

Title

Diverse, Adaptable, and Resilient: Historical and Ethnographic Perspectives on Sultanates in Southeast Asia

Co-Conveners

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Panel Description

Sultanates have long comprised an essential element in local statecraft across the “Lands below the Winds.” Defined in many historical accounts by magic, inner charisma, and religious piety as opposed to complex bureaucracies or institutions, these rulers often appeared to embody the “indigenous” cultures and peoples of pre-modern Southeast Asia. Recently, historians have challenged this assumption of indigeneity by advancing the framework of “the stranger king,” of foreign or alien outsiders from India, China, Persia, and even Europe to resolve conflict and assume the throne. This panel seeks to continue and extend this line of inquiry, examining sultanates as dynamic and resilient institutions in the precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods. The onrush of modernity did not usher in inevitable decline and subjugation. Instead, sultanates travelled much more complex paths. Subject to exile at the hands of colonial rulers, for example, many sultans collected money, resources, and even weapons in new imperial hubs such as Singapore, eventually returning home to mount campaigns for restoration that even if unsuccessful, proved culturally significant and long lasting. Likewise, when post-colonial states denied sultans and local kings viable claims to sovereignty, these rulers did not vanish, but continued to find ways to re-inscribe royal rituals, symbols, and practices in the everyday lives of villages from southern Vietnam to the Southern Philippines. By examining sultanates and kingship from pre-colonial South Sulawesi to the coastal ports of colonial Aceh, from post-colonial Champa to Mindanao, this panel will demonstrate that far from being “traditional” or “atavistic,” sultanates have proven adaptable, surviving and sometimes thriving in diverse circumstances.

Panel Presenters

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Discussant

Gerry van Klinken, KITLV, klinken@kitlv.nl

Individual Paper Titles and Abstracts

- 1.) *Resilience, Continuity and Adaption: The Bugis Kingdoms after Conversion to Islam*
Stephen Druce, Universiti Brunei Darussalam

The South Sulawesi kingdoms that emerged at about 1300 from small existing settlements were largely uninfluenced by Indic ideas and their evolution and transformation to large

political entities based on indigenous cultural and political precepts. This evolution and transformation is well documented by studies using archaeological data combined with oral and extensive local textual sources, most of which are derived from oral traditions. These precepts remained resilient through history as various external influences arrived in the region. In the seventeenth century, the ruling elite converted to Islam and an increasing number of foreigners settled in the region, both Southeast Asians and Europeans who resisted the Dutch VOC's attempt to establish a monopoly on the spice trade. Following the Makassar War of 1669 the Dutch established themselves as a permanent fixture in the region, save for a brief interlude during the Napoleonic Wars, but direct rule was confined to Makassar and its environs. The Bugis kingdoms remained virtually independent until the beginning of the twentieth century although most were nominally vassals of the Dutch in a relationship that reflected local conceptions of tributary-kingdom relations. Using data from fieldwork, mainly derived from indigenous textual and oral sources, and other historical data, the paper aims to emphasise the resilience and continuity of local political systems and customary laws and rights in several Bugis kingdoms and show how they were adapted in response to new ideas, influences and opportunities that arose through interaction with their new religion of Islam and Europeans

