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Ancestors in Borneo Societies: Death, Transformation and Social Immortality. Edited by Pascal Couderc and Kenneth Sillander. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012. 390 pp.

Ancestors in Borneo Societies is a collection of essays that attempts to develop and redefine the study of ancestors in Borneo studies. Among anthropologists, this region is associated with the pioneering work of Robert Hertz on secondary mortuary rituals (Hertz [1907] 1960) and the practice of headhunting (Hoskins 1996). Although reforming the established scholarship of *The Dark Side of Humanity* (Parkin 1996) was an ambitious goal, Courdec and Sillander have brought together a comprehensive collection of papers framed by an original analytical concept — ancestorship.

The book is composed of an introduction and eight chapters. Except for Oesterheld's thematic discussion of the role of ancestors in the Dayak-Madurese conflict, each essay focuses on a single people. Their foci ranging from East Kalimantan to the southern part of Malaysian Borneo, the contributors provide rich ethnographic accounts collected among the Bentian, Benuaq, Uut Danum, Gerai, Iban and Melanau groups. The book also contains noteworthy illustrations and a detailed map for those unfamiliar with the region. A welcome addition would have been a glossary of indigenous terms and their etymology.

The originality of this volume lies in its introduction to the analytical concept of ancestorship. In their attempt to bring ancestors back *au goût du jour*, Courdec's and Sillander's introduction reviews the classic studies of Fortes and Radcliff-Brown, amongst others. They argue that the focus on the posthumous treatment of the remains and the spirits of lineal forebears greatly limits our understanding of the nature and roles of ancestors in society. Rejecting lineage or descent as the basis for their classification, Courdec and Sillander suggest that any person of the past having a positive influence on society through symbolic representation may be considered an ancestor. These include mythological figures, animal spirits, local divinities and worshipped or revered forebears. They propose that

the resulting relationships between ancestors and the living should be referred to as “ancestralship” rather than “ancestor worship” or “reverence” (p. 6). Although they acknowledge that most languages of Borneo have no direct equivalent for the word “ancestor”, this broad definition of ancestralship allows the authors to reconsider Sellato’s contention that “the cult of the ancestors” is rare in that region (Sellato 2002).

One of the recurrent themes discussed is the potency and authority of ancestors. For instance, Sillander’s discussion of the Bentian’s rituals and myths of origin notes that the enshrinement of some skulls does not constitute a form of worship but rather a materialization of the potency (*naiyu*) held in part by the ancestors. In the context of the Dayak-Madurese conflict, Oesterheld explains that the invocations made by Dayak warriors are a way of calling upon the magical powers and presence of ancestors during battle. He argues that common or mythological figures also provide a sense of solidarity and of “pan-Dayak” identity (p. 286).

Presenting a very different form of ancestralship, the chapter by Helliwell examines the case of the Dayak community of Gerai, whose members reportedly give very little importance to ancestors per se. Instead, she finds that ancestralship is omnipresent through inherited hearths containing symbolic relics. Each hearth represents the affiliation and customs of a group and constitutes a “hearth descent line” (p. 356).

Another analytical issue is the transformation of an individual spirit into an ancestor. Most of the contributors find that this process is not solely, if at all, dependent on mortuary rites. For example, Sather tells us that among the Sarabas Iban, most spirits become ancestors during the house-building ritual (*Gawai Antu*). For the Uut Danum, Courdec reports that becoming an ancestor is often attributed to breaking taboos or “trespassing a spirit domain” (p. 171). Another recognized phenomenon is metamorphosis. Drawing on her discussion of current theories about animism, Béguet finds that instances of metamorphosis among the Iban — death being only one of them — constitute the transformation necessary to secure the vital force, *semengat*.

Bringing these main analytical concepts into life, this volume details a multiplicity of circumstances in which each category of ancestors may manifest its potency or power. They may form the backbone of a society's identity through taboos, customs and mortuary rites, as shown by Appleton's chapter on the Melanau of Sarawak. Ancestors may also deliver the vitality necessary for the (re)generation of life within a community. Sillander and Béguet show that among the Bentian and the Iban, spirits are thought eventually to become the dew that nurtures plants and rice. Finally, the benevolence of ancestors may be called upon to assist with everyday concerns such as illness, personal achievements and well-being.

Putting aside its unmistakable ethnographic and theoretical contribution, a possible shortcoming of this volume is a rather insulated and static approach to ancestorship. With the exceptions of Oosterheld's and Payne's chapters, there is too little consideration of the ways in which it relates to historical and social change. Moreover, one might question whether ancestors constitute a permanent and stable category or status. In Japan, for instance, an ancestral spirit that ceases to receive the appropriate ritual care reverts to being an unattached spirit (*muenbotoke*), no longer benevolent but instead dangerous to the living (Boret 2014). Indeed, the editors did not integrate Japan, a well-known case of an ancestor-based society, into their comparative analysis. As Payne himself mentions, Japanese people have a specific term for ancestors (*senzo*) but often call upon the power of other divinities (*kami*) for the benefit of an individual or a community (see also Smith 1974). Many of these *kami* were once ancestors, before being incorporated into the pantheon of protective deities of a group or, sometimes, of the entire nation.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, *Ancestors in Borneo Societies* is certainly a most resourceful contribution, one that invites a serious consideration of the concept of ancestorship in the anthropology of death.

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Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia: Women's Rights Movements, Religious Resurgence and Local Traditions. Edited by Susanne Schröter. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013. 335 pp.

"It is no secret that religion and state 'conspire' against women." These words open Siti Musdah Mulia's chapter (p. 111) in *Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia*. However, to what extent does Mulia's view describe the fate of Muslim women in Southeast Asia today? Historically, Muslim men in Southeast Asia have been seen as treating their women more respectfully than men in other Islamic societies. In sixteenth-century Aceh, for instance, women served as heads of state (*Sultanah*). In 2001, a Muslim woman, Megawati Sukarnoputri, was elected president of Indonesia, the largest Islamic country in the world. On the other hand, the global Islamic revivalism that affected Southeast Asia throughout the 1970s and 1980s witnessed the strengthening of patriarchal discourses. State-sponsored campaigns promoting the "ideal" family from the "Islamic" perspective entrenched essentialist arguments that men are the protectors of