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CONTEXT OF DOUBLE-TIERED STATEHOOD

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IN WHICH SENSE ARE THE IBAN INDIGENOUS? RE-IMAGINING INDIGENEITY IN THE CONTEXT OF DOUBLE-TIERED STATEHOOD*

MOTOMITSU UCHIBORI**

Asking whether the Iban of Sarawak are an indigenous people in the Malaysian state is a seemingly absurd question.¹ I first described the Iban as indigenous in quite an innocent manner without being aware of the complexity and controversial position of the term, in my doctoral theses written in 1978. From the current vantage point, it is significant that the adoption of the term was suggested by then my supervisor, Derek Freeman, who had recently been engaged in research on Australian Aboriginal communities at the time when the term had begun to be prevalent in the Australian context.²

Generally the primary context in which indigeneity is a component of an ethnic situation is in political and social discourses of statehood. In the Iban case, the most crucial factor is that the statehood in question is peculiarly double-layered, that is, the states of Sarawak and Malaysia as a federal polity. Sarawak, along with the other Bornean state of Sabah, have maintained a special status within the federation, and although there have been a number of alterations to the actual implementation in favour of tighter integration to the federation, the ethnic situation of the peoples in Sarawak is still largely predicated on the context of the local state. In this sense, any mention of a singular 'nation-state' in the Malaysian context is still problematic.

It is also well argued that attribution of indigeneity to an ethnic group is a function of international circumstances. For that matter, international organisations, both governmental and

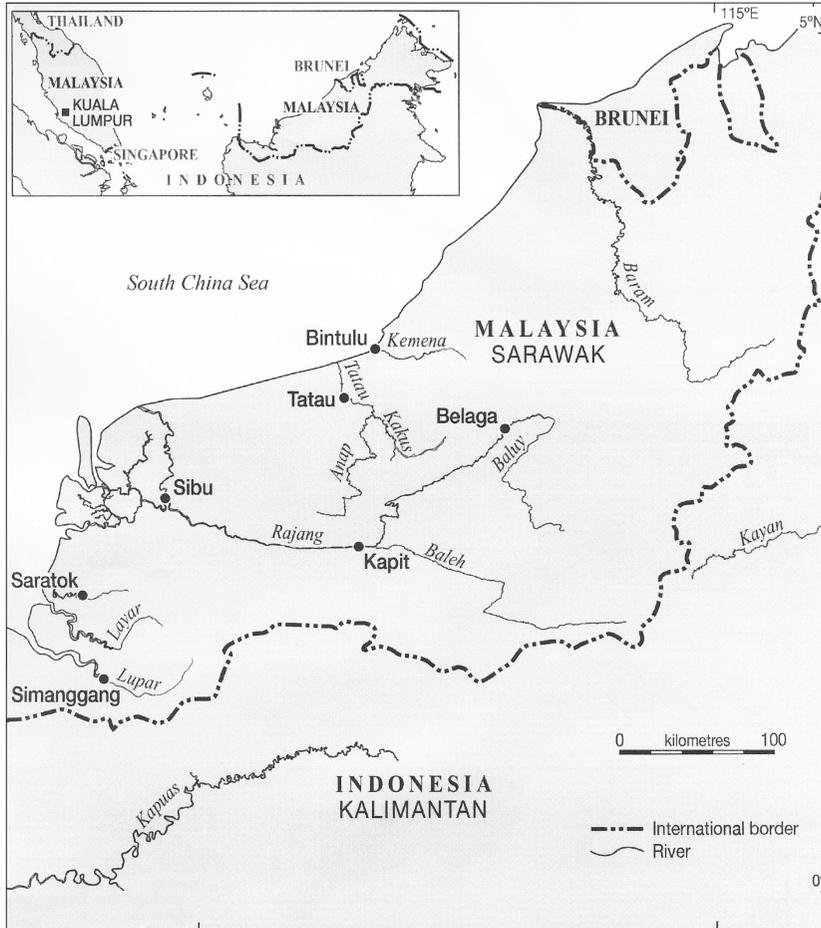
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¹ The Iban population reached more than 800,000, that is around one third of the total population of the state of Sarawak. This number makes them the most numerous single ethnic group in the state, followed by ethnic Chinese and Malays (numerically, Malays did not surpass the Chinese until 2018). The Iban language is a *lingua franca* in many areas of Sarawak. From this perspective, it may appear strange to raise the matter discussed in this article. However, the dual-layered statehood of Malaysia makes for a complex situation.

² In this article, I will not delve into the characteristics of Iban society, in general. For this, see Freeman's last account on the Iban society [1981], which, though based on his fieldwork done 1949-51, is not dated as far as the discussion of the deep-rooted habitus of the Iban is concerned. As for the difference of semantic nuances between the terms 'indigenous' and 'native', Freeman's suggestion sounded rather too conventional, because his reasoning was that the term 'native' included the Chinese born in Sarawak and that, therefore, 'indigenous' was more accurate (personal communication in 1977). However, the sort of shift of meaning of the term 'native' really occurred in Sarawak around 1930. According to Pringle (1970, 316), prior to 1931 the Chinese born in Sarawak were called 'native'—as a term of nationality—in the state. It is significant that the term 'indigenous' was introduced to the Land Rule, in the same year as of the census of Brunei (see Appendix).

FIGURE 1. MAP OF CENTRAL SARAWAK



Source: original map @ Australian National University

non-governmental, act either in collaboration with or in contraposition to the states in question, and local organisations within each of them. In some cases the function is direct intervention, and in other it works as providing general trends of international opinion and imagery. As the following argument shows, the ethnic situation of all groups/categories of people in Sarawak is no exception. In sum, then, the state of Sarawak, Malaysia as a federation, and the international arena of indigenous movement combine to be the tripartite context in which the current ethnic situation of the Iban is discussed.

