A History of Architecture and Trade

Edited by Patrick Haughey
Contents

Acknowledgments vii
Author biographies ix

Introduction: The architecture of trade is as old as human history

1 Legacies of colonialism: Towards an architectural history of capitalism

2 Spices, spies, and speculation: Trust and control in the early Batavia-Amsterdam system

3 Cities of incense and myrrh: Fantasy and capitalism in the Arabian Gulf

4 Borneo, the river effect, and the spirit world millionaires

5 House as marketplace: Swahili merchant houses and their urban context in the later Middle Ages

6 An anachronism of trade: The Mercato Nuovo in Florence (1546–1551)

vii
ix
1
10
44
62
80
115
128
Indianization, beginning in the first century of the common era and escalating over the next centuries, is described as the process by which southeast Asian chieftain cultures adopted some form of Hindu or Buddhist world views in order to gain a foothold in the increasingly vibrant and messy maritime world. The resultant palace-based kingdoms operated as theocentric, distributional nodes. Inevitably, the story revolves around irrigation, paddies, palaces, temples, ports and shipping, and just as importantly, the India-China trade that energized the system. Less fleshed out is the history that looks in the other direction, namely into the forest highlands. And yet, so many of the commodities that were transported across the ocean came from the forests: rubies, diamonds, gold, camphor, cinnamon, Dragon’s Blood, edible bird’s nest and so forth. These commodities were not there “just for the taking,” but were in territory that often belonged to animist forest cultures.

One can imagine Indianization as an inverted sieve sucking in commodities from its upstream periphery to place them in the civilizational vortex of luxury trade. As James Scott has pointed out, little is known about the nature of these upstream exchanges in comparison with the volumes we know about southeast Asian oceanic trade, so one moves into the upstream world with caution; but to ignore the difference between sites of trade and sites of extraction is to ignore one of the fundamentals of the success of the Indianized palace cultures of southeast Asia. On its surface, the trade was asymmetrical, gold was exchanged for beads, and thus, ultimately what is at play is the “cunning” of exploitation, a cunning that escalated by the 12th century with the introduction of coinage. But the upstream cultures were more than just passive suppliers; they also profited from these exchanges, mainly in the hope of enhancing ceremonial status and fulfilling ritual obligations. In their own way, they too “drove” the economy. In this chapter, I look at Borneo as a test case for this discussion, since such exchanges occurred in a particularly concentrated form and survived, though weakened, into the 19th century. The Borneo story shows how powerful the animist world was a necessary and equal partner in extraction enterprises. Borneo is, in fact, so important to the story of southeast Asian trade that without it,


tury of the common era and escalat-
der as the process by which southeast

t form of Hindu or Buddhist world
increasingly vibrant and messy mari-
t kings operated as theo-centric,
y revolves around irrigation, paddies,
and just as importantly, the India-

less fleshed out is the history that
to the forest highlands. And yet, so
ported across the ocean came from
mph, cinnamon, Dragon's Blood,
monodities were not there “just for
f it often belonged to animist forest

inverted sieve sucking in commodi-
te them in the civilizational vortex of
ed out, little is known about the
mparison with the volumes we
, so one moves into the upstream
difference between sites of trade and
fundamentals of the success of the
Asia. On its surface, the trade was
eds, and thus, ultimately what is at
unning that escalated by the 12th
. But the upstream cultures were
also profited from these exchanges,
ial status and fulfilling ritual
ove” the economy. In this chapter,
 discussion, since such exchanges
m and survived, though weakened,
 how powerful the animist
in extraction enterprises, Borneo
theast Asian trade that without it,

Indianization would have taken on a significantly less dramatic profile. And yet it falls completely out of the literature on Indianization because the nature of the exchange that took place on the island does not rise to the level of a document-based, civilizational narrative.

Borneo’s export portfolio

The scholarly literature on southeast Asian trade describes most of the things coming out of Borneo as “forest products.” But this modern-era concept can deflect the conversation in the wrong direction. Borneo was not the exporter of forest products. It was the exporter of wealth. Trade accounts compiled in 1829 tell us that in one year, the Borneo to Singapore trade had a value of a quarter-million Spanish dollars. And that was only the first stop of many before the goods reached their final destination, producing what one speculator estimated as a profit of a hundredfold. Even in 1911, the Chinese would buy a pound and half of crystallized camphor from Borneo for fifty dollars—equivalent to about two ounces of gold. One can only imagine its “palace-value cost” in China at that time. “[The] Chinaman does a thriving trade in the wild produce of the country, and makes huge profits out of the Dayaks and other natives on this river.” As to bezoo stones, the gall bladder of a long-tailed monkey (Semnopithecus priosus)—a late 19th-century ethnographer noted:

A curious industry is the collection of galiga, or bezoo stones, which are also mostly secured by the Orang Poovan [Borneo’s forest tribes]. These galiga are highly prized for medicinal purposes, and are sold at fabulous prices to the Boeugs [Celebe traders from Sulawesi who settled in Koetel], who resell them to the Chinese.

A chronicle of the Banjare kingdoms of south Borneo dating from about 1663 notes that a representative from Banjare was sent to China, “taking with him ten diamonds, forty pearls, forty emeralds, forty red corals, forty rubies, forty opals, forty loads of beeswax, forty bags of damar, and thousand coils of rattan—a hundred gallons of honey, and ten orangutans.”

Statements like this before the 16th century are extremely rare, meaning that working our way backward in time is to work into the realm of conjecture, but there can be no doubt that Borneo was a powerful “pull” on southeast Asian trade from the early centuries of the first millennium BCE. Gold, dried bark, diamonds and the other goods that came out of Borneo were established parts of Indian spiritual needs and based on lore that seems to have almost been written by—or at least written to the benefit of long-distance, luxury product merchants. Already ancient Vedic priests required incense and gold, even though gold, for example, did not come from India, but from the famed Suvarnabhumi, the name of a land mentioned in ancient Indic sources. Suvarnabhumi means “Golden Land” and is described as
“an island in the ocean, the furthest extremity towards the east of the inhabited world, lying under the rising sun itself.”

Over time, of course, the geography of the Indian Ocean became more concrete, but it was not until the rise of the great Hindu kingdoms in India and the Buddhist kingdom at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka that east Indian Ocean trade began to seriously escalate. This, together with the end of the Roman Empire, produced a type of “turn” to the east. West-facing ports were supplanted in primacy by east-facing ones. Furthermore, the various kingdoms in India, feeding on the newfound trade opportunities, began to organize themselves by building and endowing large-scaled temples to which an increasing number of devotees were expected to shower wealth. This devotional economy and its trickle-down effect significantly increased the demand for luxury items. From that perspective, one can argue that the mythologically- and spiritually-induced “pull” toward Borneo and similarly far-off places created in its wake a civilizational gap that had to be filled and thickened for it to be a more effective producer of wealth. By the 9th century, the luxury trade was in full swing. When the artists designed the reliefs on the walls of Borobudur that represented the life of Buddha, they added an image showing the forest tribes of Borneo, who can be identified by their tell-tale blowpipes. The men are portrayed clustered on the forest floor shooting darts at the long-tailed monkeys in the trees. On their own, the Borneo forest people do not kill monkeys. Is it possible that they are collecting bezoar stones to trade with?

One of Borneo’s first exports in ancient times was probably camphor, which had a wide range of medicinal, spiritual, and especially aphrodisiacal properties. Irrelevant today as a global commodity, we can forget that even in the centuries BCE it was valued as a gift worthy of sovereigns and more expensive even than gold; it figures, for example, among the items sent by the emperor of China to Alexander. The treasure house at Ctesiphon included one hundred sacks of camphor, a royal fortune! There is no way to know where that camphor came from, but the name that the Indian merchants had for Borneo was Karpuradvipa (Camphor Island). As for diamonds, they were extracted from the riverbeds in the southwest part of the island. It is, of course, not known when diamonds were first discovered on Borneo, but the name that the Javanese gave the island was Puradvipa or Diamond Island. Then there was gold, which was associated with immortality in the Vedas. Gold was not a commodity one finds in India itself. In fact, the Roman author Pliny complained that India was draining Rome of all its gold which it used to pay for Indian luxury goods. With the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, south Asians were desperate to find other sources. George Coedes even speculated that Indian exploration of southeast Asia might well in fact have been stimulated by the search for gold when western sources dried up. Another valuable, but rarely mentioned commodity was cinnabar ore, out of which mercury is made. It came from mines in Bau, just west of Kuching in northwest Borneo. It was used for
medicine, gold-smithing and lacquer. Once again, there is no way of knowing when cinnabar was first mined, but when Magellan’s boats arrived in Brunei in 1521, they reported that the chiefs ingested mercury, a treatment particularly common to the Chinese world since ancient times. It was certainly exported to India, which had no local sources.\textsuperscript{17}

Gold, diamonds, camphor and cinnabar were only a small part of Borneo’s portfolio of offerings. There were tortoise shells (used by the Chinese as oracle bones); hornbill ivory (which the Chinese valued above true ivory, or even jade, to make belt buckles for high officials); rhinoceros horn (used to treat fever, rheumatism, gout and other disorders); crane crest (used to make dagger crane crest scabbards and rings); beeswax (which has numerous uses, including medicinal, but also for cloth-dyeing in Java); lakawood (a scented heartwood and root wood of a thick liana, Dalbergia parviflora); and Dragon’s Blood, a resin produced from the rattan palms of the genus Daenonomrops gathered by breaking off the layer of red resin encasing the unripe fruit of the rattan. Rolled into balls, it was used for Hindu ceremonies in India; in China, especially during the Ming Dynasty, as a red varnish for wooden furniture; and almost everywhere as a cure-all. The rubber of the gutta-percha tree was an important medicinal commodity exported to China.\textsuperscript{18} Last but not least, there were the edible bird nests, something that the Chinese emperor and his elites had a particular fondness for.\textsuperscript{19} These nests are still today the world’s most expensive food.\textsuperscript{20} English naturalist H. Wilfrid Walker described his arduous voyage into the highlands to witness the death-defying harvesting of the nests from the roof of a cave.\textsuperscript{21} Standing knee deep in guano at the bottom of the cave, he mused to himself that if only he had the courage to dangle on the flimsy ropes to get a nest or two, he “might have come away a wealthy man.”\textsuperscript{22}

Despite its undeniable status as wealth producer, the island does not figure with any prominence in the scholarly literature on Indianization. It is not mentioned in the foundational book \textit{The Making of South East Asia},\textsuperscript{23} by George Coedes, nor is it mentioned in \textit{The Indian Ocean in World History}.\textsuperscript{24}

