

**Ooi Keat Gin, ed..** *Brunei – History, Islam, Society and Contemporary Issues*. Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series. New York: Routledge, 2015. 274 pp. \$163.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-138-78765-0.

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This much-anticipated book, edited by Ooi Keat Gin, delivers diverse research on Brunei and stands out both for its depth and balanced presentation of research issues. The book contains recent research conducted by scholars at the Academy of Brunei Studies at the University of Brunei Darussalam. Contributors discuss specifically the history of Brunei, the role of Islam in Brunei, Bruneian society, and various contemporary issues related to the country. Organized chronologically, this edited collection begins by providing a historical context through which Brunei is slowly introduced through new findings. The latter part of the book deals with more contemporary issues facing Brunei today, such as labor and the Islamization trend.

Although the book does not provide a comprehensive overview of Brunei, it does compile the latest research related to the country in one volume. Compared to neighboring countries, Brunei rarely makes it into publications; only a handful of quality books have been produced on Brunei, most of which have been published by local academics in a limited number of copies. Books produced abroad, especially by renowned publishers like Routledge, are welcome additions. This collection also comes at a critical time. Recent backlash of Hudud implementation as portrayed in the media discourages the presentation

of a positive image of Brunei. Although the book does not attempt to explain Brunei's position in the implementation of Sharia law, through its organization, it helps to explain the situation in the country. It includes the development of Brunei into a truly Islamic country, embracing a Bruneian way of life while progressing at the same pace as other countries in the region. Consequently, contributors do not try to explain political changes on behalf of Brunei; rather, they help to bring about an understanding of Brunei in the last decades of the twentieth century.

This book, in my opinion, successfully introduces Brunei in a positive tone by addressing major research issues, such as Brunei's embrace of Islamic values and the impact of such values on Bruneian society as well as various socioeconomic problems in Bruneian society today. In doing so, the book offers a balanced view of the country. From an academic perspective, the updated research provides an invaluable source of current research to facilitate future research on Brunei.

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