

Ulaskan Buku/ *Book Review*

An Analysis of Malay Magic

by Kirk Michael Endicott, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, ISBN: 0195885767

K. M. Endicott's book, *An Analysis of Malay Magic* first published in 1970 by Oxford University Press contemplates explicitly on magical beliefs and practice of the Peninsula's Malays. Before digging the information provided by Endicott, the readers needs to know that this book is about an analysis of the previous colonial writers such as R. O. Winstedt, W. W. Skeat, F. A. Swettenham and J. M. Gullick about the so called "old religion" of the Malays. The uniqueness of Endicott's writing was that he precisely analyzed the Malay magic studies in a structured way and with his further analysis. His efforts not only focus on analyzing findings generated by previous writers, he also helped to create hypotheses regarding certain issues. He often challenged some irrelevant information and data used in prior studies. Apart from a descriptive method normally chosen by previous researchers, Endicott's structuralism method helped him to produce a more analytical and critical essay. Although his apprehensions can be seen in some part were influenced by the previous writers such as W.W. Skeat, his work was distinctively written to preserve the theme of Malay magic according to his own system. His high respect for and keen interest in understanding Malay culture seems obvious as he considered the Malay magician as specialist and the practice as a profession.

One of the significant ideas on Malay magic was described in chapter four in which he discussed the foundation of Malay magic. What caused Malays to believe in magic? He sees that Winstedt regarded Malay ancient practices as anthropomorphic as they embraced animal influences in their world view. Endicott agreed by taking Malay folktales as an example to show that animalistic world-view is part of their significant component of belief. Indeed, most of Malay folktales encompassed stories on animal and natural elements. Endicott also commenced his analysis on other different theories of scholars, first on Skeat's anthropomorphic theory. He also looked into Cuisinier's *sumangat* as major theory in Malay belief. The core idea of *sēmangat* perceived by all these scholars as something vital to be differentiated through their material embodiment as Endicott underlined the principle to evaluate *sēmangat* must be based on two principles where *sēmangat* is a soul becomes souls and another one is concentration to differentiate *sēmangat* itself from other souls such as *nyawa* dan *roh*. This is essential to establish a correct rite. A third perspective of *sēmangat* based on the Malay world view is the interception of Sufism to correspond with how physical bodies interact with celestial power. He established a strong idea on how Sufism provided a sturdy connection between a being's *sēmangat* and unification of God in the semi-conscious mind. Nowadays, it is an understanding that none of the Malays know about the Sufi system occurring in their magic belief.

In his structural definition, Endicott begins with the concept of *nyawa*, *roh* and *sēmangat*. Based on my understanding, he perceived soul of man is characterized by *roh*, *nyawa* and *sēmangat*. Endicott took into consideration the report of Robinson and Annandale which differ in defining the terms based on their observation on Pattani peasants. He also familiarized on degree of *sēmangat* that can attain *keramat* and *sēmangat* with free-spirit as disintegration of its body. Characterization of free spirits such as *pělēsit*, *polong*, *bajang* and *bēlian* and also *jin* are given as well. Discussion on the spirits related closely to birth demon or vampires like *bajang*, *pontianak*, *penanggalan* and *langsuir* also was given. Along with that, transformation of stillborn children was explained in this chapter. Some of these spirits are categorized as blood-suckers and relate to the systems of ideas of life and death. Another component discussed in this chapter is relationship of *badi* with physical beings or body. Last but not least, he made a good point on the fundamental distinction between man and animals. The counterpart argument by Annandale who claimed "Petani Malay make no, or, indeed, between animals and highly an inanimate object" when he seems to take stand to disagree with this by briefly discussing the Malay conception of human souls. He made the differentiation of soul material in man with further discussion on *roh*, animals and were-tigers which possessed a human body.

Some people might be interested to examine works by previous writers such as Skeat, Windstedt, Anandale or the other colonial writers but his idea on sorting of human soul was really interesting. Starting from chapter two till the end, he repetitively highlighted on this classification which is useful for the reader. He even brought his hesitancy on some key words of the previous writers which failed to appeal his understanding like Skeat's 'reflection of souls'.

