

## The Reflection of Indigenous Peoples' Changing Identity in the Social, Cultural and Historical Contexts in the Cities of Sarawak

Cases Study: Kuching (including Lundu and Serian as satellite towns) and Miri cities

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### Introduction

According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, a modern understanding of the Indigenous Peoples should consider the following: (1) their self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and their acceptance by the community as members; (2) their historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; (3) their strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; (4) their distinct social, economic, or political systems; (5) their distinct language, culture, and beliefs; (6) their forming non-dominant groups in society; and (7) their resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities. According to Benedict Kingsbury (1995, 23), World Bank, in September 1991, promulgated a new operational directive which states that “the terms indigenous peoples, indigenous ethnic minority, tribal groups, and scheduled tribes describe social groups with a social and cultural identity distinct from the dominant society that makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the developing process. For the purpose of this directive, indigenous peoples is the term that will be used to refer to these groups”. Based on the aforementioned criteria and definition, it goes without saying that the Dayak ethnic group is an Indigenous Peoples because all the criteria and the definition stated by the UN is valid for them. For the sake of national security and development, the Malaysian government also provided for ethnic segregation in the Malaysian Constitution of 1957.

Just as ethnic segregation in Malaysia was permanently defined in the Malaysian Constitution of 1957, the constitution also mentioned the Indigenous Peoples of Sarawak and Sabah in article 161 A [6] and [7], and named them “*bumiputera*”. This ethnic category was formulated to differentiate the

indigenous peoples from the Chinese and Indians. In Peninsular Malaysia, *bumiputera* is applied to Malay and Native groups, whilst in Sarawak, the term is used for Malay, Sea Dayak (Iban), Land Dayak (Bidayuh and Selako), and upper river peoples which further consist of many subdivisions. Due to the ethnic segregation defined in the Malaysian Constitution of 1957, the status of indigenous people as Iban, Bidayuh, and Selako will still be embedded in their social life.

There is no official definition of Dayak in Malaysia, except for Malays. A Dayak is someone born of a parent from the Dayak lineage (Selako, Bidayuh, and Iban). He or she speaks Dayak vernaculars, and adheres to Dayak customs and traditions. This category is suited for the three dimensions of ethnicity identified by Fisherman (1977) in Appel and Myusken (1987, 12) to be paternity, patrimony, and phenomenology.

The Iban group still consists of several subdivisions divided in accordance with the rivers where they dwell, such as Iban Batang Lupar, Iban Batang Rejang, Iban Skrang, etc. From a linguistic perspective, the Iban tribe is included in the Ibanik language family. Bidayuh is divided into four different ethnic dialect groups, as follows: Bukar Sadong dialect (Serian District), Biatah dialect (Kuching District), Singai/ Jagoi dialect (Bau District), and Selakau/ Lara dialects (Lundu District), (Chang Pat Poh 1999, 19). In this paper, Bidayuh and Selako are distinguished based on the language they speak. Bidayuh speak dialects from the Bidayuhik language family, while Selako speak dialects like those of the Melayik language family.

A large concentration of Iban such as, Sibu, Sarikei, Kenowit, and Kapit dwell along the Rejang River basin. Their early old settlement found in Sri Aman and Betong divisions. The Bidayuh are mainly found in the Penrissen, Padawan, Serian,

and Bau areas, whereas the Selako are mainly found in the Lundu area.

Being inland people, their culture, livelihood, and way of living and seeing the world were determined by nature. All these aspects intertwined with one another. For example, in Dayak's cultivation practices, all customs and traditions related to natural elements applied from the time of the land survey up until harvesting time, e.g., *gawai batu* (stone feast) for Iban, *naik dango* (harvest feast) for Selako. Sounds of birds were used to determine the location of ground farming and the schedule to clear the land. Krober (1963) in Maffi (2005, 601) said, "Cultures are rooted in nature, and therefore can't be completely understood except with reference to environmental or natural factors". In rural life, several aspects of nature directly formed Dayak's culture such as omens, dreams, rain at midday, a rainbow in the sky, and taboo. These aspects were able to trigger fear in Dayak who saw in them signs of calamity. Nonetheless, these elements were also able to predict the time for holding some activities like feasts, farming activities, hunting, and gathering. These aspects shaped the notion of how Dayak construed themselves.

