

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Christoph Marcinkowski (ed., in collaboration with Constance Chevallier-Govers and Ruhanas Harun), *Malaysia and the European Union: Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century*.** Freiburg Studies in Social Anthropology 32 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011). 272 pp. ISBN 978-364-3-800855. EUR 24.90.

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This collaborative work – edited by IAIS Principal Research Fellow and Co-Chair (Publications) Dr. Christoph Marcinkowski of Germany – is a treasure trove of economic and political data across many different areas. The contributors organise data that generally is not found in one place, and their assessment of the data illuminates the Malaysia-EU connection.

While Malaysia is the EU's second most important trading partner in ASEAN, there has been a lack of academic and intellectual attention to this connection; hence, this work is especially welcomed. Previous analysis generally reduced relations to economics and trade, and the direction of the focus was one-way; e.g., Malaysians going to Europe to get educated by Europeans, European goods sold to Malaysia, etc.. What has been lacking is a look at the 'softer' and 'cultural' areas of cooperation, including environment, human rights, security, migration, and higher education. This book fills that need.

Besides being a country with relations to the EU, Malaysia also carries referents to the world of Islam. The cultural aspects of cooperation that are very recently arising include the idea of Islam – consider the influential conferences on EU-relations with Malaysia and Islam held at the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, IAIS Malaysia. Thus by looking beyond economics, there are opportunities to improve relations with the world of Islam, that is, Muslims in the EU, and issues around Islam affecting the EU.

Even though many European colonial powers dominated the region, Malaya and Malaysia is culturally and in other ways more connected to the United Kingdom, Ruhanas Harun points out that after Tunku Abdul Rahman's anglophilia, pressure from Indonesia and other forces led toward non-alignment. The next decade saw Dr Mahathir, who did not share the Malaysian elite's anglophilia, strengthening bonds with Europe, especially with France and Jacques Chirac. Even so, elite focus is still on the UK, and the significant efforts of the Alliance Française and the Goethe Institute still play catch-up with Britain.

Charles Santiago examines some of the stumbling blocks of economic cooperation, stressing that the perception of liberalisation—the darling of the West – is seen

over here as a somewhat one-sided affair. Hence, we will find that Malaysia is not necessarily ready to introduce IPRs, public procurement and competition law.

Malaysia has become a powerhouse in the field of *ṣukūk* (usually translated as ‘Islamic bonds’). However, problems of cross border legal definitions of ownership remain. Sheila Yussof and Younes Soualhi point out that *ṣukūk* must be structured as profit and loss, not guaranteed returns and should not look like conventional bonds. A move from asset-based to asset-backed will signal the move toward substance inspired by the *sharī‘ah*.

Eva Rossi and Silvia Hofer examine higher education and find that EU-priorities seem to prevail. The problem of brain-drain is not being adequately addressed. However, actual re-framing the relationship will be difficult, since a mutually beneficial arrangement may go against explicit EU-policies.

Christian Giordano points out that Europe discovered itself by discovering, conquering, and subjugating the rest of the world. For Europe to therefore seek or claim cultural unity is delusional or arrogant. What is working in Malaysia is a national harmony, located in the *Rukun Negara concept*, based on unity in diversity, although in practice all too often a unity in separation. However, in general it works, and the situation would not be improved by being lectured at by Europe. Looking at the EU-side, notions of integration “tend to be exclusively unidirectional. Immigrants must adjust somehow and there is no reciprocity from the host society.” In fact, immigrants from “less modern, thus more primitive societies, ought to acknowledge and accept” Western modernity’s civilising superiority (199).

Constance Chevallier-Govers provides a clear and detailed description of the Human Rights dialogue. Her analysis is cogent and persuasive for the contentious issues, including the Anwar situation, ISA (Internal Security Act), the ‘Allah’ question, the Ahmadiyyah community, and the Kartika case. Negotiations between the parties tend to stall on universal versus an ‘Asian Way of Human Rights’, but the important thing is to keep the dialogue going.

In closing, in the last few years, there have been some positive movements in the EU-Malaysian relationships, especially in the cultural, as opposed to strictly economic, realms. This is the first book to really address these movements. Policy makers should read this book to understand the historical background of the relationship and to gain insight into areas to concentrate on. The elite connections here to England prove that far more important than economics is the cultural, ‘soft’ power. It may be that the EU-Malaysia relationship will be improved rather on the *cultural*, not economic, fronts.