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THE PROCESS OF SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGE IN A KENYAH COMUNITY

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SINOPSIS

Kertas ini mengkaji proses perubahan dalam sistem sosio-budaya orang-orang Kenyah di daerah Baram, Sarawak. Perubahan-perubahan ini dilihat sebagai akibat dari kemasukkan ekonomi pasaran; pertukaran dari ugama tradisional ke ugama Kristian; pengenalan pelajaran formal dan pekerjaan di luar sistem ekonomi tradisional.

Dalam masyarakat tradisional Kenyah, masyarakat itu diperkuatkan menerusi sistem ekonomi sara hidup. Rumah panjang merupakan pusat sosio-budaya kehidupan mereka. Organisasi sosial dalam rumah panjang melahirkan perhubungan masyarakat dan juga perhubungan antara keluarga-keluarga pada bilik-bilik di rumah panjang. Semua tanggungjawab sosial diperkukuhkan oleh adet *Kenyah satu worldview yang mencakup hal-hal duniawi dan ghaib.*

Sistem tradisional sosio-budaya lama kelamaan runtuh apabila ekonomi sara hidup dilanda oleh sistem pasaran yang bercorak keindividuan. Proses ini menjadi lebih buruk setelah orang-orang Kenyah menukarkan ugama mereka ke ugama Kristian yang mengikis asas ideologi adat.

Pengenalan pelajaran formal dan wujudnya peluang-peluang pekerjaan di dalam sistem ekonomi moden menjauhkan lagi generasi muda dari kehidupan ekonomi dan kebudayaan tradisional masyarakat mereka. Proses dekulturalisasi di kalangan masyarakat Kenyah bermula dengan penerimaan kebudayaan dari kota barat.

SYNOPSIS

This paper examines the process of change in the socio-cultural system of the Kenyah people in the Baram District of Sarawak. These changes are seen to be the result of the penetration of the market economy; the conversion to Christianity; the introduction of formal education; and employment outside the traditional economic system.

In traditional Kenyah society the community was integrated within a self-subsistent economy. The longhouse was the hub of Kenyah socio-cultural life. The social organization in the longhouse expressed community relations as well as intra-familial relations within a room in the longhouse. All social rights and obligations were reinforced by Kenyah adet, *a worldview encompassing the secular as well as the supernatural realm.*

The traditional socio-cultural system gradually disintegrated as the previously self-subsistent economy came under the impact of an individualized market system. This process was further aggravated with the conversion of the Kenyah to Christianity, which eroded the ideological basis of adet.

The introduction of formal schooling and the opportunities for employment in the modern market economy further alienated the younger generation from the economic and cultural life of the traditional society. With the gradual adoption of westernized urban culture, the process of deculturalization among the emerging generation of Kenyah has set in.

INTRODUCTION

This article is based on field research conducted by the writer from June —February 1975 in a Kenyah longhouse community in the Baram District in the Fourth Division of Sarawak. The outcome of this research was a thesis entitled, "Kenyah Society in Transition: A Baram Case Study" which was submitted to Universiti Sains Malaysia. The article which is based on the thesis, is an attempt to explain the rapid changes taking place among the generation of Kenyah most exposed to the impact of the introduction of a cash economy on the traditional self subsistent economy and society. It traces how the traditional sociocultural organization has changed as a result of significant induced changes in the economic, religious and educational institutions.

TRADITIONAL SOCIOCULTURAL ORGANIZATION

The Kenyah comprise one of the very many indigenous ethnic communities in Sarawak. In 1970, they numbered 9,932, most of them concentrated in the Baram District.

The Kenyah were traditionally a group of subsistence swidden agriculturalist with a very clear-cut class society based on three classes of 1) the aristocracy or *keta eu*, 2) the freemen or *panyen* and 3) the slaves or *panyen lamin*. This class structure was reinforced by a worldview called *adet* which explained and upheld the existing order of things in traditional Kenyah society. *Adet* was a comprehensive system of rights and obligations which had to be observed by all members of the community towards each other and between members of different social classes. *Adet* therefore defined all social relationships within and between different social classes. It was both a moral and religious system, and involved customs, rules, canons, sanctions and a system of rights and obligations acknowledged by the whole community. It applied in all fields of Kenyah life, economic, political, religious and social.

