

Hannah Ming Yit Ho  
David Deterding *Editors*

# Engaging Modern Brunei

Research on language, literature, and  
culture

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# Preface

Even as ‘modern’ is generally differentiated from a historical or traditional past, the use of the term in this book encompasses a broad definition. As modernity may be closely linked to the rise of a nation-state, it is important to approach the concept in the context of history (Dirlik 2002), especially in a country such as Brunei Darussalam where the society in the modern world is substantially molded by reference to its history. Indeed the national ideology of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB, ‘Malay Islamic Monarchy’) that continues to exert a pervasive influence over Brunei society (Asiyah et al. 2017) is fundamentally based on over six hundred years of Islamic history by the Malay people under the guidance of a Sultan, ever since the conversion of the first Sultan to Islam in the fourteenth century (Saunders 1994).

We should also acknowledge other terms that make reference to the concept of modernity, including the continuity of ‘late modernity’ (Giddens 1991) and the state of ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2000), as both these concepts challenge the idea of postmodernity that suggests an end to modernity. In as much as it is tempting to fix modernity to a specific time scale, the modern may be better explained both in terms of history and also the on-going developments of the nation. In this way, historical and contemporary cultures reflect the process of modernisation.

The title of this book *Engaging Modern Brunei*, thus alludes to various ways in which the chapters focus on language, literature and culture to explore significant developments within the nation-state. Across these interrelated domains, modern Bruneian identity is shaped, defined and negotiated through the use of language, online media, literature, art and culture to mediate established and emerging identities, as modern Brunei dates back to a pre-independent time when Malay and Islamic identity was already entrenched in the nation (Melayong 2020). In post-independent times, modernising processes have continued to contribute to emergent developments within the nation, which often remain informed by traditional concepts that are appropriated by the modern-day citizenship. The various chapters of the book look at various ways that modern Bruneian society is reflected in and shaped by: the language of newspapers, magazines and online government forums, the patterns of language usage by the Chinese minority, and the discourse of historical texts between Britain and Brunei; literature that includes historical fiction as well as novels dealing

with the economic development of the country, approaches towards the environment, and the concept of home; the teaching of literature in schools; various facets of culture including art, films, and the symbolism of marriage ceremonies; and finally the responses of the population to the imposition of sharia law. These disparate topics provide a multi-faceted window onto the ways that Bruneian society has emerged and continues to evolve in the modern world.

We would like to acknowledge Associate Professor Noor Azam Othman's unfailing support prior to the start of, and throughout, this book project. The idea for this book on Brunei arose over a cup of coffee with him. The focus on language, literature and culture seemed logical as there is considerable local expertise in these interrelated fields which can be reflected and developed in the chapters of this book.

Our sincere gratitude is extended to all contributors who have complied with various deadlines along the way. Their hard work and dedication to this project are very much appreciated. The final product of this book is also a result of the reviewers who have given us valuable comments. We also thank everyone else who has been involved in this book in any way, shape or form.

Gadong, Brunei Darussalam

Hannah Ming Yit Ho  
David Deterding

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