There are several reasons for this absence. Camphor, diamonds and gold were all lightweight and easily transferable. A few bags of gems and some gold nuggets along with sacks of dried bark and perhaps a sampling of exotic bird feathers to top things off could make a fortune and easily fit in the long, tube-shaped holds of a typical outrigger boat, for example.\textsuperscript{25} There were also many players operating at different scales and with different types of mastes with dozens of possible transit ports, not to mention the innumerable bays and deltas with their own micro-economies. By the time the goods reached India and China, they had changed hands numerous times. The most important reason for the absence of Borneo from our discussions is that the goods moving about in southeast Asian maritime flows make their appearance in the historical records only at the end of their movement across space and time, in other words when they become jewelry, gifts, incense and payments as registered in official proclamations or inscriptions.
Since scholars rely heavily on this type of documentation, their perspective can only be on the end-game. The name of camphor reflects the problem. The word derives from the Italian camfora, which was a medieval Italian word from the Arabic kapur, which was in turn from kapur barus, which means “the chalk of Barus,” Barus being the port located near the modern city of Sibolga on the western coast of Sumatra. Though the entire world thought that camphor came from Barus, it was only the staging point for camphor, much of which came from Borneo.26

Borneo should, of course, not be considered in isolation. Trade between India and the Indonesian kingdoms was well-established by the 3rd century CE.27 The same for Funan on the Mekong Delta, which served as an intermediary between India and China. But in all of these discussions, scholarship on southeast Asian trade tends to bring us to the shores of Borneo, but not further inland.28 To get past the problem, we have to differentiate geographies of trade from geographies of extraction. This means that I have no choice but to turn to the reports written by English, American, or European ethnographers, naturalists, geologists and government officials who came to Borneo beginning in the early 19th century for shorter or longer stays depending on their purpose. Apart from the flora and fauna, they wrote on marriage customs, tattooing, head hunting, war craft and religion, and had viewpoints typical for that period. It was a land, as one commentator wrote in 1821, “infested by numerous races of barbarians or savages, differing from each other in language and ever in a state of hostility.”29 William Walker, who travelled in southeast Asia collecting bird and insect specimens, had a more positive impression of Borneo’s cultures, but the title of his book was the rather intimidating: Wanderings Among South Sea Savages (1909). Some of the perspectives sound more innocuous. The self-proclaimed anthropologist Owen Rutter, for example, wrote in 1929 that in Borneo, “the pagan village is a self-contained, self-sufficing community, independent, if need be, of the outer world.”30 Similarly, the naturalist Carl Bock argues in his book The Head Hunters of Borneo that “they live in utter wildness, . . . almost entirely isolated from all communication with the rest of the world.”31 These Romantic Era interpretations place the emphasis on tribal isolation. Such views aside, there is enough in the various reports in combination with more recent ethnographic studies—particularly those of James Scott and Michael Dove—to begin to stitch together a general picture of what Borneo trade might have looked like before the 18th century and by extrapolation, even during the period of Indianization.

River worlds

The ancient cultures of Borneo were numerous and their ethnographic backgrounds complex, but on the question of trade, the situation becomes somewhat simpler, as there were basically three different zones of interaction.
The river mouth, the upstream areas and the forests. Today, the remnants of the latter two, the upriver and forest communities, are often lumped together under the rubric Dayak. Though Dayak is a Borneo word for one of the tribes, it probably means something akin to “man.” Calling everyone Dayak was a convenience for the English, who also differentiated between Sea Dayak and Land Dayak. This is problematic since Borneo communities did not differentiate themselves in this way. Yes, those who lived along the sea were different in many respects from those who lived in the uplands, but the name of a particular community was derived from the sacred river along which it lived. So deep is the river embedded in consciousness, that in almost all the ancient languages of Borneo the word for water is the same as the word for river; “when water is brought up into the house it is still the river when they drink, they drink the river; when they boil their rice they boil in the river when they name their children they pour the river over them.” Even the names of most villages were river-based. Long-glat meant “at the mouth of the river Glat.” Orang Sungei meant “River People.” Furthermore, the world was organized as an up-and-down to these rivers. Ngadju meant “Upstream.” Uma-Tempai meant “House at the Tepai” (a tributary of the Mahakam). Further upstream, one found more mobile, forest-based societies, known generally today as the Penan. Though they did not make boats, they too were usually known by the river around which they migrated. The Penan called the traders who ventured into their territory “from the river-mouth.”

The ancient Borneo river cultures did not see themselves as living on an island in a vast sea. The sea—even for the so-called Sea Dayak—was nothing but yet another widening of the river mouth of which the particular river on which they lived was a tributary. The global imaginary—if one could phrase it thus—would be drawn in the form of an ever-widening river with the Malay, the Chinese and the others living at the widest part. The world was not a globe, but an increasingly wider plane sloping downhill. Toward the upper reaches there would be the sacred landscapes of mountains, hills and areas where the spirits live.

There are ... many sacred hills, rivers, and lakes wherein dwell certain powerful demons who govern the spirits. In this nether world, some say that there are trees and plants and animals ...; this point, however, seemed open to considerable doubt in the minds of some whom I questioned, while others had so definite an idea of it that they drew maps to show the positions of the different regions. They seemed to regard it as a large river, along whose tributaries dwelt the various classes of departed spirits.

Borneo cultures were animist, meaning that humans exist in a complex relationship to a world that includes sacred landscapes and the spirits of ancestors. Shamans served as the key mediators between the human and spiritual world. Birds were consulted before any kind of activity. Gold, for
example, was a living spirit and was used not as money, but was buried in the earth near rice paddies to invigorate its productivity. Camphor was also a spirit, and because it knows in advance what the camphor hunters are after, it can punish them in any number of ways. As a result, the men had to take great precaution and, for example, not mention the word camphor, but instead use the phrase “the thing that smells.” If the hunt went well, the workers couldfind a hollow trunk with several feet of crystallized camphor, a veritable fortune. If something went wrong, all they would find was an empty log with liquid gum at the bottom, which was quite useless.

The same was true for nests made by swallows (Hirundo esculenta) that were seen as bringing good luck, thus they were not to be hunted or harmed. Though guards lived in the cave to protect the nests, their work was made much easier by the fact that the caves were watched over “by an army of ghosts” so fearsome that the porters who brought Walker to see the nests would not venture near. The harvesting was done only after “a good omen in the shape of a good dream [came] to one of the chief owners of the caves.”

People lived in longhouses set up on stilts high above the river shores, each longhouse an economic unit unto itself containing two hundred or more people. Villages consisted of one or more of these longhouses headed by lineages of elders (Figure 4.1). There were also commoners and slaves, all of whom play their respective roles in the right-knit world. Upriver longhouse cultures, however, did not trade directly with arriving boats. That was done by shoe-based people, whose descendants are now usually called the Malays, and were originally from places in Vietnam, Java, China and Burma. It has been suggested that the Funan elites from Vietnam were the first coastal intermediaries—the first Malays, so to speak—dating maybe back to 100 BCE or as is quite likely, even earlier. These intermediaries had, upon their arrival, married the daughters and sons of the various local chiefs in order to secure tribal “buy-in” to their efforts. In this way, they developed shared aristocratic lineages that allowed them to dominate the upstream trade. We get a glimpse of how this worked when the Spanish ships from the Magellan expedition arrived at Brunei in 1521. Their discussion with the sultan who controlled the northern shores took place in his palace, in which a statement from the Europeans was repeated from a lower-ranked chief to a higher-ranked chief up to the king.

The shore communities were all excellent boat-builders, but the primary role of boats was not to travel long distances, but to control arriving boats and protect them as they approached the shore. The two-level war boats of the so-called Sea Dayak were certainly marvelous and described by the English in the 19th century; “as well constructed and very fast, holding sixty or seventy men ... It is no uncommon thing for the Dayaks to pull [at the oars] for eighteen hours with only short intervals of rest sufficient to boil and cook their rice.” Much of the trade was in fact done on the arriving boats, though larger items were traded on the docks. As to the voyagers, who in later centuries consisted primarily of Malay and the Bugis from Sulawesi, of course they had
their representatives in the shore communities with each river mouth, and generally speaking, exported different sets of goods. The English in the early 19th century identified a robust cross-oceanic trade with fleets of many dozen boats, each carrying about fifty men, travelling to and from Borneo twice a year. "Few persons would like to trust themselves in one of these crazy tubs during a run of 900 or 1000 leagues, without a nautical instrument of any kind." One of the fundamental realities of sea trade was that the more successful a port became, the more pirate communities sprung up in neighboring inlets. Borneo's river-mouth cultures played the double-edged game depending on circumstances; protecting their interests by suppressing local competition; and themselves exploiting the shipping lanes of others.

Scholars have used the term thalassocracy to describe this type of culture, one that we see developing in various parts of southeast Asia. But the word can be misleading in the Borneo context since it emphasizes maritime economics. In Borneo, the core mission of the river-mouth communities was to control access to the rivers, not to impose a will onto people across the sea. Furthermore, different elites developed at the different coastal regions, specializing in different commodities. Instead of a thalassocracy, perhaps one can coin the word "aktisocracy" from ακτή (akti) meaning "shore," and κρατεῖν (kratein) meaning "to rule".
The hybridic shore-elites organized the acquisition of goods in preparation for the trading season, and this meant that they had to negotiate with the various upriver communities that provided the forest goods. It was a distinctly two-sided enterprise. Since most of the river mouths were quite wide, the first upriver longhouse could be a hundred miles or more from the port, and usually at a distinctive moment in the landscape where the forest closes in on the narrowing river.

The upriver communities who supplied many of the goods had a relatively short list of needs, the most important being jars (Figure 4.2). In ancient times, some form of basket was certainly used, but in the period already before the Song Dynasty, the longhouse communities began to have a particular fondness for large, colorful Chinese, kiln-fired jars. The jars held special foods, oils and salt. In China such jars—Martaban jars as they are now known—were made to serve as durable, water-tight transportation containers. The Islamic traveler, Ibn Battuta, who visited lower Myanmar in 1350 CE wrote: “The Princess made me a present consisting of four huge Martaban jars filled with ginger, pepper, citron and mango, all prepared with salt, as for a sea-voyage.” In Borneo, the jars were not just containers, but valued in and for themselves. They were key to the life and identity of the longhouse. Along with gongs that were used to announce various events, jars and other items were displayed in the longhouse on a raised platform across the entrance, transforming the longhouse into the cosmological, spiritual center for its group.

A longhouse elder did not care where a jar or gong came from, but bringing it up from the shore increased its owner’s semangat. Semangat,
which historian Anthony Reid has characterized as "soul-stuff," is a type of vital principle that permeates the universe. Somewhat equivalent to the idea of kami in Japan, it is present in everything from rocks and plants to animals, and even man. Semangat is not static. In the human, for example, it can rise and fall depending on circumstances; when it rises in the soul of a man, it improves his quality of leadership to become something akin to what we might call charisma. The wealth that derived from semangat was considered not in terms of property, but in services rendered. The potency of a man's semangat is thus not acquired by work in the form of sweat and labor, but by its apparent effortlessness (which the English misdiagnosed as laziness when they arrived due to the hot weather). For a chief or elder, it was this "effortlessness" that brought the jars.

