

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family

Society: Ngaju Dayak

Language: Ngaju

Language family: Austronesian → Malayo-Polynesian → West Barito → South

ISO code: nij

Population: 890,000 as of 2003.

1.2 Location:

The Ngaju Dayak is located in the Indonesian province of Kalimantan Tengah (literally, Central Kalimantan). Kalimantan is the Indonesian name for Borneo. The Ngaju people live along the many waterways of Central Kalimantan, including the Kapuas, Kahayan, Katingan, Rungan, and Mentaya rivers (2, p. 53).

1.3 Brief history:

The category Dayak includes several indigenous groups in the island of Borneo, in both Indonesia and Malaysia. The Ngaju is the largest Dayak group in Central Kalimantan. The Ngaju people do not call themselves Ngaju, but rather identify with the river they live along, e.g. those from the Kahayan would call themselves uluh Kahayan (2, p. 53).

The province of Central Kalimantan itself was formed when some Dayak tribes, led by the Ngaju, demanded a province separate from South Kalimantan, which is governed by the Muslim Sultanate of Banjar (2, p. 162). The demand was approved in 1957 by Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, who then appointed a Dayak-born national hero Tjilik Riwut as governor. The basis of the Ngaju's resistance was their pagan religion: Kaharingan. The Ngaju wanted freedom to express and practice religion, free from the Islam authorities (2, p. 163).

Today, some Ngaju people live in the cities of Central Kalimantan, such as Palangka Raya (the province's capital), Kuala Kapuas and Sampit. Most of them still live in villages, with only a few hundred people per settlement (1, p. 16). Reportedly, the Dayak people currently live under poor economic conditions and therefore cannot afford to pay for their children to get higher education (11).

1.4 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:-

- The first Protestant missionaries to reach the Ngaju were from Germany, and they did so in 1835. They built schools and converted many Ngaju into Protestants (9, p. 76).

- The Dayak Ngaju used to be headhunters. When the colonial Dutch ruled over the island (between the mid 1600s-mid 1900s), they banned headhunting, and so the numbers were reduced, though some Ngaju villagers still do it. But once the Indonesian government took over, the activity is almost abolished completely because the government enforced stricter rules on killings (10, p. 161).

- The Dutch colonial government also influenced the abolition of slavery within the Ngaju society in 1892 (9, p. 78)

- When the communist party was declared illegal in the 1960s, the Ngaju's traditional religion, Kaharingan, was considered atheism and therefore, communist. The Ngaju had to declare some sort of other faith, but eventually in 1980, Kaharingan was finally recognized as a proper religion, but affiliated with Hinduism (2, p. 303).

1.5 Ecology:

Central Kalimantan is composed largely of jungles (82%), rivers (12%) and the rest swamps and swidden (1, p. 15).

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Rice. Among the Ngaju, rice also serve as a bridge between the real world and the spiritual world: bringing benefit for humans in the real world (2, p. 176).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Fish, presumably, as all Ngaju live along rivers. But they also hunt. According to one National Geographic article, monkeys and wild boars are favorites (7).

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

- Blowguns and poison darts for hunting (7).

- Swords, blowpipes and bamboo quiver filled with poisoned arrows and a machete for those who go headhunting (10, p. 169)

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

All from 6, p. 96:

To the Ngaju, sexual division of production is of divine regulations and must be followed:

- Men carry out the hard field tasks, such as felling trees, burning off, fencing and building field huts.
- Sowing and harvesting are shared by men and women
- Guarding the fields against animals and weeding are women's jobs
- Men go on trading expeditions and look for forest products

2.6 Land tenure:

In a Ngaju village, the land is owned by the people of the *utus randah* or *pehe below*, or the inferior/poor class (6, p. 43). These people are also the ones who perform agriculture.

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

Food taboos are associated with activities such as headhunting. For example, a man who is going headhunting must not eat a large variety of fish, or the head and tail of any fish, for fear of getting hit in the head. A headhunter must also not eat the flesh of an animal who died spontaneously (10, p. 185).

