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Transformations of Iban Social Consciousness

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This paper is concerned with changes undergone by a tribal people in insular South East Asia since their first encounter with a European power. The focus of attention is on specific ways in which their conscious model of the world has been transformed by the impact of a unique colonial state.
The Iban, one of several proto-Malay ethnic groups living in the East Malaysian state of Sarawak, traditionally practised a form of shifting agriculture, cultivating dry-rice on the hills of western Borneo. Nowadays the majority still largely maintain this subsistence economy, modified by the introduction of cash crops. Changes of attitude towards their own subsistence economy will be discussed as one of two topics which allow us to examine the overall transformation of the Iban world.
The second topic and major focus is the problem of ethnicity or, more specifically, of subjective consciousness of ethnic identity. The Iban case illustrates one way in which a tribal ethnic category was given clearer definition by the Brooke state of Sarawak.
Changing consciousness of mode of subsistence and social identity serve as a paradigm for assessing the transformation of the subjective world of the Iban. They permit the elucidation of the relation between objective social reality and subjective experience of it, and for this reason, are an appropriate focus of inquiry into the consciousness and historical change of a particular people.
[SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS, ETHNIC IDENTITY, SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY, IBAN]

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts a phenomenological elucidation of social consciousness as it is presently discernible among rural Iban inhabitants in the state of Sarawak in East Malaysia. Following the phenomenological maxim which maintains that any consciousness is consciousness of something, I deal with two thematically specific 'fields of consciousness'; one is the consciousness of social identity and the other is the actors' subjective attitudes towards their own subsistence activities. Taken together, these two 'fields' occupy a central place in the entire horizon of Iban consciousness of their living social existence. The first 'field' concerns social identity, the status in the social world which the Iban attribute to themselves; whereas the second 'field' is the self-reflection of the Iban on the material basis of their society, their mode of subsistence. More specifically, the problem of ethnicity and ethnic

consciousness in contemporary socio-political contexts will be a focal point of the first 'field', while in the second 'field' is included the relevance of the notion of 'peasantry' to those who are still only marginally involved in a cash economy.

The regional focus of this paper is on the Second Division of Sarawak, especially on the up-river communities along the Skrang River in Batang Lupar District.[1] The Iban are the most numerous single ethnic group in Sarawak, and their communities are distributed in all of the seven administrative divisions of the state. Considering the diversity of their social and economic situation, I cannot claim that the following discussion is generally applicable to all Iban populations without important reservations. Therefore in the following section I give some historical and ethnographic information about the Iban in general, and those of the upper Skrang in particular, which will allow an assessment of the limits of generalization.

Any particular mode of consciousness is a historical phenomenon. I assume in the following argument that consciousness in contemporary contexts is hardly explicable unless it is seen as an outcome of transformative processes which the actors and their predecessors have experienced over succeeding generations. We need to pay particular attention to periods during which the society in question underwent radical change. In the case of the Iban communities with which we are concerned here, the period of fundamental change in social and political environments began as early as the mid-nineteenth century. The cognitive model of the world which they had held up to that time was inevitably transformed by the impact of foreign influences and consequent changes in social experiences. Although this is not a historical study of change in chronological order, the formation of the contemporary consciousness can only be explained as the *transformation* of the preceding mode of consciousness. Therefore the interpretative scheme will be historical, in the sense that it will largely depend on revealing or, more precisely, constructing a set of contrasts between the two historical modes of consciousness.

A brief remark is necessary to set my argument within the theoretical framework of phenomenological sociology. In this paper, analysis is centred on consciousness of everyday life; that is to say, the pre-theoretical consciousness of 'ordinary people as they lead their ordinary lives' [BERGER, BERGER and KELLNER 1974: 18]. A well-

1) The field research on which part of this paper is based was conducted in the upper Skrang between September 1975 and February 1977. The research was financed by the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies of the Australian National University and sponsored by the Sarawak Museum. I gratefully acknowledge all the kind assistance given by these two institutions. During my stay in the upper Skrang I lived mainly at Rumah Ngelambong at Sungai Paya, which was the field base for extensive research covering other longhouses in the area and in the upper Layar. Rumah Ngelambong was situated along the stream Menjuau, about a one hour walk from Nanga Menjuau (at its confluence with the Skrang River). It took on average six to seven hours to get to the nearest town of Simanggang, and considerably longer for the return trip. In dry seasons it was almost impossible to make boat trips beyond nearby longhouses. Rumah Ngelambong and other longhouses which do not face the main Skrang River are thus among the most isolated Iban communities in the Second Division.

thematized mode of consciousness, such as political ideology, is beyond the scope of my argument. The essential task is to reveal and articulate what is taken for granted by the actors in ordinary life situations. Statements and actions which provide clues for the investigation of such everyday consciousness are spontaneous occurrences. Everyday consciousness, viewed in this perspective, may seem excessively situational, and even amorphous. However, it is possible to speak of the organization of such consciousness as being composed of potentially articulate, mutually interdependent parts. Each such part, or 'field of consciousness', has a large degree of correspondence with a particular domain of social experience. Consciousness of social identity, for example, has its experiential basis in personal interaction with people who come from outside the most immediate social circle. It is through the specificity of the domain of experience that we can delineate a 'field of consciousness'; even if it is not perceived, or conceived by the actors in this way.