I. *On the Term Indigenous*

The following argument proceeds largely along two axes of operational reasoning about

the use of the term(s) of 'indigeneity/indigenouness'. The one is concerned with (1) the referential/descriptive range of the terms when they are used in essentially neutral writings/documents, while the other is with (2) intentionally connotative perspective when they are mobilised, so to speak, by social and political advocates (c.f. Niezen, 2003). Admittedly, being not independent of each other, these two axes do not cross at right angles to each other. In fact, every single use of the term(s) in actual situations is a result of a practical mixture of reference and advocacy, being pinpointed variously at a coordinate in the quadrant delimited by the two axes. To put it rather preemptively, this mixture, or even confusion, is the fundamental source of the naïve question of mine as stated above about the indigeneity of the Iban. And, furthermore, it makes up the central antinomy in their ethnic situation.

There has been legal definition of 'natives' in Sarawak since the Brooke Government rule before World War II. The most salient characteristic of the definition is the literal enumeration of the names of twenty groups, or twenty-eight if subgroups are included. The listing first appeared as a part of Sarawak's land law, which established the land category of Native Customary Land, and it continues to be valid until now without substantial change via the post-war period of the Crown Colony. It is at present included in a clause of the Malaysian Federal Constitution, while the Sarawak State Constitution only specifies the reference to the Federal clause. It is important to the argument that the enumerated category of natives includes the Malays, the Sea Dayaks, the Land Dayaks, and the Penan among others, while, as usually anticipated in enumerating lists, a number of named groups of people are improperly omitted.³

The term 'natives' in the Native Customary Land Law is almost identical with that of 'indigenous' in the referential sense of the term. If this equivalence is followed, the Iban, who used to be called the Sea Dayaks until quite recently in some regions, and even the Malays—at least locally rooted ones—are to be categorised as genuinely indigenous. In fact, the Federal Constitution uses the term 'indigenous' in other place as a better substitute for the 'natives'.

On the other hand, however, the term 'indigenous' in the advocatory sense is not applied to the Iban without certain reservations at least within Sarawak. And in this context the ethnic situation of the Iban is similar to that of the Malays, who are, maybe needless to say, not treated as such, either. That is so despite the fact that the Iban tend to be designated indigenous in both senses by the general lay public especially outside Sarawak or Malaysia (for

³ Malaysian Constitution Article 161A, Clause (6) includes the following definition of natives.

In this Article, "native" means

(a) in relation to Sarawak, a person who is a citizen and either belongs to one of the races specified in Clause (7) as indigenous to the State or is of mixed blood deriving exclusively from those races; and (b) in relation to Sabah, a person who is a citizen, is the child or grandchild of a person of a race indigenous to Sabah, and was born (whether on or after Malaysia Day or not) either in Sabah or to a father domiciled in Sabah at the time of the birth.

And Clause (7) enumerates Sarawak's 20 or 28 "races" regarded as "native" as follows,

The races to be treated for the purposes of the definition of "native" in Clause (6) as indigenous to Sarawak are the Bukitans, Bisayahs, Dusuns, Sea Dayaks, Land Dayaks, Kadayans, Kalabits, Kayans, Kenyahs (including Sabups and Sipengs), Kajangs (including Sekapans, Kejamans, Lahanans, Punans, Tanjongs and Kanowits), Lugats, Lisums, Malays, Melanos, Muruts, Penans, Sians, Tagals, Tabuns and Ukits.

This list in alphabetical order has not changed even in detail since Sarawak Land Rule of 1931 as quoted in Pringle (1970, 316), except the Iban mentioned in the latter as Dayaks (Sea), alongside the today's Bidayuh being Dayaks (Land).

a Japanese case see footnote)⁴.

A named group may well be referred to here for the purpose of contrasting their ethnic situation with that of the Iban. They are listed in the above enumeration of the 'natives' by the name of the Penan, while historically diverse naming of their sub-divisions has been applied to them and especially to their forefathers.⁵ Since 1980s the Penan have been a continuing focus of international concerns for conservation of tropical forest and cultural survival of hunter-gatherer communities. The initial concerns were concentrated on environmentalist advocacy while the subsequent cultural and/or human right advocacy grew increasing stronger as the international/global movement of indigenous peoples began to affect the public opinion both within and without the state of Sarawak. The intervention of a European activist who stayed with a Penan 'nomadic' group in northern Sarawak forest in early 80s and of broadcasting media induced by his publicised presence functioned as a releaser of the combinative advocacy of environmentalism and indigenous rights. The name of the Penan became in global advocacy forums the representative noun of the indigenous peoples of Sarawak, occasionally with other names such as the Kayan and the Kenyah, both of whom, traditionally being swidden cultivators, were similar to the Iban in their mode of livelihood.

Within Sarawak, largely in response to international advocacy, the Penan as a whole began to be a special target of a rural development scheme planned and implemented by the State government. The target included the long settled Penan in more easily accessible parts of northern Divisions of Sarawak, while a reserve area was established for the sake of the 'nomadic' Penan in primary forests adjacent to a national park. Those 'nomadic' Penan were said to be entitled to roam there for hunting, away from the government-built settlement stations. The designation 'indigenous' in the second sense for both long-settled and nomadic or semi-settled Penan, is thus accepted in the international as well as domestic contexts together with much renewed connotation of the term.