One can imagine the jars as battery packs that brought life—in a very real sense—to the longhouse. The more jars, the stronger the life-force. Unlike batteries, however, the older the jars were, the stronger they became. Some jars possessed oracular powers. A late 19th-century English description reads as such:

One very valuable jar, named Gissi, was brought, a common-looking article, small, and one that would certainly have been trampled on by strangers, but it is supposed to possess mysterious qualities— one of them being, that if anything be placed in it over night, the quantity will increase before morning; even water will be found several inches deeper. It is wrapped in cloth and treated with every mark of respect. People crawl in its presence, and touch and kiss it with the greatest care.

During the period of the Sultanate of Brunei, from the 14th century onward, even the Sultan had a jar. It was covered with a golden cloth and could actually speak to him.

Beads played an equally important role. Imparting physical strength and inner brilliance, they were signs of status, marking out social rankings within tribes. Lower classes were rarely allowed to wear beads. Beads were also used in exchange for slaves. If a person was captured during a tribal conflict, a family could use beads as ransom payment. Some beads possessed powerful healing properties, especially among the upriver tribes where beads protected the soul, allayed the spells of enemies and fought against armies of malevolent spirits. Beads were also used as gifts to the spirit world.

It is the custom among the Bukits, one of the most primitive tribes, for the youths, when they reach the bank of a new river, to divest themselves of every article of clothing, save a chaplet of leaves, which they twist from the vines near at hand; then crouching at the edge of the water, they toss some personal ornament, such as a brass ear-ring or a bright bead, far out into mid-stream, and at the same instant scoop up a handful of the water; gazing earnestly into the few drops which they
though, they invoke the spirits of the river to protect them, and implore
permission to enter the new territory.37

Though the people of Borneo could easily have made their own beads,
imported beads had special value, particularly small glass beads brought
by traders from distant lands. Not any beads would do. Particular tribes
needed particular colors for particular purposes. In marriage ceremonies,
for example, yellow, black, blue, dark blue and so forth, all had specific
meanings.38

Another commodity that most of the longhouses held in high esteem was
salt, not in granular form, but as a brick. There are numerous salt seeps in
Borneo, so it was not salt as such that was needed, but the imported brick.
Its owner would store it in the sacred jars and would in fact, only use it
rarely. Salt was most likely imported from what is today south China, from
Nanzhoa, or later, Dali. The cakes were brought down to shore, with the
Funan traders finishing the deal.39 When they reached Borneo, the further
upstream, the greater the value. As one commentator noted, a trader could
make “a gross profit of over $200 on every sack of salt the trader cared to
take to the Labao country.”40 And finally, there are a range of specialty items
that one or the other tribe needed, as remarked upon by Charles Hose, an
amateur zoologist, writing in 1912,

It is worthy of note that the Kayans have long used and highly prize for
the decoration of their swords the hair of the Tibetan goat dyed a dark
red, and have continued to obtain the hair at a great price form the
Malay and Chinese traders.41

Jars, beads, salt and other specialty items, including copper or brass wire for
bracelets, and later, iron as part of a package deal, were very much real and
valuable as they were needed by the lun do (“people of quality”) who headed
up longhouse society. To be successful, these lun do had to provision big
feasts, equip raiding parties, lead migrations, or build longhouses. Their
marriages involved a complicated exchange of these prestige objects, such as
slaves, livestock and money, but also jars, beads and weapons.42

Though the usual word to describe this in modern anthropology is status,
the word does not imply a puffed-up culture of ostentation. Status here is an
inner quality that allows the person to navigate the complexity of the spirit
world more easily than those without it. A person with high status is seen as
a person who has a stronger connection to the spirit world. But there are no
guarantees and a spate of bad luck, as we might phrase it, can reduce a
person’s semangat. Obviously, the kings in Vietnam and India also worked
on the principle of status, but those people had alternative and secondary
means by which to acquire and enforce it. For the lun do, it was the only
game along the river. It was acquired, not required. It allowed an elder
clearer access to the spirit world. It gave him a path within that complexity
that others did not have. Stated differently, semangat was the oil in the
system. It was what kept the goods flowing, and just as important to
Indianization as the needs of Hindu priests and kings.

Forest exchanges

Imagine boats arriving at the shores of Borneo with jars filled with beads
and salt, with later boats adding iron, textiles and other commodities to the
mix. From the shore, the goods made their way upriver in boats still under
the control of shore communities with perhaps an occasional Chinese or
Malay intermediary. Where the river became impassable, there was a trading
post and the goods were unloaded. A description of the goods was sent out
to the nearby villages in a four- to five-day journey’s radius. The men of the
village arrive to take the goods and disappear with them to the village
longhouse “without the slightest article being pilfered,” as the English wrote
back in their reports. The tribe assembles and the goods are inspected.
Present are made to the headman, who takes precedence in choosing what
he would like, and on down the rank. The price is fixed and an agreement is
reach regarding payments. The traders, however, are not interested in craft
items, nor does the tribe produce craft items for trade. Payment is made in
the form of bee’s wax, camphor, bird’s nest, or whatever the local community
mines and can procure from the forest.

We come to what will become the crux of the matter. The longhouse does
not have these goods in waiting on the shelves. Instead, men are sent out to
the forest to gather the goods. In the meantime, the trader has to wait,
remaining at the longhouse at the expense of the community for a month or
more until everything is assembled. The goods are then brought to his boat
and he leaves to finish the journey back down to the shore.

The story does not end here. These communities in turn brought the
goods even further upstream in dugouts of shallow draught, pushing and
pulling them past the rapids to designated exchange spots. The nomadic
forest tribes were hardly isolated cultures. Anthropologist Bernard Sellato,
one of the few contemporary scholars who has looked at tribal trade, found
that the nomadic forest tribes were not remote primitives as described in
early 20th-century anthropology, but an integral part of the extractional pro-
cesses. The exchange of goods would take place at particular times, usually
around the period of rice harvest. In that way, the forest tribes could get rice
without—from their point of view—having to do much work for it. It has
been reported that the contact between the forest tribes and their down-
stream traders did not take place face-to-face. Rather, the goods are set out
on a log and the traders would remove themselves by hiding behind some
nearby trees. The forest men would inspect the goods and leave what they
thought was a fair exchange. They would then also retire behind the trees. If
the Dayak did not like the result, they would make some adjustment, adding
or subtracting goods back and forth until everyone walked away satisfied.
Like their downriver cousins, the nomadic forest tribe wanted the usual status enhancement items: salt, beads, iron axe blades, items of copper or brass and even jars, though the jars were hidden in caves. Ethnographers have pointed out that some of the river longhouse groups had their own forest group contacts, thus enhancing their trade capacity.

The settled tribesmen of any region find this trade so profitable that they regard the harmless nomads with friendly feelings, learn their language and avoid and reprobate any harsh treatment of them that might drive to leave their district.9

The exchanges do not go as easily as outlined here, for the group of men who set out to acquire the goods often had to travel far from the village. And the further from the village they went, the greater the likelihood that the group would encounter various type of dangerous spirits. Adherence to omens regarding these spirits would inevitably slow the group or even stop it from proceeding until favorable omens were noticed. As a rather irritated American “explorer” wrote:

I am very sure that [their divinity] saddled them with a dire affliction when he introduced to them the omen-birds; more procrastination, failure of expeditions, and exasperation of soul can be laid to the score of these birds than to anything else on earth. There is hardly an undertaking, however slight, that can be begun without first consulting these wretched birds. Yet it is hardly to be wondered at, that all tribes should hold the birds to be little prophets of the jungle, dashing across man’s path, at critical moments, to bless or to ban... Once our whole party of eight or ten boats had to pull up at the bank and walk through the jungle for a quarter of a mile or so to make a bothersome white-headed hawk think that he had mistaken the object of our expedition.70

An impatient twenty-one-year-old English ornithologist recalled during an expedition in 1932:

All the local tribes are very superstitious. Good and bad omens can interfere with the best-laid plans, especially when an unpleasant or difficult job is on hand. Our first week in the Base Camp was completely disorganized by an unfortunate omen snake, which was finally placated with much ceremony—hens, eggs and borak rice-spirit. Spider-hunters (Arachnothera), which are perhaps the commonest bird in the rainforest, are the main omens. Normally, no particular notice is taken of them, but on an expedition into new country or up an unclimbed mountain, where the natives are unwilling to go, bad omens are always available.71
From the longhouse point of view, the men had to work in concert with the bird and animal spirits in order to gain proper access to forest products, which were often under the control of other tribes. The Penans, for example, were generally considered expert in locating camphor, so groups requiring camphor would have to deal with them. And even then, they could do it only after a favorable dream. Odoardo Beccari, an Italian naturalist who visited the island in the 1870s, noted that his guide, Kam-Uan, "was of opinion that this tree ought to be now rich in camphor, judging by the smell given off by the chips of its wood." But Kam-Uan would not let Beccari chop the tree down. The guide promised that "he would return to look for it as soon as he had dreamt a favourable dream." It was, Beccari wrote somewhat sarcastically, only "the fortunate one who has dreamt the dream of good omen begins to tap the chosen trunk." To prove to his guides the invalidity of their procedures, Beccari opened up a tree that he thought had camphor only to find a useless goo at the bottom. In other words, forest goods, even for the locals, were not just for the taking. The rules of engagement in a spirit-saturated economy were complex, time-consuming and not to be trifled with.

The whole process of exchange was conducted without markets, which only appeared in downstream areas with the Muslim and Chinese, who were generally loath to travel upstream. The process was also conducted without warehouses or any particular preplanning and storage of goods. For the shore cultures, who played both sides of the game, knowing how it all worked combined with a good sense of patience lay at the heart of a successful extraction policy. Knowing the forest was not just being good "animist," as we might phrase it today—it was a form of knowing, in its own right. The longhouses were not extracting material from the forest, but from the spirit world, a distinction that is usually lost in discussion on trade.

**Ancestor spirit millionaires**

The above substantiates the argument made by Bennet Bronson, who proposed a useful model to understand the coastal states of southeast Asia, particularly the more thinly settled areas with limited agricultural cultivation. These river-mouth societies prospered because they controlled internal and external trade. By supplying goods to distant elites, in return, these distant, more advanced realms "supplied goods which may themselves serve as political instruments, as emblems of rank or legitimation, and as gifts through which the loyalty of subordinate centers can be maintained." The model was an important step in identifying river-based economies, such as the ones in Borneo, as having a dynamic that was separate and distinct from, and just subservient to palace-based economies.