In dealing with a mode of consciousness at a concrete level, it is necessary to make a distinction between its contents and the form peculiar to it. Some phenomenological sociologists have introduced the concepts 'organization of knowledge' and 'cognitive style' to designate those two aspects of consciousness [BERGER, BERGER and KELLNER 1974: 20]. The distinction is particularly important in analysing transformation of consciousness, because of possible incongruity and unevenness in changing consciousness. Generally speaking, 'cognitive style'—which refers to ways in which actual experiences are cast in a particular mode of consciousness—is more resilient to exogenous impacts than 'organization of knowledge'—which refers to elements of the experiential world. In reality, the two aspects of consciousness make up a feedback system. The existing cognitive style constrains the possible range of contents of knowledge, which may in turn eventually alter the cognitive style when newly introduced elements become irreconcilable with it. Indeed, an important question to ask is to what extent the cognitive style of present-day Iban has been affected by the obviously changed content and organization of their knowledge.

Changes in consciousness of social identity and of mode of subsistence serve as a paradigm for assessing the overall transformation of the subjective world of the Iban. To be sure, there are more distinctly cultural, and therefore more directly subjective fields of consciousness; for example, cosmology, religious notions, moral order, or imagination in oral literature. But my primary aim here is to interpret the significance of this transformation in terms of its relation to essentially exogenous changes imposed upon the socio-political environments. In this regard, the two fields of consciousness to be discussed occupy privileged positions. They permit the elucidation of the relation between objective social reality and subjective experience of it, and for this reason are an appropriate focus of inquiry into the consciousness and historical change of a particular people.

ETHNOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The ethnic group currently called the Iban is one of several proto-Malay peoples

living in western Borneo. Their population at present numbers approximately 320,000 in Sarawak, and possibly exceeds 400,000 if we include those residing in West Kalimantan of Indonesia. This makes the Iban one of the largest indigenous ethnic groups on the island of Borneo. More significantly they form the most numerous single ethnic group in Sarawak, constituting almost one-third of the total population of the state. In fact, unlike any other indigenous people, the Iban now reside in all seven administrative divisions, a consequence of their relatively recent migration from the southern parts of Sarawak. They are thus geographically distributed throughout the state. Furthermore, the number of Iban who dwell in the state capital, Kuching, and other provincial towns is gradually increasing. This situation should be taken into account even when we focus our attention on the social circumstances under which rural inhabitants in up-river areas lead their regionally confined lives. Although their daily communications and transactions are conducted within a narrow local circle, extended networks of kinship and friendship make those remoter areas and towns somewhat familiar to them. This combines with the existing custom of *bejalai* ('travelling') to widen the experiential world of the Iban.

The Iban were traditionally shifting (swidden) agriculturalists, cultivating dry-rice on the slopes of low, though often steep, hills along river valleys. The majority of Iban still maintain this subsistence economy, though it has been modified by the introduction of cash crops, such as rubber and pepper. Up-river inhabitants rely heavily for their daily diet on hunting, fishing, and gathering, which are carried out individually or in groups within, or in the vicinity of, their communal territory (*menoa*). Their meagre income from cash crop production is spent on clothes, kerosene, salt, sugar, tobacco, and various utensils, unless it is consumed totally in the purchase of rice in case of bad harvests or in the 'hungry season' (*maia lapar*) before harvesting. Earnings from seasonal labour migration to Sabah and Brunei—termed *bejalai*, using a cultural idiom for 'travelling' of all kinds—may be a source of occasional income, though a high proportion of labour migrants return home almost empty-handed. Trading of jungle products has only marginal significance, except for the selling of wild boar meat by some communities.

Iban agriculture has been fully studied by Freeman [1955, 1970], for the 'pioneering area' of the Baleh region (now in the Seventh Division), and by Padoch [1982], for the 'long-settled area' of the upper Batang Ai in the Second Division. Despite the overall uniformity in technology and land tenure, there is one crucial difference in land usage between these two historically and ecologically divergent areas. In the 'pioneering area' Iban cultivators show a marked proclivity towards opening new tracts of field in primary forests, whereas cultivators in the 'long-settled area' rotate field sites on a fallow basis. The existence of this regional difference is noteworthy in two respects. First, the up-river communities along the Skrang River, with which we are concerned here, share basically the same land usage pattern with the upper Batang Ai Iban, a pattern which stands in sharp contrast with the much better-known Baleh Iban practice. In fact, there is virtually no virgin forest in the Second Division as a whole which is easily accessible to local Iban inhabitants, and utilization of