This paper first discusses the longhouse as the basic unit of traditional social organization and later describes the significance of extra-longhouse

relations for Kenyah society as a whole. In traditional Kenyah society, the longhouse community formed the total world in the sense that all the spiritual, cultural and physical needs of its members were provided within the community. Kenyah like most other indigenous people in Sarawak lived in longhouse communities mainly for reasons of defence against headhunting raids. The importance of the longhouse was reinforced by the wealth of rituals and ceremony tied up with the agricultural activities of the Kenyah. All this was given an ideological base in the system of *adet*, covering expressions of community values and enforceable rules of customary law.

THE TRADITIONAL LONGHOUSE

The construction of the traditional longhouse reflected principles of community social organization. The longhouse consisted of a series of compartments or rooms joined contiguously to one another (unless topographically impossible as with the longhouses upriver where the terrain along the river is broken by steep cliffs) and situated close to a river. Each longhouse compartment was separately owned and occupied by a simple domestic family called the *lamin*[1] in whose members were vested a corporate estate of agricultural land which the family cultivated largely with its own labour. Family rooms were connected to each other by a common verandah, or *ja e'*, where the principal social activities of the longhouse were carried out. The verandah belonged to the community in the sense that anyone could use it. It was, for example, a place where children played, men and women did their weaving and mending of mats, baskets, nets and so on and where much of group and village socialization took place. In times of festivity, it was at the chief's verandah (*ja e' bio'*)[2] that the community gathered to drink, dance and make merry.

It was also on the chief's verandah that the villagers gathered to hear him advise and chastise and to teach the *adet* to the community. Whenever there were disputes, he also heard trouble cases here and made judgements with the help of the committee of elders (*kelunan latak*). As mentioned earlier, disputes were heard and settled in public and young and old, men and women, could sit and hear all that was being said and discussed. Hence, the whole community was able to participate and become involved. In this manner, community responsibility was also inculcated in the young. It was on the longhouse verandah that the Kenyah girl or

1 *Lamin* refers to the family of a room or members of the room, in Kenyah. There are different words for it in different tribal usage for example the Iban *bilek* or the Kayan *amin*.

2 *Ja e' bio'* literally means the 'big verandah' which is the portion of the verandah outside the chief's room. The chief's room and verandah is usually situated in the middle of the longhouse and the rooms of other aristocrats adjoin it on both sides.

boy grew up in the care of the older members of the *lamin* and the village, where a girl at her first dance learned to be a good hostess and later to court her boy friends; where the Kenyah boy learned about and gathered what the ideal Kenyah man should be. It was here that the activities performed helped to affirm and integrate the longhouse community, beginning at the level of the individual and the family but extending further in a chain of relationships to the whole of the longhouse community.

THE LAMIN

To a Kenyah, his first responsibility was to his *lamin* family. He met his responsibility by contributing his labour and whatever he produced or hunted. He learnt to obey the head of the household be it a male or female and accepted his duties from the early age of baby-sitting to joining the adult labour force in farming. In the past, if a man was brave and ambitious, he might prove himself a warrior and acquire prestige in headhunting.

Just as the individual saw his primary responsibility in his family, so the *lamin* family, as the smallest social unit, also had responsibilities to the community as a whole. Hence all able-bodied *lamin* members had to fulfill these obligations on behalf of the family, particularly in *adet senguyun*[3] and *adet mabe'*,[4] in performing work for one's peers and for the *keta eu*, if one was *panyen*. In weddings, funerals and community work, one was expected to lend a hand, to help decorate the *lamin* during a wedding, to make a coffin at a death, or to entertain visitors to the longhouse and during festive occasions by singing, toasting, and dancing. In this manner, a Kenyah child was socialized in the *lamin* family early and came to enter into the community affairs. Eventually, when a man started a family of his own, the process of socialization was repeated with the young.

