My experience with this book began rather later than that of Chun Sheng. During his post-doc at Harvard in 2020, he had compiled a draft, but lacking access to either the university library or interested staff because of COVID-19, he was unsure of some of the data and his conclusions. He asked me to check the manuscript, which I agreed to do, but then I began to discover gaps and to proceed to fill them. The result has been a substantial rewrite by both of us over the succeeding three years and our agreement to produce a joint volume.

Following completion of my PhD in Guyana (South America), for McGill University (Montreal), I moved to the University of Adelaide and began field studies in Borneo (mainly Kalimantan) in 1983. My initial introduction to Banjarmasin was to a city living on private generators, as the level of the hydropower dam was too low to be operational and there was a serious El-Niño drought. This soon developed in the logging regions of East Kalimantan into a large-scale forest fire, brought about by the “changed condition of the forest”, according to a leading commentator. After several field seasons resident in Banjarese and other villages in the Upper Riam Kiwa, I shifted my focus, from a concentration on the forests and the active deforestation and grassland formation still taking place, to attempted reforestation and replanting, eventually of oil palm, the new “golden child”. This brought a move to field sites in West Kalimantan, then a leading oil palm centre, especially to Dayak smallholder villages in Sanggau district. Consultancies also followed with the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). Later work also involved first-hand knowledge of various transmigration sites in Central Kalimantan, including the notorious “Million Hectare Rice Scheme”. I had meanwhile been involved in research in the environmental history of Borneo through archives in the Netherlands and collaboration in work of the KITLV anthropological group in Leiden. I managed to acquire some knowledge of Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei through overland travel and conference attendance, while residence on logging company sites, oil palm estates and in national parks like Kayan Mentarang (North Kalimantan) helped to fill in my “Borneo” experience and enabled me to understand the rapid changes taking place. I have been grateful to always find a welcome from local villagers and fellow researchers, who have
been keen to assist me to understand the complexities of life on this large island. My special thanks goes to Jennifer Sheehan of the Cartographic & GIS Services of the Australian National University (ANU) for drawing the maps for Figures 1.1, 2.1a and b, 2.2 and 5.4.

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