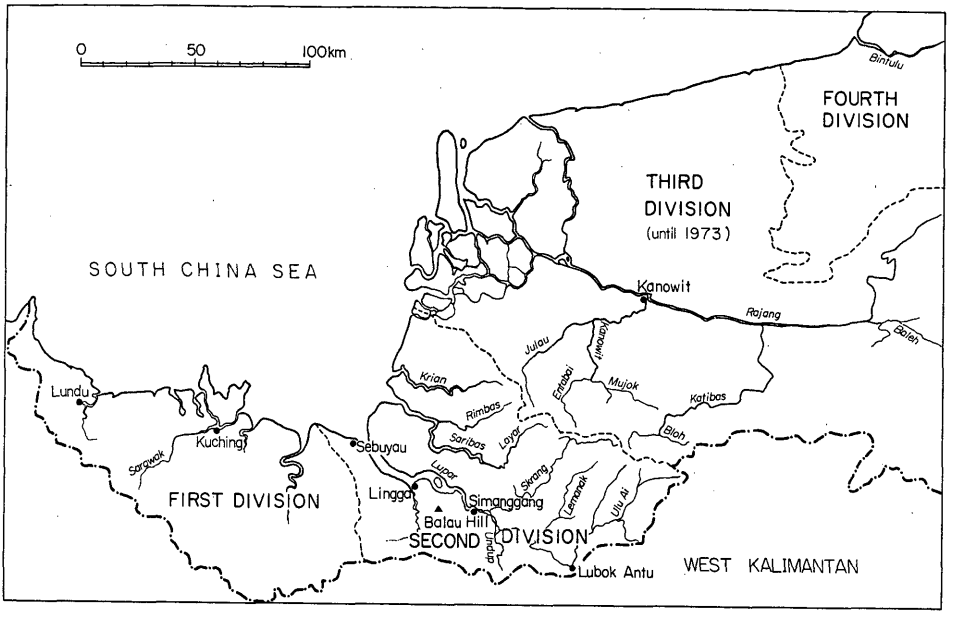

Figure 1. Southern Part of Sarawak.

secondary bush vegetation, at best, should be regarded as typical of their agricultural method. The second difference is more profoundly connected with the nature of shifting cultivation in general, and of Iban social formation in particular. The Iban are known in anthropological literature as one of the most migration-oriented shifting cultivators, practising the most wasteful use of land resources. For example, Geertz, drawing on Freeman's reports, goes so far as to say that the Iban regard 'natural resources as plunder to be taken', showing 'superior indifference toward agricultural proficiency', and thus deserve the name 'less of shifting cultivators than *mangeurs de bois*' [GEERTZ 1963: 27]. This popular image of Iban agriculture is derived from the practice predominant in the 'pioneering area'. In this view, the preference for opening virgin forest found among pioneer cultivators is regarded as the cause of Iban expansion. As I see it, this view makes curious equation of *migration* with *expansion*, while in fact those two phenomena are not logically identical. In order to give a full picture of the phenomenon of expansion we have to pay due attention not only to migration and 'pioneering area', but also to the continued occupation of established territories and the utilization of already cultivated lands. Without the latter there would be no expansion, at least, as it is observed among the Iban.

This does not, however, diminish the importance of migration in Iban society at large. Constant, if not even, outflows of a portion of population from the once occupied areas have been a persistent feature throughout the known history of the Iban as a whole, whether documented or not. Although, as Padoch [1982: 116] rightly points out, migration and the quest for virgin forest are not the *only* Iban re-

action to deteriorating fecundity of land resources, it is the flow of emigrants which has kept a favourable balance between population size and natural resources (including game and river fish) in the 'long-settled area'.

There is a number of published works on Iban migration history [SANDIN 1967; MORGAN 1968; FREEMAN 1970; PRINGLE 1970]. We need not repeat here the routes and chronology of the migration processes in detail. The areas along the valleys of the Batang Lupar (Batang Ai) and the Saribas (Layar), and their tributary systems in the Second Division, have been inhabited by the Iban for at least three hundred years since the reputedly first Iban migration from the middle reach of the Kapuas River (now in Indonesian Kalimantan). From the beginning of the nineteenth century onward, or possibly from the end of the eighteenth century, emigration from those 'long-settled areas' to the Rejang River Basin and its tributary valleys, and later to areas further north has been almost incessant. This tendency continued unabated until the first half of the 1970s, when a considerable number of families left their longhouses in the upper Skrang and Layar for the Fourth and Fifth Divisions. One drastic case was the emigration of an entire longhouse community to Limbang region in the Fifth Division, leaving land resources to the discretion of the adjacent community with which it had, rather untypically, shared the territory. This enabled the remaining community to utilize the existing secondary growth on a freer basis, that is to say, with more choice to select yearly field plots. Individual motivations for migration vary. Iban society shows a strong tendency to what Bateson called 'symmetrical schismogenesis' [BATESON 1958: 175–177]; and discontent between community members often leads to partial or total breakdown of the community [cf. HEPPELL 1975]. Migration is, as often as not, a strategy adopted by a discontented party. It is, in short, a social as well as an ecological phenomenon.