Borneo presents us with an added question that might not be so relevant in other places. Why did the system work so well and for so long? Contrast Borneo with Vietnam, where, according to William Southworth, the river
system remained the key component of political power until the eighth and ninth centuries, when an expansion of agriculture and settlement into the interfluvial plains, and the increasing development of road networks and communication, allowed more powerful, regional state systems to emerge.⁷⁷ Though Borneo did change in other respects, as I will discuss later, Borneo did not experience these types of changes until the 19th and 20th centuries.

To argue that the lack of change was a result of its isolation and lack of relevance to southeast Asian trade is wrong. As we know, it was not only not isolated, it was also extremely relevant to southeast Asian trade. At first, the answer seems relatively simple: The shore-based cultures, and their various non-Bornean hackers exploited an inherent imbalance of desires. It was what made Borneo so lucrative to begin with. The traders who arrived in Borneo, like the Europeans who arrived in the Americas, would exchange what for them were trinkets for items of more value. Gold, for example, was easily panned in several places. A 19th-century English geologist who analyzed gold deposits in Borneo wrote that, “so much gold is reported to occur in this area of the country, that when a stick smeared with gum is pushed into the ground, it comes out covered with gold-dust.”⁷⁸ Still today, a lucky hiker can find gold nuggets along forest river edges.⁷⁹ But gold was not valued by the longhouse communities, a fact that the early traders from India noticed (just like the later-day English). It was, one can say, their lucky day.⁸⁰ In fact, as the naturalist A. H. Everett wrote in the early 19th century, “None of the savage tribes of this [northern] part of Borneo seem ever to have made use of this metal, notwithstanding their intercourse with the Malays, and in a less degree with the Chinese . . . I have never known an instance of a Sea Dayak or Land Dayak, a Kyan or Bakatan, seeking gold of his own account, and manufacturing it into any description of ornament, however rude.”⁸¹

An English report notes that the Dayak’s “ignorance and simplicity are often taken advantage of by a lot of Malaya for their own ends, who cheat and swindle these aborigines to their heart’s content,” as if the English were not doing the same and worse!⁸² Another writer describes how “an ignorant customer” bought a jar for the astonishing amount of £400.⁸³ Yet another observer wrote in 1912:

Besides these old jars there are now to be found in most of the Sea Dayak houses many jars of modern Chinese manufacture, some of which are very skilful [sic] imitations of the old types; and though the Dayak is a connoisseur in these matters, and can usually distinguish the new from the old, he purchases willingly the cheap modern imitations of the old, because they are readily mistaken by the casual observer for the more valuable varieties.⁸⁴

There can be no doubt that the history of the assumption of easy money and easy deception dates back to the very beginning of the Borneo trade in the first centuries BCE when traders could get gold for beads. A large part of the wealth generated by southeast Asian metrical nature. Beads were mass-produced where they were already made out of millennium BCE.⁸⁵ Bead-making was, in fact, since it was such a key element in south from south India, which had established to the Funan in Vietnam then by the moment the Chinese got into the action, they were not part of the southeast century possibly, as evidenced by a dayak. Clearly once the Dayak acquired the jars and beads were mass-produced in action, in Burma, Thailand and Vietnam. Vijaya, located in the Binh Dinh prov. had even sent a bead-maker to Borneo at cost. The English observer noted, of course, there is much profit.⁸⁶

In his own way, even the Sultan got Islamized, they had to give up their jars and beads. But the Sultan, as we reason. The fewer the number of jars, the lesser the trade would come to give him ritu he would give in return “a little water, a little water, a little water, a little water.”⁸⁷ It is a brilliant The Sultan of Brunei knew not only water but water.

However, if the trade in jars, beads, Civilizationizing cunning (often discuss the flattening rubric of “trade”), both a bargain, especially since many of the wanted were of lesser or no value to us their perspectives, almost free if only, long enough to get what they needed. The century commented in his notes that the extreme value of [campfire procured exchange for a bamboo of] Idan did know the value of camphor culture, was valued higher than gold home be probably said to his friends, the extreme value of salt, that I can bamboo of salt.” The same is true for the Igbo that anyone would want to a good fortune to possess such a thing, that area had become rich.⁸⁸ His dau.
the wealth generated by southeast Asian “trade” was, in fact, of this asymmetrical nature. Beads were mass-produced in India, in Cambay mostly, where they were already made out of carnelian, onyx and agate in the first millennium BCE. Bead-making was, however, a highly-protected enterprise, since it was such a key element in southeast Asia profit-making. It expanded from south India, which had established an early monopoly on its production to the Funan in Vietnam then by the ninth century to Java, and at some moment the Chinese got into the act. Though they made beads since early on, they were not part of the southeast Asia trade networks until the tenth century possibly, as evidenced by a distinctive glass style that one finds in Borneo. Clearly once the Dayak acquired the taste for Chinese-styled jars, the jars and beads were mass-produced in China and then later, closer to the action, in Burma, Thailand and Vietnam, one such site being the kilns at Vijaya, located in the Bình Định province. By the 17th century, the Chinese had even sent a bead-maker to Borneo itself, thus cutting down transportation cost. The English observer noted, of course, “They say that in his matters there is much profit.”

In his own way, even the Sultan got into the act. As the Sea Dayak became Islamized, they had to give up their former beliefs and sell or destroy their jars and beads. But the Sultan, as we saw, did not destroy his, and for good reason. The fewer the number of jars, the more important his was. When tribesmen would come to give him ritual gifts, some bird’s nests for example, he would give in return “a little water from [his] sacred jar with which to besprinkle their fields.” It is a brilliant example of the cunning of exchange. The Sultan of Brunei knew not only where his bread was buttered, but how to butter it.

However, if the trade in jars, beads, salt and miracle water was part of the civilizational cunning (often discussed in the scholarly literature under the flattening rubric of “trade”), both sides thought that they were making a bargain, especially since many of the things that the downstream cultures wanted were of lesser or no value to upstream communities and were, from their perspectives, almost free if only, of course, they could trick the spirits long enough to get what they needed. When an Englishman in the early 20th century commented in his notes that “so little does the Orang Iban [Ibans] know of the extreme value of camphor, that a bamboo of camphor may be procured in exchange for a bamboo of salt,” he did not realize that the Orang Iban did know the value of camphor. Salt, for reasons unique to their culture, was valued higher than gold. When that Orang Iban man went home he probably said to his friends, “so little does the White man know of the extreme value of salt, that I can give him a bamboo of camphor for a bamboo of salt.” The same is true for bird’s nest. The Dayak were certainly puzzled that anyone would want to eat a bird’s nest and thought it to their good fortune to possess such a thing. And indeed, the chief who controlled that area had become rich. His daughter was well provided for in beads. As one traveler in the mid-19th century noted:
Were I to endeavor to estimate the price in produce she and the parents had paid for this hip-lace (of beads), the amount would appear fabulous. She showed me one for which they had given eleven pound's weight of the finest bird's nests, or at the Singapore market price, thirty-five pounds sterling.\textsuperscript{32}

Even Beccari remarked that:

The evident prosperity, I might say opulence, of the Tubao Kayans was due to their camphor and gutta-percha, which they trade for cotton cloth, glass Venetian beads, and especially for gongs and thick brass wire, which are highly valued by them . . . Nipa salt is also in high estimation, but less so than amongst tribes who live farther from the sea.\textsuperscript{29}

So when we—scholars—discuss the history of trade we might fail to realize that Borneo longhouses were not trading in the narrow sense of the term. From their point of view, they were extracting status out of the downriver people. Just as there was a "pull" that brought Indian, Funan, Malay and Chinese traders to the shores of Borneo, the pull driven by the promise of easy profit, there was a reverse "pull" that brought sacred jars, salt and beads—the status-producing/enhancing package—up into the forest. It can be called the River Effect. One can contrast the perspective of India and China with the perspective of the longhouse. The former sees forest goods and easy wealth, the latter sees spirit intensifiers and semangat. Navigating the dangerous ocean has to be linked with navigating the dangerous forest.

Since it was the amount of semangat an elder had in his community that allowed him to put together hunting parties to acquire forest material, the higher an elder's status, the more he could acquire. The word that came to indicate a man of high semangat was "Orang Kaya," which the English translated as "rich man." And there were many. But even they were not the richest people in the land. The entities with the greatest semangat were the ancestors. They received all the wealth lost in rivers by the capsizing of boats in the rapids," and as such were described as "exceedingly rich." They were the island's millionaires, so to speak.\textsuperscript{34}

O.W. Wolters has pointed out how in southeast Asia, foreign materials become incorporated into local realities, but in Borneo, I argue, we have to see the spirit world not as the recipient of "foreign" items, but as the force driving the economy in the first place.\textsuperscript{37} The spirits in that sense generated wealth not just for the elites in Vietnam, Malaysia, India and China, but also for the people living on the slopes of the mountains. These wealthy spirit ancestors produced just as much pull on the system as the kings of India. From the perspective of these ancestor spirits, places that we call India, Malaysia and China were not great civilizations, but nothing more than their downriver suppliers. Ancestrality was, therefore, not just part of an animist belief system. It was, to change the terms, an economic system in its own right. The outside world, in Borneo.

The problem for historian of trade entities.\textsuperscript{36} Ancestor temples, or go to without these wealthy goods to India and China revises the role in history.

The failure of Kutai Martadipura

In the fifth century, one of the most important commercial centers for specialists who set up shop of Indianization will usually called the "Kutai Martadipura" was created around 350 on the island of Kalimantan. It is no accident—it is close to the great Stone pillars with Sanskrit inscriptions commemorate local Dayak chieftains and that it was called the "Kutai Martadipura," which means "wealthy," and who was also a "priest"). Since -varman was in commonalit at Kanchi, it could be conjectured as south-central India.\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{59}}

The rise of Kutai Martadipura was the Silk Route luxury trade.\textsuperscript{59} The great civilizational end, the greater the urge. The expanding economy created in Java, Vietnam, Cambodia and elsewhere attempted "Indianization" of Borneo. The impediment was the failure to develop only developed much later). This mud and inadequate soils. The soils of Kalimantan were seemingly too acidic to support modern drainage techniques.\textsuperscript{61}

There could also have been cultures of their own longhouse polities that could also, but that probably resisted the effi-

nace-paddy people. Though it is not necessarily the same people. When one moves upstream, the less likely a palace-based worldview. In a tradition, longhouse are dissatisfied with the corp-

se paddy fields and build temporary
its own right. Though its magic, so to speak, worked throughout the Asian world, in Borneo it developed a unique type of logic.

The problem then from a historiographic point of view is that today, no historian of trade would dare to include ancestor spirits as viable trading entities. Ancestors do not provide ledgers, make inscriptions, commission temples, or go to war. And yet, in the context of southeast Asian trade, without these wealthy, invisible entities as a motor in the system, the flow of goods to India and China would have taken on a significantly less dramatic role in history.