This process was traditionally similar for the *keta eu* but as pillars of traditional society they had additionally to uphold traditional *adet*, while enjoying the prerogatives that went with it. Thus they were expected to show exemplary behaviour and lead all functions and rituals. In their relations with their *panyen* they were required to act as patrons. Thus everybody knew his place, his role and obligations in the community as defined by *adet*. *Adet* encompassed the physical world and the supernatural, and the interaction between the two. Thus the spirits had to be appeased before the villagers were assured of a good crop and in the same

3 *Adet senguyun* literally translated is the 'custom of mutual help'. This was a system of reciprocal labour exchange carried on by *lamin* families (usually comprising relatives and kin), on a rotating basis.

4 *Adet mabe'* is obligatory labour. This was compulsory labour service which the aristocrats (*keta eu*) exacted from the freemen (*panyen*) families during each of the four stages of the Kenyah agricultural cycle, namely, felling, burning, sowing and harvesting.

vein, all social relationships had to follow the norms of *adet* so that the community would not be spiritually endangered. This was especially so in the relationships between *panyen* and *keta eu*. In Kenyah belief, the *panyen* and *keta eu* were conceived as two different moral entities with separate boundaries which should not be crossed and hence ritualized actions and taboos helped to maintain these boundaries and prevent their infringement. Certain acts and behaviour of the *panyen* infringed on social boundaries and when this happened, supernatural punishment was incurred. This belief therefore influenced the *panyen* behaviour towards his counterparts and the relationship between *panyen* and *keta eu*. In this manner certain things were forbidden (*malan*) and the idea of *parib* or *parit* gave meaning and strength to the belief. *Parib* or *parit* according to Galvin (1975) not only denotes something sacriligeous, it also conveys a sense of guilt and reparation. This was important because these beliefs constituted an inbuilt mechanism which was learnt and transmitted, and shared by all with the same worldview that helped sustain the social order. *Adet* therefore explained the existence of the social class differentiation as necessary to Kenyah moral unity. In this way the boundaries separating *keta eu*, *panyen uma* and *panyen lamin* were justified.

CHANGES IN LONGHOUSE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

When the material Kenyah world changed, these beliefs and values became disoriented. With the expansion of the cash economy, there developed a very strong dependence on the *pasar*. The transformation of the originally self-sufficient economy into a commodity economy producing rubber and other cash crops, brought along with it elements of a consumer society. Money became the means of acquiring goods and services from the outside world and as more money could buy more things more readily there developed an interest in accumulating money. Many villagers soon acquired a taste for the new commodities and services available in the *pasar*. Sugar, coffee, cigarettes, beer, cloth, clothes, cooking oil, *ajinomoto* (monosodium glutimate) became indispensible. With the improved transport system, people have turned to the *pasar* as a means of earning cash either selling their rare jungle products, like rattan and camphor, or rubber or earning a wage by becoming labourers. When they have money from their labour or sale of goods, they visit the shops in the *pasar* and buy a radio, a watch, a shirt or even a shot gun; or else they sit in the coffee shop and drink beer or coffee and visit the local cinema or have their photograph taken at the local photo studio. For those who have no money 'window shopping' is enough, looking at all the things on sale and bearing in mind what item they would like to acquire when they next came into some money. The *pasar* hence became

the central focus of the market economy, reflecting the increasing penetration of trade and commodity production in the surrounding villages It also became the centre of modern administration and welfare services, reflecting the new political system. The hospital and the clinic are situated there and sometimes villagers have to make visits to the hospital especially when some one was very ill. The District Officer, District Court and government departments, for example the Department of Agriculture, Health and Information are located there and these transmit the modernisation process to them. Through them the village is made familiar with new methods of farming and better strains of padi and the like. The Department of Information shows films on life in the towns, its amenities and development projects and he is told how he might improve his production and earn more money. Thus the Kenyah is inculcated with the idea that the good life is there for everyone who is willing to try it or reach for it, but that this can only be realised if he establishes links with the wider society.

Political leaders and other important guests on their longhouse and upriver visits never fail to remind them to send their children to school. The radio which is now found in most *lamin* in the longhouse informs them of government policies and speeches and how to take advantage of State benefits and programmes for development. Government officials, as the most frequent visitors, represent to them the most concrete evidence of modernization and urban sophistication. It is no wonder that they aspire for their children these which they see can only be fulfilled through a good education.