Contemporary Iban ethnography cannot be properly presented without understanding the nature of the people's historical experience since their first encounter with a colonial power. Sarawak was established as a 'private raj' by James Brooke in 1841, and continued to be ruled by him and his inheritors for the next hundred years. Although the Brooke state was a colonial state in the sense of a foreign administration imposed upon native inhabitants, it does not fit squarely into the normal typology of colonial regimes. Most important in this respect is the fact that Sarawak 'was not a part of any greater imperial whole' [PRINGLE 1970: 348]. It was an autonomous state, with the Brooke Rajahs being almost absolute rulers who ran the state on a largely personal basis. It is perhaps a corollary of this personal rule that the Brooke state had a general suspicion, if not explicit antipathy, towards foreign capitalist enterprises. Sarawak remained practically closed to capitalistic development throughout the period of the Brooke regime, to such a degree that it gained a rather sarcastic reputation of being an 'anthropological (or ethnological) zoo'. In fact the stated ideal of Charles Brooke, the second Rajah (1868–1917), was to protect native 'virtue' from possible degeneration as an outcome of contamination with external civilization [cf. CRISSWELL 1978: Chapter 7]. The following passage, taken from a semi-official history of Sarawak, reveals this ideology most clearly:

> The Sea-Dayak [Iban] has all he wants. He is well off, contented, and happy. He is a sober man, and indulges in but few luxuries. He is hard-working and he is honest, but he lacks strength of mind, and is easily led astray. Therefore, the longer he is kept from the influence of civilisation the better it will be for him, for the good cannot be introduced without the bad. Perhaps the problem of his future will work out better by a natural process [BARING-GOULD and BAMPFYLDE 1909: 440].

The innocent *bons sauvages* image of indigenous 'tribal' inhabitants was thus consolidated during the Brooke period. Needless to say, this image was not so much a result of close observation of the natives' conditions as an outdated romantic stereotype. Nevertheless, what is significant is that it played a definite role in determining the trajectory which the Iban would follow in their entry into the modern world.

Sarawak, especially the indigenous sector of its inhabitants, remained largely at the level of subsistence economy well into the second half of the twentieth century. To be sure, some Iban succeeded in smallholding rubber plantation in the 1920s, but this was restricted to the Saribas and Krian regions. For the rest of the Second Division, cash crop production by Iban is a remarkably new activity, traceable only to the 1950s in most up-river communities. There are a number of reasons for this retardation. One major reason is that the up-river areas of the Second Division had suffered perennial unrest, caused by violent conflict between the Brooke government and 'rebellious' Iban, from the end of the eighteenth century until as late as 1920. The upper Batang Ai was the home of the 'rebels', and was attacked a number of times by government forces, and especially by pro-Brooke Iban, whereas the upper Skrang became a vulnerable target of counter-attack by revengeful 'rebels'. In both areas emigration ensued on the scale of an exodus. Still worse, the upper Skrang once became almost deserted in 1930s when a 'rebellion' broke out in the Entabai just across the watershed between the Skrang and the Kanowit-Entabai. This incident was traumatic for the upper Skrang Iban because resettlement was enforced by government, who feared they might take the side of the 'rebels', many of whom were their relatives. It was only by about 1940 that the area was once again inhabited by those who returned from down-river and from the upper Layar.

The affliction suffered by the upper Skrang Iban was a typically tragic result of the peculiar way the Brooke government handled Iban affairs. It was one of the primary concerns of the Brooke state from its inception to suppress Iban headhunting and 'piracy', and thus to bring about peace to troubled peoples. It was even a professed *raison d'être* of the state. Ironically, in order to carry out this policy, the Brookes had to rely on the use of troops composed of subdued or allied Iban, since they did not possess their own suppressive apparatus. In this way, some Iban became instruments of Brooke policy. So the Iban as a whole stood in an ambivalent position *vis-à-vis* the government. In concrete situations there emerged an often violent antagonism between pro-government Iban and anti-government 'rebel' Iban. Pringle's authoritative account [PRINGLE 1970] of the relationship between the Iban and the Brookes is abundant in instances of such conflicts. The paradox is often

noted that Iban warfare and headhunting were all the more exacerbated by the Brooke policy of suppressing this bellicose complex [cf. WAGNER 1972]. Thus the Europeans continued to hold a warrior image of the Iban, which somewhat contradicted the *bons sauvages* image, but was equally romantic.

