

Konferenzberichte / Conference Reports

German-speaking Scholarship and the Malay World: Exploring an Empirical Tradition

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This colloquium explored the empirical traditions of German-speaking researchers who had been active in maritime Southeast Asia right from the beginnings of the European presence. Although Germany had no colonies in Southeast Asia, Germans have been deeply involved in the colonial history of the region. Thousands of German-speakers were employed by the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) and served as soldiers, doctors, engineers, merchants and administrators. In the nineteenth century many Germans were working on plantations in Java, Sumatra and Borneo; the Rhenish Mission Society, the Basel Mission Society and the German-Austrian Societas Verbi Divini (SVD) were responsible for the Christianisation of Nias, North Sumatra, Flores, Sabah, Central Kalimantan and several other regions in the Malay Archipelago. Therefore it is not surprising that many German-speaking researchers wrote extensively on the present nation-states Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

15 researchers presented some 17 papers on various aspects of the approach of German scholars to the Malay world. A second conference could easily be filled with another 10 or more papers since such well-known scholars as the anthropologists A. E. Jensen, A. Bastian, F. Blumentritt, P. Schebesta, the geographer K. Helbig, the poet A. v. Chamisso, the zoologist W. Kükenthal, the ornithologist-linguist E. Stresemann or the SVD missionaries in Flores had to be omitted from the conference.

Prof. Wolfgang Marschall (University of Berne) delivered a paper on the Austrian anthropologist and cultural historian Robert von Heine-Geldern and his immense impact on Southeast Asian studies, who not only popularised the term “Southeast Asia”, but tried to explain cultural traditions and wrote against European and Eurocentric images of Southeast Asian peoples. Dr. habil. Fritz Schulze (University of Frankfurt) highlighted the position of the naturalist Georg Rumphius within the scientific community of his time. Rumphius, who died in 1702 exactly 300 years ago should not be interpreted as a devoted botanist who made his way against all odds, but more as

a scholar who tried to develop an outline for systematical scientific research as a contribution to the general knowledge of his time. The papers by Dr. Arndt Graf (University of Hamburg) on Wilhelm von Humboldt and by Prof. Ulrich Scholz (University of Gießen) on the geographer Franz Junghuhn described the research of two outstanding German scholars of the nineteenth century. Humboldt's voluminous work "Über die Kawi-Sprache auf der Insel" (1836-8) contains more than a linguistic analysis of the Old Javanese language. It reflects his concept of language philosophy which combines language, cultural and area studies to deliver an idea of the "most perfect form of a language" or a general cultural perfection. Franz Junghuhn, who travelled extensively in the Netherlands East Indies, has often been compared with Wilhelm von Humboldt's brother, Alexander von Humboldt. He must be considered as one of the founders of tropical geography and cartography. Junghuhn's oeuvre still belongs to the standard geographical literature on Indonesia.

Prof. Michael Hitchcock (University of North London) focused on the well-known German painter Walter Spies. Hitchcock showed in great detail how Spies constructed resp. created the image of the people of Bali and their environment. A recently "discovered" collection of Walter Spies' photos in the estate of Beryl de Zoete provided a fascinating portrait of the impact of Spies not only on the European academic world of the 1930s, but on the non-academic European public as well and, of course, on the Balinese themselves. Prof. Wilfried Wagner (University of Bremen) elucidated some facts behind German missionaries in the Malay world, mainly using examples from the Rhenish Mission in Sumatra. He differentiated between the missions' original intentions, the realities the missionaries were faced with in Indonesia and the manner of their reporting and subsequent interpretation.

As German linguistic research on Southeast Asia was particularly influential in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century it is not surprising that this colloquium paid much attention to language studies. Waruno Mahdi (Fritz Haber Institute, Berlin) treated the traditions of language studies by using materials from seventeenth century sources, German-speaking traders, soldiers, doctors or simply employees of the Dutch East Indies Company. By focusing on linguistic materials especially on the Malay language Mahdi was able to show their importance for the dialectal and diachronical studies of Malay. Dr. Jan van der Putten (University of Leiden) examined the linguistic approach of the Prussian linguist Hermann von de Wall who did research in the Riau Sultanate in the nineteenth century. Von de Wall was employed as government linguist and was in charge of producing a "standard" Malay dictionary. A close look into the entries of his dictionary revealed that von de Wall tried to establish fixed rules of the Malay

grammar even if these did not correspond to any form of spoken or written Malay. The Swiss linguist Renward Brandstetter and his views on Indonesian languages, literatures and cultures were presented by Prof. Bernd Notthofer (University of Frankfurt). Brandstetter, who was never able to visit the Malay Archipelago himself, became an expert on the Malay, Bugis and Makassarese languages and literatures. He not only proposed reconstructions of what he called "Proto-Indonesian" but aimed to inform the European public about Indonesian cultures as well. It is remarkable that from the very beginning of his research in the 1890s he held the opinion that Indonesian linguistic and literary traditions are of no less "value" than those of the West. Otto Dempwolff was among the first scholars to carry out linguistic fieldwork among speakers of Austronesian languages. Dr. Hans Schmidt (University of the South Pacific) focused in his paper on Dempwolff's systematic comparisons of Austronesian languages and his methods in establishing an ancestral language ("Ur-Indonesisch") of the world's largest language family. Dempwolff's impact on comparative Austronesian linguistics is enormous although it could not be discerned during his lifetime.

Further papers were presented by Yufu Iguchi (University of Tokyo) on "A German philosopher's view of Japan", by Prof. Wolfgang Marschall (University of Berne) on the Swiss cousins Paul and Karl Sarasin who travelled in Sulawesi, by Prof. Amin Sweeney and Dr. Ulrich Kratz (University of California) on the Malayologist Hans Overbeck, by Holger Warnk (University of Frankfurt) on the German Methodist missionary Emil Lüring who worked in the Malay Peninsula from 1889 to 1909, by Prof. Gerard Diffloth (EFEO, Phnom Penh) on the research on the Aslian languages of Malaysia by Father Wilhelm Schmidt, by Waruno Mahdi (Fritz Haber Institute, Berlin) on George Wernrdly who wrote the first standard grammar of the Malay language in 1736, and by Dr. Helmut Lukas (University of Vienna) on the contributions of Austrian researchers into the Malay world.

The colloquium on "German-speaking scholarship and the Malay world" was the fourth in a series of conferences on the construction of maritime Southeast Asia by foreign scholars and was organised by the Institute of the Malay World and Civilization (ATMA), National University of Malaysia (UKM) and the chair of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Frankfurt (Main), Germany. Since the year 2000 already three seminars on French, Dutch and Scandinavian scholarship have been carried out, furthermore a colloquium on Chinese scholarship on the Malay world is planned for autumn 2002.

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