

## BOOK REVIEW

**Victor T. King and Stephen C. Druce (Eds.). *Origins, History and Social Structure in Brunei Darussalam*. London: Routledge, 2021.**

**Victor T. King and Stephen C. Druce (Eds.). *Continuity and Change in Brunei Darussalam*. London: Routledge, 2021.**

Published online: 31 July 2023

To cite this article: Abdul Rahman Embong. 2023. Book review: Origins, history and social structure in Brunei Darussalam and Continuity and change in Brunei Darussalam. *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 19 (2): 237–242. <https://doi.org/10.21315/ijaps2023.19.2.10>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.21315/ijaps2023.19.2.10>

If we are searching for a comprehensive reference on Brunei society and its history from the early days of the sultanate to the present, this Modern Anthropology of Southeast Asia Series that carries these two volumes on Brunei Darussalam is a delightful intellectual feast. Edited by two prominent scholars on Southeast Asian anthropology, Victor T. King, at the University of Leeds, and Stephen C. Druce, at the University of Brunei Darussalam with contributors who are recognised in their respective fields sharing their chapters, the two books celebrate the golden jubilee of the landmark publication of the doctoral study by Donald E. Brown, entitled *Brunei: The Structure and History of a Bornean Malay Sultanate* (Brown 1970), as a special monograph in 1970 by the Brunei Museum. Brown's pioneering study on Brunei was funded by the London-Cornell project for his PhD at Cornell.

The two-volume publication edited by King and Druce is no mean feat. Anyone with experience in organising such work can appreciate the editors' skills, patience and persuasion in enlisting the contributions of other scholars and to have the two books published in the same year by an acclaimed international publisher in time for the golden jubilee celebration of Brown's foundational work. Reading through the two volumes, one can discern the intellectual debt these scholars owe to the work of Donald Brown who had since become a highly respected scholar and anthropologist, the doyen of

Brunei studies. As indicated in the first book, *Origins, History and Social Structure in Brunei Darussalam*, its various chapters attempt to re-evaluate in detail the early history and historiography of Brunei Darussalam, the origins of the sultanate, its genealogical foundations and the structure and administration of Brunei society. The book addresses key issues such as status systems, titles and social stratification, Chinese sources for the study of Brunei, Malay oral and written histories and traditions, the symbolism, meanings and origins of coronation rituals, previously unknown sources for the study of Brunei history and the processes of incorporation of minority populations into the sultanate. In the course of doing so, the writers draw on the seminal work of Brown whose major monograph on the sultanate marked the beginnings of advanced sociological, anthropological and historical research on Brunei.

Donald Brown's extensive influence in Brunei Studies and anthropology could be seen in the fact that not only is there a prologue written by him entitled "On Brunei: Fifty Years Later", but various chapters either have his name in the title, or is referred to in the contents. Two chapters with his name in the title are written by Victor King, the lead editor of the book, and his co-editor, Stephen Druce. The first chapter entitled "Brunei Darussalam: Origins, early history and social structure" carries a subtitle "Celebration and evaluation of the work of Professor Donald E. Brown". This is complemented by King's single-authored chapter (Chapter 3) which is a re-visit namely on social structure, corporate groups and categories, etc. not only in Brown's 1970 monograph but also in his later work *Principles of Social Structure: Southeast Asia* published in 1976 (Brown 1976). A bonus is added in this book in the form of Chapter 2 by A. V. M. Horton, which is a re-publication of his work written a decade earlier, in 2010, to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Brown's monograph.

The companion volume, *Continuity and Change in Brunei Darussalam*, also edited by King and Druce again manifests the unmistakable intellectual footprints of Donald Brown. As argued by the editors in the introductory chapter, although other studies have been undertaken on Brunei after Brown's publication, there would have been no major points of reference without Brown's contribution before the declaration of the full independence of Negara Brunei Darussalam from the British Crown on 1 January 1984. Works on Brunei have been expanding since then thanks to the interest generated by the Brown's works. The second volume is in fact to incorporate such interests by later scholars to show the society's changes and transformation while maintaining continuity.

Brown personally contributed the last chapter (Chapter 11), entitled “Epilogue: Brunei Studies Fifty Years and More”, indicating advances in studies on Brunei since his work in 1970 and the future of Brunei Studies.

The second book begins with the introduction by King and Druce, entitled “Donald Brown’s Brunei, Society and Recent Transformation”. According to the authors, the book draws on studies undertaken by “both locally based scholars and senior researchers from outside the state, (and) explores the underlying strengths, characteristics, and uniqueness of Malay Islamic Monarchy in Brunei Darussalam in a historical context and examines these in an increasingly challenging regional and global environment” (p. i).