Generally speaking, Brooke policy towards the Iban was intentionally conservative. However, this does not mean that there was no change in the conditions of life of the Iban during the Brooke period or thereafter. On the contrary, their life was thrown into an entirely different and alien context by the advent of state power. Their subsistence economy seems to have changed little, but the wider context within which it persists is fundamentally different from that of the past. Their legendary 'warrior' orientation appears to be an inheritance from the distant past, but it is in fact just as much a product of their historical experience of the Brooke period. The 'anthropological zoo' was always a myth. The most significant transformation in Iban life, namely their incorporation into the Brooke state, was denied in that state's view of its mission to conserve a traditional Iban way of life; and yet the terms and strictly limited nature of this incorporation did allow a degree of continuity in the Iban mode of existence, particularly their subsistence economy, which veiled the significance of the transformation even from them.

CONSCIOUSNESS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

It is now a commonplace to point out the ambiguity of ethnic boundaries, and the difficulty of defining ethnic categories simply in terms of a particular social space [cf. KEYES 1979]. An ethnic group cannot be regarded as an entity with a finite set of cultural characteristics as it was once naively believed. In Borneo too, questions arise as to the essential criterion of ethnic boundary and the sociological validity of treating even an allegedly homogeneous ethnic group as if it were a closed social system [KING 1982: 30]. These questions are particularly relevant to Iban social identity, because, while the Iban are usually recognized to be an almost exceptionally homogeneous linguistic-cultural group [JENSEN 1974: 55ff.; KING 1982: 42], this identification, though based on certain objective criteria, is not primarily how they identify themselves.

The ethnic label *Iban* is a relatively new introduction. Its etymology is uncertain but possibly of Kayan origin (Kayan *ivan*: 'wanderer'?) [JENSEN 1974: 16]. Although it appeared as an ethnic designation as early as the 1890s in the Sarawak Gazette,[2] its subsequent use was sporadic, preference being given to the term Dayak (or Dyak). Its use by the people themselves began among those who lived in close contact with other interior groups, mainly the Kayan and the Kenyah, in the Baram area of the Fourth Division and up-river areas in the former Third Division. It was only after the Second World War that the term became widely accepted by residents of the

2) The first appearance of the term Iban in the Sarawak Gazette was in No. 77, 29 April 1874; but this was not as an ethnic designator. It was the name of a small stream, probably, in the upper Kanowit. The inhabitants there were referred to as '*Iban* Dyaks'.

Second Division, mainly as a result of improved communication and information services. Interestingly enough, Freeman [1981: 8] reports that in 1951 the Saribas Dayaks 'vehemently refused to be called Iban, insisting instead on referring to themselves *kami Daya*' (we Dayaks). In the 1970s the identity card, which any Iban wishing to travel outside his or her own community has to carry with him- or herself, gives ethnic identity as Sea Dayak. However, the label Iban is now firmly established in their consciousness, without the slightest reservation.

What then is the consciousness of social identity in the use of the label? Is it coterminous with what ethnologists define as an ethnic unit? The question, suggested by the approach of 'ethnosociology' [cf. GALATY 1982], is an indispensable step if we are to explore consciousness of social identity in a wider perspective.

In everyday contexts the term Iban is used in three different sets of opposites. First, it refers to a member of their own ethnic group as distinct from other groups or categories (*bansa*), such as the Chinese (*China*), Malay (*Laut*), Europeans (*Orang Puteh* or, more usually, *Tuan*) and other indigenous ethnic groups (Melanau, Kayan, Memaloh, Kenyah, Bukitan, etc.). As the Iban see it, belonging to an ethnic group is determined naturally; that is to say primarily by birth and, to a lesser degree, by upbringing. They are acutely conscious of this, to such a degree that a man of Memaloh origin, who has been married to an Iban woman and lived in an Iban longhouse for more than fifteen years, is still referred to (and often even addressed as) Memaloh, rather than by the use of his proper personal name. The rare Iban who is converted to Islam and adopts Malay customs is regarded by other Iban, and still identifies himself, as an Iban. In fact, in current Iban social processes there is no *masuk Melayu* phenomenon or idiom (*masuk Melayu*: 'entering the Malay world' or 'becoming a Malay'), an instance of shift in social identity which is otherwise widely encountered on the periphery of the Malay world. In this perspective, Iban ethnic identity seems to be fairly rigid, and to have a well delineated boundary. The distinction between *Iban* and *non-Iban* is simple and clear, at least at the surface level.