Formal education is provided by the State and primary education is free and compulsory. Almost every longhouse community today has a primary school. Education can be considered a prime moving force in the adoption and assimilation of the community into the larger State and Nation. Schooling gears the young generation for the society in which they will fit eventually, that is the outside society, where they can perform a service, be it a school teacher, nurse, politician and the like. Through it, many Kenyah have left behind community life and entered into another. The cutting of social ties becomes complete when the older generation die off and there is no need for the young to pay their yearly visits to the longhouse and to make courtesy visits back home.

'KRISTEN'

In place of *adet*, Christianity provided a set of beliefs which could be reconciled with the new system of production and leadership. The acceptance of Christianity served to further undermine the ideological basis of *adet*.

European government and administration had stopped the constant warfare among warring tribes in the Baram and exposure to European technology and arms had made the Kenyah realize the superior technology and power of the White Man. Thus when the first European missionaries came to the Baram after the Second World War, it was natural for the Kenyah to identify this new 'white religion' with the technologically superior society from which it came. Christianity symbolized the power and prestige of white civilization. Hence,

> "the Christian Church...represents, in fact, the importing into non-Occidental countries of the Christian Church's version of Occidental Culture. The impingement and infiltration of this...then, are not merely accidental, casual, and undirected...the propagandist come with materials and culture associated with the prosperity and power of the Western nations..." (Price: 1924: 274)

Many of the Christian missionaries opened up schools and conducted welfare work simultaneously with their religious activities wherever they went, so that they were held in high regard. Through their social work they brought modern medicine and health as well as schooling which were linked to the better and 'superior life'.

This vision of life was not totally strange. Government officials on their longhouse visits openly showed their aversion for native practices and native beliefs like the keeping of slaves, and the taboo systems. The Kenyah became aware that Kenyah society was backward and lagged behind that of the European and the urban dweller. Through these contacts they slowly came to realise that their taboos and beliefs inhibited their desire to better their standard of living.

So when the missionaries came, the conditions for accepting the new religion were already present. It can be said that Christianity helped to speed up the breakdown of the longhouse community as it traditionally was. In the *Adet Po on*[5] many rituals and ceremonies (for example those connected with headhunting and the agricultural cycle) were observed by the community as a whole and expressed its social order. Some of these rituals had already been stopped through Brooke legislation, such as abolition of headhunting, and slavery. Other rituals were stopped with the Kenyah's conversion to Christianity. These included the observance of taboos regarding agriculture (such as staying away from work on receiving bad omens), and religious rituals performed in honour of head trophies. Christianity also introduced a new values system, in which upholding of personal morality was a major component. Christian standards of good and bad were used to define acceptable behaviour, and some types

5 *Adet Po on* refers to the 'old *adet*' which the Kenyah believed in and practised before the advent of Christianity.

of traditional longhouse social activity were frowned upon and disallowed. Thus in some longhouse communities, dancing, singing and drinking are now forbidden, closing a channel through which community spirit could be expressed.

For the Kenyah, the transfer of their spiritual belief system from *Adet Po on* to *Adet Kristen* was smoothened by the association of the Kenyah deity system with the Roman Catholic deity system. During the period of conversion, the clergy identified the Kenyah God *Pesulong Luan* and the Goddess *Bungan Malan* with key 'figures' of the Roman Catholic Church such as the Holy Trinity and the Virgin Mary. This identification persists even today in the minds of many Kenyah. For example one old woman showed me a picture of the Virgin Mary and told me that she was the Holy Female Spirit *Bungan Malan* of the old Kenyah religion.

How did Christian belief affect *keta eu* and *panyen* relationships? For the ordinary *panyen* Christianity freed him from many inexplicable doubts and fears. It provided him with beliefs and practices which not only removed most of the former taboos but also ended the sacredness that surrounded his relationship with the *keta eu.* Under *Adet Po on* the *keta eu* were believed to be the supernaturally chosen leaders whose words and orders were to be followed. Disobedience to them would bring the wrath of the supernatural on the person concerned. With the coming of Christianity however, and the belief in the Christian God, spiritual authority shifted from the *keta eu* to the Church and its representatives. As many of the priests were European, this further enhanced the prestige of the Christian churches. The priests were now the key figures interpreting the orders and laws of the supernatural. In spiritual matters, the *keta eu* were now seen to be ordinary people, equal with the *panyen* before the Christian God. It was no longer necessary to believe in the wisdom and infallibility of the *keta eu.* Hence when the economic system altered and the *keta eu* stopped fulfilling their obligations, it was possible to criticise them without fear of supernatural sanction. Hence the spiritual underpining of the *keta eu*'s superiority was removed.