In the rural areas, two physical environments were highly considered to have formed the social, cultural, and historical life of Dayak: shifting cultivation and longhouse. Shifting cultivation was the main livelihood of Dayak and also the core of Dayak culture, due to the whole process of shifting cultivation practices involving *adat* ceremonies based on natural elements. For instance, the *gawai Naik Dango* (harvest feast in Dayak Selako) and *Gawai Batu* (stone feast in Dayak Iban), which were conducted annually after harvest time, indicated a sign of respect for the spirits and nature. In this farming method, Dayak planted hill paddies with corn, cassava, and indigenous vegetables.

The longhouse was built as a fortress to protect Dayak, especially the women and children, from the attack of their enemies when headhunting practices among the Dayak were rampant in the past. Dayak's enemies were the other Dayak sub-ethnic groups outside their community members; so, for instance, there were encounters between the Iban and Bidayuh. In addition, the longhouse also

became the center of the socio-cultural activities (births, weddings, festive events, and death) of the inhabitants. As the center of the socio-cultural activities, longhouse became the city for Dayak in the past. When the city for Dayak served as their longhouse, every decisions for Dayak such as customary law, custom and tradition, schedule to open farming ground and arrange the feasts will be determined in the longhouse.

In modern society, a city is a physical environment for rapid social changes where multicultural interactions happen. Staying in a city for the first time may be a challenge for Dayak, though they prefer to live in this new living space. Having spent most of their lives in the rural area, Dayak have to learn many things about city life such as job specification, the urban people's different perception of time compared to Dayak, and the difference in cultural behavior among those who live in a multicultural society. In order to keep their identity as Dayak, they needed to be empowered in the field of culture and identity when dealing with the influences of city life. This sort of empowerment should be clearly stated in the national education curriculum that applied as early as the first year of school.

### Research objectives

- a. To describe the situation and characteristic of Kuching (including Lundu and Serian towns) and Miri cities.
- b. To describe the Selako, Bidayuh, and Iban cultures, their social situation and history during a specific period of time.
- c. To describe how the three communities feel about living in the city.
- d. To see and identify in the Iban, Bidayuh, and Selako communities their changing identities in the urban area (Kuching, Lundu, Serian, and Miri) due to the development of cities.

### Significance

This study tries to look at the changes in the Dayak identity as an interior people after having had intensive contact with the urban environment. The basic idea of this paper is to see how city life

shapes and influences the Dayak's socio-culture and way of life. The expected contributions of city life to the Dayak community include: a new way of thinking, particularly their beginning to construe themselves as part of the wider community; and, how this new way of thinking enriches their life such that they maintain a great understanding of one another for the betterment of the community, and strengthen their awareness of their local knowledge and wisdom, for the sake of their own dignity, sovereignty and integrity.

### Methodology

This research applied a qualitative method through observations and interviews that were supported by relevant theories. Since this study used a multi disciplinary approach, relevant theories from various scholars are elaborated on throughout the different sections of this research. In-depth interviews with informants were also encouraged. Additional data and information considered as primary data and information were obtained from various documents and books. The field findings were collected through random sampling. There were 100 persons interviewed during the field work in Kuching, Lundu, Serian, and Miri. Twenty percent were recorded, while 30% of the interviews were done during working hours, and 50% were investigated and interviewed in the traditional markets, which sold local vegetables, fruits, and food, such as the Sunday Market in Kuching, and traditional markets in Serian and Lundu. Most of the interviews were conducted candidly to maintain a natural atmosphere.

### Borneo – Sarawak

Sarawak measures 124,449 square kilometers. According to Mark Cleary and Peter Eaton (1992,18), "Since the ancient time, the central spine of rugged mountain with dense, impenetrable, and steamy rainforest which covers the middle island of Borneo had become the boundary of nation-states, Kalimantan, Indonesia and Sarawak-Sabah, Malaysia". Brosius (1986, 175) said that "the forest and mountains were the repository for memories of past events".

The coming of Islam to Brunei in the 16<sup>th</sup> century marked the commencement of the dominance of the Malay Kingdom in Sarawak. On 24 September 1841, James Brooke was appointed Sarawak Governor and then assigned as Rajah. Then Brooke's family governed Sarawak for 100 years, from 1841 to 1941. On 1 July 1946, Sarawak was proclaimed a British colony. Finally, on 16 September 1963, Sarawak joined Malaya to form the nation of Malaysia, (Tan Chung Lee 2006, 7-9).