The failure of Kutai Martadipur

In the fifth century, one of the island’s aktisocracies tried to develop a more proper palace culture, bringing in the usual contingent of Brahmin, ritual specialists who set up shop as religious overlords. It is here that historians of Indianization will usually mention Borneo for the first time. The kingdom was the Kutai Martadipur (not its original name, which is unknown) and it was created around 350 on the southern flank of the island. Its location was no accident—it is close to the extraction sites of edible bird’s nests and gold. Stone pillars with Sanskrit inscriptions indicate that the first ruler was a local Dayak chieftain and that it was his son who took on an Indian name, Aśwawarman, and who was also called vaṃśa-kartṛ (“dynasty-founder/priest”). Since -varman was in common use by the Pallavas (with their capital at Kanchi), it could be conjectured that these merchants stemmed from south-central India.

The rise of Kutai Martadipur was directly related to the expansion of the Silk Route luxury trade. The greater the wealth-consuming needs at the civilizational end, the greater the urgency to push upstream at the other end. The expanding economy created in its wake the great palace-cultures on Java, Vietnam, Cambodia and elsewhere, and yet, as far as we know, the attempted “Indianization” of Borneo fizzled out. It seems that the main impediment was the failure to develop large-scale, rice cultivation (which only developed much later). This might have been the result of the terrain and inadequate soils. The soils of Kalimantan, unlike those of central Java, were seemingly too acidic to support extensive rice cultivation without modern drainage techniques.

There could also have been cultural factors in that the major rivers had their own longhouse polities that could not only exist independently of each other, but that probably resisted the efforts to unify themselves into a dutiful, rice-paddy people. Though it is not sure when rice came to Borneo, rice remained stubbornly rooted to the scale of the longhouse. And the further one moves upstream, the less likely the longhouse would acquiesce to a palace-based worldview. In a traditional Dayak world, if the people of a longhouse are dissatisfied with the conduct of their chief, they will retire to their paddy fields and build temporary houses there. If over time the matter
is not resolved, a new longhouse will be built and a new chief elected to rule
over it, while the old chief remains in the old house with a reduced following,
consisting mainly of his near relatives.102 The forest longhouse groups were
even more egalitarian in nature.

We can now read an inscription at Kutai Martadipur in context. It proudly
states that the king conquered his neighbors in battle. But what the king
quickly learned, and what was not on the inscription, was that his control
was extremely limited. Even the English had difficulty asserting themselves
beyond the river deltas.103

The experiment at Indianization may have failed, but that does not mean
that the role Borneo played in larger geopolitical parameters of Indianization
was any less important. Much to the contrary! It was only just beginning,
for what remained durable, were the aktisocracies of various scales, most
of them dominated in one way or another through shifting trade alliances
by non-Bornean regional powers. This arrangement had been established
and accepted by the locals who had integrated it into their spirit world
economy as far back as 200 BCE. In other words, the local tribal communities
with their aktisocratic encirclement were sufficient for the task of wealth
extraction. The result is similar to what James C. Scott in The Art of Not
Being Governed, an Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia (2009)
calls a state-repelling feature: Egalitarianism is a social structure that often
makes it difficult for a state to extend its rule into forest communities.104

However, it was not just internal momentum that swayed events. The
various "nouveau riche" rulers of Sumatra, Java and Vietnam were less-than-
eager to see the rise of a rival kingdom to their east. This might help explain
the mystery of Borneo gold. Robert S. Wicks, in his study of southeast
Asian trade networks, produced a telling map in this respect. It shows where
gold coins were found and used in southeast Asia. By the 13th century, they
are almost everywhere, from Java to Burma and across to the Philippines.105
Not a single dot on Borneo. Among the most obvious reasons is that the
longhouse cultures did not see coins as a status symbol and the idea of
accumulating money to pay for goods was anathema to their exchange
perspectives, which were designed not around trade, but around spirit world
enhancement. The elders may have well understood the magical aspects
of gold, but most evidence points to the circumstance that here too it was
searched for mainly as a means to ends.106

It is also more than possible that the powers that worked the gold did not
want Borneo cultures to develop the skill of smithing. Skilled jobs had to
remain at the level of the palace cultures. Scholars now argue, in fact, that
what was formerly known as Java gold, was, in actuality, gold that came
from Borneo, since gold sources on Java were limited.107 There is no doubt
that Java’s rapid rise had much to do with its capacity to control the Borneo
gold trade and to separate extraction from manufacturing. In the eighth
century, the Shailendra Dynasty on Java was one of several "nouveau riche"
kingdoms that emerged on this principle. Famous for their goldsmithing,
they even produced their own gold coins, the *mas*, or the larger *tabil* (which equal 16 *mas*). This might help explain why the Majapahit from Java invaded south Borneo in the 14th century, not just to suppress the rise of the potential state of Nansarunai, which was established by the Ma'anyan Dayaks, but to keep Borneo within well-established parameters. In essence it was in Java's best economic interest to make sure that Borneo's akhisocratic system remained a local one, thinly positioned around the island's shores. Maximum profit could be gained not by controlling the resources, but simply by placing the island in a containment field that, though messy, polyvalent and certainly porous, could be sufficiently manipulated by the major regional players from across the water.

The Malay-connected Banjar kingdom came to dominate the south, whereas the Chinese developed their points of contact mainly along the north coast, especially once they decided to bypass the Champa ports such as Oc Eo and Indrapura on the coast of Vietnam. By the tenth century, a micro-state had emerged on the northeast coast of Borneo, Po-ni, as it was called in China, had contacts with the Song Dynasty, and at some point, even entered into a tributary relationship with China. Unlike the Javanese, who seemingly looked suspiciously at state formation in the island's southern reaches, the Chinese viewed it more favorably, since it better matched their bureaucratic expectations. When the Majapahit came to control the southern shores in the 14th century, Po-ni fell into decline, only to be revived with the establishment of the Malay-originating, Sultanate of Brunei in 1368, which had connections to both China and the Sultanate of Malacca, and in the mid-15th century had expanded its influence to Sumatra and beyond. Almost every discussion of southeast Asian trade will point this out, but neither Po-ni nor the Sultanate controlled anything beyond the shore communities. It was not the forests that made the island so impenetrable to Indianization or early Islamization, nor the presumed savagery of its inhabitants. It was the affluence of its animist communities, which produced a type of stand-off, so to speak, against civilizational encroachments.

**Upstream affluence**

We can now create a working image of Borneo in the pre-modern era. Borneo possessed a structured and self-organized forest culture in the interior, tuned in its own particular way to the extractional needs of the "civilized" world across the water. The genius of the system was that the things that the Chinese and Indians and their intermediaries wanted did not match with the things that the Borneo tribes wanted. There was no direct competition for resources. This basic principle is not to be overlooked.

However, since the two worlds needed each other, the result was a hybridic shore culture that served as a containment field—a tertiary element, so to speak—purposefully isolating the inland tribes from the civilizations over the horizon so as to better master the necessary exchanges in the forests; nor
were these aktsocrats ever allowed to be really strong enough to call the shots. Though they contributed substantially to the luxury trade of southeast Asia, they were themselves never truly “Indianized.” They were containing and themselves contained, betwixt and between—a type of glue that allowed the “cunning of exchange” to work both ways. And so to concentrate on the issue of “state formation”—around which so much of the history of southeast Asia revolves—is to miss the fact that sea-based trade operated in a proportional relationship with upstream river and forest cultures. The productive, if not foundational, role that forest cultures had in shaping southeast Asian trade was studied by James Scott. At Borneo, we can go further to argue that Indianization needed the forest cultures to remain un-Indianized so that the transaction between civilization and upriver society could remain productive at both ends. Indianization, therefore, was vested just as much in establishing robust palace cultures as in self-limiting its reach into the forests. After all, as long as the upriver and forest cultures remained un-Indianized, the prices of the commodities remained simply the price of transportation plus beads! There was an ecological-style balance to the up-and-down movement of desires that linked palace, shore and forest, each feeding from and sustaining the other. The upriver tribes of Borneo probably never realized just how the coherency of their spirit world protected them from civilizational encroachments.

I would like to add to Scott’s thesis the concept of a spirit world affluence, even if that affluence is not written in ways that any of us can comprehend anymore. Affluence might seem like an unusual word to use in the context of ancestor spirits, but it helps us move past our received image of “animist” cultures living in concert with their forest environments. Before Indianization, Borneo’s communities, like so many First Society cultures, lived in relative isolation and benefited from their position within an extraordinarily rich ecological zone. In this way, the Borneo cultures were not unlike the Haida on the northwest coast of Canada where there was no dearth of food and resources. And indeed, food was never a problem on Borneo. That many hunter-gatherers should be considered affluent in this respect was first proposed by Marshall Sahlins in 1966. The argument went against the grain of the assumption that hunter-gathering was a fight against starvation. Sahlins noted that hunter-gatherers lived in a society in which “all the people’s wants are easily satisfied.” And indeed, his thesis with some modifications has born itself out, especially in environments like Borneo’s where there was a rich ecological diversity. The pre-contact Borneo people were in that sense certainly “affluent.”

I want to take Sahlins’ argument into the domain of the post-contact, starting from the early days of Indianization, perhaps already in the early centuries BCE. The Borneoians quickly learned that their forest provided more than just food. They learned that the increasingly powerful river-mouth people had a particular interest in their forest, and that by supplying forest goods to the downriver people, they could upriver a different set of

Meanwhile, by the 13th century, the economic conditions in Southeast Asia, driven by maritime trade, were very different. The downriver communities of Borneo were no longer isolated from each other, and the economy was no longer based on the production of goods for local consumption. Instead, the economy was driven by the production of goods for export to distant markets. This change in economic conditions had a profound impact on the way the Borneoians lived their lives. The downriver communities, which were once self-sufficient, now had to rely on the upriver communities for food and other goods. This led to a new set of social relationships, as the downriver communities had to negotiate with the upriver communities to get what they needed. The Borneoians also had to adapt to the new economic conditions, as they had to learn how to produce goods for export and how to trade with other peoples. This change in economic conditions also had an impact on the way the Borneoians thought about the world. They had to learn how to think about the world in new ways, as they had to consider the needs of distant markets and how to satisfy them. This change in economic conditions was a major factor in the transformation of the Borneoian society.
goods. A influence-of-existence, so to speak, was enhanced by the presence of spirit world intensifiers.

