Nicholas J. Long

Being Malay in Indonesia. Histories, Hopes and Citizenship in the Riau Archipelago.

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(paperback).

The Indonesian province of Kepulauan Riau (Riau Archipelago), which consists of the islands directly south of Singapore and peninsular Malaysia, was created in 2004. With its newly achieved autonomy the citizens of this new region, which is the location of ancient Malay polities and modern industrial parks, had to develop an own understanding of their own identity, thus reflecting a variety of issues that many residents of contemporary Indonesia face. With these topics in mind, Nicholas J. Long has produced an ethnographic study of the early years of this new political entity in which the issue of Malayness and Malay identity were central to many of the discussions and debates of the time. In the process, he discusses issues such as decentralization, autonomy and identity within a framework of anthropological theory that make this work relevant to scholars of Indonesia as well as the larger world.

Long begins the work with a chapter focussing on identity studies that places his own work alongside its influences, particularly that of social theorist Slavoj Žižek. He then proceeds to explore different aspects of the lives of Riau Islanders in the subsequent seven chapters and place them alongside wide ranging theories. The first of these chapters focuses on his research site, the capital of Kepulauan Riau, Tanjung Pinang. Although it is often depicted as a centre of Malayness, Long points out that this does not reflect the multi-ethnic reality. Chinese migrants founded the city in the late eighteenth century, and even today Malays only make up approximately 30 per cent of its population. The influence of this Malay identity and its 'history'—as opposed to 'stories' (*cerita*) about the past—on the society is the focus of the next chapter in which Long discusses how history along with the ways history is remembered and perpetuated reflect power dynamics in the region. This chapter and those that follow focus on issues such as the marketplace, neighbourhoods, ghost stories, and competitions among the residents of Kepulauan Riau. Each reflects Long's considerable intimacy with his subjects, and he presents each chapter in a reader-friendly format. He begins with a vivid anecdote, and then proceeds to analyse the events surrounding it, often focussing on the importance of sentiments and beliefs have in the actions of the residents of this young province.

By living in Tanjung Pinang, and not among those who set the agenda of history, identity and power, Long is able to question a depiction of the region that scholars—including myself—have long perpetuated of a deeply entrenched

Malay heartland. In the process he provides the reader with an ethnographic survey of modern life in a multi-ethnic provincial capital in Indonesia. As he negotiates his way through interviews, scandals in his neighbourhood, and the peculiarities of judging a tourism/beauty contest—all written in a very clear manner that conveys the joys and frustrations of researchers everywhere—he reinforces the need for long-term stays in research sites as well as the continued relevance of ethnographic research. In doing so, he has produced an excellent ethnographic survey of life far from the centres of power in early twenty-first-century Indonesia.

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