

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Society: Iban

Language: Iban

Language family: Malaysia (Sarawak)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

IBA

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

“lowland community” in Malaysia (Sarawak state)... Borneo

1.4 Brief history:

The Iban fought other tribes aggressively in an effort to gain more productive land for their growing population. By the middle of the 1800s, they had established themselves and few had pioneered the Rejang Fiver valley. When the Brooke Raj came to Sarawak in 1841, thousands of Iban migrated to the middle and upper regions of the river, and by the end of the century, all remaining places were full. In the past three decades, the Iban have abandoned their longhouse (their homes) and moved into Sarawak’s towns. Their history was greatly influenced by the state of Sarawak and the goings-on there. Sarawak was a British colony from 1946 until 1963. Before 1841, the Brunei kingdom ruled the people. In 1841, “the government of Sarawak was given to James Brooke as a reward for helping the Brunei pacify a local revolt. Ruled by the Brooke family until the Japanese occupation. After it became a British Crown Colony, Sarawak became on of the 13 states in the Federation of Malaysia.

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

The Iban moved to new places with the enforcement of a new government and during the period of British colonialism and moved next door to influential ethnic groups, such as the Chinese, Malays, and Europeans. Sarawak ran its first general election as a democratic state in 1970, and a chief minister is appointed as head of government. Education is increasing, required to go to school at six. Many are literate and obtain degrees from local and overseas universities. Small number of universities.

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The diversity of terrain, varieties of soil and consistently high rainfall and temperature have resulted in the most complex and luxuriant rain forests in the world—forest is the second most important economic resource of Sarawak.

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:

Population in Malaysia: 658,000; total all: 694,400

Village size: ???

Home range size: Sarawak = 48, 250 sq miles

Density: 29.6% of Sarawak’s total population

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Rice farming

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Fish

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Sword and spear

2.4 Food storage:

Open verandah – for drying rice and fish

Loft – storage purposes

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Female: required to work in the fields, especially during planting and harvesting seasons. They manage farms together with husbands. Women collect wild vegetables.

Male: responsible for bringing back meat from hunting or fishing

2.6 Land tenure:

Rights to land are established by clearing and farming it, or by occupying it. Held in perpetuity. Maintained in the living memory of the residents of each longhouse. Boundaries are indicated by landforms or trees, or are marked by planting a row of bamboo. In the early 1900s, those who lived closer to government centers obtained titles to their land.

2.7 Ceramics:

Women make pottery for cooking in.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

At the end of April, head of house holds a meeting for family heads to discuss farm sites and date of harvest so all rice matures at the same time; permits families to coordinate harvest rituals.

2.9 Food taboos:

It is considered rude to blow your nose or spit when someone is eating. Visitors should receive betel nuts and should be served food if they haven’t eaten. Otherwise, the host is considered greedy.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Dugout canoes are used because rivers are the only “highways” in the jungle in which they live.

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Male: 5' to 5'3"

Female: a little less than the males

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Couldn't find this in any of the sources

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):

5 to 6 people

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

If educated, they tend to get married later

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Divorce is not uncommon, especially in the early years of divorce; it's somewhat "simple"

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Monogamous

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

In each generation, a son or daughter should remain in possession of the bilek – continuation of ownership is highly regarded.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

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

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)

Not greatly restricted, but first cousins are permissible

Preferred marriages are within the kindred, especially with first to fifth degree cousins. Marriage within the longhouse is as common as marriage outside and marriage between parallel cousins is avoided – cross-cousins = good.

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?

Marriage within the kin group is preferred to protect property rights; avoid union with a descendant of slaves or a person of ill fortune.

4.24 Joking relationships?

I never read anything about "joking relationships" in any of the sources, so I assume they don't exist.

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

Descent is ambilineal

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

Marriage between a man and woman who are related as members of adjacent generations is not approved, but propitiatory rites can be performed if necessary

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

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

When born child gets a name and the last name is their father's last name. When they have a child, they lose their name and it becomes "mother" or "father" of child's name.

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

Inter-ethnic marriages, though dangerous in some ways, often help to establish and maintain advantageous commercial relations.

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

Preferred and proscribed marriages are recognized but parents prefer to arrange marriages

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

Couldn't find in any sources

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

Conflict between Iban and non-Iban over who was in control of the most productive land; conflict between Iban and Kayan was serious enough to require the second rejah to send a punitive expedition and expel the Iban forcefully; head-hunting, slave-catching

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

Land boundaries, sexual improprieties, personal affronts... land ownership causes fight because tribes will try to migrate on it and take it over for themselves... good land = good status; head-hunting, enslavement of captives

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

They used to migrate a lot so they would come into contact with outside tribes; not as migratory anymore

4.18 Cannibalism?

No

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

A longhouse may include as few as 4 families with 25 residents or as many as 80 families

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

Move from the main house to live in a dampu, a smaller version of the longhouse nearer the rice fields to get hill rice; also migration to get better land; journeys for adventure by young men

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

Prior to the arrival of British adventurer James Brooke, there were no permanent leaders, and family leaders directed affairs of each house. Brooke created positions: headman, regional chief, and paramount chief.

5.4 Post marital residence:

In each generation, a son or daughter should remain in possession of the bilek – continuation of ownership is highly regarded. *Utrolocal like an ambilocal residence. A couple may reside with either set of parents (or in their longhouse), but they must choose between one or the other.*

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Land rights is the most crucial social problem. The rapidly developing economy has caused Iban to give up their land to be developed into agricultural plantations.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Life appears “communal”, but each bilek family has a strong sense of independence and individuality

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

I never read anything about “joking relationships” in any of the sources, so I assume they don't exist.

