

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIDAYUH CUSTOM (ADAT) AND ENVIRONMENT

By

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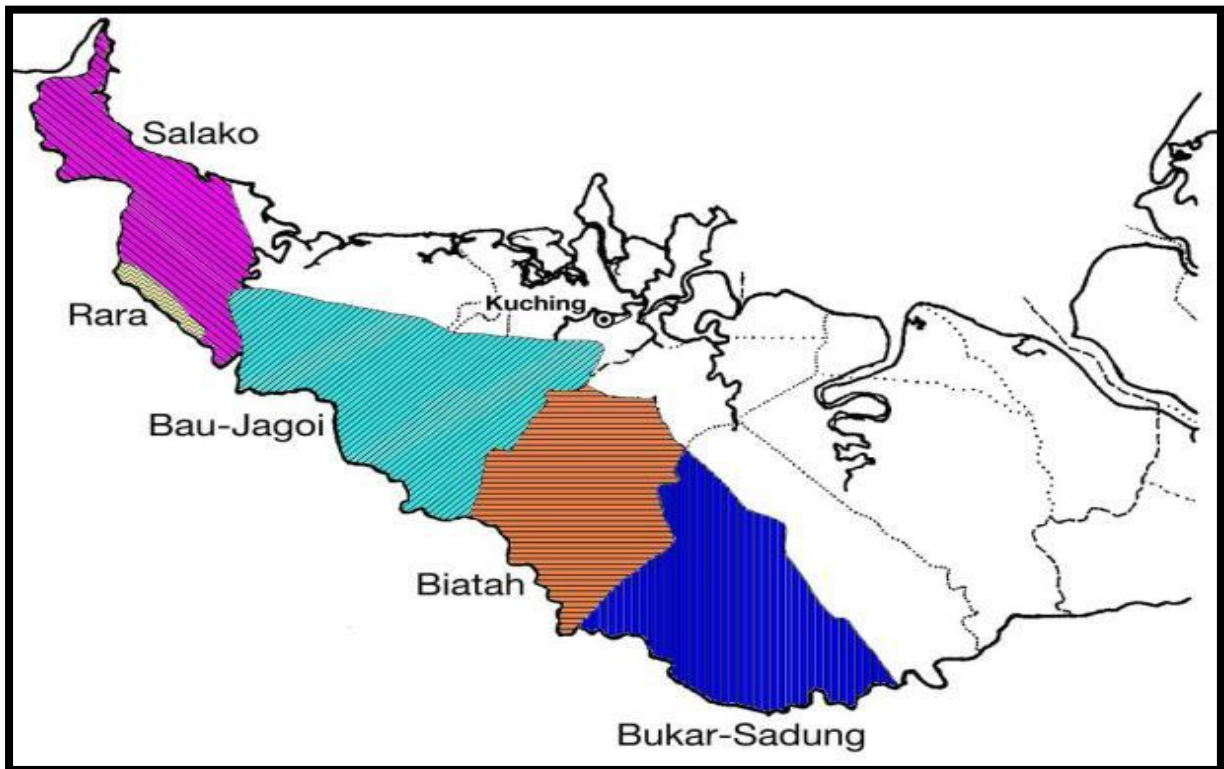
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Lundu District

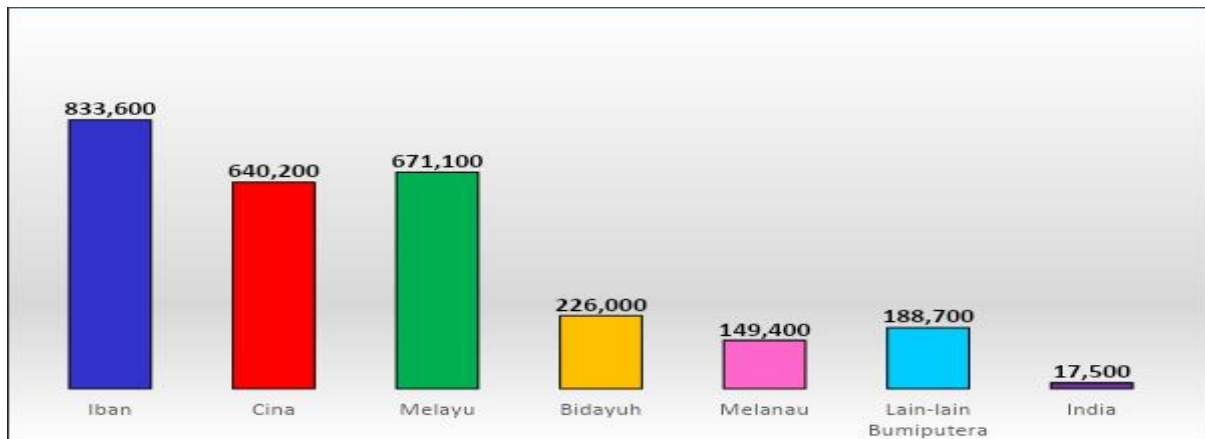
Bau District

Padawan-Siburan

Serian District

Settlement of the Bidayuh according to sub-group

(Source: Economic Planning Unit Chief Minister's Office Sarawak, 2020).