Yet, the term Iban has other, less strictly ethnic connotations which make the implied focus of social identity open to a degree of ambiguity. The second usage of the term refers to an ordinary person (Iban) as opposed to a shaman (*manang*), as in a phrase such as 'an Iban cannot see a soul while a *manang* can'. In normal everyday life Iban shamans are hardly distinguishable from other, ordinary people. They live on their swiddens and participate in community activities just as others do. In this respect, and as members of an ethnic group, shamans are nothing but Iban. It is only when their special ability to communicate with unseen spiritual beings is the focus of discourse that the distinction 'we Iban (*kami Iban*) you shamans (*kita' manang*)', or vice versa, obtains significance. In this opposition, then, the term Iban is characterized by the lack of a specific mark rather than positively defined. The third usage of the term extends its semantic unmarkedness a step further. In this usage it means simply a person, as in phrases such as 'is there anyone at home?' (*bisi' Iban di rumah*?) or 'nobody can be seen' (*nadai Iban dipeda*')'. Its opposites

may be anything other than human, such as animals or spiritual beings. In this sense it is synonymous with the term *mensia* or mankind, though this is more explicitly taxonomic in its semantic function. In short, the term Iban here works almost as an indefinite personal pronoun.

The semantic unmarkedness of the term seen in the above two usages is carried over to its usage as an ethnic label. Behind the seeming clarity of ethnic boundary there is significant ambiguity as to the range of applicability of the label Iban in everyday situations. To put it formally, the normative semantic transparency of the term is dimmed by its contextual pragmatics. Generally speaking, the Iban are well conscious of the cultural and linguistic uniformity of all the regional subgroups of their own people in Sarawak and West Kalimantan. If an Iban informant is asked to define it in a neutral context, the boundary does not differ from that which external observers recognize on the basis of cultural-linguistic characteristics. There is, however, one possible exception: a regional subgroup who live mainly in the lower Batang Lupar in the Second Division. In ethnographic literature they are often called Balau or Balau Dayaks, for their reputedly original longhouses were located at the foot of Balau Hill. The Iban of the upper Skrang have had a long history of interaction with them since the pre-Brooke period. The Saribas and Skrang Dayaks often raided Balau communities and Malay villages allied with them. This 'piratical' activity was checked by the Brooke government, which used the Balau Dayaks as the major element in its expeditionary forces. Despite the absence of any serious antagonism between the two subgroups in more recent history, up-river Iban still harbour a certain suspicion of the Balau who, they believe, tend to take advantage of geographical proximity to the political centre to the detriment of the interests of up-river Iban. It is probably this memory of historical experience which leads to the up-river Iban making the distinction, in some contexts of discourse, 'we Iban, they Balau', despite the fact that the Balau subgroup is thought, even by up-river Iban, to be a branch of the Iban just as much as the Skrang, Saribas, or Lemanak Iban and so on. Because of the semantic unmarkedness of the term Iban, its named opposite acquires markedness in this pragmatic distinction. In this case, the markedness of the term Balau is that of political adversary. The Balau are perceived by ordinary Iban to be people who are potentially hostile. Hence they are politically non-Iban within the cultural unity of the Iban. The parallelism between the distinctions Iban/*manang* and Iban/Balau is obvious (for a similar case of 'ethnic shifters' among the Maasai, see Galaty [1982]).

There is another, seemingly minor case of pragmatic ambiguity in the usage of the ethnic label Iban. In this case ambiguity arises not from the exclusion of a section of the people as above, but from the inclusion of other, usually quite distinct, ethnic categories. In some conversation situations, in which speakers are not paying much attention to detailed ethnic classification, Iban tend to lump all peoples similar to themselves in some respect under the all-embracing label Iban, in contradistinction to an ethnic category lacking this similarity, or this basic ordinariness. Most commonly, the people who present the utmost otherness to Iban eyes are Europeans. The opposition *Tuan* (Europeans)/Iban is thus the most uncompromising categorical

distinction. When this distinction is the topic of conversation, then ethnic categories other than Iban, such as Malay or even Chinese, may be included under the label Iban.

All the above cases of ambiguity of the term Iban point to one thing. The connotative core of the term is ordinariness, and the sets of distinction spring from the opposition ordinary/extraordinary or unmarked/marked. This cognitive style give rise to a consciousness of ethnicity among the up-river Iban which we might call a form of unthematized ethnocentrism, almost reminiscent of the 'tribal' mode of social identity [cf. SAHLINS 1968].

However it may be, present-day consciousness of ethnicity among the Iban must be fundamentally different from that of their pre-colonial, or even of their pre-independence predecessors, at least as far as the content of knowledge is concerned. The fact that the ethnic label Iban is a new introduction already indicates this change. In order to explore further what sort of changes have taken place in the field of consciousness of social identity, we have to take a brief look at the 'traditional' mode of consciousness.