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

- Decorated canoes are usually sent with foods and goods from neighboring villages, whenever a Ngaju village is holding a *tiwah* (1, p. 61, also see 6.3).
- Interesting point: traditional coffins of the Ngaju are usually in the shape of a boat (6, p. 92).

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Divorces are unlikely to occur, as according to Ngaju law, or *hadat*, marriages cannot be broken (6, p. 85).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Polygynous marriages are unlikely to occur, as it is against the Ngaju law, or *hadat*, to take a second wife (6, p. 85).

4.8 Arranged marriage, bride purchase/service, dowry:

Parents, aunts and uncles of the prospective couple arrange most Ngaju marriages (1, p. 97). The groom's family pays bridewealth for the bride's, but the bride is not considered to be bought, as it is the grooms who move into the brides' homes. The bridewealth is simply ceremonial (6, p. 82).

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

- Bilineal (3, p. 284)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Children are considered to be indebted to their parents, because parents give them life. At a parent's *tiwah* ceremony, their surviving children shoulder most of the responsibility of the ceremony (*tiwah* are expensive rituals, as many animals are sacrificed, see 6.3) (1, p. 105).

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

A *basir*, a Ngaju priest, are usually impotent men, or the few hermaphrodites. *Basir* also dress like women and some are formally married to men (p. 56). To be a *basir* is both an honor and shameful to relatives (6, pp. 56-57) (also see 6.1).

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Endogamous marriages are preferred. The Ngaju is especially concerned about accidentally marrying a *hantuén*, or a mischievous nonhuman, into the family, and so marriages among cousins are preferred as it is easier to make sure that the prospective spouse is indeed human (1, p. 97).

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

This is highly unlikely. To the Ngaju, adultery is an act that should be severely punished (6, p. 58).

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

Cousins are preferred as spouses; both cross and parallel are acceptable. (8, Notes, number 7)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring?

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

The Ngaju places high respect on their elders. Teknonymy is practiced. It is important to always call kin with their appropriate terms, for example, you cannot joke around calling your uncle “grandfather,” because the Ngaju believe that it will bring bad things (5, p. 10).

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

The Ngaju practice bilateral kinship (1, p. 99)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

The Ngaju strictly forbid incestuous marriages. They believe that “lightning would strike villages where incestuous marriages occurred.” (1, p. 100)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

Yes. Wedding ceremonies are the re-enactment of creation of the first human couple from the Tree of Life, the Ngaju’s creation myth (see 6.5) (6, p. 85).

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

Schiller mentions name-giving ceremonies as part of the Ngaju’s ‘*gawi belum*’ rituals, which are associated with protecting life and enhancing prosperity. Marriage is also included in this group of rituals (1, p. 54).

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

The Ngaju prefer cousin marriages, so marriages are preferred to be within community, more specifically within a *kula* (as defined by Schiller: “a group of all relatives, including the lineal and lateral kin of the fourth ascending generation.” 1, p. 95).

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

In group: Slave sacrifice during death ceremonies. Reportedly, a death ceremony of one chief brought about the sacrifice of 60 slaves (9, p. 77).

Out group: Hostility among other Dayak tribes causes violent death and emigration from villages (9, p. 77)

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

All from reference number 10, pp. 149-217:

Killings by the Ngaju can be caused by anger or theft. But the three most elaborated reasons for headhunting are “borrowing blood,” revenge, and status.

In the case of borrowing blood, when a villager feels ill cannot be cured, it is sometimes suggested that the reason behind this is a lack of blood-smearing and so someone has to go on a headhunt. Another case is when an elder who is nearing death requests a head from a headhunting activity to be presented on his death ceremony.

A kinsman is usually expected to reciprocate in killing when a villager is killed as a result of headhunt. Without a head, a *tawah* (see 6.3) cannot be performed on a Ngaju man and therefore he must be revenged, so that the *tawah* can finally be performed. It is also a great shame if one cannot revenge the death of a kin.

When a Ngaju man is able to kill something, be it a man or an animal, the killed creature will be of his possession in the Afterlife. Headhunting is also directly linked to power in the current life: the Ngaju believes that when a man kills a creature, the strength of the creature is transferred to the killer.