EDUCATION AND OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT

Another important factor leading to socio-cultural change among the Kenyah was the introduction of schooling. State support of education on an extensive scale only began after Second World War. Prior to that the elementary schools founded upriver were operated strictly on missionary initiative. The schoolhouse in the village studied started in 1952. After merger into Malaysia, education, especially secondary schooling was increased. Education was seen as an avenue of improvement and brought awareness of economic opportunities. It was with formal education that

the process of Kenyah deculturalization was made complete. With compulsory formal education, the first and most important function of the community was removed and taken over by the State. Education for the young were now subject to the goals and values of the State and the modern society. When the Kenyah child enters school, he begins to learn patterns of behaviour in the classroom situation. In the teacher-pupil relationship and among fellow classmates there are role expectations. Kenyah socialization is partially replaced by the schooling process, a ritualized system of learning under the guidance of the teacher in which the pupil is systematically taught reading and writing skills, knowledge and patterns of behaviour. He is inculcated with the values of the new society which schooling represents. He learns that to do well in class means to get better grades and to do this, he has to be competitive and individualistic. He learns that this is a liberal system wherein one has to prepare oneself to get to the top and only the best would succeed. For those who passed, these ideals were extended into boarding school and secondary education. Boarding school life affords the Kenyah child a taste of urban life and comforts. If he is enterprising, secondary education would last five to seven years, all of which time he spent in a school and town environment.

From a population census taken during my stay in the village, it was found that the largest proportion of those who have left the village come from the 15–19 age group. 78.8 per cent or 26 out of a total of 33 from this group have left the village. These include those in upper secondary schools and those working as nurses under training, in the armed forces, clerks, teachers or those who have followed their husbands who have found employment outside the village. The second largest group of youths who have left the village come from the 10–14 age group. Out of a total of 54, 59.3% or 32 individuals have left and these are now found mainly in the boarding schools. In terms of the total village population of school-going age namely those between the age of five and twenty four, this age group from 10–14 form the largest total. This group comprises those who first enter secondary school and pupils receive automatic promotion until they reach Form Three when they take the Lower Secondary School Certificate Examination. The youth who passes through this system is cut off from his traditional community, except for visits during the holidays. Most of those in the upper secondary schools only return once a year; some have not returned for over a year (those receiving tertiary education in colleges, university and training schools like nursing and the police) because of the distance involved in coming back to the village and the finance incurred. Education has been responsible for drawing most of the young into the modern sector initially into the school system and later as skilled individuals (or unskilled labour) to the *pasar* and economic

activities related to it. The training and discipline a successful Kenyah receives alienates him from the traditional community life because he is trained to fit into the town background, to work as a clerk, teacher or nurse; if he is adaptable and lucky enough, he is able to go to the university or even abroad and become a lawyer, doctor or civil servant. Education provides the opportunities for this to occur.

If a young man succeeds in the world outside his village, he becomes a great asset to his *lamin*. If he fails he will most likely feel the disappointment of his family. There was a boy in the village who returned home from the *pasar* because he could not stand school discipline, saying that the teacher was very fierce and he did not like school. His return to the village was frowned upon by the grown-ups who constantly scolded him when he was in their presence, saying for instance.

"If you had gone to school you would not have been so dirty".

One day he twisted his ankle while following the others to the gardens and they told him,

"If you had gone to school, this would not have happened".

