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Borneo in Fragments: Geology, Biota, and Contraband in Trans-national Circuits

Eric **Tagliacozzo**

Abstract

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Borneo – supposedly one of the most isolated islands on the planet – became a trans-national site of growing importance. Instead of being imagined as a site of endless forests, inaccessible mountains, and undisturbed nature, Borneo became a place to extract and move objects, many of them spinning off into international circuits. The British and Dutch, who became the dual colonial overlords of the island, became the primary actors in facilitating these movements. Yet Asian actors – such as the Chinese, Malays, and various Dayak peoples – also were heavily involved in these transits. The first part of this essay looks at the role of geology and minerals in effecting these transitions. The second part of the paper examines the movement of biota, especially vis-a-vis *Chinese networks, in connecting Borneo to other shores. Finally, the third part of the essay looks at contraband cargoes of diverse origins in also facilitating these connections. I argue that far from being an isolated and 'off-the-beaten-track' locale, Borneo became central to new ideas of trans-national connection in Southeast Asia, linking people, commodities, and trade circuits into an ever-tightening embrace.*

KEYWORDS: Borneo, geology, biota, contraband, trans-national circuits.

Introduction

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Borneo – supposedly one of the most isolated islands on the planet – became a trans-national site of growing importance in Southeast Asia. Instead of being imagined as a site of endless forests, inaccessible mountains, and undisturbed nature, Borneo became a place to extract and move objects, many of them spinning off into international circuits. The British and Dutch, who became the dual colonial overlords of the island, became the primary actors in facilitating these movements. Yet Asian actors – such as the Chinese, Malays, and various Dayak peoples of the interior – also were heavily involved in these transits. The movement of objects in and around Borneo was by no means new; these circuits had been going on for centuries, in fact. Yet after the mid-point of the nineteenth century these circulations speeded up considerably, with more and more 'things' – including nature, commodities, and even transited human beings – moving in wider and wider orbits.

Eric Tagliacozzo, History Department, Cornell University; et54@cornell.edu.

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Borneo became a blur of motion in these decades leading up to the turn of the twentieth century, with significant quantities of materiel pushing out from its shores. In conception as well as in reality, there was no longer a *modus operandi* of categorising the island as 'marginal' to the currents of history and human interaction in any viable way.

The present essay examines this 'quickening' of Borneo's material life in motion through several inter-related sub-themes. The first part of the paper looks at the role of geology and minerals in effecting these transitions. Borneo was quickly identified from the mid-nineteenth century as a source for many of the world's most desired minerals, and the search for these commodities brought many of the island's geologic riches into the emerging trans-global economy. The second part of the essay examines the movement of Borneo's biota, especially *vis-a-vis* Chinese networks, in connecting this huge island to other shores. Various flora and biota, as opposed to subterranean minerals, also became increasingly important in linking Borneo to wider arenas of exchange. Finally, the third part of the article looks at contraband cargoes of diverse origins, and their part in also facilitating these connections. As all of this movement became more and more important to the island's economic life, an increasingly vital sub-set of goods were being traded illegally, and outside the ambit of controlling colonial authorities. I argue that far from being an isolated and 'off-the-beaten-track' locale, as it has been described by outsiders for centuries,[1] Borneo became central to new ideas of trans-national connection in Southeast Asia, linking people, commodities, and trade circuits into an ever-tightening embrace. This process happened earlier than the 1850s, but it was from this time forward that 'Borneo's fragments' took on a truly regional importance.

Emerging Patterns

Despite this sense of isolation, the history of Borneo's commerce and relations with other lands stretches far back into antiquity. The Chinese Buddhist monk Fa Hsien was one of the first travellers whom we know visited the region, describing Buddhist communities in South Sumatra in the first millennium AD; he is also perhaps the first recorded Chinese to touch down in Borneo, based on trans-literations of early toponyms (see especially Wheatley 1961: 37–41, 108). However, it was later, in the Sung Dynasty (AD 960–1279) that Chinese maritime trade with places like Borneo expanded to become an important industry in China proper. Chau Ju Kua, Superintendent of Trade in Chuanzhou, wrote in his *Chu Fan Chi* (AD 1225) that many tropical products (such as sandalwood

[1]Because of the almost completely forest-covered nature of the island and its lack of urban complexes of any size, these descriptions go back to some of the earliest European explorers of Southeast Asia in the sixteenth century. See Victor Savage (1984) *Western Impressions of Nature and Landscape in Southeast Asia*.

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and gaharu wood) were coming directly from Borneo (Nicholl 1989: 8) Chinese traders heading down to Borneo and Southeast Asia in general to barter for these products in fact helped to stimulate a maritime 'Golden Age' for overseas Chinese shipping. By the middle of the Sung period, junks could carry up to 600 tons of cargo and several hundred merchants and crew in voyages down to Southeast Asia. This was accomplished in ships over 100 feet long, with beams and depths running 30 feet at the widest points (Kwan and Martin 1985: 52; Manguin 1980: 266–276; Mills 1970). From archaeological and other work completed along the Borneo coasts in the last forty years, a complex picture is gradually emerging of how these earliest contacts with Chinese commerce distributed people up and down the coasts of the island.

How did all of this traffic move between Borneo and the Sinicized, developing world of trade to the north? There appear to have been several options on how to travel between Borneo and this burgeoning sea of activity starting to look south toward the island. Two routes along the *Jiao-Guang* ('Eastern Sea Route') could take a trading junk to Borneo in search of the predominantly natural products of the region (Wong 1984: 201). Both left China with the northeastern monsoon in the dead of winter, with the first plying south along the coasts of the Southeast Asian mainland and returning up through Borneo, the Philippines, and Taiwan (Purcell 1965: 18). The other alternative, which Mills transcribed from the *Wu-pei-chih* charts, followed a direct path across the South China Sea in the inverse direction, calling at Luzon, Mindoro, the Visayas, and Sulu before branching down to the northern extremities of Borneo (Mills 1973: 19; see also Ptak (1999). In either case, junks seemed to depend less on charts than on *portolans* or rutters (sailing directions), with the ones published during the fourteenth and fifteenth-centuries about the northwest coasts of Borneo giving extremely detailed references (Mills 1974: 42–51; Brown 1978: 46–58).

A new factor was added to the trans-regional trade with Borneo in the sixteenth century, one that signalled a change in older commercial relationships and the start of new systems that were part of a complicated new world. European ships began to arrive in Southeast Asia, at first only a few Portuguese *caravels* at a time, but later the representatives, traders, and explorers of a variety of maritime nations, such as Spain, the Netherlands, and England. Coercive mercantile tactics were eventually initiated by all of these powers, as each attempted to shift trade to benefit their own distant treasuries. Many Southeast Asian polities which had formerly shipped tribute to other Asian potentates (usually in the form of natural products) now had to deal with the more aggressive trade policies of various Europeans. This was a gradual shift to be sure, but the general predation, war, and 'piracy' that spread along the maritime routes changed the character of the sea routes. In the case of Borneo and the societies which had traditionally participated in this trade, these changes were to be significant and encompassed the ways in which many Borneans led their everyday lives. In

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fact, by the eighteenth, and then more seriously in the nineteenth centuries, territory started to be claimed by these same European travellers.

