The Importance of Dutch and German 19th-Century Sources

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The most recent publications on the Kaharingan religion in Central Kalimantan insist that the original tribal religion of the Dayak Ngaju is the oldest religion of the world and the most original, orthodox, and standing religion of mankind. The belief is that God himself manifested this religion as the world religion, that is the "compass," the guiding line for human life; and that in the future Kaharingan will probably spread to the whole of mankind.[1] Thus many educated Dayak from Central Kalimantan are convinced that the Kaharingan religion is an equally monotheistic and as important a religion as are Islam and Christianity. The former pastor and lecturer with the theological academy STT-GKE in Banjarmasin, Dr. Marko Mahin, urges the churches, especially the GKE Church, to do penance and confess their fault of discrimination against the Dayak religion and culture. The Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis (GKE) is a result of the missionary work of German and Swiss missionaries beginning 1853. It is the biggest and most ineradicable church of the Dayak tribes in Central Kalimantan. But is this kind of religion, Kaharingan, really a homogeneous doctrine from the very beginning of mankind? Educated Dayak in southern Borneo only know the oral traditions from their ancestors. The only written source they know about is the dubious book "Ngaju Religion" from 1963 by the Swiss missionary Schärer. In fact, much older written sources give a quite different origin of the Ngaju tribal religion. Here, I select two sources only, a Dutch and a German one.

I

The Dutch historian on "Indies" history, J. Pijnappel, – actually the German geologist and metallurgist H. von Gaffron, whose language and writings confused the Dutch scientist – wrote a very profound essay on southern Borneo (1859). In 1853, H. von Gaffron travelled in the western part of southern Borneo and collected important facts/material about nature, people, history, and religion. He reports, that before 1846 the Dayak were politically and economically independent and with their own ships bartered with the Malays in Singapore (Pijnappel 1860: 305, 343; Riwut 2003). The vassalage and dependence upon the ruling house of Banjarmasin and Kotawaringin began with the appearance of a certain Raja Tanga (before 1680 A.D.; Pijnappel 1860: 282, 304). He was of princely birth from Johor and tried to rule Seruyan[2] and Sampit in the Kotawaringin area. Raja Tanga had only one descendant, the Princess Putri Bui. She married a Banjarmasin prince. Therefore, the Kingdom of Banjarmasin got influence over the western part of southern Borneo and the independence of the Dayak tribes ended (Pijnappel 1860: 278, 304). The influence of Banjarmasin in Southwest Borneo is a historical fact, but the part of Putri Junjung Buih is legendary. Nevertheless they are the earliest hints to the famous Putri Junjung Buih, the ancestress of the Banjar Kingdom.[3] In many Malayan and Indonesian princely chronicles one finds Putri Junjung Buih as an ancestress of regional kingdoms, at least from Sumatra/Malaya as far as the Celebes Sea.[4] According to Overbeck's translation, the Sejarah Malayu narrates: "Once upon a day a mass of foam came floating down from the upper waters of the river. Inside the foam there was a nice small girl, who was adopted by the ruler 'Sang Si Perba of Palembang' who called her 'Putri Tunjong Bueh'."[5] Sang Si Perba had four children. The emperor of China sent a delegation to Palembang to ask the hand of one of his daughters for marriage. The envoy of this delegation got the ruler's assent that his oldest daughter would become the emperor's wife. She sailed to China, but the ruler gave Putri Tunjong Bueh in marriage to the young envoy. Many authors tell that the young Chinese who married Putri Tunjong Bueh, was appointed by Sang Si Perba as the ruler of Palembang's inland and of all Chinese in Palembang. All rulers of Palembang are descended from him up to this day. Also, the saga of Banjarese Putri Junjung Buhi (or Buih or Bueh) shows the same characteristics: the princess in the foam, floating down from the upper waters of a river, her husband from a kingdom beyond of the sea, from Majapahit, emerging sitting in a gong at the mouth of Barito River.

The more ancient the source and tradition about

1 *Lembaga Pengembangan* (2003: 15; 2002: 27, 30); Baier (2008: 44 f.); Mahin (2009: 217 f., 334 f.).

2 Formerly known as "Pembuang," because Raja Tanga was expelled from this area as well as some time later he had to flee from Sampit to Java (Pijnappel 1860: 304, 311).

3 Eisenberger (1936: 4); Schwaner (1853/I: 46 f.); Rees (1865/I: 14 f.); Cense (1928: 14 f., 125–128); Ras (1968: 27, 29, 60–62, 93 f.).