First, we need to trace the roots of Iban social identity to the time when the ethnic label Iban—and indeed also Dayak—had not yet been devised. At the advent of the European in the mid-nineteenth century, the people who are now called Iban had no generic ethnic label at all. The term Dayak was probably borrowed from Dutch usage, in which it referred to all indigenous non-Islamic peoples in Borneo. Thus the inland people who lived in what are now the First and Second Divisions, whom the Europeans encountered first, came to be called first Dayaks indiscriminately, and were later subdivided into Sea Dayaks and Land Dayaks.[3] The latter comprised various non-Malay groups in the First Division, who were later to be renamed Bidayuh for administrative convenience. The category of Sea Dayaks, as the Europeans conceived it, was coterminous with that of the modern Iban, though their initial knowledge of the people was confined to those in the First and Second Divisions. However, this designation was used only when it was necessary to distinguish them from Land Dayaks. More often than not, they were simply called Dayaks (or Dyaks), occasionally with the addition of the names of the rivers or streams along which they lived. The use of names of rivers to designate the inhabitants of the drainage area was exactly in accordance with the traditional custom of the natives themselves, who would say simply 'those (or we) of such and such a river'. The superimposing, in fact the imposing, of the term Dayak on a wider group of inhabitants was a European device.

The fact that the ethnic labels are of foreign origin does not necessarily mean that there had been no native consciousness of wider ethnic unity. Most probably, they

3) The following quotation from one of the earliest writings on Sarawak inhabitants may well illustrate the situation:

> The Dyaks appear to be divided by many customs and usages naturally into two classes, which have been called by Mr. [James] Brooke, Land and Sea Dyaks; the latter appear to have been the more savage and powerful, the former the more quiet and easily managed [LOW 1848: 165].

took the vague cultural unity for granted, and did not feel any urge to distinguish themselves explicitly from other cultural groups. But it is even more certain that in pre-Brooke times their political, or more generally ethical, allegiance was confined within a narrow region usually along a river valley, though possibly larger than an 'endogamous' unit or a 'grouping whose members did not take one another's heads' [FREEMAN 1970: 126].

The nature of interethnic relationships in pre-Brooke Sarawak, especially in the up-river areas outside the sphere of influence of the Brunei Sultanate, is still a subject of speculation. Some Iban, notably those who lived in the down-river areas of the Saribas and Batang Lupar, had close contacts with local Malays, through whom they had an indirect relationship with the Sultanate. River systems provided them with routes for barter trade. The Iban would exchange their hill paddy for salt and iron products brought by Malay peddlers. The Iban ethnic designator for Malays is *Laut*, derived from the Malay term for 'sea'. The association of this word in the language of poetry with luxuries, such as valuable ornaments, reflects the nature of trade between the two peoples. Furthermore, the Iban of the Saribas and Skrang had been engaged in coastal raiding, often in alliance with Malay 'pirates'. They were in fact notorious for their headhunting raids. Again the rivers were their main routes. Thus the Iban were not totally isolated from the outer world before the establishment of the Brooke state. Nonetheless, trade relations were limited in scale as well as in range; headhunting raids had disruptive rather than stabilizing effects on interethnic relations; and the Iban world, viewed from within, constituted a largely closed self-contained social space.

The self-contained nature of the Iban micro-world depended on their almost totally self-sustaining form of subsistence economy based on rice cultivation and on their social structure. The Iban produced nothing other than rice which was worth trading.[4] There was no commodity production as such. King [1982: 35] has recently suggested the importance of interethnic trade in the upper Kapuas in West Kalimantan, based on what he calls 'ethnic craft specialization'. According to King, each ethnic group in the region specializes in producing specific craft articles for exchange or trade: the Maloh (whom the Iban call the Memaloh) being gold- and silver-smiths, the Kantu' making fine split bamboo mats, the Kayan making swords, and the Iban weaving patterned skirts, jackets and blankets. This may be true for the Kapuas area, where a number of different ethnic groups live side by side in relatively stable relationships. By contrast, Sarawak, especially the area which is now called the Second Division, was the frontier for those Iban who migrated from the Kapuas and aggressively occupied land which had been sparsely populated by hunter-gatherers such as the Seru, Bukitan and Ukit. Although trade relationships with the

4) According to Pringle [1970: 45], the Second Division was not a traditionally important area for jungle produce. It was only in later years that it supplied large quantities of wild rubber (*jelutong*). The main camphor producing area in Sarawak was the Baram River area in the Fourth Division. The Iban in the Baleh area were actively engaged in camphor gathering and even in rhinoceros hunting before the end of the nineteenth century.

Kapuas area must have been maintained through land routes, their importance must have been much diminished. While King's account might apply to the Iban and other ethnic groups at the time prior to Iban migration to Sarawak, migration resulted in a degree of what we might call 'subsistence involution' on the part of the émigrés.

A core of Iban cultural identity was and is still largely the concomitant of this heavy reliance on a subsistence economy based on rice cultivation. Identity requires at least one otherness. In certain contexts the Iban always consciously oppose themselves as rice cultivators and rice eaters to those who do not cultivate and do not eat rice. In the past, the opposite category was the hunter-gatherers; now there is another, and more marked opposite: the Europeans and other foreigners who the Iban believe do not cultivate rice. Even today this is still the most powerful marker of Iban-ness, despite their knowledge of the existence of many other cultivators of rice, particularly of hill rice. In pre-Brooke times interethnic relations, if any, were categorized by the Iban in terms of the distinctions: Iban/Malays, Iban/hunter-gatherers, and Iban/enemies. We need to turn to the traditional social structure to comprehend this last distinction.

