

studies. One of the notable contributions of this book is that the author gives diverse opinions the individual Iban shamans and laymen offer concerning those unseen beings, and that he does not make an over-systemization of this diversity. As such, this book plays a real encyclopedic role in the scholarship of this field.

The source material of this book is almost exclusively from the lower Saribas-Krian region. It may be of some interest, therefore, to offer here a somewhat different opinion the Skrang Iban would give to one conceptual set, among others, given in this book. The Skrang Iban, especially elder ones, would classify the deities or gods, called *petara*, as a sub-category of the spiritual beings (*antu*) in general, rather than make a clear contrast between the two (86). The contrastive opposition between the benevolent and the harmful to humans is a matter of degree or emerges only as a situational one. As the most dreadful *antu* (*gerasi*) may assist shamanic calling, as is given in this book, the usually benevolent gods may turn out to be troublesome or even harmful for humans if the mutual relationships are not maintained well in ritual services or in response to mysterious encounters in dreams. This may serve as another example of diversity of the views that the Iban would have towards the beings of ambiguous nature in their unseen world.

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SELLATO, BERNARD. *Innermost Borneo: Studies in Dayak Cultures*. Paris: SevenOrient/Singapore: Singapore University Press. 221 pages. Maps, tables, b/w photographs, references. Paper €24.00/S\$42.00; ISBN 2-914936-02-8.

Bernard Sellato, the author of this book, is Director of the Institute for Research on Southeast Asia (IRSEA), University of Provence; a member of CNRS, the French National Science Research Center, and editor of the Southeast Asian studies journal *Moussons*. As he tells us in his introduction to *Innermost Borneo*, he first came to the island in 1973. At the time, working as a uranium geologist, he came to know well the Aoheng and neighboring tribal peoples of the remote Müller Range, where he was then engaged in geological mapping. Eventually, after living for two years with the Aoheng, a community of forest farmers inhabiting the headwaters of the Mahakam and Kapuas Rivers, he abandoned geology for anthropology, receiving his doctorate from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in 1987. Today, he is the undisputed authority on the smaller Dayak groups of the central Borneo interior, including not only farming communities like the Aoheng, but also a variety of rainforest hunter-gatherers.

*Innermost Borneo* comprises thirteen chapters, most of them previously published as articles or book chapters, but also including five previously unpublished essays. Additionally, many of the published papers originally appeared in French and are translated here for the first time into English by the author himself, including two major essays, "Social Organization in Borneo: A General Overview" and "How Tribes Come into Being." The latter, which was originally published in 1992 as *Rituel, politique, organisation sociale et ethnogenèses: les Aoheng de Bornéo*, deftly combines a micro-sociological analysis of ritual, politics, and society with insights from history and comparative linguistics in one of the finest examples of anthropological writing in the Borneo literature. The publishers are to be commended for bringing together this significant, but scattered, body of scholarly work in one readily accessible volume.

Despite being written over a period of twenty years and treating a variety of topics, the collection hangs together remarkably well. First, the focus is clearly interior Borneo and, in

the author's words, the "small tribal minorities living in [this] most remote nook of the Borneo hinterlands" (13). Its object, as set out in the introduction, is "to provide the reader with a few keys to a better understanding of traditional life in one of our planet's last isolated spots" (14). At the same time, Sellato relates, one of the things he learned in living with the Aoheng is that they "were just regular people, in no way different from the average French person," and so a further object of the book is "to make the Aoheng and their neighbors appear less foreign, less 'exotic,' and more familiar" to its readers. Also contributing to the book's coherence is a brief, but engaging introduction. Here, Sellato draws out some threads that he sees as connecting the essays and the logic behind their arrangement. He also reflects, although in a much more cursory way, on the changes that are now transforming interior Borneo and how, in some cases, his own thinking has moved beyond the ideas expressed in some of the earlier essays that are republished here.

The book begins with an account of the earliest European explorations of central Borneo, particularly those of Anton Nieuwenhuis at the turn of the twentieth century. This account originally appeared as the author's introduction to an abridged Indonesian translation of Nieuwenhuis's classic *In Centraal Borneo* and is here appropriately re-entitled "The First Written Sources." This is followed by two introductory chapters, the first describing the upper Kapuas region, the second the upper Mahakam. While providing necessary background, both chapters warrant an update in view of the massive destruction of the rainforest, road building, and population displacements that have occurred since they were first written. In fairness, Sellato addresses some of these changes head on in the next chapter, "Forest Economics: The Dayaks and their Natural Resources." Here he examines the experiences of two interior communities, the Aoheng and Punan Tabang, in their encounter with government agents of change intent on imposing governmental control, settling them down, and appropriating their resources. In a postscript, Sellato acknowledges his own increasing doubts about his earlier assumption that traditional cultures are necessarily good custodians of the natural environment. Here, it must be added, however, that customary conservation practices are now under pressures unimaginable even twenty years ago.