The population of Sarawak by ethnic groups can be broken down as follows: Iban 713,421 (31%), Malay 568,113 (27%), Chinese 577,646 (23%), Bidayuh 198,473 (8%), Melanau 123,410 (5%), and others 156,436 (6%) for a total population of 2,354,048 persons (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2010).

### The city as a place of rapid social change

The city is characterized by high population density, diverse social strata, the specialization of jobs, and a consumer society that provide the promise of prosperity and livelihood improvement. The specification of jobs in the urban area has established a pattern of complex relationships with the isolation of groups, depending on their job specification and social status. This phenomenon tends to cause persons with the same kinds of jobs to be more closely associated with one another. Due to the specification of their jobs, people can easily change their social class.

Today, the main problems in urban areas are traffic congestion, flooding, garbage, disease, joblessness, slum dwellers, squatter settlements, and social tension. The increase in vehicles and population growth do not balance with the increase in physical infrastructure such as roads, housing, and other facilities. This condition has been aggravated by limited job availability, which ultimately triggers unemployment and criminality.

In order to be sustainable, the modern city must heavily depend on the network system in the periphery, namely, the suburban areas, villages, or settlements in the vicinity. The network system consisting of economic forces, labor, education,

and trade functions as a connective tissue that feeds the city through the network of commuting goods and people.

### Urbanization

Urbanization is defined as a process of growing the urban population as a result of the movement of the rural people into the urban areas. According to Ridu (2003, 21) “What we need to do is to enhance the urbanization of rural life through rural-urban convergence characterized by towns, rural non-farmers, and fading rural urban distinction”. Most of Dayak’s villages in Sarawak are provided with good transportation networks to cities that enable villagers to live conveniently as commuters. As commuters, the villagers can commute easily from village to the city and head back to their village again at the same day. In the village, they can work at their home to provide goods, handicrafts, local vegetables, etc., and bring the goods to the city in the morning; and then in the afternoon, they can be back again in their villages. This way of living and working should be encouraged for Dayak, due to the scarcity of land in the city and expensive housing options.

### Kuching City

“Kuching derived from the *mata kuching* (cat’s eye) – fruit tree (*Nepbelium nalareense*)”, so says Alice, Yen Ho (2004, 10). This city is situated in the middle of Sarawak River which has a number of bridges built by the state to provide access to either side of the river, making it very convenient.

Kuching consists of two administrative areas administered by a *Datuk Bandar*, legally called “Mayor” in Kuching South and “Commissioner” in Kuching North. The Northern City of Kuching ever since the era of James Brooke (1841-1868) had become the administrative area. As the administrative area, James Brooke established houses and government buildings for his personnel offices and homes, this area was the center of Brooke’s administrative kingdom. To develop his kingdom, Brooke encouraged migrant workers to come to Sarawak. They lived in many kampongs

situated in the northern area. Meanwhile, since the early years of the city, the southern area had been busy with business activities. This area is now better known as the city center.

Nowadays, Dayak come to Kuching as commuters, as temporary or permanent residents. As temporary residents, most of them live in rented rooms located on the second or third storey of buildings, although there are some employers who also provide rooms for their workers. These rooms are sealed and bulkhead without any window. A narrow alley stands between each of the rooms. There are three doors that should be passed through to come to the rooms from downstairs. Each door has to be locked for security purposes. For the workers, these rooms are but a place in which to sleep. They are very similar to human cages. The rooms’ building is the zone of the working people’s homes. Meanwhile, permanent residents live in the residential zone and in single family dwellings. This is the zone of the high class.

To maintain the sustainability of urban life in Kuching, the Government has encouraged the establishment of rural-urban interaction by enhancing the quality of physical infrastructure such as roads and bridges, water resources development, sewerage, the maintenance of high conservation areas for tourism purposes, and agricultural development. In the urban area, the main attractive amenities such as the university, tourism objects, bus stations, supermarkets, and traditional markets are built outside the city center. For Dayak, this condition is a blessing in disguise because they can access these amenities easily. For instance, they can go to university from their village, and buy food, clothing, and household needs by commuting. This set-up is able to accelerate social transformation and erase the difference between rural and urban areas.

### Lundu Town

Lundu is a satellite town of Kuching which is located in Southwest Sarawak, at the border of Sambas District, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. There are several tourism objects in this area such as Gunung Gading National Park, attractive Siar

and Pandan Beaches and the peoples with variety of culture and way of life. From Kuching, Lundu is able to be reached in one hour.