In such contrast between the Iban and the Penan, the question posed in the title of this

⁴ I quote here, as the most revealing example, comparatively well informed perceptions of the Sarawak situation held by a Japanese lay person:

"The state of Sarawak has a unique ethnic composition within Malaysia, herself known as a multi-ethnic nation-state. In addition to three major ethnic stocks of the Malays, the Chinese and Indian descendants, there are indigenous people(s) called the Dayak. Of Sarawak's total population of 160 million, the population of indigenous people occupies 44 per cent. We say here simply the indigenous people, but, in reality, there are a variety of them. More than 20 ethnic groups live there with the respective cultures of their own. People living in interior area, especially, call themselves Orang Ulu, which means literally People of the Interior. Indigenous ethnic groups live upon various jungle products. Forest, almost the life of those people, is now rapidly disappearing." (The underlined phrases are the translation of the same Japanese word of *Senjuu-minzoku*); <http://www.geocities.co.jp/SilkRoad/6405/> accessed on 2011.12.30, written by Michio Uchida, an independent journalist and the author of *Winds in Sarawak* (1999, in Japanese). A typical advocacy use of the term to the Iban in the United States is seen in the writings appearing on the web page of "The Borneo Project". (<http://www.borneo.live.radicaldesingns.org>) The Iban are treated there as just one of the native ethnic groups of Sarawak, regardless of their more subtle ethnic situation in the state.

⁵ About the Penan in the 1950s refer to Needham [1965] among other writings of the author, and in the late 1980s see Brosius [1992]. The Penan are classified into two subcategories, the East Penan and the West Penan, though smaller groups are usually called in accordance with their original and/or present homelands. On hunter-gatherers of Borneo at large, see Sellato [1989]. For those engaged in commercial hunting, see Kato's dissertation [2011] on the Sihan. Hunter-gatherers or those formerly engaged mainly in foraging subsistence activity from the list in the Constitution: Bukitans [Beketans], Lugats, Lisums, Penans, Si[h]ans, Ukits.

article can be alternatively posed as “How has the indigeneity of the Iban been different from that of the Penan?”, or as “How have the Iban failed to be indigenous in the sense in which the Penan have?” These concrete forms of the question help us understand the significance of setting up two axes to discuss the applicability of the term ‘indigenous’ to particular human groups under particular ethnic situations.

As for the use of the term ‘indigeneity/indigenusness’, I would like to add, there is a sort of slippage between the two usages of the word. The same word is used not only with different intentions, referential and advocacy, but also in confusingly similar contexts. It may be argued that this slippage is a manifestation of what Derrida would call the *différance* of the word as a *signifiant*, as the word has shifted its referents somewhat floatingly within a certain delimited range. It is notable that the *différance* in this case is caused by addition of new connotations rather than alteration or deprivation of older denotations. Naturally, therefore, the Iban are still to be designated in most discourses as indigenous; here, without being invested with new ideological overtones.

The dual senses or axes of the term ‘indigeneity/indigenusness’, as used in Sarawak and, in this case, the neighbouring state of Brunei, may be simply distinguished as ‘indigenous (1)’ and ‘indigenous (2)’, as stated at the beginning of the present section. The referent groups of the ‘indigenous (1)’ consist of all the ‘native’ groups of people, “living naturally in a country, not immigrant or import, native”; it includes “Malays, Melanaus, Sea Dayaks, Land Dayaks, and Other *Indigenus*” (Noakes, 1950; italics is mine) (see Appendix). This phrase corresponds to the definition of the ‘natives’ in the Federal Constitution, but the Penan fall here into the last literally residual category, for Noakes was concerned with population census, thus enumerated the names of the major population groups. Minor groups are often excluded from attention of this kind. The ‘indigenous (2)’ category, by contrast, refers to those groups of people, who, have previously been variously defined by outsiders or elusively escaped definitions. In short, the ‘indigenous (1)’ is, in principle, an exogenous static/statistical designation, whereas the ‘indigenous (2)’ is a consequence of interactions with external agencies. It should be noted that the referents of the ‘indigenous (1)’ and of the ‘indigenous (2)’ are not strictly in a position of mutual exclusion. Needless to say, on the other hand, they are not in relation of inclusion to the other, either. The one is not logically a subset of the other.

In Sarawak, the Penan are the unique beneficiary of the recent phase of international interest in indigenous status. It is almost symbolic that, while they tended to be classified as ‘Other Indigenous’ they have now come to be a substantial entity with certain potency in contexts where negotiation are involved, for a couple of decades. Indeed, they are sometimes referred to as if there were ‘the indigenous people’ in Sarawak, not only by foreign organisations and media, but even by domestic/local officials and public media in Sarawak.

II. *The ‘Natives’ and/or the ‘Indigenous’ in the East-Malaysian ‘Racial’ Mosaic*

It should be emphasised that neither in the past nor currently any special generic single appellation for the native ‘non-Malay’ population has been used in Sarawak. The term Dayak(s) or Dyak(s) used to be widely known at least in Sarawak, and the most likely candidate for such a nomenclature, but there is more than one historical reason for that not happening. Unlike in

Indonesian (former Dutch) side of Borneo, the term Dayaks was used in Sarawak only for the Land and Sea Dayaks in the colonial period, both of the Brooke Government and of the Crown Colony. Other non-Muslim natives were, as already mentioned, variously called by specific 'ethnic' names, most of which were of vague origin and ambiguously defined (see Appendix). After independence, as a part of Malaysia, a new semi-generic category of Orang Ulu ('Up-river People') was invented and was brought into use as the inclusive nomenclature for all of the non-Muslim natives inhabiting mostly the remoter parts of Sarawak. The Penan, together with the Kayan, the Kenyah, the Kelabit and others, were put under this category. Dayaks, consisting of the Land and Sea Dayaks, in the above sense were not included therein. In fact, it seems that the main function of the invention of the nomenclature was to contrapose Orang Ulu with the Dayaks, and perhaps also against the Malays, on the ethnic maps in the newly activated Sarawak state politics. It is significant that another named native community, the Melanau, was not included in Orang Ulu category, either, despite the fact that a number of smaller communities closely related to them linguistically were contained under the category. The background to this is that more than two thirds of the entire Melanau population are said to have been converted to Islam since the mid nineteenth century, and they have become increasingly affiliated with the Sarawak Malay, especially so after the independence. The category of Orang Ulu, nominally defined in terms of geography, is then at least partly a political creation. Although its formation was derived from the 'racial' composition of the colonial State of Sarawak, the category began to consolidate as part of the ethnic divisions and alliances in the post-independence political arena.