2.) *Sojourning Sultans and Survival in Late Colonial Southeast Asia*

Joshua Gedacht, University of Wisconsin-Madison

In 1874, amidst a raging war of pacification and counterinsurgency, Dutch military officers took the unilateral step of “dissolving” one of the oldest political institutions on the island of Sumatra, the Acehnese Sultanate. Nearly forty years later, against the backdrop of a similarly fraught military campaign in the southern islands of the Philippines, an American general unceremoniously stripped the “ridiculous little” Sultan of Sulu of his sovereign powers. These colonial acts appeared to spell the demise of two of Southeast Asia's most prominent Muslim kingdoms. According to most historical narratives, these sultanates receded to the background, giving way to local chieftains, colonial collaborators, and post-colonial rebel groups. However, this paper will argue that sultanates did not vanish, but instead survived and proved resilient. In the years after their overthrow, the sultans of Aceh and Sulu sojourned throughout the region, circulating from Maluku to Singapore, from Banten to Penang. During their travels, sultans and their retinues studied in colonial schools, pursued business opportunities in the markets of Singapore, and maintained political networks at home. These circulations and sojourns helped nominally deposed monarchs to inspire restoration movements, rebellions, and loyalty to central regimes. Drawing from a wide array of colonial records and local manuscripts, this paper will demonstrate that even if sultanates never reclaimed sovereignty, they persisted not only as a source of memory, but as enduring forces in the making and re-making of Acehnese and Sulu histories.

3.) *“Every family is a Royal Family”: Perspectives on Sultanship among M'ranao upland farmers in the Southern Philippines*

Magne Knudsen, Universiti Brunei Darussalam

Among the M'ranao in the Lanao provinces of Mindanao, there may be more than a thousand men who carry the title of sultan. While many scholars, colonial administrators and travelers have noticed the peculiarity of this phenomenon, few have sought to explain it. To seek a comprehensive understanding of the fragmented nature of 'sultanship' among one of the largest Muslim ethnolinguistic groups in the Southern Philippines, the paper examines various 'internal' and 'external' dynamics and determinants of local-level leadership, including geographical, socio-cultural and political economic. In addition to engaging historical and other scholarly literature on the M'ranao, the paper draws on data from ethnographic fieldwork among members of an upland mixed swidden and fixed field agricultural community. Their diverse and dynamic livelihood practices, bilateral and flexible kinship system and 'egalitarian' style of leadership, as well as their account of the origin and spread of Islam in the region, provide key pieces to the puzzle of why there are so many sultans in Lanao. More than that, I argue that the resonance of sultanates in the everyday life of M'ranao upland farmers can help us move past traditional frameworks for understanding sultanates as an institution.

4.) *Remembering a Lost Legacy of Kingship: Champa and the Cham of Vietnam*
Mohamed Effendy Abdul Hamid, National University of Singapore

Champa once existed along the coast of Southern Vietnam. It was one of the earliest civilizations of Southeast Asia and has developed a sophisticated culture and society since the 600 C.E. The Cham, the people of Champa, built many temples and produced many aesthetically refined sculptures which still can be seen today in museums in Vietnam and France. However, the destiny of the Cham and Champa were greatly influenced by the Northern Vietnamese who eventually expanded into Cham lands in a series of invasions from the 15th to 17th centuries. Many Cham abandoned their homeland and migrated to Cambodia, Aceh, the Malay peninsula and throughout Southeast Asia. In these cataclysmic periods, the Cham kings were either captured, killed or/and assimilated by the Vietnamese however some were to be co-opted Vietnamese kings to serve certain agendas. However, in the 19th century, in retaliation to a major revolt by the Cham, the Vietnamese captured the last Cham king in Panduranga, the last bastion of Cham power and beheaded him.

Before this cataclysmic end to Cham kingship, there were attempts by the Cham kings to strengthen their weakened powers from the 16th to 18th centuries which includes intermarriages with the *Kerajaans* of the east coast of the Malay peninsula. Yet, even as Cham kings sought to express solidarity and forge political networks with Malay Muslim kingdoms, they also continued to practice a unique form of syncretic Hindu and Buddhist traditions; the Cham kings, unlike the other kingdoms in the Malay-Indonesian world, did not place Islam centre stage in efforts to preserve their power. Hence, this paper will showcase both Cham efforts to perpetuate the idea of Cham kingship despite the loss of the monarchy, as well as the resilience and diversity of kingship in Malay-Indonesian contexts. Through an emphasis on cultural and ritual traditions, the reading of Cham manuscripts and the preservation of relics important to the memory of power, this paper argues that the Cham could transform the idea of the Cham king to fit within multiple agendas i.e. cultural survival, placating the Vietnamese state and furthering the agendas of the Cham religious elite.