This sleepy up-country town is the nearest town from the Dayak Selako's settlements. It is also the nearest place where Selako are able to feel the city life and intensive social interaction with outsiders. Most of Dayak Selako commute to sell their goods and forest produce. The local government provided a place for Selako to sell local fruits and vegetables to the outsiders. This place became a place to make social interaction between Selako people and the outsiders.

### **Serian Town**

Serian Town is located at the Sanggau District Border, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. It is about 65 Km from Kuching. Serian is also a satellite town of Kuching. This town has become the most important place for Bidayuh to interact. The town is very well connected to its rich hinterland, both by road and by river.

It can be reached in a half-hour or one hour by vehicles from Kuching city center. As satellite town, Serian has potentially become the commuters' zones for their exposure to urban expansion.

Based on the Yearbook of Statistics Sarawak 2011, the Serian district population was 90,763, of which about 65% were Bidayuh and the rest consist of Chinese, Iban, Malay and India.

### **Miri City**

Miri is located near the beach. The term "Miri" was derived from the name of Miri's native, known as "Miriek". Europeans inadvertently changed the name Miriek to Miri. Miri's history is closely related to the history of the petroleum industry in Sarawak. On 10 August 1910, the Anglo Saxon Petroleum Company found oil in Canada Hill, overlooking the small fishing village of Miri. "At the time of the spudding in of Well No.1, Miri consisted of about 20 scattered houses and two Chinese shops" (Harper 1972, 24).

In the mid-1920s, Miri became the administrative center of Miri and Baram regions. In the 1970s, Miri was also the center of a major timber industry. Baram River, the second largest river in Sarawak, became the transport artery that linked inland forests to the coastal ports, thereby facilitating the conveyance of humans and timber. Owing to the support from these two main resources, Miri grew from a fishing village into one of the modern cosmopolitan cities in Sarawak within a short period.

Today, Miri, with an area of 977.43 Square Km, is inhabited by several ethnic groups. The population by ethnic groups is as follows: Iban 90,649; Chinese 77,183; Malay 45,884; and other native ethnic groups, as many as 54,584 people (year 2010 census).

### **Who are the Indigenous Dayak People?**

Who are the indigenous Dayak people? What information do we use to categorize the Dayak? How have their territories formed their identity? In the past, the notion of Dayak as backward, aggressive, fierce, cruel, ruffian, poor, stupid, uncivilized, pagan, drunken and head-hunting (Gomes 2007, 1) gave them a stigma. As a result, Dayak were marginalized, humiliated, and ignorant in all aspects of life. They had to struggle for their dignity, sovereignty, and integrity, and their quality of life was so low. In mid 1980, one of the prominent Dayak figures in West Borneo said, "If it was possible for me to fire myself as a Dayak, I would like to fire myself; but I cannot do that. Therefore, I have to empower myself so that the other ethnic groups will respect me as a human being". Due to their history, how Dayak were colonized, marginalized, manipulated, and humiliated by the Malay Sultanate, ultimately led to the increase in their sense of kinship and solidarity, which in turn created 'a shared us feeling' a feeling that they had the same fate and destiny which united them as one group, Dayak.

Aside from their cultural values, Dayak also had a shared belief, common values, and attitudes derived from natural elements. In the past, these

shared beliefs were able to trigger fear and anxiety among them. Recently, many Dayak from the younger generation did not allow themselves to be dictated to by these natural elements because Dayak who had been to the city started to realize that their fear did not have a strong basis. They also witnessed how their forefathers feared such animals (certain birds, crocodile, insects etc.), which, in the city, were stored in the museum. Still, some Dayak from the older generations continued to allow these natural elements to influence their belief system.

#### Dayak Selako

Based on their language differences, the discussion on Selako and Bidayuh are separated in this paper. According to several linguists, Dayak Selako speak one of the dialects belonging to the Malayik language family, while Bidayuh speak Bidayuhik (see Hudson (1970, 1978) and Collins (1999a, 1999b, 1999c) in Albertus (2004). Language has strong dimensions that differentiate human identities. Fishman (1977 in Appel and Muysken (1987, 13)) stated “Language is the recorder of paternity, the expresser of patrimony and the carrier of phenomenology”. As the recorder of paternity, language is able to record values, ways of life, and core cultures from forefathers to their descendants. It influences culture and thought. As the expresser of patrimony, language becomes a means of communication to express feelings and cultural practices. It facilitates the learning of new values and culture as the legacy of collectivity and learning. As the carrier of phenomenology, language provides meaning to the culture and values inherited from the forefathers.