4 Sejarah Melayu: Overbeck (1927: 131 f.); Mees (1935: 34 f.); Ras (1968: 86).

5 Literally translated from ancient Malayan: The princess, the lotus in the foam, in modern Indonesian: The princess, lifted up by the foam.

this ancestress, the more it is domiciled in the west of Southeast Asia, the nearer it is to India and Hinduism. Thus, Ras insists on the connection with the Indian goddess Lakshmi (1968: 439; 1973: 184 f.). According to Rachel Storm (2000), Lakshmi rised from the milk ocean when it was boiled by the Devas (gods) and the Asuras (demons). This myth also reports that Lakshmi sitting in a lotus flower rised from the water and selected Vishnu as husband. Palembang and Johor, which dominated East Sumatra as far as the frontier of Minangkabau in the 16th and 17th centuries (Cribb 2000: 80 f.), are regions from where the legend of Putri Junjung Buih entered Borneo. Because there are several other important names of deities originating from Hinduism, such as Mahatara, Dewa, Dewata, Jata, Naga, and others, it is obvious that some of the main notions do not originate from the Dayak but are adopted from Indian Hinduism. The tradition is still alive that the Tumon Dayak from the Delang River and the Blantikan River immigrated from the Minangkabau area (Mallinckrodt 1924: 399; Kato 1997: 620). It is a fairly obvious inference that these influences from India and western Southeast Asia began to enter Kalimantan during the thalassocracy of the Srivijaya Empire and its non-islamic succession states.

Now then, we find the Putri Junjung Buih legend and its characteristics in many so-called "high cultures" of the coastal kingdoms in the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, and Borneo. But do we find them also in tribal oral cultures? Hans Schärer was probably the only scholar who tried to find the Dutch structuralism of ancient Javanese and Balinese cultures (in the first half of the 20th century popular in the Netherlands) in a tribal culture, in the Dayak Ngaju culture.[6] But Schärer failed totally in his endeavor. The repeated ritual verses with other words do not relate to two moieties of the Ngaju tribe but to the art of recitatives of Ngaju ritual poetry (Baier 1987: XII, XV; 2003: 69; 2008: 31). Otherwise we find the mythology or the Putri Junjung Buih legend exactly in the myth of origin of the Ngaju. The Ngaju name of the ancestress in the ritual language (*Bahasa Sangiang*) is: "Kameloh Putak Bulau Janjulen Karangan, Limut Batu Kamasan Tambun," freely transcribed: "The Princess in the golden foam which came from the upriver rubble," – the second phase of the ritual name with other words: "of the grease which came from the jeweled stones from the Naga-dragon." This ancestress really entered the world on the rocks at the upper waters of the river, then floated downriver with a boat to the mouth of the river. There she met the male ancestor "Manyamei Tunggul Garing Janjahunan Laut, Sahawung Tangkuranan Hariran," freely transcribed as "The Great-Grandfather, the stump of the ivory-tree which emerged from the sea, the godlike Sahawung from the manifold treasures of the sea." This ancestor entered the world in the sea and sailed with a boat to the coast, where he met the Kameloh.[7] Thus, when we consider sources and their information about the past, we are able to widen our horizon and would be saved from one-sidedness and faults. We see that this stands also for the knowledge of one's own culture, especially when there are no written sources about the past of religion and culture of the Dayak Ngaju.

II

The second kind of sources only gives short notices about an established custom which belongs to the service of the priestesses (*blian* or *balian*) of the Dayak Ngaju religion: to be available as "hierodules" (in ancient Greece and India temple slaves and prostitutes) during their ritual feasts. The German missionary Denninger reports in 1853: The widow of a chief in the Paju Epat village Murutuwu (Hudson 1976: 27 f.) arranges a cultic feast "and called for a *blian* from Ja-ar in Patei because the people of Sihong [formerly identical with Paju Epat] … don't have prostitute *blians*" (Denninger 1854: 341). That is true, the priestesses of all Ma'anyan tribes are married women who live in their families with their own children.