5.8 Village and house organization:

More currently, some live in urban areas but there are Iban who still live in longhouses. A longhouse is like a row of terraced apartments erected on wooden pillars above the ground. A series of family apartments (bilek) connected by a passageway and gallery. Each unit is owned and maintained by a single family unit. Each longhouse is governed by an elder. The “tuah borong” reads omens and is responsible for ritual well-being of house; tuah rumah is administrator, of great personal prestige... through his knowledge and persuasion people follow him.

5.9 Specialized village structures (men's houses):

A gallery where boys who have reached puberty live with other bachelors

Open verandah – for drying rice and fish

Inner covered verandah – “village street” for activities and gossiping

Loft – storage purposes

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Couldn't find in any sources

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

There is a lack of lineages and clans, so the family sharing the apartment is the key economic and legal unit.

5.12 Trade:

Collect bamboo and rattans for own use or sale, natural rubber is a collectible. Ironwood is increasingly scarce

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

There are no set social hierarchies, no classes, but the Iban are status-conscious and competitive to have the most prestigious family. Success = the best land, wealth, and good rice; women are not lower status; rights of both are equal even though the heads of house are men.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

Many still hold traditional beliefs, but many have become Christian while others are Muslim.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Bard – chant at all major rituals

Augur – critical activities like arming or traveling

Shaman – psychotherapist who is consulted for unusual or persistent ailments; takes a magical flight to retrieve and return a patient's soul.

Iban have developed psychotherapy rituals

6.2 Stimulants:

Couldn't find in any sources

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

Birth: A baby is not immediately named when it is born, but after it is given the name of his or her grandparents, a bathing ceremony is performed. Puberty: A girl reaches puberty at 10. A boy will move to sleep in a "gallery" with other bachelors at 10. The birth of a child marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood. They cease to use their birth names and are referred to as the "mother of" or "father of" _____. Death: Many series of complicated rites are observed, but the final and most important rite includes the erection of a tomb house over the grave, as a house for the dead.

6.4 Other rituals:

Girls will learn to cook and unhusk rice at 7, while boys must hunt with their fathers. More experience is gained at the age of 13 in preparation for marriage; healing rituals performed by a shaman.

6.5 Myths (Creation):

Remote creator gods brought the elements and structured order into existence; A bird-god directs their lives and popular gods provide models for living. They observe the behavior of birds and other species before farming or hunting. If the signs or natural events seemed like bad omens, they would not carry on with those things.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

The bronze-knobbed gong is an ancient instrument that varies in size used in musical and nonmusical events. A ketebong is an hourglass-shaped drumhead carved from the trunk of a tree. Various dances are performed to gong and ketebong music, including a women's performance, warrior dances and the sword dance. Most of the stories and legends are orally passed down. Sports include cock-fighting and spinning types, soccer, tug-of-war, arm-wrestling. Iban women are considered to be Borneo's most-skilled weavers by making the pua kumbu, a handspun textile made from a locally grown cotton plant. The secret of making it is passed from mother to daughter. The cloth is used from women's skirts, men's jackets, and blankets. They also make pottery for cooking and baskets and mats from plants.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

Young boys will go on journeys to find heirloom property of wealth... substitute for head-hunting, but they don't go if the birds or other natural events suggest to them that they shouldn't, especially if the tuai burong of the longhouse says not to.

6.8 Missionary effect:

Couldn't find anything about missionaries in any sources

6.9 RCR revival:

Now more focus on Christianity, but they still hold onto their myths and foundation of how they were created

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

When one dies, he/she becomes a spirit. Death rites ensure the harmony of the temporary presence of the spirit among the living and for the future welfare of the living and the dead.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

None

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

Yes, they refer to parents by "mother of ____" and "father of ____"

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

Folklore tells of a divination system in which divine guidance is sought in natural events, bird behavior. There were also headhunters.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

Tattoos: to mark past hunting expeditions for human heads or game, men were given tattoos on thighs, arms, neck, shoulders, and back. Traditionally would file their teeth to points.

7.2 Piercings:

Tusks and bone decorations in the lobes and top rims of their ears.

7.3 Haircut:

Mostly straight black hair, smooth and hairless skin, from light to dark brown; all facial hair was removed
Women wore long hair tied in a bun.

7.4 Scarification:

None

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

Only what they wear during festivals (as shown below)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

For festivals, men dress in war costumes (breast and back-plate of animal skin decorated with hornbill feathers, a rattan cap adorned with beads and feathers, a painted shield, a head-hunting sword and spear.

Women: wear patterned, woven skirts instead. Silver or brass-ringed corsets, collars made of beads/silver, silver combs for hair.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

The women wear a corset made from brass, which is made of a series of cane hoops covered with tiny silver or brass rings, pinned together with brass wire. They also wear a silver headdress and a sash. Men can wear a turban of embroidered cloth or a rattan cap with feathers and a shoulder shawl.

7.8 Missionary effect:

Couldn't find in any sources

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

Men's loincloths have been replaced by cotton shorts. Eyebrow and eyelash removal is beginning to die out.

Women traditionally wore a woven short black skirt with bare breasts but less common—blue cotton skirts and sarongs are more common today.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

Siblings can be direct siblings, adopted, or someone close to the family

Five or six persons defined by kinship and affinity = bilik-family; even chance children will be born into the wife's or husband's family; There can be two types of families or siblings = one which involves ties back to grandparents and first cousins, the other dealing with a group of people who share reciprocity Iban, which can be non-kin or even non-Iban.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

Mostly monogamous; isolated moments of sororal polygyny

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

Bilik family = five or six persons; terms of reference = Eskimo; terms of address = Hawaiian

Iban's practice "genealogizing" to find ancestral ties with strangers as far back as 15 generations

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

"The Iban emphasize achievement, not success."

Numbered references

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