The starting point of Selako’s migration to Lundu was the Sajingan area, Sambas region, West Kalimantan. Schneider (1974,195) stated that “The migration occurred in two waves: the Year 1830, Selako Gajekng who settled in Kampung Sedemak and around it, and the Year 1871 Selako Sangkuku who settled in Kampung Biawak, Puch and around it”.

According to Nek Dewa, the informant from Sajingan village, “A group of persons in Dayak

Selako community who can apply the customs, tradition, and customary law is usually more respected in their community because they were considered as having the responsibility to regulate the relationship between man and man, man and nature, and man with God. This group was called Salako Gajekng and the rest of the group is Salako Sangkuku”. This group represented the Selako community in general.

*Rumah bantang* or the longhouse of Selako people was the center of their culture. It was associated with socio-cultural activities such as rituals and festive events.

During the reign of James Brooke as Rajah of Sarawak (1841-1868), Dayak Selako still conducted barter for their forest produce to purchase their households needs, as noted by Henriette (2008, 119): “Dayak chief with a number of his people come to Kuching to pay their rice tax, or purchase clothes, tobacco, gongs, gunpowder, whatever the bazaar possessed which they valued, to exchange for those things, they brought with them beeswax, dammar, honey, or rattan”. From the sixties to the seventies, Dayak Selako planted palm oil, pepper, and rubber trees which provided a steady source of cash. Palm oil, pepper and rubber trees plantation were a form of monoculture plantation because other vegetation could not be allowed to grow in the same area. This monoculture plantation for getting cash made it necessary for the barter system of the past to be replaced by the currency trading system.

The Bidayuh population in Lundu region is around 12,034 (year 2010 census). This figure classified Selako and Bidayuh as one group. In 1970, Schneider (1974) recorded the population of Selako to be 4,207 persons, which showed that in 40 years, the Selako community increased twofold.

#### Dayak Iban

Iban moved from West Kalimantan to Sarawak as early as 1540. They entered Sarawak by way of the low-lying watershed Kapuas Between Batang Lupar / Batang Ai’. After the 1880s, Iban populated the coastal region toward Miri (Samuel 2005, 42).

Iban are familiar with the myth of *Keling* (the god of adventure and warfare) and *Raja Berani* (the King of Bravery). Keling and Raja Berani are the spirit of Iban to move and to walk (*bejalai*). *Bejalai* is a form of the Iban tradition, which is allegedly used as a driving force for Iban to become the most expansive and aggressive people in Sarawak. *Bejalai* means “walking”, which was the way the Iban looked for farming ground, hunting, and gathering spaces. To it is attributed the Iban’s spread to the whole Sarawak region within the shortest possible time.

Two aspects led to the emergence of Iban’s customs and traditions in shifting cultivation. Firstly, Iban believed that the forest and land were always inhabited by invisible creatures (the spirit of their ancestors and deities). Therefore, they should ask permission from these spirits/deities before clearing the land. Secondly, the Iban also believed that paddy or rice had a soul or spirit; therefore, a form of respect and gratitude toward the spirits should take place in the form of a feast, for instance. One of the feasts was a stone feast (*gawai batu*). Gomes (2007, 48), wrote “Gawai Batu takes place before the farming operations begin, and is in honour of *Pulang Gana* (the god of the land), who lives in the bowels of the earth, and has the power to make the land fruitful or unfruitful”.

James Brooke (1841-1868) encouraged the Iban move to Kuching for the position of Sarawak Rangers. The reason behind this was that James Brooke wanted to get the protection of Iban, especially after the insurrection conducted by the Chinese gold miners in Bau in 1857. The movement of Iban to Kuching mostly happened due to the rubber economy which peaked in the 1900s. However, from 1947 to 1980, the increase in the number of Iban that moved from the villages to the cities was relatively very small because city life did not support Iban’s farming livelihood. Based on the official statistic data, in 1947 Iban in the urban areas comprised just 0.9%, while in 1980 just 4.8% of the total Iban population (Department of Statistics Kuching in James Masing 1988, 57).

As time passed, Iban learned the market mechanisms of working and selling their goods. Presumably,

city life appeared more promising than staying at the longhouse. As the number of well educated Iban increased in the city, many of them got decent jobs, conducted business activities, and obtained employment with a fixed salary.