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

Relationship between the Ngaju and the neighboring Dayak tribes along the Barito River, Dusun and Lawangan, is apparently hostile (9, p. 77).

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

About a few hundred per settlement (1, p. 16)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

The Ngaju are a settled group of people.

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

Usually, different villages are united as subtribes under chiefs (3, p. 284)

5.4 Post marital residence:

Matrilocal. After marriage, the husband has to be formally admitted on the threshold of his wife's family's house by a respected woman elder. The husband also is allotted a private place in the house, to show his position and his functions (6, p. 71).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

The rivers on which the Dayak live along define their territorial boundaries. People on different rivers often consider their neighbors to be enemies and therefore subject to headhunting or be captured and turned into slaves, who can be sacrificed during ceremonies (8, p. 74).

5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

Unlike most other Dayak groups, the Ngaju do not live in longhouses with multiple families. Instead, they have ‘great houses’ or ‘betang,’ which houses extended families. (2, p. 218).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

There are houses in which the Ngaju house the bones of their dead. These bone repositories are called ‘*sandung*’ and are usually brightly painted, with pointed roofs, windows, doors and miniature stairs (each kin group has their own *sandung*, and only those of that specific kin can be placed there (1, p. 101) so that the dead will form another household in the Afterlife.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

The Ngaju sleep on sleeping mats (6, p. 71), so, presumably, on the ground.

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

In choosing a spouse, the main group to choose from is called the *kula*. In Schiller's words, the *kula* isa group of all relatives, including the lineal and lateral kin of the fourth ascending generation (1, p. 95).

5.12 Trade:

- According to ethnologue.com, the Ngaju language itself is a trade language used by communities all along the rivers of Central Kalimantan.

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

The Ngaju is divided into five classes (6, pp. 39-45):

a) *Utus gantong* or *tatau* (the superior/rich class)

Said to be the true descendants of the Dayak godhead, those of this superior class are said to be the good and handsome man and holds the positions of leadership in the group, as well as possession of the sacred heirlooms (gongs, jars, spears, etc.)

b) *Utus randah* or *pehe belom* (the inferior/poor class)

This class is only called poor because they hold no possession of sacred heirlooms. They are also considered bad and ugly. They own land and operate agriculture and interestingly, provide the *balian* and *basir* (the priestess and priest of the Ngaju religion).

c) *Jipen* or *rewar* (the slave class)

This group performs the menial tasks in the village. Though slavery has been abolished, some people of the slave class still sometimes attach themselves to families from the upper classes. Slaves were often sacrificed during *tiwah* (see 6.3), or the Ngaju's death ceremony.

d) *Witches*

This group is considered evil and the lowest of the low, as they are not considered completely human.

e) *Priest* and *priestesses*

(see 6.1)

Ngaju is born into a class, and marrying into a lower class can cause membership loss.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

The Ngaju invest quite some time and money to RCR, especially through *tiwah* (see 6.3).

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Shamans in the Ngaju religion come from the *utus randah* or *pehe belom*, or the inferior/poor class. Interestingly, to be a priest or a priestess is both shameful and honored. Priestesses, or *bailan*, are often also prostitutes, while *basir*, or priests, are impotent men or hermaphrodites. *Bailan* and *basir* are mediators between men and gods (6, pp. 54-57).

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

Birth:

To the parents, a birth is the culmination of their unity as the Tree of Life (see 6.5).

Death:

In the anthropological world, the Ngaju is perhaps most well known for its *tiwah*, or death ritual. A *tiwah* is extremely elaborate and may last up to 33 days and cost thousands of dollars (8, p. 75). Multiple shrines, a hall and sacrificial posts must be erected, and many types of animals are sacrificed. Slaves used to be sacrificed.

The *tiwah* is the final processing of the dead's souls and physical remains (1, p. 55). Up to several years since the death of a Ngaju, their bones are exhumed, cleaned of any remaining flesh, powdered and perfumed, and put inside the *sandung* with other relatives.

Since it is so expensive, a *tiwah* isn't usually performed for one person. Villagers usually wait until there are several dead kinsmen who needs for *tiwah* to be performed, and money is gathered from extended families.

