

terms of nationalism and national histories? Also, if recognising women's contributions means treating women as the same as men and adding them to the ranks of men without raising significant questions about gendered frameworks, such an approach could rather confirm and consolidate the superiority of masculinity as a benchmark.

Interestingly, some of these women's own voices actually reveal the inherently violent and insensible nature of nationalism. We can see examples of this in Daw San's, as well as Shamsiah Fakeh's and Aishah Ghani's, attitudes toward minorities in their territories. On the other hand, Ardeth Maung Thawngmung and Violet Cho's interesting examination touches on the doubts and uneasiness toward the nationalism of Zipporah Sein. In other words, while the individual authors are successful in presenting tensions concerning the concept of nationalism, developing substantial discussions about the nature and problems of nationalism is left to the reader.

However, none of this negates the value of this book, as these issues actually help to facilitate such further discussions of women and nationalism. In view of the relative lack of studies of this subject, the book is an important addition not only to the field of Southeast Asian studies and history, but also to the recently growing field of biographical studies, as well as the literature of gender and nationalism. As such, *Women in Southeast Asian nationalist movements* should attract a wide audience in diverse fields.

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Brunei Darussalam

Brunei: From the Age of Commerce to the 21st century

By MARIE-SYBILLE DE VIENNE

Singapore: NUS Press in association with Institut de Recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est Contemporaine (IRASEC), 2015. Pp. xviii + 345. Maps, Illustrations, Lexicon, Bibliography, Index.

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This latest monograph on Brunei Darussalam is well-written enough to be read as a detailed, straightforward account of unfolding developments or a brave advancement in Malay world historiography. It covers the same events as its predecessors but is wary of overarching *longue durée* themes that do not 'totally stand up to examination' (p. 10). Brunei's golden age as a geopolitically important economic hub is well covered but not 're-scripted into a new continuum', noticeably the case for Ranjit Singh's (1984) and Bala Bilcher's (2005) studies. The section on Brunei's far-reaching transformation from 'thalassocracy to rentier state' emphasises the discontinuity typical of colonial histories while an insightful chapter-long critique of state hagiography revolves around nation-building strategies. This study comes close to describing the proverbial elephant rather than its component parts.

Though well-researched and cross-referenced, de Vienne's 'series of hypotheses' regarding a gradually Indianising first-millennium trading chiefdom and an 'Islamised thalassocracy ... radiating as far as Palawan and Sambas' (p. 20) should not be mistaken as exhaustive or authoritative. For example, Johannes L. Kurz identified issues with the identification of 'Boni' and 'Foni' as early names for Brunei. As with all attempts to gather 'cruelly-lacking' provenance from a wide variety of sources, no scholar possesses sufficient expertise to settle all major debates. Nonetheless, the author introduces novices to the potential and difficulties of historicising Brunei's proto-history. Fifth-century Sanskrit inscriptions, *silsilah* (Bruneian genealogies) accounts of a Chinese Muslim sultan and highly cross-referenced 'reconfigurations of merchant geopolitics' (p. 37) are the staple in *longue durée* Malay world histories.

This 92-page dive into the distant past stands out for how information is juxtaposed with subsequent periods. Fluctuating strategic fortunes explain why today's 'Brunei cannot compete with Singapore or even the ports on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula', presenting its colonially-created 'rentier state' as 'an additional economic dimension ... far beyond the regional framework' (pp. 10–11, 95). The medieval camphor hub illustrates what Brunei no longer is. Politically, Brunei Darussalam's possible unbroken ancestry into antiquity is not disputed. De Vienne critiques, but does not quite criticise or legitimise such hagiographical use of the past. *Longue durée* continuity is thus not denied but attenuated and distilled of its more questionable conclusions.

Brunei's nineteenth-century reduction to 'the confluence of the Kedayan and Brunei Rivers' (p. 20) and its consequent lowly but fortunate protectorate status is well covered by colonial-era studies interested in British Borneo. This could account for why de Vienne only devoted 40 pages to the event-filled period (1803–1983). As Ooi Keat Gin's review noted, military history is another aspect covered very lightly, even with respect to the Second World War and Brunei Revolt.

This is in contrast to the data-rich post-independence section of the book (1984–2014). Stark differences with the rest of the Malay world, particularly the denial of citizenship rights to its Chinese local-born population, stands out in contrast to accommodation reached under other affirmative-action arrangements in Malaysia and Indonesia and Chinese-heavy Singapore. These neighbours experienced varying degrees of success as offshore manufacturing partners of multinational corporations, but the low-population, migrant-resistant, oil-rich kingdom, despite serious attempts, never succeeded in such diversification. Pile on the failure to rebuild Brunei's 'second-rank' regional hub status, despite possessing 'the best port [more accurately harbour] in west Borneo', and Brunei's economy looks essentially like 'an oil emirate transplanted to the China Sea' (pp. 5–11), despite de Vienne's spirited attempts to argue otherwise based on its more successful attempts to convert 'hydrocarbon rent to financial rent' (p. 165). Thorough data collection, presented accessibly, showed how investing reserves (eleven times the GDP) could yield 28–31 per cent of GDP in 2011 (p. 193). Nonetheless, without the discovery of new deep water natural gas deposits, and worries about the depletion of existing mineral deposits by 2030 with clear-cut socio-political consequences, Brunei would certainly be looking at drastic changes in every aspect of existence.

Tradition as an ‘instrument for managing society’ (p. 258) is clearly traced to recent invention. Royal ‘ceremonies regularly put the sovereign in contact with his subjects’ which ‘runs against the practice related by Pigafetta [Venetian travelling with Spanish fleet], in which the sovereign only communicated with his subjects by means of a bamboo’ (p. 258). Intensified Islamisation in recent years, in the form of stricter controls on alcohol, Islamic dress codes and imposition of Shariah law is understood to be undertaken to undercut the appeal of radical Islam and in Brunei, is clearly subordinated to and not a challenge to the absolute rule of the Sultan. De Vienne seems convinced that despite the prevalence of rhetoric that might alarm the uninformed, ‘a genuine rule of law’ prevails in Brunei (p. 277). While it appeals to imagined continuities, the regime clearly understands that the only real one that matters is the longevity of the welfare monarchy.

Specialisation is inevitable if history is to have depth, but over-specialise and what was meant to be complementary become competing methodologies and worse still, dogma. More than just a much-needed update in a field with few book-length scholarly works, de Vienne’s apparently neo-Rankean approach to Brunei’s history challenges both ‘short durée’ historians who view Malay world states as largely modern constructs and *longue durée* scholarship that tend to overstate the influence of the regional substratum on which such constructs were erected. Largely populated by contesting approaches that risk presenting part of the picture as a whole, Malay world studies could do with more histories that assess across current schools of thought.

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Indonesia

Being Malay in Indonesia: Histories, hopes and citizenship in the Riau Archipelago

By NICHOLAS J. LONG

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On 1 July 2004, Provinsi Kepulauan Riau (Riau Islands province) officially came into being as the thirty-secondth province of the Republic of Indonesia. This legislative proclamation of significant political and economic devolution was part of a larger decentralising wave sweeping post-Suharto Indonesia. Post-New Order central government legislation granted regional governments a bigger share of revenue generated by the province and greater authority over local affairs. This blossoming (*pemekaran*) of autonomous political units across Indonesia was officially trumpeted as promoting greater democratisation across a culturally diverse and geographically behemoth archipelago. Provinsi Kepulauan Riau came into existence as an autonomous region