Iban	833,600
Chinese	640,200
Malay	671,100
Bidayuh	226,000
Melanau	149,400
Other Indigenous tribes	188,700
India	17,500

Distribution of ethnic groups in Sarawak in 2020.

(Source: Economic Planning Unit, Chief Minister Office Sarawak, 2020).

1. Adat Bidayuh

Lembat, 1994. in Adat Bidayuh 1994, mentioned that the primary function of the ADAT in the Bidayuh society is to maintain a harmonious relationship among members of the physical and spiritual well-being of the *kupuo*. Any breach of customs may threaten relationships and the spiritual well-being of the community, such as the health and material prosperity of the people.

In order to preserve a cohesive community life and maintain the continuing state of spiritual and physical well-being, ADAT must be strictly adhered to. The highest party responsible for keeping and maintaining traditional practices is under the authority of the Temenggong, assisted by Pemanca, Penghulu and also the Head of the *kupuo*.

W.R. Geddes (1954) described, the strongest of the forces binding the villagers (the Bidayus) together into a community are their common ADAT that is possessions, common works, common fears and common protection. The Bidayuh believes that common possessions, common work, common security and protection are protected by the Adat that unite and preserve them. Historically the Bidayuh community who settled in Sarawak prior to the beginning of the Brooke's era brought along with them their customs and generally, the body of customs is known by as adat. AF Poeter in his book – *The Development of Land Administration in Sarawak from the Rule of the Rajah Brooke to the Present Time* stated that

Within Sarawak the term “adat”, without qualification, is used to describe this body of customary rules or law; the English equivalent is usually “native customary law” or native customary rights”¹

2. Procedure of *adat* applied to acquire land among the Bidayuh people. How it affects the environment.

To acquire rights to the land, a native or a native family must **clear virgin jungle**, plant and occupy the land continuously. JD Freeman², writing on the Principles of Dayak Land Tenure among the Dayak said:

Actual family ownership is established by the filling of primary jungle (Kampong) and this is always undertaken by individual families. By clearing the virgin forest for a tract of land, a family secures full discretionary rights over the secondary jungle harvest, and thereafter, for as long as it remains in the local community of which it has been responsible. Once land has been acquired and is inherited in the same way as are the other valuables of family”

¹ JC Fong. 2011. 69. Law on Native Customary Land in Sarawak. Thomson Reuters Malaysia Publication. Petaling Jaya, Selangor Malaysia.

² In JC Fong. 2011.71. Law on Native Customary Land in Sarawak. Thomson Reuters Malaysia Publication. Petaling Jaya, Selangor Malaysia.

The concept of creation off customary rights of ownership over land and by clearing jungles and farming there on was recognised in Laws of Sarawak 1958. Farming methods of cultivation within the needs of the community for the site of their padi farms confers on them the rights. Once the jungle has been cleared it becomes *mawang*³. It is a recognised customs that *mawang* is for the use of the original worker, his heirs and descendants. This is the only way the Bidayuh can acquire land by inheritance according to Adat Bidayuh 1994.

3. Bidayuh traditional economic activities.

3.1 *Birumuh* (Padi farming): Bidayuh cultural and traditional economic survival.

Reviewing from the livelihood system, as an effort to meet food for daily needs, the life of the Dayak people has been polarized with a system of "farming". Farming means a system of shifting cultivation from one plot of land to another. Usually the field cleared by slashing, cutting, and burning the forest system without destroying the forest and the surrounding environment. Among the Bidayuh community it is called *Birumuh*. It is a rice growing economic activity among the Bidayuh community of Borneo. Rice is the staple in Borneo and the Bidayuh people's expertise in growing it is a big part of the reason for their developed culture.

For the Bidayuh, the first stage of the rice (padi or paddy) production cycle for wet padi is burning the stalks, which creates alkaline ash. For hill padi, the hill slopes are cleared of vegetation and burned. This is also known as slash and burn or shifting cultivation. Rice production either starts in the *akap umuh* (rice field) or hill slopes (for hill padi). Rice seed is planted in a protected bed for wet padi while rice seeds are thrown in a hole punctured on the ground for hill padi. The ensuing discussion examines further how the farming cycle and practices within the framework of their culture and tradition undergo continuous practices of padi production among the Bidayuh people.