Puberty:

Male:

The male youths are first educated on being a proper man, then have their teeth filed and perform self-circumcision in secret. During the days of headhunting, young males are only accepted into the society after participating in a headhunt.

Female:

When girls approach puberty they are usually kept in a room above her parents' and may not be touched. Many myths about how girls are taken to the Underworld surround this puberty ritual. A community ceremony is performed when the girl is finally allowed to emerge.

6.4 Other rituals:

The Ngaju's sacred year is also based on the Tree of Life (see 6.5). The beginning occurs with the constellation of Orion and beginning of the works in the fields. Throughout the year, working agreements must not be broken. A community must work together and form a unity. The end of the sacred year is marked by harvest. The period between the end and the beginning is called *helat nyelo*. The community feasts during this period, and sacrificed major animals. They also erect the Tree of Life and re-enact the creation of the

world. When the feast reaches its climax, a mass sexual intercourse occur among the participants. This act is apparently not considered adulterous, as it is a re-enactment of the reunion of Mahatala and Jata, the Upperworld and Underworld. (6, pp 95-97).

6.5 Myths (Creation):

In general, the Ngaju believe in supreme deities in the Upperworld and the Underworld who created the whole world and mankind and gave their laws (*hadat*). There are several names for the two deities, but commonly, the Upperworld deity is called Mahatala (a male), and the Underworld one, Jata (a female). The world first came into existence when the seats of these two deities clashed together. The unity of Mahatala and Jata create the Tree of Life, which is considered the total godhead of the Ngaju.

Mahatala and Jata also struggle with each other, destroying themselves and their embodiment in the Tree of Life. But after death comes new life, and so the new creation originates in the death of the godhead.

The concept of the Tree of Life is the basis of all of Ngaju religious ceremonies, and the notion appears in rituals such as birth, initiation, marriage and *tiwah*. The Tree of Life also governs the Ngaju's sacred production year (see 6.4).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- The Ngaju are known for their *hampatongs*. These are sculptures representing souls of the departed, or spirits. Depending on their purpose--commemorative or protective--they distinguish themselves by their shape or by their location within the village in which they are placed (4, p. 77).

- They also paint 'soul ships', which are supposed to carry their dead to the Afterworld

- For *tiwah*, the Ngaju make masks with frightening features (bare teeth and hooked noses) (2, p. 259).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6, pp. 91-92

- In sacrificing animals, when observing the *tiwah* of a man, a female animal must be sacrificed, and vice versa.

- Women's coffins are decorated with hornbills, while men's coffins are decorated with watersnakes.

6.8 Missionary effect:

Many Ngaju are converted to Christians, and a smaller number are Muslims.

6.9 RCR revival:

In 1980, the Indonesian government finally recognized the Ngaju indigenous religion by grouping it with Hinduism. Some Dayaks who have converted to Christianity and Islam actually converted back because of this shift (8, p. 76).

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

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- According to the Ngaju, the total community is comprised of both the living Ngaju and the dead Ngaju. The dead members of the community now reside in the village of the dead (at the edge of the living village, in the bone repositories called *sandung*) with the rest of the ancestors (6, p. 142).

- The dead are still invited to important ceremonies, informed of occurrences such as births and weddings, and asked for advice (6, p. 148)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

Yes. The Ngaju consider calling an elder's name a sin (3, p. 9).

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification (6, pp. 89-91):

Tattooing is significant among the Ngaju. They usually mark initiation rites. Today, tattooing only occurs sporadically.

On men, the first tattoos will be acquired before or during puberty, then after acquiring wealth and reputation, and the major tattooing will occur after about the age of 40, after participation in headhunting, etc. The most respected Ngaju man receives the best and most complete tattoo, which will form the entire Tree of Life. The Ngaju Dayak say, "the tattooed man is the perfect and sacred man, and only such may receive the perfect tattooing."

Women's tattoos are simpler. Women are usually tattooed when they reach a new stage in life, whereas men are tattooed whenever they accomplish a dangerous task.

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

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