The River Effect did not develop all at once. The first commodities in this exchange were beads, but over time, the portfolio of up-rivered goods expanded. Maybe around the ninth century, salt and jars were added to the list. According to Robert Finlay, huge quantities of jars were brought to Borneo’s ports along the Sarawak River during the Song Dynasty in the tenth century.12 The portfolio of down-rivered goods also expanded. Scholars have argued that iron ore was first mined during this period as well, becoming established around 1000 CE in the river delta area of Sarawak near the port of Santubong.13 The Chinese traded iron for jars. At some moment, the rubber sap of the gutta-percha tree was added to the down-rivered commodities. By this time, Borneo had become one of the region’s prime sources of pharmaceutical products in Chinese medicine cabinets. More prosaic items like rattan were also added to the list of down-rivered elements.14 In response, coming upriver, there was now copper wire, then goat hair, cloth from India and so forth. Probably by the 11th century, longhouse chiefs, having now moved to rice paddy cultivation, which intensified the spirit world even more, had compounded the ways to differentiate themselves from others. The more items that were added to the list in both directions, the greater the resultant dynamic within Borneo’s status system and thus the more complex the associated spirit world became. At some moment, burial structures and headhunting were integrated into this spirit system, but why the buildings that housed the heads were round and what shaped that development is not known. Regardless of which product appeared when, the general drift was toward an increased expertise culture, if one can use that concept, by longhouse elders who differentiated themselves by their higher ability to “know” the complex ways of the spirit world.

Meanwhile, by the 13th century, the southeast Asian palace economies on Java, or in Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand were becoming more recognizably modern, with bureaucracies, warehouses, treaties, religions, warships, etc. It was a world that differentiated itself increasingly from the forest-world economies which were associated, as in Borneo, with tribal communities. In the first centuries CE, these poles were probably relatively close. The shore communities of Borneo might not have been all that different from shore communities, even in India. By the 13th century, they were clearly distinct, with Borneo as one of the places where the distinction remained in play well into the 19th century. Even money, which began to come into circulation in the centuries before the 13th century, never penetrated Borneo culture and only barely during the Sultanate. But what might be seen as an indication of the backwardness of the tribes could also be seen as a system that as time went on, was increasingly “constructed” by the shore-based communities to disenfranchise the tribes, so as to keep the profit margin high.15 What is certain is that in the period during which Indianization intensified, namely between the 9th and 13th centuries, the spirit world
needs of Borneo intensified as a commensurate response to the increased extractions of requirements—of this there can be no doubt. In other words, while the Indianized world of southeast Asia became more thickly industrialized, the upriver communities in Borneo became more thickly spirit-saturated. The epistemological production of the one have a parallel with and are in fact bound up with the epistemological productions of the other.

**Dénouement**

It was, of course, not destined to last.

As the scale of the down-rivered extraction increased, the cheapness of the up-rivered commodities remained constant. The cost of manufacturing beads, jars, and salt, if anything, went down. Chinese and Indian buying power increased and the profit potential ballooned, and with the upscaling of the civilizational world in terms of wealth-demand along with the introduction of monotheistic world views, it was only a matter of time before there was a breakthrough. There was simply too much at stake. By the early 19th century, in fact, the equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars were in play. In essence the bipolar arrangement that existed between king and ancestor spirit had to be replaced by a world that aimed to fully disenfranchise ancestor spirits from their control of the forest.

Ancestriality is not something that disappears overnight. The transition began in the 14th century with the Islamization of the coastal communities where jars and beads were destroyed or discarded as part of a liberation from superstition. Even more substantial change occurred in the 18th century when the Sultanate imported Chinese workers to man the gold mines—in essence, to circumvent the predictably slow process of longhouse-spirit exchanges. From the longhouse perspective, it meant that gold was removed from their trading marts as a medium of exchange. The addition of a large group of Chinese also introduced a people with different cultural perspectives and world views. The Chinese revolted under the sultan, who called in the English. When they arrived in 1842 under the flag of the English adventurer James Brooke, they picked up where the sultan had left off, securing the gold and diamond fields along with the Dutch, who used the Borneo diamonds as the foundation for their Amsterdam diamond trade. The English imported coffee and rubber trees in the usual disastrous attempt to make dutiful plantation workers out of the “savages.” Ships brought in boatloads of cheap glass beads, resulting in a massive devaluation of their importance for the upriver communities. Christian missionaries offered their alternatives. The last remaining forest millionaires were the chiefs controlling the remote caves of bird nests. But the English already had even them in their sights. By the end of the 19th century, headhunting and piracy ballooned, not because of the inherent savagery of the people, but because there were fewer and fewer ways for the upstream river cultures to maintain contact with their ancestors on whom their identity depended. Captain

Rodney Mundy, who was placed in charge, observed that Sea Dayaks does not disguise the profit

Turning from the vegetable to the precious—diamonds, gold, tin, iron, and an article that I believe to be a specimen of—

But first things first:

How long will that great beneficence—endowed by nature with every resource, the dwelling place of demons in

The burning of the longhouses—with reports—meant the destruction of the wood that was rendered practically invisible in the course of the disease. These were not made for such compounded stress by the shores to populate vast stretches of land. The prime source of the wealth was surely gambling. The English noticed, but the best bets were the balloon of the boom times, as did smallpox. The prime source of the wealth was surely gambling. The English noticed, but the best bets were the balloon of the boom times, as did smallpox. The prime source of the wealth was surely gambling. The English noticed, but the best bets were the balloon of the boom times, as did smallpox.
Rodney Mundy, who was placed in charge of suppressing piracy among the Sea Dayaks does not disguise the profit-making imperative at stake:

Turning from the vegetable to the mineral riches of the country, we have diamonds, gold, tin, iron, and antimony-ore certain; I have lately sent what I believe to be a specimen of lead-ore to Calcutta; and copper is reported . . . A profit can be made a hundred fold.116

But first things first:

How long will that great beneficent Being permit this beauteous land, endowed by nature with every requisite for the happiness of man, to be the dwelling place of demons in human form?117

The burning of the longhouses—which Mundy dutifully describes in his reports—meant the destruction of the jars, and without the jars, inhabitants were rendered practically invisible in the spirit world. The spirit world, not designed for such compounded stresses, literally fell apart. Tribal refugees headed to the shores to populate vast squatter communities. Cholera spread, as did smallpox. The prime source of money turned out to be opium and gambling. The English noticed, but never bothered to explain the rise of insanity in the ballooning shore communities. By the 1860s, 100-ton ships were waiting impatiently at the docks. In the 20th century, the creation of modern states that divided Borneo into three zones hardly improved matters from the longhouse perspective. And it was not just technologies of power and exploitation that were at play here. In 1911, Freud published Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics, in which he argued that aboriginals, whom he called “Wild People” (Wilden), share an overvaluation of psychical acts governed by an omnipotence of thoughts with modern-day neurotics. They project their inner mental life onto the external world without any of the usual checks and balances. The practices of animism were for Freud merely a cover up of instinctual repression. How can a reader not be disgusted when Freud writes:

When the Sea-Dayaks of Sarawak bring home a head from a war expedition, they treat it for months with the greatest kindness and courtesy and address it with the most endearing names in their language. The best morsels from their meals are put into its mouth, together with titbits and cigars.118

Colonial arrogance reinforced by a theory of civilizational disrespect.

Today the oracle birds still flutter through the forests, but no one knows what they are saying anymore. So when we read today that the Dayak are “small tribal minorities living in [this] most remote nook of the Borneo hinterlands,” we should not for a moment assume that this ethnocentric, near-view
description does justice to the situation in the tenth century—it’s just another
check mark in the long column of “lost cultures.”11 This brings us, obviously,
to the maw of a different type of conversation. My focus was on an earlier,
more subtle moment in history in which Borneo had a unique place in pre-
colonial trade, not because of its “civilizational culture,” but as a source of
a whole range of low-extraction-cost, luxury commodities; for a while, for a
long while, in fact—almost a thousand years, this longhouse world was a prac-
tically invisible, yet key player in the southeast Asian economic system, itself
responding to the intensification of desires placed upon it with an intensifica-
tion of its own spirit world economy. I tried to suggest that just as we tend
to write the history of trade from the civilizational perspective, it is possible to
write a history, though the conjectural, that takes the longhouse perspective
into account, treating it not as the abstract source of civilizational wealth, but
as an economic motor in its own right. From the beginning, however, the
system conspired to return as little wealth as possible to Borneo—gold for a
few beads or some drops of sacred water—exploiting, but also in a way pre-
serving (if one can use that word) the island’s cultures well into modern times,
only to expose Borneo’s longhouse communities in the 20th century, almost
unprotected from the self-legitimizing and intrusive forces of monotheism,
colonialism, capitalism, nation-centricism and modernization.

Notes

1 A Spanish dollar was roughly equivalent to the US dollar in the early 19th
century. Today, this amount is worth on the order of ten million dollars. But its
true value would be significantly greater, for Singapore was only the first stop in
a long series of exchanges. Author unknown, “Trade with the West Coast of
Borneo” (from Singapore Chronicle, 1829) in Notices of the Indian Archipelago:
Edited by J.H. Moor (Singapore Chronicle, 1837), p. 13. To get a sense of the
mid-19th century trade see: Peter Lund Simmonds, “On the Trade and Commerce
of the Eastern Archipelago,” Journal of the Society of Arts 9 (May 10, 1861),
p. 451–466.

2 Edwin Herbert Gomes, Seventeen Years Among the Sea Dyaks of Borneo: A
Record of Intimate Association with the Natives of the Bornean Jungle
(Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1911), p. 239.

3 It was so precious that in the early-18th century, the camphor trees in Formosa—
now Taiwan—were owed by the Chinese state and the penalty for chopping
one of them down was nothing less than death. Author unknown, “The Camphor

4 H. Wilfrid Walker, Wanderings Among South Sea Savages and in Borneo and the

5 Carl Bock, Head Hunters of Borneo, A Narrative of Travel up the Mahakam
and Down the Barito (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Seade and Rivington,
1882), p. 205.

6 Johannes Jacobus Ras and Hikayat Banjar, A Study in Maya Historiography

7 The point here is to challenge the usual idea that trade emerged naturally from
small, local beginnings and developed to more technologically proficient ends,
dominated by state actors. Though this might be useful in context where there
are strong state actors like in China and India, it does not work all that well for southeast Asia. Furthermore, if we assume that Indianization was an export of various forms of Hinduism and Buddhism from India, we will only follow the more "official" self-narratives of the states. My point here is to emphasize the ancient, tight relationship between the economic and spiritual worlds and suggest that for India in particular this relationship created a specific set of "spiritually" mandated pull mechanisms that were just as important as pushes.

8 Lionel Casson (ed.), Periples of the Erythraean Sea (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 91. The actual location of this land has preoccupied many scholars and may indeed include Borneo, but for me this conversation is irrelevant. The main point is that it was extremely far away. Suvannabhumi should, therefore, not be seen as the product of mythological fantasy, but as a significant and real element in the blueprint of a maritime-oriented, devotional practice that was foundational to the Velic world view.

9 The Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thrivunamamalapuram is estimated to possess $22-billion worth of gold and jewels stored in underground vaults. The accumulation of spiritual wealth had no other purpose than to enhance the potency of the presiding deity. Kings and merchants, competing with each other in showmanship, added to this "wealth" not only to gain pūnyam ("religious merit") but also to acquire legitimacy in the eyes of the people. The Padmanabhaswamy Temple is an extreme case, but it helps to remind us of the cultural relationship between wealth and pūnyam.


