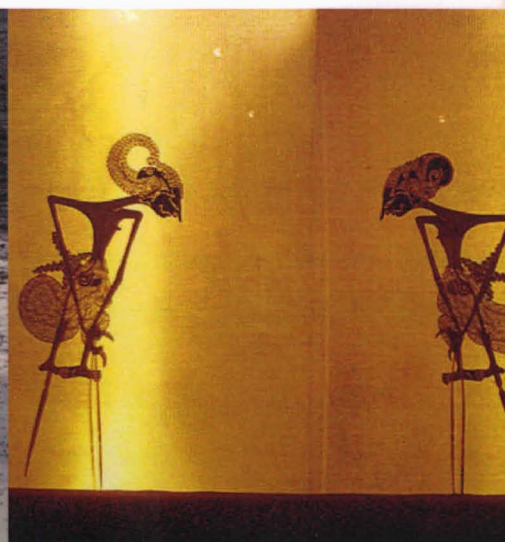




# IMAGINED COMMUNITIES REVISITED

Critical Essays on Asia-Pacific  
Literatures and Cultures



*Edited by*

Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf  
Mohammad A. Quayum

*With a Foreword by*  
Benedict Anderson

**Imagined Communities Revisited**  
*Critical Essays on Asia-Pacific  
Literatures and Cultures*

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Nor Faridah A. Manaf & Mohammad A. Quayum



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# **The Politics of Branding in Southeast Asian Literature: Understanding the “Other”**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The writing world is closely associated with the world of publishing, media promotion and, ultimately, literary awards as a form of recognition of excellent writings. However, every aspect of a writer's life will be affected by a certain ideology or politics of the related writing industries. The rise and fall of the popularity of a writer are much dependent on these three aspects: publishing, media and awards won.

This paper investigates to what extent the publishing world, media and selection of the winners of literary prizes are ideology free by analysing scholars' observations on the matter and studying controversies that arise among the writers themselves. The paper studies a selected sample of Southeast Asian writers who write in their mother tongue (either in Malay, Bahasa Indonesia or Bahasa Brunei). Not much is known of writings of these writers and this paper is an attempt to understand the other world which is often seen as a rival to the English-writing world. A number of famous writers and various recipients of many literary prizes in Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia were interviewed and their perceptions will be shared in this paper.

This paper analyses to what extent the literary world is influenced by cultural capital through the politics of branding which is channelled through publishers' ideology, and the hidden agenda of media and literary awards. These hypotheses and assumptions may invite public anger, but the politics of branding or the hidden agenda of the media (media agenda-setting) is not something new. Controversies arising about the awards is also not something we have never heard of.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine issues related to the politics of branding and to investigate the extent of how ideology-free publishing, media and literary prize organisers are in the Malay archipelago, taking into account the views of some scholars and writers from three Southeast Asian countries namely Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia.

## **WHAT IS CULTURAL CAPITAL?**

Cultural Capital is a sociological concept popularised by French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. In a paper entitled “The Forms of Capital,” he mentions three forms of capital:

- i) Economic capital: Anything that commands economic resources and can be directly converted into money and may become subject to property rights (e.g., cash, assets).
- ii) Social capital: Anything that provides resources of group memberships, relationships, networks of influence and support.
- iii) Cultural capital: Any form of knowledge, skills, education and advantages that give a person a higher status in society.

Bourdieu further categorises cultural capital into three types:

- i) Anything that is usually inherited from the family through the process of