For Malay anthropological studies especially in its ancient belief, *kramat* is considered as a fundamental concept that the people should know. Indeed, *kramat* which is believed to possess natural powers still being worshipped up to the present day although the practice is frowned upon in Islam. An articulate definition on *kramat* by Endicott was able to give us a clear understanding on the principle of *kramat* in relation to its sacredness, deformation, peculiarity of shapes and religious penance and high concentration of *sěmangat*.

There will be no better guide in this area than Endicott's research as he successfully compiled, highlighted and commented on previous survey on Malay magic. His philosophical knowledge of this field and his systematic analysis of the Malay magic framework allows Endicott to tease out the assumption and prominences of previous scholars' work. In particular, his approach which is more structured rather than descriptive enable him to explain coherently to his reader.

In Malay magical thought, there is a system to relate with their philosophy. At first I can see Endicott mentioned that Malay magic and practice should differ between regions. He particularly argued with previous scholars when they divided the spirit by four regions. Another remarkable issue is about the division of environment that differentiates the belief. The complexity of the environment divisions like jungle-water, habitation of man and so on (discussed in chapter five) were perceived by Endicott to play a vital role in Malay magical practices. He organized the soul relation with environment to express important abstract distinction. His disagreement with the previous writers such as Skeat, Annandale, McHugh, Gimlette and Robinson about the idea of supernatural beings can be seen as he doubted about their "rankings" and their systematic distinction between heaven and earth through classifying the spirit according to limited distinction. The positive formulation by Endicott enabled us to ponder a clear understanding of the relation of natural elements with supernatural entities through the light of evidence.

The analysis of Malay magic beautifully ended with a captivating chapter on the operation of magic. Endicott highlighted the ubiquitous vital principle through manifestation of practice by a special practitioner who was able to enforce, control and manipulate the *sěmangat* according to their interest. Further, the operation of Malay magic was investigated through the spells and magical equipment. Among the elements he examined were the Spectre Huntsman, boundary weakeners, essence receptacles, communicators, offerings, numbers, taking the rice-baby and spirit-raising séance. Last but not least, he refined the survey to Malay magical rites. At first, he observed the differentiation of magic which resulted in simultaneous differentiations between body and soul. This can be observed through the rice-baby ceremony and creation of *pělēsit*. Next, he explained on spirit contact magic where he regarded some ritual objects or percussion instruments as able to attract the spirits and the last finding was the essence control magic designed to control the actions of souls or spirits.

It is interesting to look at the way he divided this book. His started with brief introduction to the Malay magic. He took a good chance by introducing his theory used in this analysis to the reader. The outline of Malay magic such as the basic terms for magician, practice of magic and areas of life where magic is applied is clearly mentioned in chapter two. The third chapter mainly discussed some theories of previous researches regarding Malay magic. Next, a comprehensive structural definition of *sěmangat* on its differentiation and concentration was well-described in chapter four. For readers on Malay magic, it is also important to have knowledge about the significant divisions of the Malay World such as natural elements of jungle-water, earth-jungle, earth-water, habitation and non-physical divisions which influenced Malay magic, which was delivered in detail in chapter five. Lastly, he creatively put the topic about the operation of magic at the back of his book which is a good idea to wrap up his analysis.

It is an honor to review such a quality analysis written by a good observer, K.M. Endicott, though it is a bit disappointing not to describe about the writer in detail as there is very limited literature on his biography. On the whole, this book will appeal to those who want to know more about Malay ancient culture especially their extra-ordinary practice, namely Malay magic.

Puteh Noraihan A. Rahman
Academy of Malay Studies
University of Malaya
50603 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia
*Taylor's University of Lakeside Campus
No. 1
Jalan Taylor's
47500 Subang Jaya
Selangor
Malaysia
E-mail: putehraihan@gmail.com

Zahir Ahmad
Academy of Malay Studies
University of Malaya
50603 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia
E-mail: zahir@um.edu.my