In the 1840s, these *bilians* (according to Schwaner 1853) were working as common prostitutes in the Ngaju area (Lower Barito, Pulau Petak, Kapuas River, and Kahayan River) besides their tasks in the cult prostitution. They were respected, even esteemed, in society (Schwaner 1853/I: 185 f., 1853/II: 114; *Commissie voor het Adatrecht* 1917: 132). The earlier German missionaries (before the Banjarese War) compare them with the Javanese *ronggings*.[8] *Ronggings* are singing and dancing girls in Java who perform in village and family festivities. Apparently, they were available as prostitutes during these festivities in the 19th century. The Christian retired teacher Ikat in Kuala Kapuas-Dahirang told me in 1969, that in his younger days he was seduced by

6 Schärer (1966/II: 434): the cosmos is divided in two moieties: upper world – nether world.

7 Simpei and Hanyi (996: 26–34); Baier (2000: 67; 2008: 46–51); *Lembaga Pengembangan* (2003: Kelas I: 31–33, Kelas III: 37).

8 Hupé (1846: 142); Hardeland (1859: 35); see also Halewijn (1832: 285 f.).

a *balian* prostitute.[9] The Indonesian publicist Kathleen Azali writes in the periodical *Bhinneka* (2012: 23): "The ronggeng represents a sacral and a profane dualism: the sublime and holy womanhood and the prostitute." She cites Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles and his famous "The History of Java" (1817: 342): "Ronggengs are dancing girls, very common in this country … not seldom they also sell their sexual services during their performance."

It is evident that in the directly adjacent neighboring areas of the Ngaju (east and upper Barito, upper Kapuas River and upper Kahayan River, the entire Katingan River) there was no cult prostitution. Pijnappel (1860: 328 f.) emphasizes that *balian* prostitution is practiced only in the "Kahayan, Pulu Petak, and Mentangei" area.

The above mentioned village of Ja-ar is the "gateway" to the Ma'anyan area from Banjarmasin and the coast. And just there was the residence of the only *balian* for the Ma'anyan region. There, at any rate did not exist any relationship to the Ngajus and their tribal religion. Thus, this available *balian* prostitute got her pattern from the coast and from Java. Hence, we may infer that the cult prostitution was not an original establishment of the Ngaju culture but was introduced from Java. The more Islam and Christianity were propagated in Central Kalimantan, the more this sacred fornication declined. It died out in about the first quarter of the 20th century.[10]

Other sources and hints are found in van Lummel's book about Borneo. He quotes:

1. the German missionary Johann Friedrich Becker (1836–1849 in Borneo), the first person who described the death festival Tiwah reasonably in detail; important statements are cited in ancient Ngaju language. Beside the male head priest female priestesses (*bliangs*, "a bad bit of skirt") are reciting "day and night," when they "act disgracefully, that would be unmentionable"(van Lummel 1882: 30).
2. When before 1845 in the Pulopetak area kinsfolk and chumminesses make a night party ("drinking – bout"), *bliangs* ("debauched women") have to perform (van Lummel 1882: 56, 60).
3. J. H. Barnstein, the first German missionary in Borneo (1835–1863), reports that even the Chinese in their Banjarmasin district engage a *bliang* for their pleasure parties (van Lummel 1882: 149).

It stands to reason that nobody likes to hear or read dark and unpleasant facts of the history of his native land. To my knowledge, no Indonesian scholar mentions this sacred fornication in his publications. That point notwithstanding, the head of the Southeast Asian archipelago collection of an Austrian museum, a lady from the famous conservative House of the Solo Sultanate, has touched upon the *balian* prostitutes, not to give information about this institution but to pillory the German missionaries. This scholar writes in one of her newest essays: the "ritual performances take the whole night. Therefore, they [these priestesses] were connected by the missionaries with the 'sacred fornication' and were called 'un-christian'" (Kuhnt-Saptodewo and Mahin 2009: 144). Original Ngaju sources, like § 456 in Baier (1977: 365 f.) were not observed and taken in consideration. In addition, she claims that Schärer interprets these nights like worship prostitution and from his remarks (1966!) this was adopted in the anthropological literature. It was ignored that many non-missionaries, such as colonial officers and military doctors, in the 19th century reported about these *balian* prostitutes. The "interpretations of the German missionaries are straitened by their Eurocentric feelings" and their "religious fancies" (Kuhnt-Saptodewo 1993: 60, 329). Thus, the cult prostitution is limited in period and tribally limited exclusively in the Ngaju culture. It was introduced from outside and pent up by the influence of other foreign religions. To reach these findings, one must consider the sources of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Alas, there are West-European anthropologists who never consider such sources and publish especially geographic errors in their publications. This small essay should give hints that for a serious scientific publication such sources must be checked and studied.

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9 Personal communication, written in my notebook under "*balian*."

10 Cf. Mallinckrodt (1924: 535 – NB "oudtijds"); Zimmermann (1969) mentioned nothing about worship prostitution in his famous essay.

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