The domestic politics of Sarawak were long run by a number of contesting multi-racial/ethnic political parties (Leigh, 1974). The situation is well contrasted with the politics in Peninsula Malaysia, where the main political parties have largely been single-'racial' ones. This salient feature originating from the balance of the ethnic population in Sarawak, in which the Muslim Malay-Melanau residents are no more than one third of the total state population, and from the conflicts between the immigrant settlers, overwhelmingly from China, and the natives including the Malays were not so tense as in the Peninsula.

In the mid-1980s, a novelty was introduced to this scene by the formation of a new political party—*Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak*. It dared to contain the term Dayak in its name, for the first time in Sarawak's political history. What was significant about the party's programme was the referentially extended usage of the nomenclature of Dayak so as to include all the non-Muslim native ethnic communities in Sarawak. This alteration, in short, favouring the seemingly Indonesian usage, nullifies the nominally geography-based, though in fact politically intended, division between Dayak and Orang Ulu.

This 'Dayakism', as it was then termed with a bit of scorn, was advocacy, undeniably politicised, for the promotion of social and economic status within the framework of Sarawak's ethnic mosaic, and it understandably aimed to contrapose the Dayaks in the extended sense as a whole against primarily the Malay and/or Muslim Melanau, and secondarily the Chinese communities. In this connection, Dayakism and its political advocacy appeared to be a typical expression of the indigenous/native population's general feeling against the economically better-off descendants of Chinese immigrant settlers, on the one hand, and, even, more against the Malays in power, mainly of local origin, including the Muslim Melanau, but also of those coming from the Peninsula. Both the ethnic Chinese and the Malays had been thought to be favoured by the government's economic/social policy at the state level, not to mention the

federal level.

In reality, however, the Dayaks' political movement was more evidently based and concentrated on the party politics within Sarawak's State Legislative Council and Government than being the active expression of popular Dayaks and Orang Ulu sentiment. At the very end of its meandering vicissitudes, Dayakism of the 1980s seemed largely dissipated in the power politics in the state. As a result, in my view, there has not been until today any effective formation of solid categorical identity, ethnic or whatever else, of the non-Muslim natives in Sarawak.

In the Borneo state of Sabah, what may be called the 'total' ethnic situation seems to have made a step further forward, if in an ironical sense, largely due to the leading state politicians' involvement in complex identity politics. The invention of the category of the Kadazan-Dusun in the 1990s was an attempt to solidify major local sub-communities, known differently as the Dusun and/or the Kadazan in diverse localities. Although there was no self-conscious mention of indigenous as such, its self-avowed aim was to increase the power of the dominant Sabahan non-Malay native for making cultural and political claims as against the Malays and other Muslims in the state at that time.⁶ This difference between the two Bornean states must be, to sum up rather prematurely, a function of the difference in the conditions of the presence of the Malay/Muslim 'natives' in the respective states.

III. *Negotiation of Identity*

When we inquire into the bases of identity of the non-Muslim native population in Malaysia, both in Borneo and, as we are going to see, in the Peninsula, the inquiry is tantamount to asking the almost tautologically equivalent question about the local definition(s) of the Malays. To put it in more concrete terms, the question should be directed to the way in which the Malays are seen by non-Muslim native population living side by side with them. In the field of Malay history, the phenomenon that is generally known as *masuk Islam*, *masuk Melayu*, 'entering into the Islam community, and entering into the Malay community', has long been taken almost for granted. It refers to the historical process in which 'pagan' people, who had been native in this part of the world, were to be regarded, or to regard themselves, as Malays once they accepted Islam. There arises the problem, then, as to how long the process requires for its completion. Sarawak cases show the process may require not negligible time, especially when the conversion is concerned with a certain size of collectivity. The converted Melanau who continue to identify themselves as belonging to the Melanau community may well provide an appropriate example for investigation of the identity change in relation to time. That is in significant contrast to the coastal native/indigenous Sarawak Malays, who come to admit mostly, at least in informal conversation, their remote and vague ancestry as native/indigenous 'pagans' of Sarawak. There are a number of contextual reasons, in both the past and the present, which have caused this contrasting difference. Among them we discern the existence of a certain room for the negotiability of identity.

The long historical process of unidirectional 'Malayisation', is undeniable. Yet, there also exists the short-term balancing that depends on identity negotiation on the time scale of an

⁶ On ethnic groups and ethnic politics in the history of Sabah State, see Yamamoto [2006].

individual's life time. In the case of the Melanau identity, despite the fact that the majority of them became Muslim, a percentage of their population was converted to Christianity with some remaining 'pagan'. As already mentioned, the hyphenated set of Malay-Melanau is often treated today as forming a single category in Sarawak political writings and sometimes even in statistics. Yet the ethnic label Melanau still obtains in some contexts in spite of such a hyphenating or amalgamating treatment with the Malays. That is chiefly because of the complexity of the distribution of religions and faiths even among closely related Melanaus. However, had it not been for the ethnic-label crystallisation introduced by the Brooke (colonial) Government and maintained, or even solidified, by the present Sarawak State Government and Malaysian Constitution later on, the ethnic boundary between the Melanau and the Malay would have been much vaguer than it now is.

As this case illustrates, the supposedly clear-cut division that separates the Malay from non-Malay native, that is the 'indigenous (1)' population, is on the single criterion of religion, but that is far from the reality in Sarawak. That may be the point of greatest difference between the native or 'indigenous (1)' ethnic situation of the Peninsula and that of Bornean parts of Malaysia.⁷ The formation of the single category of non-Muslim indigenous population, such as realised by the invention of the name of Orang Asli as against the Malays in the Peninsula, would be fundamentally hazardous, as the case of Dayakism, in the Bornean states shows. What emerges from the Bornean scenes of negotiation of identity is a gradation, or cline, of ethnic hierarchical relations between various named groups rather than sharp dichotomous divisions, among which the identity of being Malays is not the sole point of reference, even though it may remain the primary one.

