

## BOOK REVIEWS

James C. Jackson and Martin Rudner (eds.) *Issues in Malaysian Development*. Southeast Asia Publications Series no. 3, 1979. Singapore: Heinemann for Asian Studies Association of Australia. Pp. 418.

Under the editorship of Martin Rudner and the late James C. Jackson, this volume presents a critical appraisal of several facets of the “Malaysian development experience”. It represents contributions from the academic community in Australia and is dedicated to the memory of geographer James Charles Jackson (former Professor and Chairman, School of Modern Asian Studies, Griffith University, Brisbane), who is well known for his academic work on Southeast Asia and particularly Malaysia. The eleven papers provide a welcome addition to the growing literature on Malaysian development — more so because of the interdisciplinary approach to the subject. Development is a complex process and the views expressed here by scholars versed in anthropology, education, geography, history, and public administration besides economics are not only relevant to students of Malaysia and of development but also interesting to all those interested in Southeast Asia.

The introductory article by Martin Rudner has appropriately drawn attention to the problems of the social and cultural plurality in Malaysia. However, for a book that entertains a diverse scholarly interest on “development”, Rudner’s rather narrow concept of development is revealing. To view development in terms of “income growth and distribution” is to demonstrate a measure of economic bias and particularly equating it with economic development. I believe the development of a society entails the development of the combined personality of a society—a process that involves “economic” and “non-economic” elements that interact with each other to provide a multi-variate quantitative and qualitative processes of change for individuals and society. In this regard, Lenore Manderson’s paper clearly illustrates that the use of purely economic and quantitative variables does not adequately measure the positive role that Malay women play in West Malaysian development. She calls for a reassessment of indicators used to measure participation in development if full recognition of the women’s role is to be realized.

Of the eleven papers in this volume, ten deal almost exclusively with West Malaysia and only one focuses on East Malaysia (Sarawak). This is a disappointing representation for a book which claims to discuss "Malaysian development". By overlooking the developmental aspects of East Malaysian states, scholars are in fact inadvertently reinforcing the general criticism of "official neglect" of these areas. And if data on these eastern states are sporadic and exiguous, there is all the more reason for official and academic attention in these states — or else the perpetuation of unbalanced development is likely to continue in Malaysia.

This collation of articles on the one hand may be lauded as an indication of the genuine interest by foreign scholars in the developmental problems of Malaysia. Yet, on the other hand, the sole contribution of a local scholar does not speak well of the much-needed representation from the Malaysian point of view.

If one accepts a broad definition of development, then the wide variation in themes of the articles presented is, in itself, not distracting. Broadly speaking, the majority (seven) of the papers deal with rural and agricultural development, two pertain to matters on urban development and the other two deal with specific problems of development related to women and education. The first two papers by Martin Rudner and J.H. Drabble provide a historical perspective to some aspects of agricultural development in West Malaysia, focusing on peasant and land tenure problems. Basing his statement on data gathered from fieldwork, George Cho justifiably criticizes the government's inappropriate policies in locating "group processing centres" (GPCs) for the modernization and development of rubber smallholders. Cho's paper exemplifies a dire need for micro-scale, fieldwork approaches to development, especially when a more realistic appraisal of developmental processes has to be achieved. Studying the trends of the plantation sector in West Malaysia, Courtenay concludes that official support should be rendered to plantation agriculture since it is no more an erstwhile colonial form of agriculture but is, in fact, a "very virile institution" benefiting local entrepreneurs and labour. Kirk Endicott displays a sensitivity to the *Orang Asli* problems and argues that the government's rural development programmes for them are creating reverse results to those aimed at and are, in fact, threatening the traditional life-styles of the Negritos and Temiar.

Christine Inglis's paper on education policy and occupational structure unfortunately reaffirms the potentially explosive racial situation in Malaysia. One of the few vehicles that can be used to transcend ethnic politics is sadly serving to re-emphasize ethnic differences in Malaysia.

The papers by James Jackson and D.W. Drakakis-Smith provide once again a reminder of the growing population and poverty in Third World

cities. Jackson argues that increasing population, disparity of wealth, poverty, and unemployment will favour the persistence of the “market” in Kuala Lumpur and the continuation of urban dualism in retail trade (i.e., traditional and modern sectors). On the other hand, Drakakis-Smith is critical of the lack of official encouragement to the private sector in the building of low-cost housing for the increasingly numerous urban poor in West Malaysia.

The last two papers in this volume conclude on a rather pessimistic note. Michael Leigh perceives development in Sarawak in paradoxical terms — with development programmes benefiting the “urban rich” at the expense of the rural poor. In West Malaysia, Frank Peacock finds the government is unable to satisfactorily implement its rural developmental programmes according to its goals of the Third Malaysia Plan. Peacock deals with some traditional themes but raises some pertinent questions for further inquiry. I found his acknowledgement of the scanty research on land tenure an appropriate signal for future research, if a fuller understanding of rural development is to be attained.

The contributions in this volume reflect the eclectic nature of development and hence should appeal to a multidisciplinary readership. The writings are clear and pleasantly sparing of academic jargon and arcane concepts, which should relate well to a wider reading public. In fact, it would be discouraging if books of this genre are confined to academic circles and used as channels for purely academic debate — its real worth can only be counted when Malaysian politicians and administrators take note of the constructive criticisms levelled against the processes of Malaysian development.

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