The main reason for life in Kuching to be preferred was that everything was available, such as adequate food, lots of ways to earn money, medical services, and education. The close proximity between the villages and Kuching was also an important reason for Iban to come to Kuching, either as daily commuters or residents.

Iban with permanent jobs in Kuching chose to live outside the urban center and to stay at the suburban areas (commuters’ zone) such as Tabuan Dayak, Sekama, and Sekandis. Nowadays, there are also some Iban in Kuching, among them prominent figures during the early days of Sarawak Independence. These are rich families who own hotels, supermarkets, oil palm plantations, etc. In Kuching, Iban are divided into three social ranks: low class, middle class, and high class. Unfortunately, however, their incomes are not known. Most Iban choose to commute from the village to the city to do business, due to the proximity of the villages to the city.

#### Dayak Bidayuh

The Bidayuh people also originated from West Kalimantan, Indonesia. According to Nais (1983, 54) in Albertus (2003, 2) “‘Dayuh’ itself means far-inland or interior area. Bidayuh means having the elements of Dayuh in custom, culture, language, prestige, etc.” Meanwhile, Geddes (1954, 6) said that “‘Bidayuh’ means people of the interior”. From these discourses, we can make one conclusion: that ‘*Bidayuh*’ is a person or group of persons who live in the interior.

Robert Jacob Ridu (2003,16) stated that, “Many writers and adventurers described Bidayuh as introvert, meek, docile, weak, friendly, and tender persons. They spent mostly of their lifetime in the upper rivers, headwaters, and mountainous areas”. Bidayuh are also a religious society. They believe in deities who live in the uplands and forest area for

instance, *Tampa Raiyub* (creator) (Geddes 1954, 25), *Dervata* (from dewata of Hindu deity) (Roth 1968, 7), *Jewata* (from dewata of Hindu deity) (Gould 1909, 38), *Topab* (supreme being), etc. It was very possible that the presence of Bidayuh in the hills and the upper rivers was also motivated by a religious attitude, which was embedded in the Bidayuh people. Today, many Bidayuh people are converts to Christian religions such as Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant due to the fact that during the Brooke era (1841-1941), many missionaries came to their villages to introduce Christian values.

Bidayuh believe that rice or paddy has a soul or spirit. Patrick Rigepp Nuek (2005, 9) wrote “The Bidayuh treats rice with respect, for fear the next harvest that would be a poor one. They respect rice as if it had a life and soul *Ieng sumuk babai* (the name of the soul of rice)”.

Nowadays, many Bidayuh live in the city, either as residents (permanent or temporary) or as commuters. Bidayuh as residents commute as well with a difference compared to the real commuter. They commute simply because they want to visit their family members in the village and for recreational purposes. As commuters, on certain days, Bidayuh come to Kuching to sell their crops and farm produce. In Kuching, government has set up a storefront for villagers to sell their crops, a traditional market which is famously known as the “Sunday Market”. Every weekend, the Sunday Market is full of people from various backgrounds selling a variety of foods, forest produce, and handicrafts.

Bidayuh who live as residents of Kuching are divided into two categories. One consists of those who have lived in Kuching for a long time and hold a permanent job, e.g., teachers, lecturers, police officers, civil servants in governmental agencies and politics, midwives, nurses and doctors in hospitals, and security officers. The second group is made up of temporary residents. This group mostly consists of the younger generation, those who have just arrived in Kuching and have already gotten jobs but still do not have houses. For a while, they lease houses or rooms available in Kuching.

### How Dayak feel about living in the city

In Kuching (including Serian and Lundu towns) and Miri Cities, Dayak could be divided into three groups: First would be the group that has the status of permanent resident in the city. The second group would consist of Dayak who are temporary residents, while the third would be the commuters.

In general, permanent residents have a permanent job in the city, or have second and third generation descendants living in the city. They are able to adjust well to city life but their ties with their own homeland remain strong. Alim Mideh, a Bidayuh Dayak from Serikin, said, “In my opinion, Kuching is a better place to live in because all amenities needed such as education, health, and the market are available. Nowadays, I stay in Kuching. Anyway, I also still head back regularly to my village because most of my family members still live there. Besides that, my village is able to be reached from Kuching in just one hour by car”.

When I asked about the influence of the city on the young generation of Bidayuh, a prominent Bidayuh, Patau Rubis, said, “The young generation of Bidayuh who live in the city are different from the Bidayuh in the village who still respect their parents and cultural values, and are still trustworthy. The young Bidayuh in the city do not respect local wisdom anymore. This is not a matter of changing identity, but is just a social disease due to the city’s influences”.