IV. *The Negotiability of the Ethnic Hierarchy*

In Sarawak, another, admittedly secondary, but still essential point of reference is the identity of 'being the Iban (Sea Dayaks)'. The Iban are, above all, the single most numerous named ethnic group in Sarawak, closely followed by the Chinese of various dialectal groups, with the population of the joint category of the Malay-Melanau growing rapidly. If we assume an 'ethnic hierarchy' within the domestic framework of the state, the Iban as a well-received ethnic community are placed on the top, next to the Malays. Ethnic hierarchy is, needless to say, a historically constructed complex order with much equivocality, with the factor of relative population size being just a part of it. It is an accumulation of inter-ethnic relations between a limited number of groups or communities within a delimited range of physical and social space, and it manifests in the field of individuals' social interactions and discourses. It is important to have this in mind when talking about indigeneity in Sarawak.

⁷ On Orang Asli's general ethnic situation, I follow Nobuta [2008] and Gomes [2007]. Recently, a newer naming of Orang Asal was invented by certain NGO's in order to include Orang Asli in the Peninsula, on the one hand, and the non-Muslim natives in Sabah and Sarawak, on the other. This bold attempt seems to be intended to contrapose non-Malay Bumiputra against the Malay Bumiputra, or even the new category as a whole against the Bumiputra as the other name for Malay. It is significant, or even ironical in a sense, that the introduction of the category presumes the integral entity of Malaysia as a nation-state. The difference in nuances between Asli and Asal, both having derived from the originally same Arabic word, is in fact negligible in this case. The effect of the use of this new category is yet to be seen.

By designating a particular group as 'indigenous' while excluding other equally 'indigenous' groups has been the basis for the emergence of 'indigenous (2)' in Sarawak. It might be assumed that the so formed 'indigenous (2)' people had occupied a peculiar, usually lower, position in the ethnic hierarchy of 'indigenous (1)' peoples. In reality, the formation of the 'indigenous (2)' people(s) is the combination of designation and self-claim, regardless of whether the term 'indigenous' is actually used or not. In short, it is constructed on two presumptions: firstly, that they are a part of a larger category of non-Muslim and/or non-Malay native/indigenous Sarawakian and, secondly, that they are, or are supposed to be, victimised by unjust political, economic and social condition.

In any case, the point of discussion is that the notion of indigeneity does not function well as the criterion for ethnic divisions in a context in which complex hierarchical relations exist between the native/indigenous communities. Even in the case of Malaysia at large, the dominant Malays claim indigeneity using the category of *bumiputra*, 'sons of the land', as against the descendant communities of immigrant settlers. The utilisation of this category may be facilitated with efficacy in the Peninsula, where there is no substantial inter-ethnic, to say nothing of hierarchical, relations among Orang Asli themselves and, therefore, the equation of the term with the broader combined category of the Malays and the aboriginal Orang Asli is logically much simpler.

In Sarawak, hierarchical relations do exist, in substantial and continuing ways, both within and between the Malays and non-Malay native population. The main hierarchical boundary is between the communities of rice cultivators and those labelled hunter-gatherers. The total hierarchical relations form concentric circles, at the centre being the Malays and the next circle being the Iban. The boundary of each circle is not sharply delineated.

In this contexts the Penan 'hunter-gatherers', in particular are referred to as representing the 'indigenous' category *par excellence*. Despite criticising the global discourses of indigeneity, local policy makers today do not hesitate in using the term 'indigenous' with exactly the same nuances as it is used in international conventions in respect of the Penan. That is especially the case when they want to defend on-going or planned social welfare or development programs for the Penan. It is ironical that these utterances are made almost as if parroting the words of foreign critics, but without much caring about the wider implications of version two of indigenous. The standard phrase used in contraposition to those 'indigenous' in this context is the 'main stream'. This contraposition suggests a conceptual slippage in the users' reasoning. In the more official usage the term 'indigenous'—largely 'indigenous (1)' sense—is now used consciously by politicians as the fashionable substitute for the legally defined category of 'natives' in Sarawak, and, at the same time, the English equivalent to the Malaysian concept of *bumiputra*. In this latter usage, the Malays and the Iban are referred to by the term, often by the same person who also uses it for the Penan in the opposite sense of against the 'main stream'.

Today there are no 'genuinely' nomadic hunter-gatherers in any part of Sarawak. Some have been settled in longhouse-styled residences for more than a century, while others have lived in government-planned villages for decades. The ratio of hunting/gathering activity to farming varies depending on local circumstances. Indeed the Penan are involved in a wide variety of productive activities ranging from subsistence foraging to the running of commercial oil palms plantations. There are even commercial hunting groups, reminiscent of the 'inter-ethnic' exchange/trade relationship that used to exist between them and rice cultivators, and of a

certain form of patron-client type relationship.

The image of the Penan, the most numerous among these 'ex-foragers', as forest dwellers victimised by commercial logging or other development plans, has been widely disseminated outside Sarawak and Malaysia. This image has some currency even in Sarawak, partly based on evidence and partly due to the long received hierarchical stereotype. However, quite contrary to the popular image of the Penan, there are a number of Penan communities that have shown tough negotiating ability vis-à-vis governmental bodies, logging companies, and also other ethnic communities in the vicinity. Understanding the source of this ability leads to a discussion of the difference between the connotations of 'indigeneity' as they relate to the Iban and the Penan.

In a certain branch basin of the Kemena River in central Sarawak, the settled Penan live in a few longhouses among neighbours of various ethnic groups, such as the Kayan, the Iban and the Punan, who are those usually known as rice cultivators. The Penan in this basin are no different from the other groups in everyday subsistence activity, but are said to hold the upper hand in neighbourhood matters, including land boundary disputes and negotiation with the outside agents, because the major part of the basin land is regarded as being originally derived from their territory. Although this territorial entitlement is not a legal one in a strict sense, the conventional recognition among local people, and the district administration of their priority or preemptive right, seems enough for them to handle the local matters with considerable dexterity.