In 1763 the British took Balambangan island, off the tip of Northern Borneo, and in 1786 Penang was also annexed, at the northern terminus of the Straits of Melaka. Sir Stamford Raffles' famous acquisition of Singapore in 1819, bisecting these earlier two outposts, begins to show the outline of the arc that would become the Anglo/Dutch boundary throughout insular Southeast Asia. An important treaty in 1824 split the Straits of Melaka for the first time, exchanging British and Dutch territories on either side, but trade and influence across this burgeoning 'frontier of influence' still continued at pace. In the early 1840s, James Brooke, an English adventurer, set up his own petty kingdom in western Borneo; this move was watched carefully by the Dutch in Batavia, with great unease as to its implications. The British Crown took Labuan island, further north off the coast of west Borneo, in the 1840s as well (Low 1848). Finally, in 1871, the two colonial powers came to the treaty table again to delineate their respective spheres. London acknowledged Sumatra as an entirely Dutch preserve, in exchange for guaranteed commercial rights across the newly stiffened maritime boundary. Two years later, the Dutch attacked the Sultanate of Aceh, and subsequently began the process of subjugating the last independent polity of any size along the length of the frontier. A year later, in 1874, the British began their own 'Forward Movement' on the Malay Peninsula, expanding their power and influence into Perak. Borneo, still considered to be the most 'remote' and 'unpacified' of all of these Southeast Asian territories, was gradually colonized by both powers, the English and the Dutch. But a clear demarcation between them was not set up until 1889, and only really started to have some real tensile force (and only in certain places, even then) after the turn of the twentieth century.

Geology and Minerals

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, both the British and the Dutch began to push into the 'unexplored' spaces of Southeast Asia that separated their burgeoning colonial spheres. The last section of the frontier that was targeted for exploration outside of Sumatra and the islands of the South China Sea was the vast forested wilderness of Borneo. Here too, as in Sumatra, initial contacts earlier in the century had already been made. The Dutch presence in Pontianak, west Borneo, for example, went back at least to the eighteenth century (Goor 1986). Yet it was only in the 1870s and early 1880s that the Dutch started to explore inland areas of this region in a systematic fashion. For example, Kater, Gerlach, and Bakker pushed the frontier of Dutch knowledge up the great rivers, and into parts of the lake districts of internal western Borneo (Bakker 1884; Gerlach 1881; Kater 1867), while Dutch residents reached the high

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headwaters of the Mahakam, which eventually emptied out on the eastern half of the island.[2] The pace of exploration and the advancement of Dutch interests into the western half of the island was also the project of J.J.K. Enthoven, whose massive two-volume study (1903), became a landmark work on west Borneo. As with the British carefully translating Dutch expedition accounts in Sumatra, however, Batavia also made sure to keep abreast of English stabs into the periphery on the other side of the Borneo frontier as well. Published accounts of British residents from the interior districts of Sarawak were translated into Dutch very quickly, so that the Dutch had an idea what their erstwhile allies (and competitors) were doing along the border (Enthoven 1903; Perelaer 1881; Senn van Basel 1881).

On the eastern half of the island, the pace of exploration also proceeded quickly, especially in the 1880s and 1890s. Carl Bock's famous journey into the interior of eastern Borneo was one of the first of these expeditions; the Norwegian received Batavia's blessing for the journey, despite the fate of several of his predecessors, who had been murdered when they proceeded inland along the great rivers.[3] The Royal Museum for Ethnology in Leiden sponsored further missions of this nature, and large government subsidies were made available to catalogue flora and fauna in unknown lands in the interior.[4] On the northeastern coast, survey ships like the *Macassar* brought large stretches of the frontier into map form at the turn of the century, outlining coral reefs and stretches of shore where formerly piratical peoples had lived (Medeleelingen op Zeevaartkundig Gebied over Nederlandsch Oost Indie 28 July 1902: 1–12.). Across from the Dutch sphere of influence and in the territories of the British North Borneo Company, the nature of these activities was very similar. The diaries of one of the Company's scientific officers in the 1880s, Frank Hatton, show how difficult expeditions into the unmarked interior really were: armed guards had to stand ready to shoot at crocodiles, while leeches crawled into sleeping men's ears, especially at night. Hatton's descriptions of the rigors of river travel in the interior, especially the forced pulling of equipment-laden craft in the face of fierce currents, show at what price knowledge of the frontier came to the men on these expeditions.[5]

Some of these explorers were more important than others, however, especially in the legacy they left for 'opening up the frontier.' One of the more noteworthy figures in this respect was Professor G.A.F. Molengraff, who led an

[2]See also ANRI, Algemeen Verslag Residentie West Borneo 1890 (#5/21). (See end of paper for abbreviations in footnotes.)

[3]The explorer Muller had been killed inland from Kutei in 1825; in 1844 the Scotsman Erskine Murray was also slain along the Mahakam River, while a Dutch resident in the environs of Kutei had also been killed in the 1860s. See Bock (1881) *The Headhunters of Borneo*.

[4]ARA, 1887, MR #531; ARA, Advies van Directeur van Onderwijs, Eeredienst, en Nijverheid to GGNEI, 18 June 1898, #10028, in ARA, 1898, MR #372.

[5]Frank Hatton's Diary of His Last Expedition Up the Kinabatangan-Segama, Volume 76, 16 Jan to 16 Feb 1883, in CO 874/Boxes 67–77, Resident's Diaries. Public Records Office (London).

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expedition up the Kapuas into the centre of Borneo in 1893/94. Molengraff's company consisted of four scientists, twenty soldiers, and one hundred Kayan porters and guides, all of whom disappeared into the forest canopy for a period of several months. However, the expedition halted short of its intended destination, when Molengraff was warned well into the interior that their party was in danger of attack. Molengraff, his zoologist, botanist, and most of the others all returned to the coast (Molengraaf 1900). Yet the medic of this journey, A. W. Nieuwenhuis, went on to lead several other celebrated expeditions into the interior in the next few years, and was actually the first explorer to cross Borneo from one side to the other. Nieuwenhuis' sojourns were undertaken with far fewer men than Molengraff's, and included no soldiers, which was a pre-condition for their being allowed through. Many of the indigenous peoples of the interior were also impressed with Nieuwenhuis' medical skills, as well as his language abilities, which he used to try to understand the varied people he met. Nevertheless, Nieuwenhuis was a man of his times, and the reason for his journey was not pure science, but also to help establish a Dutch presence in the interior (Indische Mercuur 1901: 63; Tijdschrift voor Aardrijkskundige Genootschap 1902: 414; Nieuwenhuis 1900). Because of this, Dutch residents in Borneo were apprised of his route and journeys by Batavia, and asked to help trouble-shoot problems, so that the expedition could be turned into a patriotic success.[6]

Yet especially after the turn of the twentieth century, one concern drove exploration forward faster and with more energy than any other factor, and this was the search for natural resources. The case of Borneo can be taken as an important example of how much the creation of the frontier owed to state and private interests racing to find ores throughout the entirety of the island. Applied geology drove empire forward in this sense; the geologist's shovel and the explorer's sextant were tools of equal importance in 'opening' up the frontier. On the English side of the divide, this was happening very early: only a few years after the founding of British North Borneo, for example, the Governor of that territory was calling weekly 'Gold Committee' meetings, which involved state officials and several Chinese prospectors.[7] By the turn of the century in the Company's dominions, these informal meetings had given way to coded telegraph correspondences about potential diamond districts, as well as oil and mineral rights agreements being leased to various concerns.[8] In Brunei, which became a British Protectorate, such dealings were even earlier, as the Sultan there cut prospecting

[6]ARA, Resident southeast Borneo to GGNEI, 30 Dec 1893, #7665/22, in 1894, MR #43; ARA, First Government Secretary to Resident west Borneo, 3 Feb 1894, #337, in 1894, MR #141.

