

# THE RISING MOON

Political Change in Sarawak 1959-1972



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MICHAEL LEIGH





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# THE RISING MOON

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Political Change in Sarawak 1959-1972

Second Edition

**MICHAEL LEIGH**



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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## Foreword to the First Edition

There are not many good books written on post-war Sarawak and a good book on politics in Sarawak is a very rare commodity. Those interested in developments in Malaysia, and Sarawak in particular, will find *The Rising Moon* a useful source of information. Michael Leigh has recorded, in minute to minute manner, the origins and developments of politics in Sarawak. His research provides a comprehensive coverage of political events in the State at the crucial stages of its independence within the Federation. It is a commendable attempt to understand the complex nature of political growth and political changes in the State, which by no means are peculiar to Sarawak. Politics and political systems grow and develop with time and experiences; so too must the politicians. In this respect I am proud to say that the direction of growth in Sarawak is healthy and full of promises. For those who wish to be familiar with the political problems in Sarawak, I would recommend this book. In doing so I am not in any way endorsing the interpretations on events, judgments or conclusions in the book which are the full responsibility of the writer.

**Datuk Haji Abdul Rahman Ya'kub**

*Pejabat Ketua Menteri / Chief Minister of Sarawak*

*Kuching; December 1972*



# Preface

The rising moon is both a symbol and a reality. Though a symbol of Islam, its appeal and significance goes beyond a single faith. The reality of the rising moon lies in its constancy. Politics involves the constancy of land and people in the same way as it involves the progression of time signified by the moons place in the eternal cycle of life.

This interpretation of political change in Sarawak is of necessity quite personal. It is through the constant exercise of many interpretations that we gain knowledge and approach the elusive truth. It is to this end that I dedicate my initial efforts to the people of Sarawak.

The research for this study was undertaken over a period of ten years, the latter five of which were given vibrancy and depth by sharing them with Barbara. The author is deeply indebted to numerous friends who willingly gave of their understanding and insights. The Curator of the Sarawak Museum, Benedict Sandin, the Assistant Curator, Lucas Chin and staff generously assisted my research with their special knowledge of the various peoples of Sarawak.

Barbara and I have fond memories of the friendships shared whilst in Malaysia. Selecting people to whom to offer explicit thanks is a difficult task, for to just so many we owe a debt both personal and professional. Among these people are Hj. Abdul Rahman Yakub, Hj. Abdul Taib Mahmud, Stan Bain, Fred and Salli Black, Barbro Body, Don Brown, William Chew, Che Lily Eberwein, Jerome Goh, Tom Harrison, Adrian Johnson, Peter and Paula Ling, Nelson Liap Kudu, Elaine McKay, Abang Muas dan Che Hafsah Harun, Sidi and Heidi Munan, Ong Kee Hui, John Pike, Safri Awang, Tony Shaw and Stephen Yong.

My work was greatly facilitated by the skills of Lindi Benson, Cheng Thiam Yong, Anne Christie, Dayang Halimah, Kuan Wei Seng, Lim Lian Hiok, Raymond Lim and Tay Siew Sim.

The study of politics at the local level necessitated working in each of the twenty districts of the state. I should like to acknowledge the helpfulness of people at every level, particularly the District Officers and Secretaries of District Councils. Thanks are due to all those officials in Malaysia and in the United Kingdom who gave of their time and experience.

At Cornell University I appreciated the support of the 102 West Avenue ‘family’, especially Milly Wagemann and Elizabeth Graves for their editorial assistance and John Mapes and Ron Witton for their tireless wrestling with the computer. The advice and encouragement of Professor George McT. Kahin has been of inestimable value. Professors Ben Anderson, John Lewis and Stephen Morris provided constant guidance and support to the endeavour. Professors Spann and Mayer, my present colleagues, helped greatly with their incisive comments upon the manuscript. Appreciation is also due to the following organisations whose financial support made possible my research in Sarawak: Australian National University Hunter Douglas Fund (1962-3), Australian Institute of International Affairs (1964), London-Cornell Project (1967-8), Cornell University China Program (1970) and the Australian Research Grants Committee (1971-2).

*University of Sydney, 1973*

The sky is dark and red  
like the tail of the perching hornbill  
Slowly it wraps its silken sarong  
around the soft outline of the new moon.

Richness  
Beauty  
Blackness ...

The pale crescent turns  
to a golden arc  
rising into the deepening  
azure sky.

**Barbara Leigh**

*The Rising Moon* was the first in-depth study of the beginnings of modern politics in Sarawak between 1959 and 1972. The plural society of that state offered a stark contrast to that elsewhere in Malaysia, for in Sarawak viable political parties spanned ethnic divisions, a development that had not then taken place in the other parts of the nation.

Side-by-side with the development of politics came the integration of Sarawak within Malaysia, and all the attendant tensions that followed from the merging of this its largest state within an expanded federation. The resultant pattern of politics was dynamic, and throughout this phase remained quite tentative due in large part to Indonesian confrontation and the armed activities of the local communist organisation. Amongst the states of Malaysia, Sarawak is unique, as all groups are in a minority, whether they be defined by ethnicity, religion or mother tongue. That necessitated political compromise spanning ethnic, religious and cultural divisions.

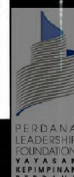


**Michael Leigh** arrived to commence his research in Sarawak in December 1962, at a turbulent time just after the Brunei revolt had been suppressed and shortly before the start of armed Indonesian confrontation. He has maintained an active interest as an analyst of the processes of political and economic change, and has authored some 60 books, chapters and articles on Sarawak and greater Malaysia, in particular *Council Negri Sarawak: Malaysia's Oldest Legislature* (1992), *Mapping the Peoples of Sarawak* (2002) and *Deals, Datus and Dayaks: Sarawak and Brunei in the Making of Malaysia* (2018). He has held the position of Professor at the Universities of Sydney, Melbourne and UNIMAS, where he established the Institute of East Asian Studies.

Cover photograph (left to right) Stephen Yong, Taib Mahmud, Abdul Rahman Yakub and Ong Kee Hui at the Astana after their swearing in ceremony for the Sarawak coalition government in 1970.



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