

Preface

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The dramatic and incredibly rapid changes in Borneo's natural environment and economic conditions in recent decades and the ongoing, profound transformations of its indigenous societies have provoked a growing interest in ethnological research.

However, comprehensive anthropological research on Borneo has primarily taken a general focus, embedded in interdisciplinary Borneo studies as part of the wider Southeast Asian area studies. In this sense this publication is presented within the framework of the "Grounding Area Studies in Social Practice: Southeast Asian Studies at Freiburg" program, supported by the BMBF (German Federal Ministry of Education and Research), in which political, anthropological, historical and economic disciplines cooperate. This anthology is the result of a workshop on "Change and Continuity in Dayak Societies," which was held from July 17-18 2015 at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Freiburg. The workshop provided an opportunity for the younger generation of anthropologists in Germany and beyond engaged in ethnological research in Borneo and actually involved in or having done such field research to come together to discuss recent processes of economic, political and social (dis)continuities in Dayak societies. Several presentations during the workshop illustrated vividly the close intertwinement of cultural continuity and change. We thus decided to emphasize this relatedness by changing the book's title slightly from that of the workshop to "Continuity under Change".

Whereas quite a number of publications document and analyze these transformations, continuity and persistence within Dayak cultures are less often examined. Therefore, the workshop and the contributions to this volume were not only aimed at analyzing the effects of discontinuities but also at specifically considering continuities within Dayak societies from various anthropological perspectives.

The contributions show how flexibility and cultural dynamics, considered key values among the Dayak, enable them to navigate and persist through

change, strengthening their identity and ethnicity at the same time. In this sense the anthology reflects the main focus of ethnological research on Dayak societies in the last two decades (see King 2013: 4).

The impetus of the workshop came from earlier research activities undertaken by Freiburg scholars on the Dayak Benuaq. As contributions on the Benuaq have received considerable attention, the original idea was to organize a conference specifically focused on Benuaq research in Kalimantan to bring together scholars from different countries and different disciplines working on the Benuaq. Unfortunately this initial idea could not be realized. Instead, however, a workshop was held with a smaller group of people but with a broadened scope from just the Benuaq to Dayak societies in general.

One of the initiators of the idea was Christian Gönner (GIZ Tiflis), the first student from the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Freiburg to graduate through studying the Benuaq in 2000 and later one of the organizers of the CIFOR (Centre for International Forestry Research) program in East Kalimantan on "Poverty and Decentralization" as part of an interdisciplinary project at the University of Freiburg on the impact of decentralization reforms in Indonesia. With his experience of more than a quarter of a century continuously observing the economic and political trends in East Kalimantan and especially in Benuaq communities, he stimulated further fieldwork on the Benuaq among students of the Institute, with Michaela Haug (University of Cologne) and Oliver Venz (University Malaysia Sarawak) conducting research on the Benuaq since the early 2000s, and with Cathrin Arenz (University of Freiburg) doing the same between 2004 and 2007. These three were the main actors involved in preparing the workshop and the present volume. I extend very special thanks to all of them.

Thus a certain concentration of Benuaq research was undertaken here in Freiburg. Further fieldwork in Kalimantan by students from Freiburg was done by Viola Schreer (University of Kent) and Anna Fünfgeld (University of Freiburg), who were also participants in the workshop. Further contributions came from Timo Duile (University of Bonn), Kristina Großmann (University of Passau), Andrea Höing (BRINCC), Christian Oesterheld (Mahidol University International College), Richard Payne (Yale University) and Irendra Radjawali (University of Bonn). I am very grateful for their active participation and extend my thanks to Jürgen Rüländ and Judith Schlehe as leaders of the BMBF project for their strong support of the workshop, and Lothar Käser for his scientific advice. Unfortunately not all participants could – for various reasons – contribute to this edited volume. I thank all for inspiring contributions and fruitful discussions. I also want to express my thanks to Isabell Herrmans and Anu Lounela (both University of Helsinki), who contributed to the edited volume but could not attend the workshop.

References

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