It is worth highlighting two important points made by them in Chapter 1 regarding the significance of Brown’s pioneering work. First, they underscore the fact that Brown’s work “was the first major attempt to understand and analyse the historical development and the key structural principles which gave order to the Brunei sultanate from the mid-nineteenth century” (p. 1)—a lasting contribution which has become the standard reference in Brunei studies, while at the same time, enriching Southeast Asian studies. The second point is on the use of primary materials in the colonial archives—a point that has relevance in a much wider context, because Brown’s work “brought to public attention some of the rich primary resources on Brunei housed in the London archives” (p. 1). With regard to this issue, Chapter 3 by B. A. Hussainmiya—though focussed on the Brunei rebellion led by A. M. Azahari in 1962 and Brunei’s rejection of being part of the newly formed Federation of Malaysia—made special mention concerning access to these primary materials. He indicated that Brown before coming to Brunei in 1966 for his field research, had already spent considerable time in the British Public Record Office (PRO) in London to source Brunei-related documents on Brunei early history and society, and later, he followed through with studies on modern Brunei. According to Hussainmiya, in the context of Brunei, Brown was “the first scholar to work on British colonial papers, followed later by people such as A. V. M. Horton, Nicholas Tarling and others who have since utilised the PRO documents more intensively” (p. 21).

As a rejoinder on the importance of primary sources for works on socio-cultural history and anthropology, we take note that while the revelation that some rich primary materials on Brunei are being housed in the London archives is not new, it is an important reminder for later scholars because it provides some leads regarding where to go and what to search for. Such concerns resonate well with most, if not all, of the former colonies like

Malaysia whose scholars too need to access such archives and utilise these materials that open windows on their history, culture and other dimensions. This point was discussed seriously in the international conference themed “Melaka in the Long Fifteenth Century” organised by Melaka In Fact on 2–4 August 2019, a conference which brought some of the top leading historians from various parts of the world to Melaka. A great deal of attention was paid not only to new findings and interpretations, but also primary sources, including those in the Malay language and other Asian languages, and where to look for them besides London and Amsterdam (Borschberg 2019).

Both books contain many interesting chapters that provide thoughtful insights on Brunei Darussalam written by insiders and also by those from outside the state. Chapter 8 on water settlements in Borneo by H.-D. Evers and the two chapters (Chapter 9 and 10) on Kampong Ayer in Brunei by Haji Tassim bin Haji Abu Bakar and Shafi Noor Islam, respectively, draw special interest of this reviewer. Evers’ chapter is a macro-study using remote-sensing data to measure the extent of water villages and estimate the number of their households and inhabitants not only in Brunei but also around Borneo. It is astonishing to know that water settlements or villages in Borneo cover approximately 25 square kilometres, with an estimated 43,025 households and 215,000 inhabitants.

Chapters 9 and 10 are specific on Kampong Ayer in Brunei—on its development, change and modernisation in the last fifty years, and how it has developed heritage tourism. In fact, when Donald Brown began his study of Brunei in the late 1960s, he stayed in Kampong Ayer, “the traditional centre of Brunei Malays”. The changes in the character and composition of Kampong Ayer as the cultural heartland of Brunei Malay culture and the socio-cultural and economic effects of the resettlement of substantial segments of the population from a “life on water” to a “life on land” is definitely of interest to researchers.

Chapter 11 in the second volume consists of a brief “Epilogue” by Donald Brown. The epilogue points to the vitality of the study of Brunei in recent years and some of its more general contributions to social science. In fact, Brown’s study of Brunei has led him to ponder the nature of human society and culture and the ways in which history is thought about and recorded. Brown sums it up well about the future of Brunei Studies. As he puts it, “There is still much to do and say in Brunei Studies. Its robust future is assured, and I count myself privileged to have taken part in developing our understanding of Brunei’s history, society and culture” (p. 178).

Finally, as concluding remarks, readers may be intrigued by the dedication made in the first volume, *Origins, History and Social Structure in Brunei Darussalam*. What is the connection between such dedication to the study of Brunei society and history and to the golden jubilee celebration of Donald Brown’s seminal monograph?

This reviewer feels that a note of explanation is in order. The first book was dedicated to the memory of the first Director of the Brunei Museum, Pengiran Dato Paduka Haji Shariffuddin bin Pengiran Metali—popularly referred to as P. M. Shariffuddin—who passed away on 22 April 2018, aged 81. The obituary by the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (MBRAS) states that P. M. Shariffudin “was looked upon as a leading authority in the history of Brunei...an indispensable reference point on the early history of the sultanate”. In terms of museum work, he was under the tutelage of the legendary Tom Harrison, when he was sent by the Brunei government in April 1957 to join the Sarawak Museum at Kuching. The obituary states further that “This three-year assignment under Tom Harrison saw P. M. Shariffuddin learning much about museum work in Kuching in preparation for Brunei’s own museum which he would later helm as its first director”. P. M. Shariffuddin honed his museum skills and knowledge further when he embarked on his diploma studies in anthropology and public administration offered by the Museums Association of the United Kingdom. This book’s dedication is thus a fitting tribute to this towering figure in Brunei socio-cultural history and founding director of the Sultanate’s museum which was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II during her state visit to Brunei in 1972.

The book’s tribute to the founding director of the Brunei Museum is more than meets the eye. It was the Brunei Museum under his directorship which took the initiative to publish the doctoral study by Donald E. Brown, *Brunei: The Structure and History of a Bornean Malay Sultanate*, as a special monograph in 1970. In fact, this reviewer is of the view that both volumes should have been dedicated to the memory of P. M. Shariffuddin for his keen sense of history and archaeology and for being the pioneer in building the Brunei Museum to house among other things, the socio-cultural history of Brunei Darussalam described in the various monographs namely the foundational one by Donald E. Brown.

Abdul Rahman Embong

Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS), Universiti  
Kebangsaan Malaysia

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