[7]'Memorandum on Gold in North Borneo, 30 May 1934' in CO 874/996. This document gives a short history of gold prospecting in North Borneo's territory from the earlier period.

[8]British Borneo Exploration Company, London, to R.W. Clarke, Telegraph, 29 Oct 1908, in CO 874/350; see also the list of consignees in 'Oil and Mineral Rights Agreements, 1905–1920', in CO 874/349.

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deals for antimony and tin with English speculators in the mid-nineteenth century.[9] It was in Sarawak, though, where the greatest amounts of minerals and ores were being found, pulling English officials deeper and deeper into the forest in search of raw materials and their profits. The Resident of Bintulu, Sarawak, a man named A. Hart Everett, gives an idea of the kinds of resources being found in 1878: gold, iron, cobalt, and copper where all being discovered, as well as platinum, cats' eyes, and spinel rubies. Diamonds were also turning up, such as one huge stone of 76 carats that was slipped into Sarawak from across the Dutch border.[10]

Valuable stones and minerals may have leaked over the frontier into the English possessions, but there was no lack of material being found in Dutch West Borneo either. Chinese gold-mining companies, or 'kongsis', had long been active in the area, digging for gold in upriver regions near the Sarawak frontier. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, however, the frequency and quality of resources found in West Borneo began to grow, partially as a result of more sophisticated prospecting techniques (Voute 1901: 116).[11] Coal, for example, was found in Sanggau in 1873, and was sent in small batches to Batavia for quality analysis.[12] Diamonds were also occasionally to be found, such as the one referenced above which managed to quickly exit the Dutch dominions (and Dutch taxes), and find its way to Sarawak. Diamonds were found in good quantities in west Borneo, including 1532 carats worth in Landak alone in 1886, and 1562 carats the next (Koloniaal Verslag 1888: 245). Yet it was the possibility of large gold reserves, particularly in areas that had once been mined by the Chinese, but had since fallen into disrepair, that really pushed Dutch interests forward into this periphery. By government decree #15 of May 31, 1880, geological expeditions were sent to re-survey many of the Chinese areas between the Landak and Sambas rivers, all in search of gold (Tijdschrift voor Aardrijkskundige Genootschap 1883: 12–13; Van Schalle 1881: 263). Gold dug out of West Borneo brought in 59,860 guilders to the Dutch state in 1886; prices went from 70 to 80 guilders per thail of 54 grams each (Koloniaal Verslag 1888: 245). In some of the western Borneo districts the undressed ore was 68 per cent of the weight/mass being found; a very high percentage of gold for the effort invested (Posewitz 1892: 337). Cinnabar and antimony were also being found in the far upper watershed of the Sekayam River at the same time (Schalle 1884: 123). By 1889, the fruit of these many expeditions trekking into the interior in search of natural resources

[9]'Sultan Omer Allie Sapprodin to Capt. Mason', 6 Dec. 1847; also 'Sultan Omer Allie Sapprodin to William Glidden', 7 Dec 1847, in CO 144/2.

[10]Everett's Diary at Papar in CO/874/British North Borneo, Boxes 67–77, Resident's Diaries (1878–98). Public Records Office (London).

[11]See also ARA, Directeur van Onderwijs, Eeredienst, en Nijverheid to GGNEI, 9 April 1873, #3364, in 1873, MR #285.

[12]ANRI, Algemeen Administratieve Verslag Residentie West Borneo 1874 [#5/4].

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was readily apparent: tellerium, sellenium, and bismuth were all being uncovered, in addition to large caches of the precious metals mentioned previously.[13]

A final look at how the search for wealth propelled the Dutch forward can be glimpsed on the eastern half of the island. Coal was one of the main products being sought on this side of the island, and was shipped to the Philippines, Australia, Japan, and even South Africa. More important, perhaps, was that it was desperately needed for the Dutch East Indies' growing steam fleet, which sought as its highest priority coal reserves on Indies soil (Het Nederlandsche Zeewezen 1910: 93, 66). Yet the human price for this reliance was enormous. East Borneo coal mines, such as the 'Oranje Nassau' vent, were often hells of sickness and maltreatment. This particular mine, which was run by eight Europeans, twelve indigenous free labourers, 115 sailors, and 495 convicts in January of 1870, routinely had a sixth of its population in the hospital at any one time. Stomach ailments and fevers brought most of the men there, but fires in the coal magazines, not to mention suicides and suicide attempts, also increased their numbers.[14] Coal was big business; selling often in the 0.75 to 1 guilder per pikul price, large concerns (such as the Steam-Cola Company of East Borneo, capitalised in 1888 with 1.2 million guilders, and many investors) all tried to get in on the action (Koloniaal Verslag 1888: 243). In Kutei, further north along the coast toward the North Borneo border, asphalt, naptha, and natural gas/petroleum contracts were also given out by Batavia, pushing the Dutch presence forward toward St. Lucia Bay.[15] Finally, the profits the Dutch state could make farming out the rights to mine gold and diamonds also provided an extra incentive for expansion, as new tracts of resource-bearing lands came into use. Licenses for digging diamonds in Martapura brought 10,818 guilders to Batavia in the first three months of 1873 alone, while gold-washing permits given out in Tana Laut district increased Dutch revenues year after year.[16] Though these sites were some distance from the evolving border, with revenues such as these pouring in, Batavia had every incentive to explore the frontier as quickly and as aggressively as possible. The Brooke regime in Sarawak and western speculators who were already eyeing the northern territories of Borneo were quick to follow suit.

Biota in Transit

In the second half of the nineteenth century, large parts of northwest Borneo started to come under European colonial administration.[17] Up until this time Chinese traders in Borneo had been more or less independent actors, funnelling

[13]ANRI, Algemeen Verslag Residentie West Borneo 1889 [#5/20].
[14]ANRI, Maandrapport Residentie Borneo Z.O. 1870 [#10a/5 January; #10a/6 April.]
[15]ARA, Extract Uit Het Besluiten, GGNEI, in 1902, MR #86.
[16]ARA, 1874, MR #519; ARA, 1889, MR #720; ANRI, Maandrapport Residentie Borneo Z.O. 1873 [#10a/8 January].
[17]British colonial involvement with Borneo started in earnest in the 1840s; in 1846, after several years of intrigue, the offshore island of Labuan became a British Crown colony.