One of the Penan longhouse communities of the basin is—had been, in fact, because it was burnt—well-known for their general well-off conditions and its luxurious construction with modern material. Interestingly, quite a few individuals from other ethnic communities have come to be members of the Penan longhouse, either through marriage or joining of their own will. They present themselves as Penan on occasions, especially to external visitors, regardless of their Punan, Iban or Kayan origins. It is tempting to name this phenomenon as a process of 'entering into the Penan', as it is in fact a locally limited reversal of the wider historical phenomenon of 'entering into the Malay'.⁸

The dexterity that this numerically small group of ex-hunter-gatherers shows in negotiation seems to derive not only from the locally limited ethnic situations, as described above, but also from a more general background of what might be almost their habitus in the field of interaction with other groups. Historically, hunter-gather communities were said to be in rather subservient relation to the neighbouring rice cultivators, especially in exchange/trade interactions. Such relational imbalance requires a certain shrewdness on the part of the subordinate, and the hunter-gatherers may have developed negotiating skills as a habitual adaptation or even as a sort of 'weapon of the weak'. Of course, however, that can be inferred only in the diachronically as well as synchronically specific context of the central part of Sarawak.

An experienced local expert from a governmental agency testifies that the Penan are generally 'tougher' negotiators in comparison with the Kayan, the Iban and the Bidayuh (Land Dayak)—all known as longstanding swidden cultivators. The expert being an Iban, this

⁸ On the ecological and social environments of the area in question, see a number of report articles in the News Letter of the Research Project on Sarawak Biomass Society, Web-site [<http://biomassociety.org/en/category/news-en/>], which I owe much information and insight. As a part of the Project's final report, Kato et al. [2020] describes in detail the distribution of ethnic groups and discusses the features of inter-ethnic relations in the area.

estimation may be biased in a certain direction, but his personal impression remains revealing because it also reflects the shift of the status of being the Penan or ex-hunter-gatherers in the current political and economic situations (personal communication on 7 Oct. 2010).

Oil palm farms, either of large-scale company plantations or of small-holders' estates, are the most conspicuous scene of commercial production in Sarawak that shows, together with the commercial logging, the advent of capitalist ventures aiming at the global market. Of Malaysia as a whole, Sarawak is the late comer in this regard, largely because of the poor land transport infrastructure. The road network began to spread mainly as logging roads, which have been more extensive in the northern half of Sarawak. The image of the Penan in the early 90s, with some Kayan and the Kenyah, blockading the logging roads attracted wide attention. However, other more recent Penan figures, who benefit from the existence of the roads, have been largely unknown to external observers. Some Penan villages along the Miri-Bintulu trunk road have almost entirely concentrated on oil palm farming, and accumulated considerable wealth by renting parts of their land as well as by harvesting from their own farms.

The introduction of this new crop, seems to have brought about a significant shift in the ethnic situation in many parts of Sarawak. A definite analysis of this shift is not at hand yet, but it is at least certain that the Penan are no longer looked down on as 'nomadic' hunter-gatherers living 'like beasts' in the forest. The disappearance, if not reversal or dislocation, of the old ethnic hierarchy may well be in prospect.

V. *Being Indigenous in Malaysia and the 'Malaysianisation' of the Iban*

The Malaysian federation is often treated as the unit that determines the social and political status of the indigenous people(s). In textbook accounts Malaysia is often referred to as a typical multi-'racial' or plural society, comprising the native Malays, and the immigrant ethnic Chinese and Indian descendants. The difficulty of nation-building has almost always been talked about on the basis of wide cultural or even 'racial' gaps existing between the *bumiputra*, including the Malays and Orang Asli, in the context of the Malay Peninsula, and the communities of the descendants of the immigrants. However, in the 1960s or early 70s, the non-Malay *bumiputra*, that is Orang Asli, were hardly noticed as worthy members of that category outside Malaysia. In the domestic social scenery, on the other hand, their existence is far from negligible outside urban circles, being in fact conspicuously visible in certain areas in the Peninsula.

The semantic relation between the term of 'indigeneity/indigenous'—both as that of (1) and (2)—and the Malay neologism of *bumiputra* may seem identical with what exists between the 'indigenous' and the 'native' in Sarawak, but they are fundamentally different from each other. Although the *bumiputra* category was invented or introduced from the Sanskrit roots as the generic term for all the 'indigenous (1)' people in Malaysia, it was not easily received as such among the non-Malay natives of Sarawak. In the initial phase of the 1970s, the Iban living in upriver areas, at least, tended to think that the word was no more than a newly coined euphemism for the Malays. By contrast, the category of 'natives' of Sarawak counts the Malays just as a component sub-category of it, even though they may be on top of the ethnic hierarchy of the natives.

The invention or introduction of the term *bumiputra* has to be understood in the political

and economic context of nation-building of independent Malaya and, later, of Malaysia. There is no room outside this political/economic sphere for the applicability of the term to any human category in Malaysia. Its semantic field is thus parting from the semantic field of the term of 'indigeneity/indigenouness', which is dual-phased in the current usage, which I mentioned in the previous sections. In other words, while the latter pair of words consists of ethnological (referential) and political (advocatory) phases, the term *bumiputra* is clearly a single-phased political one. In this aspect the extension of the term to Sarawak State of Malaysia may seem, on the surface level, to have simply substituted it, for the equally generic term of the 'natives'. In fact, the adoption of the unaltered definition of the 'natives' as that of the 'indigenous' (here, read *bumiputra*) of Sarawak in the Malaysian Constitution is the clearest evidence for this. The question will arise, then, as to why the process of this terminological substitution encountered unexpected delay or even neglect among rural residents.