This illustrates the high prestige and hopes that are placed on education and the disappointment and displeasure heaped upon the young failure. A successful youth who succeeds in passing the various exams and then works for a living in the towns can send money home and the *lamin* family will have extra cash income. His or her family will not have to worry if rubber prices are low. They may build a better apartment or paint it. If one fails, all the years at school will be wasted and the sacrifices made by his family will be unrewarded. The price paid becomes dear when a child does not manage to get a good job in the town, as the investment on him is considered lost. Further, they have lost also a farmer which he might have been had he stayed at home. Whether he is successful or not most of the youths no longer have a stake or future in the community. The males work in towns, marry and set up homes there. The females are a growing breed of independent women, unlike their mothers, and now live on their own with other working girls in the towns. Their roles and outlook are markedly different from women in traditional Kenyah society. Many of those who dropped out of school come from the 15–19 age group. These are the individuals who have failed their Form Three and Form Five secondary school examinations. They are thus eliminated from government controlled schools. Some determined ones however continue in private schools, others return temporarily to the village. Most of them prefer to seek some form of employment outside the village. Those boys who do not make the grade academically leave for the towns to do odd

jobs, beome unskilled workers, coffeeshop hands and the like or work in timber camps; while the girls become waitresses or domestic help. It is evident that greater opportunities are available today for Kenyah youth to move out of the village for long periods of absence if not for good. This isolation from the community takes them out of the village orbit or social life. Those who do return do so for a brief holiday or between periods of employment from one occupation to another. They thus remain free to come and go as they choose and this independence means they no longer belong to the community; neither are they dependent on village life for their social needs. This development for the *lamin* family results in the gradual assertion of independence of children from their parents. The economic activities of the youth are beyond the control of the *lamin*. The separate income of the youth and their separate existence has changed the parent-children relationship. To their parents in the longhouse, the young generation are becoming a lost generation, deculturalized, detribalized, ignorant of *adet* and swallowed up in the new world. In this manner the conditions for the breakdown of traditional Kenyah socio-cultural organization in the future are created as the traditional system loses the ability to reproduce itself in its children.

CHANGES IN CULTURAL LIFE

The increasing monetisation of the village, the conversion to Christianity and the migration of the young for schooling and jobs have altered the cultural life and sysem of values of the community. Outside employment not only had a direct effect on the young people concerned, but also on their families in the village. The successful Kenyah who has adapted well to the larger society brings economic comforts and material prosperity for the *lamin* family at home. This means the aged parents can afford to do less arduous farm work and live on the money a son or daughter sends home. This has created wide economic differences between *lamin* families, with consequent differences in life styles. Some families with enough money sent home, no longer participate in reciprocal work groups because they no longer need to farm and they can now afford to hire labour. Moreover, such families can afford to visit their working sons or daughters in the towns and may stay there for long periods of time. Thus their social life is no longer exclusively centred on the longhouse community. In the village studied, the closely-knit community living in the traditional longhouse is also fast disappearing. Four of the wealthy families (including the Tua Kampong), have built separate houses of their own and no longer live in the longhouse. Ownership of such private homes is fast becoming a status symbol because only the well-to-do can afford it. Even the physical set-up of the longhouse has changed. There is no longer a

common verandah, which has been so much a part of the traditional longhouse. Instead, each *lamin* has a cemented 'five-foot way' on the ground outside the *lamin* door. Activities held here tend to be *lamin*-centred encouraging *lamin* privacy. The young now do not have to rely on the longhouse community for their social and economic needs; they now look to the outside world. Neither have they any inclination to return home to the *kampong*, having more in common with their English-educated counterparts in the towns who have similar hopes and a future which they hope will be realized within the larger social system. Hence the longhouse has largely stopped being a centre for expressing community spirit and for educating the young.

Besides the owning of houses mentioned above, other manifestations of new status symbols associated with the modern society are also evident in the village. Some of the *keta eu* dress like people in the *pasar*, some even labour to sign their names if not make attempts to read and write, and use modern crockery and utensils in their kitchens. Today, no longhouse celebration is complete without Western 'pop' music and Western dancing. There is no common verandah for people to gather to socialize. The *syarikat* has taken over this function, having opened up a coffee house of sorts similar to the one found in the *pasar*. Here the men sit around, drink and chat in the evenings.

The market-orientation of agricultural production, the profit-orientation of business, and the seeking of jobs outside the village have individualised the Kenyah of various classes and reduced their commitment to and sense of belonging in the community as a whole. The basis whereupon *adet* operated can no longer provide them with guidance in their relationships with fellow villagers.