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the ecological produce of the island off to South China as one among many commercial groups involved in this trade. However, the arrival of the British and Dutch in concerted numbers around the mid-century altered these dynamics. Though many Chinese were seen as potential allies (or servants) in European attempts to control the economy of Borneo, other local Chinese were seen as dangerously independent. The famous Chinese gold mining *kongsis* of west Borneo were one of these groups; by the mid-century, they had mostly been rendered militarily non-threatening by the Dutch, and were starting to be incorporated into Batavia's political and economic authority.[18] The Bau War of 1857 accomplished similar objectives for the Brookes in Sarawak, as rural, predominantly Hakka, Chinese in the goldfields were also brought into Kuching's orbit.[19] Chinese 'piracy', too, which had been a serious concern of both the British and the Dutch even into the 1850s in Borneo's waters, now started to be curbed as well, as European navies began to better control the coasts. Chinese could still live outside of European authority by mid-century, but the pursuit of economic enterprise was now starting to be proscribed in Borneo, at least in areas closest to the outposts of these regimes (Lapian 1974: 143–54; Tagliacozzo 2000: 70–100; Zhou 1987: 44–66).

These changes pushed many Chinese traders interested in the ecological products of the island further and further up Borneo's rivers. Chinese commerce, though split between many different dialect groups, was particularly strong among Hokkien and Teochew communities, and each of these sent representatives upriver in large, complex networks of trade. In lowland river ports and coastal communities, Chinese *taukehs* (large merchants) often funded these journeys, supplying credit, merchandise and supplies so that forest products could be brought down to the towns (Chew 1990: 66–67, 91, 130–131). Upland peoples bought their knives, salt, beads, and textiles from these small-scale itinerant Chinese merchants, in exchange for the traditional China trade goods which then found their way (through a series of intermediaries) out into the wider world. Kuching, Marudi, and other towns became busy collection centres for upriver produce, places where goods could be watched and taxed by the new English regime (Chew 1990: 122). Yet in the inland areas of Borneo, high up

[18] A vast literature exists about these semi-independent mining organizations; the Dutch, especially, saw their independence as something dangerous, particularly because of Chinese 'secret society' links across the frontier to Sarawak. See *ANRI, Politiek Verslag der Residentie Borneo West 1870* (Borneo West #2/8); *ANRI, Algemeen Administratieve Verslag der Residentie Borneo West 1886* (Borneo West #5/17); de Groot (1885), and Adriani (1898). The best contemporary analysis of events can be found in Heidhues (1993: 68–88); see also Yuan Bingling (1999).

[19] See Daniel Chew (1990: 37–42). 'Smuggling' between Chinese in Sarawak and west Borneo was thought to be a dangerous problem by both European regimes; for Dutch discussions on this, and eventual cooperation agreements worked out with the Brookes on this issue, see ARA, Dutch Consul Singapore to GGNEI (9 Jan 1889, #37), in 1889, MR #38; ARA, 1889, MR #593, 620, 683; *ANRI, Politiek Verslag der Residentie Borneo West 1872* (Borneo West, #2/10), and *ANRI, Algemeen Administratieve Verslag der Residentie Borneo West 1889* (Borneo West #5/20).

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on the different river systems, many of the old arrangements of collection and cultural contact remained the same as in previous decades. We know something of the economics of these voyages from men like Tillema; he tabulated with great care the costs for expeditions into the interior, some of the numbers for which I will include here in a footnote.[20] Chinese traders intermarried frequently with Dayak women; these unions helped to insure some level of honesty in economic dealings, as it was more difficult to cheat kin (Interaksi 1989; Tan 1979; Thung 1985: 15–29). Chinese temples were also erected in many of these upland locales, documenting the passage of these merchants through plaques and burial markers, often hundreds of miles upriver from the coasts.[21]

Yet the continuing value of the ecological products trade also meant that Chinese traders were frequently the object of robbery and violence, as other regional actors tried to plunder them of their valuable cargoes. This seems to have happened frequently in the 1850s and 1860s, as Chinese merchants were repeatedly ambushed and killed by Malays and Bajaus, who then stole their accumulated carry-baskets of forest products. The Governor of Labuan in 1856 knew this to be a potentially disastrous situation, as the wealth from the Chinese trade now fuelled the growth of towns and commerce in all of British Borneo. "The Chinese in their persevering endeavours after gain are the best pioneers of trade" he wrote; "They are fortunately not easily deterred."[22] The Admiralty agreed, and promised the Colonial Office in London that they would do their best to protect Chinese merchants in Borneo's waters.[23] Yet it was the passage of these traders upriver that presented the biggest problems of shepherding and control, as here they were often out of reach of the arms of British government. Chinese forest-products merchants continued to be killed in the 1860s, and the British continued to take depositions from area Malays, Chinese, and Iban as to the grizzly circumstances of their murders.[24] It was only in the 1870s, when the British government finally started to be able to better influence

[20]Tillema calculated the costs for a large trading expedition into the interior of the Apo Kayan as follows: 89 rowers receive fl. 3560; their food costs, for rice: fl 235.14; for fish; fl. 308.00; for tobacco and matches, fl. 130.58; for slat fl 28.48; cost of 1000 paraffin cans for packing stores is fl. 500. Total expedition costs fl. 4762.12.

[21]The key source for researching the dispersion of Chinese through British Borneo is Wolfgange Franke and Chen Tieh Fan (1982–1987) *Chinese Epigraphic Materials in Malaysia* (multi-volume), Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press. Franke and Tien chart the spread of Chinese through both urban and rural Sabah and Sarawak, using a wide variety of epigraphic sources: stone slabs; brass plates; tombstones; wooden tablets; memorial stele; censers; ceremonial boards; wooden alters; ancestral tablets; and deity tablets.

[22]The Governor was referring to several murders of Chinese merchants which had recently been perpetrated on the Borneo mainland; see CO 144/13, Gov. Labuan to H. Labouchere, 9 Oct 1856.

[23]CO 144/13, Admiralty to CO, 31 Dec 1856, #11261.

[24]CO 144/13; see the depositions of Hussein of Pontianak (21 July 1856), So Ock, Chinese Trader (7 August 1856), and Serif Akul of Benoni (14 August 1856). These men describe the murder of Chinese merchant Baba Go Chun, who was killed by two plundering Bajaus with a trident through the neck.