The second Dayak community group consists of temporary residents. This group usually includes young Dayak people who have already graduated from college or high school, or villagers who seek jobs in the city. This group mostly stays in the zone of the working people’s homes to have easy access to their jobs. Their homes are in several storey buildings which provide rooms for rent in the second or third floor/storey. The function of the room is to provide a place to sleep. Roffina, an Iban girl from Miri said, “If I had a choice where to stay and work, I would chose to stay in the village rather than in this city. Living in this city is expensive, but I live in Miri because there is a

job in this city; anyway, when I get older or start receiving a pension, I'll go back to my village again”.

Midi Jonek, a Bidayuh who always commutes to Kuching said, “Nowadays, I am able to survive and live comfortably in the city because the roads and bridges reach the rural areas as well, so I can move from my village to Kuching in just 30 to 60 minutes. In Kuching I have a house, although to live in the city is a better choice for personal reasons, especially because you gain access to better education, job opportunities, and a career. I can assure you that my children will get better education and health”. He added, “Recently, I experienced having no boundary between rural and urban any longer. I usually bring my laptop to my village from where I can access the Internet for 24 hours. Therefore, good transportation and technology information fade the gap between rural and urban areas”.

As soon as they experienced the process of transition to city life, Dayak nearly never practice their tradition and culture any longer; but this condition never changes their identity as Dayak because they are majority in number and there is strict ethnic segregation in Malaysia that separates citizens into different ethnic group categories.

### Conclusion

Since time immemorial, Dayak have been spending most of their lifetimes in and with nature. Therefore, their way of life, how they think, and see the world have also been determined by their culture and nature-based belief systems. Their close association with natural elements has earned for Dayak the title “inland/ interior people”.

In recent years, the urbanization and modernization of the rural areas, and the industrialization of natural resources through development programs provided them opportunities to interact with the outside world beyond their own community members. In the Sarawak region, transportation and communication networks connect all places and humans across the region.

In Kuching, the improvement of physical infrastructure such as, roads, bridges, storage facilities; water resources development, drainage, sewerage, river conservation and communication systems; social infrastructure such as health and medical facilities which consist of hospitals, dispensaries, maternity and health centers; educational components of infrastructure consisting of primary, secondary and technical schools, vocational schools and universities, as well as electricity, water supply, community centers, and security services have become the main attractions of city life. To a certain extent, these developments are also expected to reach the rural areas—a condition that has the potential power to reduce and fade the differences between urban and rural areas.

Population growth due to urbanization has caused certain areas which were originally rural zones, to turn into developing zones of the city. There is a tendency in Kuching for the city center to expand its area by invading the outer areas. For the Dayak people, especially those who now live in the city permanently and have disconnected themselves or are less related to their original homeland in the rural areas, this progress has become a blessing in disguise. It has given them the opportunity to revitalize their own roots and basic identity as Dayak, which have already faded due to the influence of modernization in the city. For commuters, this condition potentially improves their quality of life due to the increase in business activities. The temporary residents have also started to try harder to improve their qualifications by empowering themselves through formal education, as stated by Peter Minos (2003, 103) “Good formal education is our savior from economic backwardness and poverty and a vital vehicle for our advancement and progress”.

Urban development and progress, in fact, have positive and negative impacts on Dayak as they have provided them enough preparation to live in the city, like well-educated men and women who regard the city as the living space to get a better life. Meanwhile, Dayak who do not get sufficient preparation will turn out to be the hard worker

with a low salary for whom city life will be a burden. Such situations are able to change their identity to feel positively about the community and to feel negatively about the challenges of city life and job specifications due to their preference for city living. City life will aggravate their inherited local values and wisdom acquired from the village.

The language spoken has also an important role in the identity of Dayak because while the common language in the city is the Sarawak Malay language, Dayak still use their vernacular when they get together by themselves. The use of the Sarawak Malay language will never disappear because the Malaysian government has started to determine the Malay language as the national identity of the Malaysian people.

Actually, there are many similarities among the three Dayak ethnic groups (Selako, Iban and Bidayuh). One similarity is their practicing egalitarian principles based on their self-confidence to show that they are able to do everything themselves without any help from outsiders. This indicates that all Dayak are supposedly equal. The movement of Dayak from rural to urban areas is also motivated by the egalitarian principle.

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