Traditional Bidayuh activities comprise shifting hill padi cultivation is related to the customs, traditions, beliefs and lifestyle of rural Bidayuh, and subsistence agricultural production which is called *birumuh*. Other than hunting, fishing and gathering to supplement

³ Mawang is equivalent to Temuda in adat Iban and customs, that is created by the ancestor

their food needs and for surplus production. There were limited monetary exchanges and given their isolated villages from the town or commercial centers, bartering with padi was generally common. All these activities of course could have been inputted in monetized terms to assign values (in the context of the modern economy). However, depending on distance and accessibility of their villages, these activities were mostly non-monetized in the past.

Factors of padi production process were related to land and labour in the *birumuh* activities. Landholdings owned by their individual families were used for agricultural production but such properties have social and cultural values and meanings attached to them. Traditional Bidayuh practice is the concept of labor exchange, the *pengirih* culture, particularly during the hill padi season such as helping one another in land clearing, open burning, weeding, and harvesting. A day's labor is seldom imputed in monetary term but will rather be 'paid back' by helping the other household in their farms. That is how *pingirih* culture is practiced and carried out throughout the entire traditional Bidayuh community.

That is what so-called by adat that is the existence of a local wisdom and values behind it. This is not only the value of wisdom and the way to sustain life, but there are other values implied such as togetherness, compassion, cooperation, arts, as well as ritual and spiritual aspects in the entire cycles of farming in the Bidayuh community. Adat relating to padi farming rites among the Bidayuh people are as follows:

1. It is compulsory to conduct *ngawha* rites on the land to be cleared for padi farming. Once *ngawha* rites is over, the *Pinuuh Binua* must preside a *ngudung* to at the *bale gambang-baruk* for consensus voice on when to start with falling down of trees and clearing the vegetation under the Bidayuh labour exchange Adat called *pingirih*. (Adat Bidayuh 1994. Chapter III)
2. It is compulsory to *ngukot ratus* (start open burning) immediately on the farming site when *jawa buran nagur* (indicated by sign of full moon) is observed in dry season. *Ngukot ratus* must commence simultaneously by all villagers on their respective farms.

3. It is compulsory to have a clear space known as *oran tokan* from boundary of the adjacent farming land when open burning is conducted. Whoever contravenes this custom shall provide *takud* of compensation for any damage caused.

4. Bidayuh are united to preserve their forest, rivers and ancestral burial ground under Adat Bidayuh 1994.

Preserving and taking care of the nature and environment means maintaining and preserving the breath, biota life, and creatures inhabiting it (Ari Wibowo. 2018). On the other hand, destroying the nature and environment means harming and threatening the breath, biota life, and its inhabitants. Similarly, if any villagers do fishing using *tibuhut* (poison) it can kill fish massively, then the doers will also be subject to customary sanctions, regulated in Adat Bidayuh 1994, Section 28.1-3.

The Bidayuh are never found living along the riverbanks or river territories, that is why they are called Bidayuh or Land Dayaks (Geddes. 1957). Nevertheless, there are magnificent rivers and streams found in the Bidayuh hinterland; river is a source of clean water for the Bidayuh people. For generations, they have tried to always maintain and protect the river for their survival. Every day, they are looking for fish only for daily consumption needs at home. Because of their concern and preservation of the rivers, the fish are also abundant enough to meet their needs living in village.

The Bidayuh community was once provoked with the encroachment into the sacred mountain in the attempt to carry out logging activities in Bung Sadung or mount Sadung. It is the ancestral homeland of the Bukar Bidayuh now comprising twenty-six villages, scattered around the sacred mountain. The 1,800 high mountain is said to be known not only for fruit trees but is a water catchment area for the Bidayuh Bukar villages.

The community wanted to continue to preserve this area within their custom and traditions inherited homeland reserve and objected to any encroachment into this sacred ancestral homeland. The people believed several customs must be observed when going up the mountain. Several ancestral burial grounds were spotted there and were even sightings of peacocks there.



EXPRESSING THEIR ANGER: The Bukar protestors letting their feelings known after the dialogue

Summary

The economic dimension shows that the Bidayuh put a high value on activities that could cause actual results and income for their survival. The Bidayuh people are ready for any changes of policies and advocacies on preservation and conservation of environment and impact of climate change despite the challenging economic activity which requires energy, knowledge and skill. Padi farming through *pingirih* culture give a comprehensive picture of how the Bidayuh regard their land, forest and river as means of their day-to-day survival.