The next two chapters deal with social organization and are substantial contributions. The first, "Social Organization in Borneo," explores the applicability of Lévi-Strauss's concept of "societies of the house," proposing, instead, a four-fold typology of Bornean societies. The second is similarly comparative in scope, but addresses a much narrower topic, looking at kinship terminology among nomadic groups in Borneo and correlating a nomadic way of life with utrolocal residence and a complex pattern of sibling-in-law terminologies. The chapter that follows, Chapter Seven, "Reconstructing Borneo's Culture History," examines a variety of hypotheses that have been advanced to account for the origin of hunter-gatherers in Borneo, taking issue in particular with revisionist, and especially devolutionary, explanations. Sellato argues, instead, for the ancient colonization of the interior of Borneo by Austronesian-speaking foragers and horticulturalists, before the use of metal made possible the opening of the rainforest to extensive swidden rice cultivation. Chapter Eight, "History and Myth among Borneo People," examines a legend recorded in writing by a Bukat leader to demonstrate the way in which identities are constructed from oral historical traditions and how these traditions may be manipulated to create a group image that a community wishes to project to the outside world.

Chapter Nine, already alluded to, is an exemplary work of ethnohistorical analysis, exploring the interconnections of ritual, politics, and ethnogenesis among the Aoheng, a group that came into being only during the last two hundred years through a coalescence of hunter-gathering and farming groups. The last four chapters, all but one of them previously unpublished, comprise a group which Sellato himself describes in his introduction as

“sketchy.” As such, they form a nice balance to the much longer, more densely argued papers that immediately precede them and deal briefly with questions of gender, sacrifice, genres of Aoheng oral tradition, and, finally, Aoheng geological taxonomies and notions relating to stones, their uses and cultural significance.

*Innermost Borneo* is an important volume, bringing together twenty years of writing by a distinguished anthropologist, and deserves to be viewed as essential reading for all Borneo specialists and others concerned with upland minority peoples in Southeast Asia. Although, regrettably lacking an index, the book is otherwise enhanced by a wealth of maps, figures, and by forty-one black-and-white photos. In his introduction, Sellato tells us that he began his fieldwork among the Aoheng by being interested in everything. “I worked,” he writes, “on language, ritual, history, social organization, oral literature, and more” (14). That he did so, taking the time to inquire deeply and at length into so many diverse facets of Aoheng life has since served him well and is richly apparent in this collection in the close attention he gives to ethnographic detail and cultural interconnections. “Later on,” he continues,

I focused on the modalities of interaction between society and the environment, and the customary institutions controlling the access to and management of land.... Through time, I became increasingly involved in investigations in ethnohistory and comparative linguistics, in an attempt to reconstruct Borneo’s culture history.

In the same way, these interests, too, are amply on display here.

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## INDIA

DUBIANSKI, ALEXANDER M. *Ritual and Mythological Sources of the Early Tamil Poetry*. Gonda Indological Studies, Volume VIII. Groningen, The Netherlands: Egbert Forsten Publishing, 2000. xxi + 224 pages. Tables, bibliography, glossary of plant names, indexes. Paper Dfl. 100; ISBN 90 6980 1108.

There are not too many books on the Tamil literary shelf that make an in-depth study pertaining to the ritual and mythological sources of the poetry. The present work is a distinctive contribution towards this direction. The author is concerned with the study of the problem of Tamil poetic tradition and tries his best to trace out the ritual and mythological features which served as the sources for the early Tamil poetry.

The work consists of four chapters, namely, Mythological Background, Ancient Tamil Poetic Tradition and Its Creators, The Love Situations and the Heroes—Ritual and Mythological Sources, and The Poetical Canon and Folklore. His remark that through a literary source, that is, Ancient Tamil poetry, a more or less comprehensive picture of the social, material, and spiritual culture of the Tamils can be construed is certainly true. Literary sources still serve as the framework and the authentic foundation upon which the multifarious ingredients of Tamil culture are constructed.

The “energy concept” discussed by the author is one such framework whereby the seeds of its genesis are well discernible in the “Mother goddess” worship that prevailed in the Indus Valley culture. This presages its close links with the continuity of the Tamil cultural milieu.