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local chiefs, that the frequency of these killings stopped. In 1871, for the first time in recorded memory, a Brunei *datu* was executed by his sultan for one of these murders. This imposition of justice suggests how much the Chinese traditional-products trade had come to mean to the local British economy. Labuan's governor wrote that the sentence would never have been carried out without considerable British pressure on the sultan.[25]

By the turn of the twentieth century, this importance could be well-documented in reams of statistics, both for Sarawak and British North Borneo. Chinese involvement in the traditional products trade was crucial and pervasive in Sarawak; the 1902 export statistics of the Brooke dominions include thousands upon thousands of dollars worth of these items (including beeswax, birds' nests, camphor, dammar, and horns), most of them funnelled downstream by Chinese traders.[26] From the Baram district alone in 1901 more than $65,000 worth of *guttah* and rattan were being readied for export, primarily collected by Chinese and their agents.[27] In British North Borneo, this involvement in the ecological products trade was equally vigorous; the lists of items being readied for transport to South China is reminiscent of T'ang Dynasty records a thousand years previously. Pearls, fins, trepang, and tortoise shell were all exported in bulk in 1897, alongside the familiar products of the interior.[28] The income on development in North Borneo shot from $20,207 in 1881 to $110,443 four years later, in 1885; export values from the colony were $145,443 in the former year and $387,757 in the latter (Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indie 1886: 398). Chinese dominated the timber-cutting trade, and most of the local import and export trade of the territory (outside of large-scale mining and agriculture) was in Chinese hands.[29] By the turn of the century, one-tenth of British North Borneo's population was Chinese: though the majority of this was not, in fact, involved in the traditional products trade, almost all of this trade itself *was* in Chinese hands.[30]

[25]See CO 144/26, Acting Gov. Hugh Low to CO, 25 Oct 1867, #37, and CO 144/34, Gov. Labuan to CO, August 10, 1871, #29. This kind of violence against Chinese traders was also fairly common across the border in the Dutch dominions; see for the 1830s 'Iets over de Daijakkers' *Tijdschrift voor Neerland's Indie* 1, 1831, dl. 1, p. 40; for a later period, see *ANRI*, Algemeen Administratieve Verslag der Residentie Borneo West 1890 (Borneo West, #5/21).

[26]In 1902, Sarawak exported $18,048 worth of beeswax, $47,525 worth of birds' nests, $3,209 worth of camphor, and $28,186 worth of dammar, among many other items. *Report for the Year 1902 on Brunei, Sarawak, and British North Borneo*, (Annual Series, #3096, 1903), 5–7.

[27]CO 802/1, *Sarawak Gazette*, 1 May 1901.

[28]See the tables provided in *Views of British North Borneo with a Brief History of the Colony, Compiled from Official Records and Other Sources of Information of an Authentic Nature, with Trade Returns* (Offices of the Company, Brown and Co. 1899: 23).

[29]*Report for the Year 1898 on British North Borneo Trade* (Annual Series, #2347, 1899), 19; *Report for the Year 1905 on British North Borneo Trade* (Annual Series, #3715, 1906), 1.

[30]There were almost 20,000 Chinese in British North Borneo in 1899, out of a total population nearing 200,000 (Offices of the Company, Brown and Co. 1899: 17).

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The late nineteenth century brought new products to the China trade; no longer would the transit of resins, wax, and nests form the majority of this commerce. The main axis of trade with China shifted to bring another crucial 'commodity' to Borneo, which also greatly affected the island's ecology: Chinese labour. Chinese coolies came (and were brought) by the thousands in the years around the turn of the twentieth century, to work in Borneo's mines and on her plantations, both of which changed local landscapes significantly. In Sarawak, loans were advanced by the Brooke Raj of up to $10,000 "for the purpose of introducing Chinese immigrants to the Rejang District", one of the areas of greatest promise.[31] The sex ratios on these Chinese arrivals were overwhelmingly male; women comprised only about five per cent of immigrants to all of Sarawak in 1904, indicating that the purpose in attracting Chinese was primarily a demand for hard labour.[32] In North Borneo, as in many other places in the world at this time,[33] the labourers came *en masse*, and they were quickly farmed out to various European enterprises which clamoured for their diligence and sweat. Conditions of their transit and labour were appalling; North Borneo soon acquired a reputation as a graveyard for coolies, a whisper which reached all the way back to South China.[34] Despite this, however, more and more Chinese labourers did come, and were co-opted into the giant corporate production regime which covered the northern part of the island.

Environmental changes which accompanied these large-scale movements of Chinese to Borneo were significant and widespread. In the mining sector, Chinese labour was crucial to the operation of many different kinds of mineral extraction, including gold, precious stones, and especially large veins of coal. The mines and processing fields needed for these kinds of operations began to dot the Bornean landscape in the late nineteenth century, spreading through the forest as European capital penetrated the island's interior.[35] Local British authorities worked hand-in-hand with the North Borneo Company to get Chinese labour for these mining ventures, pointing out to London the important

[31]CO 802/1, *Sarawak Report and Statement of the Treasury Department for 1900*.
[32]CO 802/1, *Sarawak Report and Statement of the Post, Shipping, and Customs Department for 1904*. The Dutch, who received their own massive influx of Chinese labour, worried about the ramifications of so many Chinese in 'Outer Islands' like Borneo; see J.J.M de Groot (1856: 351–4.)
[33]Chinese were also en route to California, Australia, Cuba, Peru, the West Indies, and many other places; see CO 882/8, Mr Churchill's Memorandum, 26 Oct 1906; for the local (Bornean situation), see CO 874/118, British North Borneo Co. to Commissioner of Chinese Immigration, 15 August 1883.
[34]Chinese coolies in Hong Kong were taken aside by Chinese representatives in the Hong Kong Registrar's Office and told "Do you know that you are going to a country from which very few ever return?" CO 531/3, Resident Sandakan to Acting Gov. British North Borneo, 28 Sept 1911.
[35]The following discussion centres on mining in the British dominions, but many of the above changes also held true across the evolving border in Dutch Borneo. For several good descriptions of the effects of mining in Southeast and west Kalimantan in the mid to late nineteenth century, see *ANRI, Politiek Verslag der Residentie Borneo Zuid-Oost 1872* (Borneo, Zuid-Oost, #4/2); Ritter (1840: 595–632) and 'Over de Goudgraverijen in de Afdeeling Sambas', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indie* 9, 1847, dl. 2, p. 385–98.

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advantages which would accrue if more and more workers could be brought. These included not only heightened production quotas on minerals, but also the secondary effects of a more numerous Chinese presence, such as increases in the profits of the local revenue farms.[36] The conditions under which many of these Chinese miners worked, however, were terrible: fires were endemic in the mines in Sarawak, as was violence between individual miners, often along dialect lines.[37] The ecological effect of this comparatively late aspect of the China Trade was also significant: more and more land was cleared for mining operations, and the chemical run-off from operations often tainted local water resources.

A larger ecological impact was perhaps felt from a final offshoot of the China Trade, which witnessed the growth of corporate plantations through large parts of the northwestern part of the island. By the late nineteenth century, an extensive plantation periphery existed in British Borneo, funnelling crops for export out into world markets. Many of the labourers of these agricultural enterprises came from China, men who either were brought via various kinds of recruitment schemes, or who came of their own accord to work the sprawling plantations of the island.[38] In Sarawak, Chinese planters were responsible for the explosion of pepper production by the turn of the century, insuring the expansion of the plant across scattered sections of the territory.[39] Such men were also heavily involved in the cultivation of rice, with Fuzhou sending thousands of men to work this crop in the areas around Sibu.[40] North Borneo's ecology and topography changed even more than Sarawak's, however, as a result of Chinese agricultural labour in the second half of the nineteenth century. Huge expanses of the Company's dominions were converted into tobacco, pepper, gambier, and coffee estates, literally changing the face of the landscape in a matter of a few decades.[41] By 1889, some 555,000 acres of North Borneo land was covered in tobacco plants alone (Doolittle 2005: 169). Chinese agricultural labourers were omnipresent in these settlements; they formed a large percentage of the labouring population in nearly every production locality, from the lands of the Tobacco Estates

[36]London also tried to keep an eye on North Borneo's plantations and mines because of the colony's grim reputation, but this surveillance produced only limited results. See CO 144/48, Gov. Labuan to CO, 24 July 1877.