The most plausible answer is rather anticlimactic. Even after the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the special status of Sarawak within the federation has kept the consolidated boundary within which the ethnic situation of Sarawak was largely maintained as it had been before. The main arena of politics remained to be the State Council rather than the Federal Parliament. Any contact that rural residents came to have with political campaigns or administrative activities was restricted almost entirely to those from the state of Sarawak. If there were certain political tensions deriving from ethnic relations, the Iban and, to a lesser extent, the Kayan as the most numerous among Orang Ulu played major roles alongside the Malays and the Chinese. In any case, there was no novel advantage in using the term *bumiputra* at the cost of the known term, 'natives' or individual ethnic names. This state of affairs continued, as I perceived from conversations with local residents, well into the 1990s.

The attempted cultural hegemony of the Malays, especially from the Peninsula, began to be felt gradually by that time. For example, in 1995 there was an episode of serial discussion in local newspaper about the morality of Iban custom of 'night courting' known as *ngayap* in Iban. It had been attacked as a primitive vice by a Peninsular Malay who, after having spent several years as a secondary school teacher in rural Sarawak, had written a letter to that effect in a nationwide newspaper. A number of Iban intellectuals, including a former state-secretary, contributed to this 'cultural battle front', so to speak, defending the custom as an indispensable heritage and, moreover, depicting it as a civilised and code-bound one.

Another, rather indirect, example of state intervention in local culture can be drawn from the establishment of state public holidays known as Gawai Days. *Gawai* is an Iban word for religious festivals, and the holidays were formerly known as *Gawai Dayak*, also established by the State Government in order to mark the school and public office holiday at the beginning of the Iban and other natives' agricultural year. As it was not a spontaneous event, such as rooted in folk religion, it was not accepted for a long time among the rural population, who did not understand its relevance to their life and used to say that it was *Gawai Perintah* (Government [made] Festival). However, by mid-1990s Gawai Day had come to be widely accepted. Locals now make full use of the instituted holidays and even tend to regard them as a symbol of cultural cohesion of all the Dayaks and Orang Ulu peoples in the context of Sarawak State, and as extension of it, furthermore, of Malaysia as the nation.

The gradual and steady integrating process of Malaysia as a federal but also national entity has been conspicuously felt in Sarawak since the last decade of twentieth century. Politically, this process can be traced back further to the beginning of 1980s, when a Muslim Melanau and

experienced federal parliamentarian/minister became the fourth Chief Minister of the State. It is also arguable that federal policy of Malaysia Vision 2020 and, more recently, One Malaysia, has affected Sarawak's domestic socio-economic situation much more directly than ever. Cultural changes, debates, or even conflicts among local Iban society as a whole may have appeared as correlative phenomena to those federal political influences, if intervention should be too strong a word.

Certainly, we may discern what may be called 'Malaysianisation' in contemporary Iban society. In cultural aspects, the arrival of federal media in general, and TV broadcasting in particular, has played the central role, especially in relatively remote rural areas (Pospill, 2006). However, as for the ethnic situation in Sarawak, including that of the Iban, they are still primarily determined in the context of the Sarawak domain. Or, it may be added, this domestic arena of ethnic situations, especially those of the 'natives', has come to be more sharply delineated as such by the enhanced integration of Sarawak state in the national, framework. That is because the ethnic arena as a whole is now contraposed as against that of the Peninsula. Neither the Iban nor the Penan as members of the arena face directly the ethnic situation of the Malaysian 'nation', but they are above all components of Sarawakian people, often including the non-native ethnic Chinese. In this connection, if we use the term 'nation' for Malaysian, we may as well use that of 'sub-nation' for Sarawakian.

What we have seen for the last two decades is the advancing integration of Sarawak state in Malaysia. In other words, the distance between the 'sub-nation' of Sarawak and the 'nation' of Malaysia has become undeniably shorter than in 1970s and 80s. It is not the 'Malaysianisation' of a particular category of people, but rather the 'Malaysianisation' of Sarawak itself that we encounter in various political, economic and social scenes. Nevertheless, the point is that the distance remains, and as far as the contentions surrounding the 'indigeneity/indigenous' are concerned, Sarawak is still largely an enclosed arena even in terms of international interventions.

VI. *The Negotiability of Indigeneity*

Several points that emerge from the above accounts of the ethnic situation of the Iban, are especially worth focussing on concerning the local notions of 'indigeneity/indigenous'.

- (1) We may raise a question as to who are the 'non-indigenous' population in a particular locality at a particular time. The Iban are certainly regarded as indigenous 1, and of the changed meaning of 'native' in Sarawak. It is significant that, although, in the neighbouring state of Brunei, the Iban, are regarded as newcomers from the other side of the state border, and they were not treated as natural citizens at the time of the implementation of its nationality decree, the Sea Dayaks, i.e. Iban, were nevertheless classified as indigenous alongside of other Borneo indigenous (Uchibori, 2002; 2004). In this context, those classified as 'non-indigenous' are limited to the descendant population of historical immigrants in both Sarawak and Brunei. This sense of indigenous is logically isomorphic to the later Malaysian concept of *bumiputra*, applied in all the Malaysian states.
- (2) In Sarawak, therefore, there are at least three possible usages of the term indigenous.

