

Preface

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Malaysia has come to be known as a typical multi-ethnic society. Malays, Chinese, and Indians are held to constitute the three major ethnic groups that make up Malaysian society. Apart from them, however, Malaysia is home to roughly sixty other indigenous groups, such as Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia and the Dayaks of Sarawak, who belong to Bumiputera (“son of the soil” or indigenous peoples) with Malays, as well as several kinds of ethnic minorities that are categorized in demographical statistics as “others,” such as the Baba-Nyonya or the Portuguese. Furthermore, as a consequence of intermarriage between these disparate ethnic groups, the degree of ethnic hybridity in Malaysia is also intensified.

Attention must be given to the fact that Malaysia’s economic system depends heavily on the role of foreign migrant workers. In fact, various sectors of Malaysia’s economic system, including the construction, plantation, manufacturing, and housemaid and services sectors, are supported by the labor of foreign migrant workers. These workers flow into Malaysia from neighboring Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Nepal. However, although Malaysia’s continuously growing economy could not be sustained without the influx of foreign migrant laborers, the presence of such laborers in Malaysia is frequently perceived as being excessive, and antipathy by native Malaysians against foreign laborers is deep rooted. As such, our work aims to provide comprehensive context through which this phenomenon can be understood.

Using the above perspectives as starting points, the aim of this special issue is to investigate “another face” of Malaysia as a multi-ethnic society. This special issue is divided into two parts. Part I covers foreign migrant laborers in Malaysia, and consists *inter alia* of studies that focus on the conditions of Thai migrant laborers working within the territories of Malaysia near the border of Thailand. These studies are proceedings of papers issued by the workshop, “Foreign Workers in Malaysia and Migration Network between Thailand and Malaysia,” held at Campus Plaza Kyoto, Kyoto, Japan, on July 29, 2012. This workshop comprised three collaborative research assemblies, the details of

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which are covered below* . Part II includes studies that cover the geographical distribution and socio-economic conditions of Orang Asli and the identity issues faced by individuals born of mixed marriages between Indian immigrants and local Dayaks.

These studies are valuable as each of them refers to aspects of the multi-ethnic Malaysian character that have previously been overlooked or insufficiently explored in the existing literature and discussion on the topic. We would also like to take the opportunity to extend our gratitude to all of our contributors.

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