[37]For example, see the different incidents reported in CO 802/1, the *Sarawak Gazette,* 1 April 1901; these were only a few incidents among many reported over the years.

[38]There was also a considerable 'free' Chinese farming presence on the island; men (and a few women), who came as settlers, rather than under the corporate regime.

[39]*Report for the Year 1902 on Brunei, Sarawak, and British North Borneo* (Annual Series, #3096, 1903), 3.

[40]CO 802/1, *Sarawak Gazette*, 1 April 1901.

[41]In Sandakan and its environs in 1890, there were 131 Europeans, 337 'Sulus, Malays, Javanese, and others', and 3627 Chinese; "The Chinese form a large part of every settlement, and up until now (are) the most valuable labourers in the tobacco estates." (*Report for the Year 1890 on British North Borneo Trade,* Annual Series, #943, 1891:, 2; see the same report for 1887, #420, p. 3. See also David Fortier (1957: 571–80.)

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Syndicate to the North Borneo Trading Co., from the Ramie Fibre Co. to the Borneo Coffee Co.'s estates (Offices of the Company, Brown and Co. 1899: 53). Conditions, however, as in Borneo's mines, were often appalling; local testimonials even to 1920 show this with little doubt.[42]

This late agricultural dimension of the China Trade continuum also managed to heavily influence the ecological history of the region. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the traditional forest and marine products of this commerce had been overwhelmed by export crops and minerals, as the Chinese Trade link with the island shifted in new directions.[43] West Borneo plantations (where Chinese were often very active) sold rice for example to Sarawak and to the Natuna Archipelago in 1886 to the tune of 35,510 pikuls of padi, alongside 10,300 pikuls of husked rice; in 1887 the numbers grew to 18,691 pikuls padi and 11,079 pikuls of rice. Coffee cultivation comprised roughly 38,000 trees in the same area, some 4250 of them fruit-bearing, while pepper as a crop did even better, with some 240 pikuls produced in the 1887 in the three districts of Montrado, Pontianak, and Sambas alone (Koloniaal Verslag 1888: 232). All of these numbers would increase over the coming years. This pattern would continue into the early 1900s, as more and more Chinese labourers came to Borneo, and were increasingly subsumed into the ecological and extraction regimes of large corporate capital.

Contraband Cargoes

We have now seen something of the trade in minerals that developed in and around Borneo, as well as the Chinese-dominated commerce in biota that also began to spin pieces of Borneo off into international systems of exchange. Most of these two branches of merchant activity were legal, and functioned above ground, as it were. At the same time, however, there was also a large and variegated trade in contraband that became important in Borneo in the second half of the nineteenth century as well. The quiet trade in spirits along the forested inland frontier of the island is a good example. From as early as the 1850s, ports such as Labuan, off the western coast of Borneo, farmed out licenses to sell spirits in order to raise revenues for the colony's exchequer.

[42]See the statements by Mr Turner (15 Sept 1919), Mr de la Mothe (20 August 1919), and Dr Williams (1 Oct 1919), all in Secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society to CO, 29 Oct 1919, #1, in *Correspondence on the Allegations Against the Administration of the British North Borneo Co*, Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, 1920. De la Mothe said the local Chinese were held in 'virtual slavery'; Dr Williams described beatings inflicted by overseers until workers were a "mass of subcutaneous bruises from shoulders down to thighs."

[43]This was so both by absolute monetary value and by weight for the products concerned. Both Sarawak and British North Borneo became massive exporters of minerals and agricultural products by the early twentieth century; though traditional China Trade items remained lucrative in commerce, these mass-produced commodities, often mined or tilled by Chinese labour, eventually far outstripped them.

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Almost as quickly, smuggling syndicates sprung up to challenge these monopolies, necessitating constant changes in the laws to fight these attacks on securing government profits.[44] Liquor was also contraband elsewhere in the British possessions, such as on the Malay Peninsula, while Malay-language newspapers from the 1890s make clear that even the seat of English power (Singapore) was never fully immune to these problems.[45] Spirits such as gin, brandy, whisky, and even homemade arrack all poured across the border and into the Dutch Indies as well (Straits Settlements Blue Books 1873). This happened in places such as west Borneo, where smugglers brought small batches of European liquor in at a time to circumvent the regulations of the local monopoly, while the frontier-adjacent Dutch farms in Riau and Aceh also lost money.[46] Attempts to ban the transit of alcohol altogether to indigenous populations along the Dutch Indies border residencies (as part of a moral crusade) were doomed to failure because of the profits traders reaped by these sales. Only at the turn of the twentieth century were larger, more systemic efforts made to staunch these commodity flows in places like Sulu where the cooperation of other colonial governments could be counted upon as well.[47]

The movement of certain types of print media are another good case in point. Letters of certain types, such as those advocating conspiracy or revolt against the state, were also contraband across the frontier. In 1889, for example, a Dutch translator was sent to Sarawak to interpret 38 Chinese letters that had been discovered, linking secret society activities in Kuching with Chinese miners in Dutch Mandor and Montrado.[48] Salt was continuously contraband across the Dutch Indies frontier, largely because the prices for it were so variable from place to place, and almost always cheaper on the British side of the border.[49] The Dutch forbade trade of salt across the frontier with Sarawak, and signed agreements with Embaloh, Taman, and Kayan leaders to this effect (Wadley 2005: 143). Period observers noted that trading salt was much cheaper though

[44]Officer of the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade to Herman Merivale, Esq., 17 June 1850, in CO 144/6; Extracts From the Minutes of the Legislative Council of Labuan, 3 Jan 1853, in CO 144/11; Gov Labuan to CO, 9 Jan 1872, #2, in CO 144/36; CO Jacket (Mr. Fairfield, and Mr. Wingfield), 21 May 1896, in CO 144/70; Gov Labuan to BNB HQ, London, 13 Nov 1896, in CO 144/70.
[45]See Enactment #6 of 1915, Malay States; also *Bintang Timor*, 6 Dec 1894, p. 2.
[46]ANRI, Politiek Verslag Residentie West Borneo 1872 (#2/10); ARA, Extract Uit het Register der Besluiten, GGNEI, 2 Jan 1881, #7, in 1881, MR #18.
[47]ARA, First Government Secretary to Director of Finances, 6 Nov 1889, #2585, in 1889, MR #773; also First Government Secretary to Resident Timor, 8 March 1892, #600, in 1892, MR #217; ARA, Dutch Consul, Manila to MvBZ, 5 April 1897, #32; MvBZ to MvK, 24 May 1897, #5768, both in (MvBZ/A Dossiers/223/A.111/Verbod Invoer Wapens en Alcohol); ARA, Dutch Consul, London to MvBZ, 28 Jan 1893, #37, and GGNEI to MvK, 27 Nov 1892, #2268/14, both in (MvBZ/A Dossiers/223/A.111/"Still Zuidzee").
[48]ARA, Resident West Borneo to GGNEI, 10 Oct 1889, #93 Secret, in 1889, MR #730.
[49]ARA, Extract Uit het Register der Besluiten, GGNEI, in 1883, MR #24; ARA, 1892, MR #388; ARA, Memorie van Overgave van de Residentie Westerafdeeling van Borneo (MMK, 1912, #260), p. 34.