The first one is the replacement for the term 'natives', as defined in the long established legal code. The local Malays are certainly included herein, but the inclusion of the Malays from outside Sarawak remains ambiguous. The second usage is as the English translation of *bumiputra*. Both the 'native' category and *bumiputra* exclude those descendants of Chinese and Indian immigrants. As the so-called *bumiputra* policy avows, this 'indigenous=*bumiputra*' contains evidently advocacy contention, and in this sense is a type of indigenous 2. However, when *bumiputra* is used in Sarawak, an irregularity occurs, for it is to include the Malays from outside Sarawak, and thus contradicts the first usage. The third usage is that of the 'indigenous (2)', which is also advocacy one but in the sense as it is used in the international indigenous people's movement. Whether the Iban are included or not depends on the nuanced position from which speakers of advocacy or of counter-advocacy stand. Here we can discern the inversion of the ethnic hierarchy with the Penan on top, followed by various 'natives', either listed by name in the legal code or not. The Iban are low down this inverted hierarchy, second only to the local Malay-Melanau. If we think of the ethnic situation of the Iban in the context of Malaysia as the 'national' entity, they tend to be regarded as 'indigenous' in this sense, but certainly not in the context of Sarawak as a separate arena. This is evidently the outcome of dual statehood.

- (3) If certain ethnicity-like categories are specifically defined in laws and decrees, as in Sarawak's listing of the 'natives' groups, the definition of their legal status is the most fundamental field of negotiability. There may emerge certain slippages between the legal definitions and the real ethnic situation, especially when some names are not mentioned (see Appendix). The legal definitions include both well and poorly defined groups, affecting the manner in which identity or belonging is negotiated. The category of the indigenous 1 is thus variable in most political units, which are generally 'nation-states'. Until the mid-1980s, Sarawak's identity card used to specify the ethnic group that the card holder belonged to and those names are still in use for administrative purposes, including census taking. Now that the specification on identity cards has been dropped, further room for negotiation is opened up. The emergence of the Penan phenomenon may be accelerated at the individual level, especially with intermarriages between ethnic groups in the central parts of Sarawak. And yet the names as such are almost invulnerable, as even an almost vacant set of ethnic groups/categories, devoid of substantial number of members, still remain intact in the legal codes.
- (4) The feature of subsistence activity, as it was maintained until the remembered past, is without doubt focalised in the formation of received images of the indigenous 2 people (Kuper, 2003). This is so basically only in global advocacy conventions at the initial stages of the movement, but it became later accepted even within the particular states in question. Although it is not entirely restricted to hunting/gathering, there is a recognisable distinction that separates these (ex-)hunter-gatherers from those belonging to the 'main stream' majority. In this sense, their images differ from other 'minority' population. Sarawak's case is typical of this, for hunter-gatherers are an obvious minority surrounded by numerically and socially overwhelming (ex-)swidden-cultivators.⁹ The Iban, as seen from inside Sarawak, cannot be indigenous 2 in this sense, even if they are accepted as the indigenous 1 both inside and outside Sarawak.

APPENDIX

A Report on the 1947 Population Census by J.L.Noakes, MBE, Sarawak Civil Servant, 1950, published by Government Printer, Sarawak.

I will quote here excerpts on the population categories of 1931 Brunei and 1947 Sarawak Census, as they appear in the Noakes' report to show how the term 'indigenous' was used as well as what its referents were in both censuses. Note that the 'indigenous (1)', was used as early as 1931 in census records. (All underlines in the following are by Uchibori.)

Part IV The People to Sarawak and Brunei (p.29),

Chap.1 Classification and Composition of the Indigenous People

The meaning of "Indigenous" in respect of the peoples of a country "living naturally in a country, not immigrant or import, native"

[Uchibori: In this part of the Report most of the initial use of the word indigenous is with quotation marks. The word 'indigenes' also appears. "Other indigenous" is used in this 1950 Report, too, but the Report mentions that this phrase is used for "minor interior tribes".]

The Non-Indigenous peoples can be classified easily. They fell into three main cultural groups—European, Chinese and a third residual group of numerically minor races which was called "Other Non-Indigenous Asiatic. (p.29, § 196)

[...] in 1909, when the State [of Sarawak] attained the present extent, the population was made and the total resulting was 490,585. In 1947 the first scientific census was [made] of the entire counting and the population was found to be 546,385. (p.3)

A Bintulu monthly report published in Sarawak Gazette No.257 of the 1887 Census in the Bintulu Area. (p.7)

	1879	1887	1947
Dayaks	947	755	5276
Tataus	105	100	118
Punans	196	213	197
Lugats	75	112	----
Bukitans	50	157	268
Malays	----	8	426
Chinese	----	30	299

[In referring to the population census of Brunei 1931,]

The 1931 Census of Brunei covered a population almost wholly indigenous, comparatively secluded and unaffected by the economic disturbances of the modern world, because the oilfields had scarcely been opened at that date. (p.10, § 625)

⁹ In connection with the changing ways of livelihood, I have been wondering how the 'indigenesness (1)' of the Iban is to be treated in the actual Malaysian socio-economic framework, when the state of affairs that tens of thousands of Iban seasonal or immigrant wage workers live with their accompanying families in the state of Johor in the Peninsula is now evident.

The main indigenous cultural groups finally selected were (p.30, § 201):

	Sarawak	Brunei
Malay	97469	16742
Melanau	35560	2519
Sea Dayak	190326	1330
Land Dayak	42195	2
Other Indigenous	29567	10570

The Report has a note that the imbalance in the number of the 'Other Indigenous' in the Brunei Census is due to bring it into accordance with the Sarawak classification. [Uchibori: the majority of those Other Indigenous in Brunei are the people called the Dusun there.]

List of the groups of Other Indigenous in the above table, for both Sarawak and Brunei, also indicating the number of subgroups of each group. (pp.31-32)

[Uchibori notes: the Dusun in Brunei is named here Bisah (=Bisaya or Ensaya in Sarawak).]

A. Bisah further subgroups	2	3. Kajaman
B. Kedayan	1	4. Lahanan
C. Kayan	22	5. Penan and Settled Punan
D. Kenyah	57	6. Rajang
E. Kelabit	5	7. Sekapan
F. Murut	2	8. Sian
H. Other and Indetermined Indigenous		9. Tatau
1. Belait		I. Nomadic Punan [Note! <u>u</u> is used here for <u>e</u> .]
2. Bukitan		

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