

used as a diagnostic of ideas abroad in Indonesian society today. This strikes me as optimistic, although I sympathise with Clark's hope that Indonesia's current cultural tensions will result in greater flexibility in gender roles.

Thoughtful and informed by a thorough knowledge of contemporary Indonesian cultural expression, this book constitutes an important meditation on the contradictory and inchoate manifestations that thinking about masculinity currently takes in Indonesia. If the conclusions Clark reaches are tentative, their provisional status reflects the fact that such ideas are always in flux, and never more so than in a society undergoing shifts as fundamental as those that Indonesia has experienced since Suharto's fall.

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Tra Zehnder: Iban woman patriot of Sarawak

By HEW CHENG SIM and ROKIAH TALIB

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Tra Zehnder: Iban woman patriot of Sarawak represents a worthy effort to document a female public personality in the state of Sarawak in Malaysia. As noted by the authors in their preface, the biography is 'the first of its kind to be written about an Iban woman leader in Sarawak' (p. i). Divided broadly into two parts, the readable book presents the private life of Tra Zehnder (1926–2011) in three chapters followed by two more on her public roles in her community, and in politics. The short concluding chapter sums up the overall impression of the authors on Tra's perspective of her own life.

During her lifetime, Tra Zehnder was arguably the highest profile Iban woman leader in the state of Sarawak. She was the first woman appointed to head the Sarawak Council for Customs and Traditions (1996–2002). The council advises the state government on matters related to native customary laws in Sarawak and makes recommendations to the government on their application, codification, publication and enforcement. Tra Zehnder was also the first woman to be appointed as the *Temenggong* or Paramount Chief for the Kuching Division Iban community (1988–1996). She was also one of the founding leaders and held various leadership positions of the Dayak Women's Association of Sarawak (Sarakup) founded in 1957, an association concerned with the socio-economic uplift of the Dayak community and the preservation of their cultural heritage.

In 1960, Tra Zehnder was appointed as the first woman (nominated) member of the Sarawak State Legislature, till Sarawak attained independence from Britain within the framework of the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. She also represented the Sarawak Dayak National Union in 1962 at the Cobbold Commission consultation for the formation of Malaysia. In 1966, the removal of Stephen

Kalong Ningkan as the first chief minister of Sarawak by Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman led Tra Zehnder to join Ningkan's party, the Sarawak National Party (SNAP). She became the head of the women's wing of SNAP from 1969 to 1983. In 1983, she was part of the faction led by Leo Moggie which broke away from SNAP to form Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS). Subsequently, disenchanted by the betrayal of her PBDS male colleagues in the 1987 Ming Court Affair power struggle, Tra quit politics in 1988. Throughout her 22 years of involvement in party politics, she was never offered a chance to contest an election, however. Nonetheless, she remained a tireless and faithful grassroots party leader until she was disillusioned by her power-crazy male colleagues.

The rewarding thing in reading the book is to get a vivid sense of who Tra was as a person. The authors managed to portray Tra's feisty personality by describing how Tra felt and experienced some of her significant life events: her father's love and hopes for her when he enrolled her in St. Mary's School; how a teenage, urbanised Tra felt as a misfit taking refuge from the Japanese Occupation in her grandmother's Iban longhouse community; how Tra's first 'shock encounter' with her Eurasian mother-in-law reinforced her determination to work for the uplift of her community. In the chapters on her public engagements, other aspects of her personality come through: her humility, ability to lead in teamwork, and her dedication to serving her community. The powerlessness and frustration felt by Tra during her active engagement in party politics illustrates perhaps the reality of Dayak politics and the self-serving nature of the Dayak male leadership, but also the subordinate role of the women's wing in party politics. Hers was also a period during which, following the Federal intervention, Dayak politicians became subordinate to a Muslim Melanau dynastic family in Sarawak state politics, shaping deeply her Iban ethnic identity. Tra's political life, while not without errors of judgement or regrets, is a story of how she conscientiously performed her duties in the successive positions accorded her and responsibilities entrusted to her, rather than seeking the prestige in these positions. The structural constraints that posed a limit on her agency are evident, but they did not impinge on her sense of honour and personal integrity.

The authors are candid with regards to their vantage point, acknowledging that 'what we have written is our representation of their (her family and social circle's) representation and Tra's own representation of her life' (p. ii). This is reflected in their sources, a series of interviews with the subject and her circle of former colleagues and friends. Tra's critics and detractors (if there are any) may perceive her life and actions differently, but the authors explain from the outset that the book is to let the protagonist and those who loved her 'to tell their version of the story'.

Reading the biography is a quick journey through a reconstructed world traversed by Tra, a petite Iban woman who lived through Sarawak's progression to modernity, straddling the rule of the White Rajahs and the ethnic politics of a nation-state. The book is a window to the culturally diverse social life of an urbanised Iban middle-class family at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and enriches our deficient knowledge of women's involvement in Sarawak politics.

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