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than producing it, so this was a powerful incentive to smugglers to take advantage of this situation (Posewitz 1892: 448–9). The list goes on, from high-quality cigars to stocks of cloth, coils of thin wire (considered to be dangerous during war-time) to non-copyrighted books.[50] Under the rainforest canopy in Borneo, a contraband trade developed in five hundred year-old Ming jars, which local Dayaks wanted to trade across the frontier, but were told would now be taxed.[51] All of these commodities were transited across the border, at different times and at different places, but always against the will (moral, financial, or political) of at least one of these two European regimes.

The situation in the 1870s on Borneo was little different than in previous years when it came to the funnelling of contraband, especially narcotics. Batavia's powers of surveillance and interdiction simply could not live up to the ideal of an indirectly controlled Dutch monopoly on opium. One reason for this was the existence of the entrepot of Labuan in the British sphere, which in 1870 farmed out not only the rights to retail chandu, but also the import, export, and transport of the drug as a revenue device as well. A free port like Singapore, Labuan quickly became a regional centre for opium smuggling to the surrounding territories, carried especially by small coasting craft that visited the colony's creeks and bays at night.[52] The extended and virtually unguarded border between Dutch west Borneo and Sarawak was also a hive of opium smuggling activity. The drug crossed into the Dutch sphere mainly through the agency of the Chinese of Landak, earning them the epithet of 'inveterate opium smugglers' from the government administrator there, who in 1872 reported that "The lying of this division on the coast nearby Singapore…and on the land side bordering Sarawak, gives plenty of opportunity to the clandestine import of opium, as the means toward watching the many entrance points by sea and by land are simply insufficient."[53] Here too, as in Riau, transgressions against the farm formed by far the largest single crime statistic in local police ledgers.[54] In

[50]ARA, Dutch Consul, Singapore to GGNEI, 10 Dec 1885, #986, in 1885, MR #807; *Utusan Malayu*, 9 Feb 1909, p. 1; Gov. Straits to CO, 26 May 1900, Telegram, and Gov. Straits to CO, 31 May 1900, Secret, both in CO 273/257; Longmans, Green, and Co., Publishers, to the Copyright Association, and forwarded to the CO, 15 Nov 1888, in CO 273/157.

[51]These types of *pusaka* (heirlooms) were considered to be very valuable by various Borneo groups, and a commerce in these products had been active for centuries. Jars were thought to have special attributes, such as being able to sing or cure diseases, while others serves as containers for burying the dead, or as dowries. See Harrison (1986) *Pusaka: Heirloom Jars of Borneo*, pp. 19–20; for jars across the frontier in Dutch Borneo, see Adhyatman (1981) *Keramik Kuna.*

[52]Governor Labuan to CO, 6 Jan 1874, #1, CO 144/42; Governor Labuan to CO, 28 Jan 1870, #55, CO 144/32. The Governor remarked that the craft that entering and exiting Labuan for these purposes were small enough that they used oars when the wind failed. They carried no manifests or cargoes other than opium.

[53]ANRI, Politiek Verslag Residentie West Borneo 1870 (#2/8); ANRI, Politiek Verslag Residentie West Borneo 1872 (#2/10).

[54]ANRI, Algemeen Administratieve Verslag Residentie West Borneo 1871 (#5/2); ANRI, Algemeen Verslag Residentie West Borneo 1874 (#5/4). The crime statistics mentioned are for Montrado only.

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western Borneo the farm system existed until 1909, and because of the large Chinese population, a disproportionate number of the 167 chests of Turkish and the 1265 chests of Bengal opium imported into the Indies that year found their way to this residency.[55] In southeastern Borneo, price differentials also led to rampant smuggling, as opium in this residency was considerably more expensive than in other Indies divisions (in southeastern Borneo in 1888, the price of opium per thail was 14.50 fl, and per matta (1/100 thail) was .14 fl., roughly fifty per cent higher than in West Sumatra, for example)[56] (Koloniaal Verslag 1888: 176).

Opium was still also transiting in the early twentieth century in and around Borneo. For various Dayak peoples on the Dutch side of the frontier, the attraction here was obvious; long accustomed to trading and using opium, the indigenous peoples of the interior were now denied legal access to the drug as part of the Dutch 'civilizing mission'.[57] However, enforcing these kinds of bans, and similar restrictions on the British side of the border which stipulated exactly when and where chandu was allowed to be bought, proved to be more difficult in reality than it was to legislate on paper. The opium farms in various British – but legally autonomous – regions like Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo ended at different times, giving windows of opportunity to smugglers before the respective states took on direct responsibility for sales.[58] As was the case in the Indies, prices also varied across these different administrative frontiers, with Sarawak under the Brookes proving particularly reluctant to bringing retail levels up to parity with their neighbours' prices (doing so would have lost the White Rajas business on their cheap opium.)[59] Sandakan, in northern Borneo, became a famed haven for smuggling vast quantities of opium to non-British territories, usually in the hulls of small boats. 'Moro' crews, who often represented Chinese interests, regularly took 100–500 tins of opium on these voyages, sailing with known winds and tides to agreed rendezvous points.[60] The tentacles of the state may have been creeping ever forward in early twentieth century Borneo, but there were still many places that both European powers – British and Dutch – could not yet begin to reach.

[55]Report of the International Opium Commission, Shanghai (1909: 301).
[56]Report of the International Opium Commission, Shanghai (1909: 311).
[57]Memorie van Overgave, West Borneo, 1912 (MMK #260), p. 35.
[58]CO to British North Borneo Headquarters, 17 May 1911, CO 531/3; CO to BNB Headquarters 20 Sep 1911, CO 531/3; and CO to BNB Secretary, 10 June 1915, #25039, CO 874/914. The farms ended on 1 Jan 1910 in the Straits, 1 Jan, 1913 in Labuan, and 1 Jan, 1915 in British North Borneo.
[59]The result of this, of course, was massive smuggling across Sarawak's land and sea borders with other polities in Southeast Asia. See Charles Brooke to Straits Settlements Governor, 7 May 1913, in CO 531/5; Straits Settlements Governor to Charles Brooke, 20 Jan 1913, CO 531/5; see also CO Jacket, 15 Jan 1913, CO 531/5.
[60]See Governor BNB to Directors BNB, 15 July 1913; BNB Co. Chairman to BNB Gov., 20 Aug 1913; and BNB Gov to BNB Chairman, 3 Nov 1913, all in CO 874/914. The opium farmer for British North Borneo himself, Chee Swee Cheng, was implicated in these smuggling ventures.

