

# Borneo in the Early Modern Period Influences from Without and developments from Within

OOI Keat Gin

Visiting Professor  
Academy of Brunei Studies

## ABSTRACT

Borneo situated in the midst of Southeast Asia experienced influences from its neighbouring lands as well as directly and indirectly from the Chinese mainland and Indian sub-continent. Geography played an important role in ensuring that particular parts of the island received influences from a particular area, viz. the northwest sector drawn to the Straits of Malacca to the west and China to the east whereas the south and southeast portions orientated towards Java. This twin directional pull could be discerned from about the thirteenth century and increasingly pronounced through to the eighteenth century. The English and the Dutch further accentuated this differentiated influences, namely the northwest towards the Anglo-China trade, and the south and southeast turning to Dutch Batavia and the East Indies (present-day Indonesia). In which direction and influence that Borneo was drawn during the “early modern period”, namely between the late fourteenth to the late eighteenth centuries will be examined. But more importantly it is aimed at uncovering the response from the Borneo indigenous peoples in facing the various influences from without. At the same time interaction from within between the coastal settlements and the interior regions will also be addressed. Attention towards change and continuity in terms of economic systems, socio-political organizations, and socio-cultural traditions provides an insight and understanding of Borneo before the advent of Western trade and commerce, and subsequently Western colonialism and domination.

## BIODATA

OOI Keat Gin is professor of history and coordinator of the Asia Pacific Research Unit (APRU) at the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia. Research interests are varied but primarily focused on Borneo. Other areas of specialization include urban cities, transmigration of labour, domestic workers, the history of medicine, wars and conflicts, and socio-cultural heritage. He edited *Themes for Thought on Southeast Asia: A Festschrift to Emeritus Professor Nicholas Tarling on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday*. *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 11, 1 (June 2009): 1-446. Recent publications include *Historical Dictionary of Malaysia* (Scarecrow, 2009), *The Japanese Occupation of Borneo, 1941-1945* (Routledge, 2011), and *Ushering A New Dawn. Nationalism, Empire, and State-building in Post-war Borneo, 1945-1950* (Routledge, forthcoming). A Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (London), he is editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* (IJAPS) ([www.usm.my/ijaps/](http://www.usm.my/ijaps/)) as well as series editor of the APRU-USM Asia Pacific Studies Publications Series (AAPSPS) that published David Kenneth Bassett, *The Factory of the English East India Company at Bantam 1602-1682*, edited and introduced by Dianne Lewis, and a preface by Victor T. King (Penang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2010), and Mohd Farid bin Mohd Sharif, *Ibn Taymiyyah on Jihad and Baghy* (Penang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2011).

----- oo0oo -----