The ordinary Kenyah is concerned with his own rubber trees or with having to work for £3 a day because he needs the money. If he hunts, he wants to sell the meat instead of distributing it because the money he gets can provide him with other things. When he is sick and want to go to hospital, he does not seek aid from other villagers but has to borrow money from the Chinese boatman or trader because this is the person best equipped to help him with cash and to give him a roof when he goes to the *pasar*. Those who became economically well-off no longer participate in the *senguyun* groups as reciprocal help of this nature is no longer needed to work their land. They can afford to pay for labour to do it instead. *Senguyun* was not just organized working parties, it was a social occasion, where the old could gossip, for the men and women to work and enjoy each other's company, working together and teasing each other during their meal breaks. Life in the evenings in the longhouse was spent discussing one another's *senguyun* groups and enquiring after one's party for the next day. *Senguyun* was an opportunity for eligible males and females to

find their life partners and for courtship. Hence the diminishing economic importance of *senguyun* has also ended an occasion for socialization on traditional lines.

The wealthier of the *keta eu* themselves have little time for the village. They are busy travelling to and fro from the kampong to the *pasar*, collecting their rent from the houses, investing money in the bank or buying the social welfare lottery and *empat ekor* ('four digit' lottery) to try their luck. The headman likewise is also busy attending meetings in the *pasar* or the big town further away. Hence as a group, the better-off *keta eu* are becoming more removed from the community. They are no longer regarded as the group from whom help can be sought in times of want. Rather they are becoming more of a group who possess the power to provide jobs for a payment, a group who have become economically and culturally different from the rest, because of their wealth and material possessions, their sophisticated *sakai* guests from the timber camps and the *pasar* and towns. In the old days, reciprocity and social obligations had a quality of "mercy" attached to them. Thus when the *keta eu* helped the *panyen* he was not merely performing an obligation, he was also expressing the Kenyah sentiment of *pengelesau*, or mercy. *Adet lesau* when practised by the *keta eu* ennobled the qualities of the aristocracy and reaffirmed the virtues with which this class was supposed to be endowed, namely the feeling of sympathy which they were supposed to show towards the *panyen* who came to them for help when beset with misfortune. *Lesau* means to 'have pity on'. When the *keta eu* gave a starving *panyen* food or any help he expressed this sentiment as a provider and source of aid for the helpless *panyen* (Galvin, 1975). Today if one asked the *panyen* why he does not ask the *keta eu* for help or money he would say,

> "they are different people, they are rich people".

Conversely if one asked the *keta eu* why were some of them poor and had no food, they would say,

> "they don't work hard enough" or
> "they are lazy, that's why".

Town and longhouse have met in the village which has now been drawn into the economic and political system generated from the towns. The Kenyah are now well aware of the difference in the standard and ways of life between town and longhouse, and there is an eager wish to incorporate the material comforts and amenities found in towns into village life. At the same time they realise that in the new world there are many things beyond their control, that they can no longer live in isolation from the influences of town life. There is a vague realisation that their lievlihood

is dependent on the town and *pasar* centres. For those with rubber, the fluctuating prices are determined somewhere in the radio which spoke from the towns. Others identify the rubber prices as determined by the government. For those who need money, the town is a place to go to earn cash and to travel to and see strange and new places, or *cari makan* i.e. to earn a living. For them this is better than farming because they are able to encounter interesting experiences. For the old, the *pasar* or towns are strange and frightening, with cars and lorries running and town people who are very different in their brisk movements and the serious looks on their faces. It is very usual to hear them tell their children before they go back to the boarding school or work places to be careful of the vehicles and the roads in the town. They also know that they must have money if they want to go to town. If they had money the town was a good place to go to spend their money. If they did not have any while in town, they know they will starve. For those who never had the opportunity to go, it is a constant wonder and amazement from the stories told by those who have been. It is usual for those who have come home from a town visit to be the centre of attraction with everyone gathering around, asking questions and listening to stories about the town. To the educated the town is where the future lies. They are ready to cut links with the traditional community. It is common to hear them say, that it is useless to marry a farmer; in fact, the educated girls look for educated boys and the male Kenyah wants a wife who can speak English, dress well and walk in high heels. Kenyah are painfully aware of their economic status *vis a vis* town dwellers, and with others in their own community. Although they have no clear idea of how this has come about, there is awareness that traditional life has been overtaken by processes over which they have little control yet on which they have to depend.

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