13 "India, China and the Arabian peninsula take one hundred million sesterces from our empire per annum at a conservative estimate: that is what our luxuries and women cost us. For what percentage of these imports is intended for sacrifices to the gods or the spirits of the dead?" (Pliny, Historia Naturalis 12.41.84).


18 Eucommia bark of the tree Eucommia ulmoides is commonly called the gutta-percha tree. The Chinese name for the bark is Du Zhong. This name refers to a Taoist monk who was said to be immortal, suggesting that the herb provides long life, good health, and vitality. The tree is a member of the rubber family and is native to the mountainous regions of China. The outer bark is peeled away and the smooth inner bark is dried. This inner bark contains a white, elastic latex that is thought to contain the compounds that account for the bark’s healing properties. Older, thicker inner bark with more latex is considered more desirable for the herbalist to use than younger, thinner bark. Generally, this elastic concoction, sweet and slightly acidic in taste, is combined with other herbs and extracts to create yang-enhancing tonics to treat kidney and liver deficiencies as well as impotence. The bark has been used in traditional Chinese herbalism for over 3,000 years. The tree does not grow widely outside China, but it grows in Borneo and thus the trade. Once again, it is impossible to know if this trade dates back to the era BCE or was a consequence of more recent post-14th century contact with Chinese traders.


21 Wandering Among South Sea Savages, p. 231–242.


25 Chinese boats, by way of contrast, were usually larger and more technologically complex. But one has to remember that Chinese boats had to be designed to carry iron, bronze, grain, porcelain, silk and even people. Proper documentation and port-side controls were essential. This was not the case in southeast Asian trade where boats were designed to be fast and lightweight.


28 Gin’s otherwise excellent article does just that, brings us only to the shores of Borneo with no reference to upstream trade. See: Ooi Keat Gin, “Borneo in the Early Modern Period c. Late Fourteenth to c. Late Eighteenth Centuries,” Early Modern Southeast Asia: 1350-1800, Edited by Ooi Keat Gin and Hoang Anh Tuan (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 88–102. Ricklefs distinguishes between an inner and “outer” sea. See: the Preface.

29 Author unknown, Headhunters of Borneo, 1899.


31 William Henry Furness III, Borneo (London, 1899), p. 25. Furness made four expeditions to Borneo from 1895 to 1901. Antiques he collected were at the collections of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology in South Pacific in 1903, and sold to Tuey Island of Yap (Yap). Furness served as curator of the Museum’s general ethnology section.

32 Heidi Munn, Beads of Borneo, p. 34.


34 L.H. Walker, Power and Prowess (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1979). Seventeen Years Among the Sea Gypsies, 1898–1900. In 1904, Nieuwenhuis, ethnologist at Leiden University and editor of Archiv fur Ethnographie, said: “We were told that if they missed or would forsake these caves, possibly they build again... The white March and the black kind in May... They have time to hatch their eggs... When the nests are not disturbed, ones the following year... It may descend from their frail swaying ladders.” (Wanderings Among South S
an inner- and an outer-Indonesia. This is useful, but in that division, Borneo is "outer." See: Merle Calvin Ricklefs, A History of Modern Indonesia ca. 1300 to the Present (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

29 Author unknown, "Borneo Proper" (from Singapore Chronicle, 1821) in Notices of the Indian Archipelago, p. 2.

30 Edward Owen Rutter, The Fugitives of North Borneo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 62. Rutter (1889–1944) was an English historian, travel writer. He served with the North Borneo Civil Service from 1910 to 1915. After serving in WWI he became a travel writer. Accompanied by his wife, who also took many of the photographs for his books, he traveled around the globe, making extended stops in Borneo, Hong Kong and Japan among other places. He was fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and of the Royal Anthropological Society.

31 Headhunters of Borneo, p. 76.

32 William Henry Furness III, Folklore in Borneo, A Sketch (Wallingford, PA: 1899), p. 25. Furness III (1866–1920) was a US physician and ethnographer. Furness made four expeditions to southeast Asia and Oceania between 1895 and 1901. Artifacts he collected were among the founding collections of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. He returned to the South Pacific in 1903, and spent two months among the Wa'ab people on the island of Yap (Yap), Furness served as curator of the University of Pennsylvania Museum’s general ethnology section, 1903–05.

33 Heidi Munan, Beads of Borneo (Kuala Lumpur: Editions Didier Millet, 2004), p. 34.

34 Charles Hose and William McDougall, The Pagan Tribes of Borneo, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), p. 213. Hose (1863–1929) was an amateur zoologist who, in 1884, took up an administrative position in Sarawak under the second Rajah Sir Charles Brooke. His large collection of ethnographic objects from Borneo was purchased by the British Museum in 1905.

35 Folklore in Borneo, p. 18.


37 Seventeen Years Among the Sea Dayaks of Borneo, p. 238.

38 Seventeen Years Among the Sea Dayaks of Borneo, p. 238.

39 Anton Willem Nieuwenhuis, Quer Durch Borneo, Ergebnisse seiner Reisen in den Jahren 1894, 1896–97 und 1898–1900 (Leiden: Brill, 1904), p. 218–219. Nieuwenhuis (1864–1933) was a Dutch explorer and medical officer who traveled extensively in central Borneo in the 1890s, recording ethnographic information about the Dayak and making biological collections. He participated in three major expeditions to parts of Borneo not then under Dutch control, the first of which took place under the leadership of Professor Gustaf Adolf Frederik Molengraaff in 1893–94. He then became the first European to cross Borneo from Pontianak to Santarinda in 1896–97. His third expedition took place in 1898–1900. In 1904, Nieuwenhuis was appointed professor of geography and ethnology at Leiden University and became the editor of the journal Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie.

40 The relationship between man and bird was pointed out to Walker by the locals. "We were told that if they missed one season's nest collecting, most of the birds would forsake these caves, possibly because there would be so little room for them to build again . . . The white kind [of nest] build their first nests about March, and the black kind in May, and, as these nests are all collected before they have time to hatch their eggs, there are no young birds till later in the year, when the nests are not disturbed, but the old nests are collected with the new ones the following year . . . It made one quite giddy even to watch the men descending these frail swaying ladders with over five hundred feet of space below them" (Wanderings Among South Sea Savages, p. 231–242).
41 The classification of the Borneo people is complex given the amount of interconnection. The usually accepted modern-day classification differentiates between the Malays, the Dayak, the Punan-Penan and the Chinese. The Malays are descendants from the shore-based non-Borneo communities that derived from southeast Asia. Many of these, of course, have long-standing relations to the Dayak and other upriver communities. The Dayak is a collective term for many of the ethnic groups living near the coast or along the rivers. There are probably about three hundred separate tribes still today. The Punan-Penan are mostly forest tribes. They are usually defined as “migratory,” but this is rather misleading term, since they do not migrate, but circulate within their various areas. This paper can make no contribution to the ethnographic question. It is safe to say, however, that the shore-based trading communities consisted of what we today would call Malys. Their interconnections to the Dayak are foundational in Nggaju representation in their death posts, which portray important figures in the community, some of which have Chinese, Malay or even European features. See: Philip Goldman, *The Divine Gifts, Dayak Sculpture from Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo* (London: Gallery 43, 1975) p. 28-29. The early history of Borneo's population is not known with any certainty. Clearly Borneo was part of the great Polynesian expansion and so its shore communities were from the start tied into the other islands, especially when it came to ceremonial trade. A rock shelter habitation on the east coast of Borneo dated to from 1000 and 300 BCE contained, for example, obsidian from New Britain in western Melanesia, 1,500 miles to the east. This is one of any number of tangible evidences that point to a robust exchange of goods already before the first contact through Indianization. See: Nicholas Tarling, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 128.

42 An elaborate set of customs and rules regulated the behavior of the ranks to one another and most other aspects of social life. However, no single elder was superior to the others, though he might have special knowledge or skill that fitted him for a particular task. A village might consist of several such longhouses. It is clear that Brunei, from images and descriptions consisted of dozens or more of these houses. It is not too hard to see how Funan or Java early arrivals could set up camp and integrate themselves into such a community, where one or the other “longhouse” group begins to dominate at a particular location. There are, however, limits to a longhouse's social elevation, and it was not really until the arrival of the Chinese that we see a more extensive lengthening of the relationships between high and low. See: H. Stephen Morris, “Shamanism Among the Oya Melaneus,” *The Seen and the Unseen: Shamanism, Mediumship and Possession in Borneo*, Edited by Robert L. Winzeler (Williamsburg: Department of Anthropology at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, Borneo Research Council, 1993), p. 102-103.


44 Henry Ling Roth and Hugh Brooke Low, *The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo* (London: Trowthve & Hanson, 1896), p. 246, 249.

45 Author unknown, “Memoir on the Residency of the North-West Coast of Borneo,” (from Singapore Chronicle, 1827) in *Notices of the Indian Archipelago*, p. 10.

46 According to reports from the early 19th century, Malays and Bugis ships moved between Borneo and Singapore, each ship carrying between 40 and 60 men, with 15 to 20 of these vessels making two voyages in the course of a year. They carried pearls, bird’s nests, wax and sandphor. The value of the goods was between 60,000 and 70,000 Spanish dollars. A similar sized group from a different river
traded primarily in gold and gold dust and yet another group exported diamonds, tin and rattan. Author unknown, "Trade with the West Coast of Borneo," (from Singapore Chronicle, 1829) in Notices of the Indian Archipelago, p. 13.
49 www.asianart.com/phpforum/index.php?method=detailAll&Id=95006&PHPSESSID=pi7a6f6d98ocbemil6ejcpl370
50 They are named after the Port of Martaban, in the ancient kingdom of Pegu and current Myanmar. They probably acquired the name however, from the Spanish and Portuguese who used the jars and picked them up there. The specific places of production and origin of these jars in south China and the chronology of its development is still unknown. Some authorities believe that "Martaban" wares, custom made for export, originated as early as the Tang dynasty; other experts think that they started to be made during the Song period.
52 William Robert Geddes, Nine Dayak Nights (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 43. See also: M. Geiger-Ho, "Vessels of Life and Death: Heirloom Jars of Borneo," Malaysia-Brunei Forum Proceedings (2014), p. 49–56: The Manunggu Jar, uncovered in a cave in the Philippines and dated to the eighth century BCE, added some light to the question of dating. It is a secondary burial jar that has on top of the lid the representation of a boat with two human figures paddling. The question before us is simply when might the jar have become an important part of Borneo's spirit world. The answer technically is that we have no way of knowing. But Palawan Island, where the jar was discovered, is just to the north of Borneo and basically an extension of its northern coast. This means that such jars could have entered Borneo along the coast of the Philippines. This suggests that jars had currency in Borneo before the Song Dynasty, though they were at the time still quite rare and might not have been more common until much later. Though almost all upper-class communities used jars in their longhouses, and in burial rituals, not all used them for bodies. In some places, the corpse was placed in a log coffin. In other places the body of the longhouse elder was placed in specially elevated platforms. During the Song Dynasty, jars became more democratized, so to speak. Every longhouse had to have one, meaning that every longhouse participated to some degree in the extractational economy.
54 The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo, p. 283.
55 The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo, p. 286.
56 Hedi Munan, "Lun Bawang Beads," BEADS: Journal of the Society of Bead Researchers 5 (1993), p. 45–60. Already in the centuries BCE, there were exchanges between Borneo and the Sa Huyuh culture (1000 BCE and 200 CE) in southern Vietnam. Ritual beads found in Vietnam were made from glass, carnelian, agate, olivine, zircon, gold and garnet, and since most of these materials were not local to the region, they were most likely imported from India. This means, of course, the presence of a gift and trade economy. The Sa Huyuh culture also used jars as burial containers, much like some of the Dayak. This begs the question of cross-cultural borrowings.
57 Folklore in Borneo, p. 26–27.
There could have been other sources, but I am following the lead here from Wicks, who notes that the Nanhsao Culture treated salt as a measure of value. It was produced in the form of cakes otherwise it was valueless, much like in Borneo. Robert S. Wicks, Money, Markets, and Trade in Early Southeast Asia: The Development of Indigenous Monetary Systems to AD 1400 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 307.


