needs to be recognized. The fact that this book had to be published under a pseudonym shows how difficult it is to write and publish freely on certain topics in Southeast Asia. For one, personal livelihoods, especially of those academics on short fixed contracts, are unpredictable, as contracts can be terminated abruptly. Even if a piece of work is published, sometimes its circulation is denied on the basis that the publication is contrary to the interests of the state. Worse still, the personal safety of individuals can be compromised through arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. In contrast, a pseudonym can also be used to make poignant shots by external and local commentators at certain regimes. By remaining anonymous, unsubstantiated comments can be made. Thus, the use of a pseudonym in this instance would require the reader to reflect from which of the above two viewpoints the author is coming from.

To sum up, this book presents the reader with a critical evaluation of the ideological process in Brunei. It shows the reader how ideological content is manipulated for regime stability. By focusing purely on

the empirical evidence, the writer does not demonstrate the theoretical potential the Brunei case holds for understanding the different dimensions of the ideological process. This omission is understandable, given the unusually short length of the text. None the less, the subject under study would have been more interesting if the theoretical issues raised were treated in greater detail.

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***Historical Dictionary of Laos.* By Martin Stuart-Fox and Mary Kooyman.** Asian Historical Dictionaries, No. 6. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992. 258 pp.

This book in the Asian Historical Dictionaries series fills a wide gap in the rather scarce contemporary literature of general accessibility on Laos. Stuart-Fox, a historian of Laos at the University of Queensland, Australia, and his co-author have compressed a great deal of information into a slim volume, which has been so structured as to serve both as a work of ready reference (useful, for example, in spelling Lao personal and place names) and as a brief historical overview, through the use of ample cross-referencing, of any period of interest to the reader. It should stand the test of time for students and specialists alike.

Following a list of acronyms and a set of outline maps, the first twenty pages are devoted to a chronology of events in Lao history from prehistoric times to 1991, when research on the book came to a close. In this part, there is considerable space devoted to the early migrations that populated the country and to the dynastic history of its rulers since the founding of the imperial mandala of Lan Xang in 1353 by Fa Ngum. Modern history, beginning with Laos' experiences during World War II, take up the last thirteen pages.

The chronology can be used as an entry point into the dictionary proper, which takes up the next 170 pages, and which itself is cross-referenced in such a manner that the reader is afforded a wider view of persons and organizations and the parts they played in history.