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Large stretches of the border residencies still remained out of the reach of these programs and colonial 'civilizing projects', especially in Borneo. Borneo remained an open field for the trade in slaves, even until a comparatively late date. On the British side of the frontier, the fragmented nature of English authority – split between the Raja of Sarawak, the British North Borneo Company, the Sultan of Brunei (who had a British advisor), and Labuan island – encouraged the continuity of trafficking for many years. In Sarawak the Brookes tried to legislate the terms of slavery and bondage to their own advantage, by fining any human transfers done outside the jurisdiction of the court. In such a scenario, not only would the 'masters' lose money for dealing outside the purview of the state, but the slave would also go free.[61] In the Company's dominions on the northern half of the island, however, diaries of company residents in the periphery show how slowly changes in attitude could be expected to transpire. William Pretyman's diary at Tempasuk in 1880 describes armed combat between parties over stolen slaves, while Resident Everett at Papar made clear that area *datus* were smuggling Bajaus wherever they wished, in defiance of Company proscriptions.[62] In Brunei, London's representative also had his hands full, as area pangerans raided the Company's territory for slaves, and then attacked British police units who were sent out to arrest the perpetrators.[63] The British consul in Brunei sighed upon hearing news of these depredations, saying that "slave-dealing and kidnapping are a part of Bornean traditions, which must be dealt with by degrees."[64] Even the Straits press expected only slow progress in the matter, intoning that it had taken the Dutch one hundred years to deal with the problem in Java, and that Brooke still could not abolish it after decades in Sarawak (Singapore Daily Times 4 January 1882: 2).

On the Dutch side of the enormous land-divide, progress was little quicker. In western Borneo, in areas far outside of any real Dutch jurisdiction, slavery and slave-trafficking went on as they always had, despite local chiefs' signatures on contracts to the contrary.[65] In 1855 a number of Iban leaders in the area around Kapuas gave a formal pledge to the Dutch Indies government that they would stop slaving, but with little evidence of this happening in the decades after this date (Wadley 2005: 143). Yet it was primarily in eastern Borneo, along the coast and in the interior just away from these coasts, that

[61] British Consul, Borneo to FO, 5 Feb 1883, Consular #7, in CO 144/57.

[62] See William Pretyman's Diary at Tempasuk (Volume 72, May 17, 1880), and Everett's Diary at Papar (Volume 73, 22 April 1880), both in CO/874/British North Borneo, Boxes 67–77, Resident's Diaries (1878–98). London: Public Records Office.

[63] Gov. BNB to Consul Trevenen, 3 March 1891, in CO 144/68. As a result of British pressure, the Sultan of Brunei was forced to issue a ban on slaving, which particularly mentioned that the Company's subjects were now off-limits. Sultan of Brunei Proclamation, 26 Rejab, 1308 A.H., in CO 144/68.

[64] Consul Trevenen to Marquis of Salisbury (Foreign Office Correspondence, London), 31 March 1891, #2 Confidential, in CO 144/68.

[65] ARA, 1877, MR#423.

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slave-trafficking managed to survive with greatest tenacity. In 1876, the small polities of Kutei, Pasir, Bulungan, Sambaling, and Pegatan committed themselves on paper against the long-standing area trade in humans. Yet only a few years later, in data collected by Dutch administration, it became apparent that these sultanates were not living up to their promises.[66] Some Dutchmen felt that this was not for want of trying; the sultans themselves, these authors wrote, could not control their own subjects or hinterlands, which essentially allowed trafficking free reign (Anonymous 1880: 481–483). By 1883, the *Straits Times Overland Journal* was describing whole villages of slaves on the east coast near Berau, despite the Dutch regulations; many of these people worked in area mines, and led particularly harsh troglodytic existences underground. Three hundred of these slaves every year were said to be sold at Gunung Tabor, where they were shipped in from the Southern Philippines, the result of barter transactions for opium, cloth, and guns.[67] By 1889, the Dutch station commander in East Borneo waters was still cruising outside the Berau and Bulungan river mouths, continually on the lookout for more perahus carrying slaves (Yuan 1999; Zhou 1987).[68]

Conclusion

Starting around the year 1850, Borneo's 'fragments' – pieces of the island's mineral-wealth, biota, and items of everyday exchange, including illegal exchange – began to move more quickly into circuits of commerce than they ever had previously. Borneo had traded in forest produce and other environmental products for centuries, if not millennia, but this was commerce on an as yet unparalleled scale. Geologists and surveyors scouted the island's precious metals, and then reported back to their metropolitan capitals on what they had found. Coal, diamonds, antimony, and bismuth then passed out of Borneo and into a number of different channels, connecting the island with colonial, regional, and transregional economies. Natural products such as rattan and birds nests followed the gems and coal, and these former commodities were often moved along production chains by Asian hands, particularly overseas Chinese ones. However, Dayaks and Malays were also connected to these trades, showing the full scale of ethnic actors who participated in the overall spectrum of these items. Finally, smuggled goods – contraband – was a last category of 'things' in motion, moving alongside and often beneath the other goods mentioned

[66]See the *Koloniaal Verslagen* cites in Kerkhoff, 'Eenige Mededeelingen en Opmerkingen Betreffende de Slavernij', p. 756.
[67]See, for example, the *Straits Times Overland Journal* of 26 March 1883.
[68]See also, ARA, Stations-Commandant Oosterafdeeling van Borneo to Commander, NEI Navy, 28 Nov 1889, #898, in 1889, MR #149. See also 'Slavenhandel. Slavernij' *Indische Weekblad van het Recht* #1655, 18 March 1895, p. 42.

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above. Between these three subsets, a considerable amount of Borneo's wealth was moved from one place to another, often on the island (but across colonial boundary-lines), around the island (into international waters), or to places far away from the island, both in Southeast Asia and beyond.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that 'Borneo's fragments' helped to condition the late imperial age in this part of the world. As the western powers sought out increasingly 'remote' sources of supply for the products that drove the industrial age, places like Borneo became ground-zeros for the kinds of exploration needed to find such items. Flags were planted in the ground to protect rights over the soil, but also the minerals that lay underneath that soil, and the kinds of things that grew in it, which could be harvested and shipped and (ultimately) profited from on a grand scale. Pieces of Borneo began to fly off in a number of different directions, spinning off into regional and trans-regional economies in far larger volumes than ever before. This problematized the normative narrative of Borneo as 'the end of the world', because more and more people seemed to be heading out to the end of the world to try to get rich off of these fragments in motion. Europeans led this charge, and benefited the most, but Asians of a variety of provenances also were crucial to the system's functioning. At the same time that rules were set up to try to control these transits, the rules were broken – via contraband rings – that pushed still other products through these Bornean systems of exchange against the wishes of regional colonial states. As was the case with the legal circuits, these boundary-crossing, illicit initiatives were also spearheaded by a variety of ethnic actors (including Europeans), all of them eager to make money off of Borneo's wealth. The result was a huge island near the geographic centre of island Southeast Asia literally spinning its substance into the seas around it. Ships left every day for decades, carrying off pieces of this, one of the largest islands in the world. The coal, plants, and contraband that made these journeys ensured that parts of Borneo wound up literally over the world, as ships left this "isolated place" for all four points of the compass.

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Abbreviations in footnotes

ARA Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague (Netherlands)
ANRI Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, Jakarta, (Indonesia)
BNB British North Borneo
CO Colonial Office Correspondence
GGNEI Governor General, Netherlands East Indies
IWvhR Indische Weekblad van het Recht
MR Mailrapport

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