The Natives of Sarawak, p. 232.

In one case, an English traveler visited a longhouse and was pleased to find that his presence took precedence over a Chinese trader. “A Chinese trader was in the house, and he, too, wanted men the next day [to help him go to the next longhouse]; but on his hinting this to the Orang Kaya, he was sternly told that a white man’s business was now being discussed, and he must wait another day before his could be thought about,” as quoted in: A. R. Wallace, The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang Outans and the Bird of Paradise (1869).

The trade more or less remained identical even with the arrival of the English. Keppel lists the items that he would like to get from Singapore to trade with the Dayak. They include salt, cotton, brass wire and iron pans, cloth, Chinese crockery, Java tobacco, candy, biscuits and “little things” such as Venetian beads. In exchange, he planned to get timber, rataan bird’s nests, gold, tin and bees wax. The Expedition to Borneo of H. M. S. Dido, p. 75.


J. A. Davidson, Borneo, p. 256.

J. A. Davidson, Borneo, p. 256.


Folklore in Borneo, p. 22.


The Seen and the Unseen, p. 123-126.

Odoardo Beccari, Wanderings in the Great Forest of Borneo [Nelle Foreste di Borneo. Viaggi e ricerche di un naturalista] (Florence: S. Landi, 1902), Translated by Enrico H. Giglioli (London: Archibald Constable, 1904), p. 272, 274. “The camphor hunters must only talk of women and erotic subjects; they must wear no article of dress besides the jaw at. The friok—the vessel for cooking rice—must not be used; and they must not indulge either in siri or tobacco. This is saying a good deal, for the Kayans, like the Dyaks, prefer going without rice to depriving themselves of tobacco.” Beccari (1843–1920) was an Italian naturalist who spent thirteen years from 1865 to 1878 undertaking research in Borneo, Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea.


Benett Bronson, “Exchange at the Upstream and Downstream Ends, Notes Toward a Functional Model of the Coastal State in Southeast Asia,” Economic Exchange and Social Interaction in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from Prehistory,
The river effect in Borneo’s spirit world


“Exchange at the Upstream and Downstream Ends,” p. 46.


www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuVvE6mkA. From the 18th century onward, gold was mined in more methodical ways, the evidence of large amounts of gold from southeast Asia in the literary accounts, makes it clear that panning though leaving no archaeological trace was not an insignificant activity.

Tom Harrison, Gold and Megalithic Activity in Prehistoric and Recent West Borneo (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1970), p. 27.

Alfred Hart Everett, “Notes on the Distribution of the Useful Minerals in Sarawak.” Journal South Asian Society, 1 (1878), p. 19. In 1869, Everett went to Sarawak in northwestern Borneo to collect natural history specimens. He eventually entered the service of the Kingdom of Sarawak under the White Rajahs. In 1878 and 1879 he was engaged by the Royal Society to search for the remains of ancient man. In 1885, he was appointed the Rajah’s Consul to the Court of the Sultan of Brunei. He later served in the administration of the British North Borneo Company.

The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo, p. 232.

The Natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo, p. 284.


This was authored by George Coyayne, of the East India Company in 1617, See: William Foster, Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East, Vol V – 1617 (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, 1901), p. 203.

The Natives of Sarawak, p. 286.

The Expedition to Borneo of H. M. S. Dido, p. 370.


Wanderings in the Great Forest of Borneo, p. 283. Nipa is a palm that grows in salt marshes. Salt is extracted from its leaves by burning them.

Folklore in Borneo, p. 17–18.

Wolters discusses how heirloom possessions are placed into new cultural “wholes” as a process of “localization.” See: Oliver William Wolters, History,
Mark Jarzombek

Culture, and Religion in Southeast Asian Perspectives (Singapore and Ithaca, NY: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1999), p. 55, 173-244. My point is that the spirit world has to be understood as more than just the end station of local burial and ritual custom.

96 Nicholas Tarling does an excellent job describing the parameters of the trade involving “hunter gatherers who exchanged their forest products...and services with lowland rice cultivators...Coastal-based traders returned goods of foreign origin or specialized services...to the hinterland producers” (The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Vol. 1, p. 190). This seems to imply that all people like to trade for more or less the same purposes. My argument is that just as the states needed to solve technical and political questions about ocean navigation, they had to solve equally thorny questions about forest extraction.


98 Studies in Southeast Asian Art, p. 238.


100 The transition from chieftain to statehood is brilliantly described by Nicholas Tarling in his study of Palembang and the Srivijaya Empire in its dealings with upriver and down shore communities. The Palembang elites had to play an increasingly complex game as their power expanded. Forest communities had elaborate cultural rhythms and ritual expectations that needed to be dealt with through a tangle of marriages, loyalty oaths, taboos and promises of riches. Buddhism and Hinduism with their inbuilt theocentric imaginaries played their various roles. Occasionally, enforcement was required. Then there were down shore communities who would prey on arriving ships. Palembang’s solution was in essence to buy the pirates out. With promises of a piece of the profit, the pirates become Srivijaya’s enforcers protecting the waters and protecting Srivijaya ships. At the core of this activity was an extensive and ostentatious palace culture and an emerging bureaucracy and theocentric expectations. See Sulu and Sabah: a study of British policy towards the Philippines and North Borneo from the late eighteenth century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); The State, Development and Identity in Multi-ethnic Societies: Ethnicity, Equity and the Nation (London: Routledge, 2010)

101 According to Roger Scott, the soil on Java is formed from fresh, nutrient-rich volcanic rock. The soils on Borneo are from the weathering of intrusive granitic rock, gabbro intrusions, and andesitic lavas, and are poor in nutrients. http://slideplayer.com/slide/5702509/


103 Ritual violence was a small but accepted part of Dayak life. The greater the imbalances, the greater the waves of secondary violence that move through the communities. When the English arrived they only added to a century-long history of tribal conflict. Needless to say, they systematically failed to recognize this. So when they replaced Dayak canoes with motorized steamers to make extraction more efficient, it was only natural that they encounter Dayak resistance, which they put down with cannons and guns while complaining about their own among “the savages.” Nothing is a better testament to the white man’s civilization arrogance than Walker’s Wanderings Among South Sea Savages.
The river effect in Borneo's spirit world  113

105 Money, Markets, and Trade in Early Southeast Asia, p. 302.
106 "Indeed the latter [gold] is only sought for as a means of procuring foreign articles for which they acquired a taste" (The Natives of Sarawak, p. 234).
109 Another important center was Santubong on a bay north of Kuching, closer to gold extraction sites.
111 Marshall Sahlins, “Notes on the Original Affluent Society,” Man the Hunter, Edited by R.B. Lee and I. DeVore (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1986), p. 85–89. It now seems that one should not equate affluence with a higher mortality rate. It is also important to identify those ecological niches that are more diverse than others. Certainly, Borneo falls into that group.
114 At the end of the 19th century, rattan “was piled high on enormous rafts measuring 300 or 400 feet long and 60 or 70 feet wide... gliding slowly down the stream, like a floating fortress” (Headhunters of Borneo, p. 203).
115 Admittedly, in some places such cultures were effectively subsumed into the Indianized world, as in Sri Lanka, but the further east we move, the less “complete” the integration is. In Java, Vietnam and elsewhere, for example, pockets of village worlds exist even today that could not be readily defined as Indianized. How their relationship with the downstream palace elites was organized is still largely unknown in most places. The situation is even murkier on Borneo, where we are dealing with a range of forest societies, sometimes called “nomadic”—but forever associated with the word “headhunters”—as well as a range of shore-based societies and sea-oriented cultures, all of which were living in a complex network of upstream and downstream exchanges.
116 The Expedition to Borneo of H. M. S. Dido, p. 191.
117 Rodney Mundy, Narrative of Events in Borneo and Celebe, Down to the Occupation of Labuan, Vol. 2. (London: John Murray, 1848), p. 219. Mundy, a much-decorated captain and admiral in Royal Navy, was deployed to the East Indies Station and was asked to keep the Sultan of Brunei in line until the British Government made a final decision on whether to take the island of Labuan.
119 Bernard Sellato, innermost Borneo: Studies in Dayak Cultures (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2002), p. 13. Local memory of the time when the
region figured more prominently in regional affairs is, however, not completely gone as some contemporary ethnographers have noted. The Banana Tree at the Gate, p. 267–268, see endnote 41. Michael Dove, The Banana Tree at the Gate: A History of Marginal Peopless and Global Markets in Borneo (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011). Dove studied how contemporary Dayak farmers have developed a hybrid production environment around such non-monetized cultivations that a strong relationship with the ritual and cosmological order and these cash-crop cultivation systems that focus on generating revenue and are intended for the short-term maximization of profit. Rubber resin, pepper and cloves, for example, are considered to be “ritually neutral” because they are quickly harvested, contrary to swidden production that includes rituals during cultivation. He points out that in Borneo the two are complementary realities. Dove focuses on the cash-crop system of cultivation since the state has an interest in regulating and controlling market-oriented cultivation, such as planting, spacing, weeding and the tapping schedules of rubber. To make smallholder’s activities visible and compliant, the state created “nucleus estates,” such as Perkebunan Jiwi Rakyat (PIR, People’s Nucleus Estate), that not only ensured the dependence of the smallholders on the state, but also standardized the authority of the state’s regime of knowledge, a regime that determines rules and controls knowledge produced by the state apparatus.