As already noted, Iban social structure is characterized by 'symmetrical schismogenesis'. This refers in the first instance to the actual and potential presence of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts, but it also connotes the general isomorphism between one social unit and another, at one level of social structure [cf. BATESON 1958: 186]. In other words, Iban society lacks hierarchical organization of social units; rather these units stand side by side, so to speak, and in *de jure* independence of each other. Traditionally there were only two levels of institutional organization of social units: small families and longhouse communities.

The longhouse community, or as the Iban call it the 'house' (*rumah*), was formerly an autonomous political unit. There was no institutional political authority beyond this level. The house or its constituent families formed an agrarian community, occupying a demarcated though often disputable territory, which included secondary bush and virgin forest as well as the house space. This was (and still is in the up-river area) an egalitarian community in terms of right of access to land resources. That is to say, member families have equal access to virgin forest for cultivation. Even when all accessible land has been cultivated once, and thus 'privately owned' (*empu orang*) as pieces of secondary growth, they can easily get permission to use such land, in which other longhouse members retain priority rights. There was no form of rent, either in the form of a portion of yield or of other valuables (this is still usually the case today). Since the Iban were and are a highly migratory people, 'ownership' of secondary forest was and is only nominal; when the 'owner' migrates to a distant place, his land rights simply lapse.

Although the longhouse community occupies a territory, this does not mean that individual families are permanently tied by the communal bond. The family/household is also in principle an autonomous unit, able to leave one community to join another, or to establish a new community with other families. In fact the longhouse community can be regarded as a product of the combination, or alliance of these auto-

nomous units, and as such prone to disintegrate when conditions change. Freeman [1970: 7] calls this unit the *bilek*-family, after the apartment room (*bilek*) or the longhouse which each single unit occupies. The *bilek*-family is the unit of production and consumption *par excellence*. Although there is exchange of labour and mutual co-operation between different *bilek*-families, the principle of exact reciprocity (*bebalas*) is strictly followed, based on the number of days for which a person of one *bilek*-family offers labour to another. When 'aid' (*saup*) or 'help' (*tulong*) is given to kin in some difficulty such as sickness, there is a tacit expectation that similar assistance will be reciprocated in future. In other words, 'balanced reciprocity' is preponderant in traditional Iban economy, with a certain degree of 'generalized reciprocity' within a close kin circle and under limited conditions [cf. SAHLINS 1965: 145ff.].

Sahlins [1965: 179ff.] suggests that the preponderance of balanced labour exchange among the Iban over generalized reciprocity, somewhat irregular for 'tribal' economy, is the outcome of the engagement in rice trade in a market. This hypothesis is weakened by the fact that the surplus of rice production, if any, is only a tiny fraction of total harvest; thus rice trade can only be a minor and limited activity. The preponderance of balanced exchange is rather an expression of an ethical emphasis on *bilek*-family autonomy and independence, which overshadows the communal tie, the very basis of generalized reciprocity.

It is of the greatest importance for the nature of Iban social structure, that all Iban, regardless of social standing, are expected to toil in the rice fields in order to meet the consumption needs of their own *bilek*-families. This ethical or moral emphasis is strongly egalitarian. In fact, Iban society is characterized by the absence of hereditary chieftainship or any social stratification; a remarkable feature in comparison with many other indigenous societies of Borneo [cf. ROUSSEAU 1979; FREEMAN 1981]. Before the Brooke government invented the institution of longhouse headman (*tuai rumah*), there had been no formal office which exerted authority at the community, let alone the supralocal, level. To be sure, there were occasionally powerful political and military leaders who could influence their followers both at and beyond the longhouse community level. But their influence and leadership were based upon personal renown, achieved through prowess in battle, knowledge of traditional custom, eloquence, and above all, acquisition of mystical protection originating in supernatural agents. They were often charismatic in nature. Individuals would follow such leaders by their own choice, for there was no coercive or authoritarian measures available to leaders. Generally speaking, traditional Iban ethics stressed individual freedom, self-reliance, egalitarianism, and competition between individuals.

Iban social structure and the ethics inherent in it, briefly summarized above, are what constituted the self-containedness of the traditional Iban world. It was an 'ego-centric' world as far as it was grasped in Iban consciousness. Although in actual social transactions any single individual or social unit was involved in various wider social networks, the cognitive style of those Iban seems to have been 'centripetally' oriented. In other words, the Iban social world was concentrically structured, with its extremely solid core—as Sutlive [1978: 39] quotes an informant as saying, 'the

bilek-family is like a sovereign state'—and its outer circles the boundaries of which would be increasingly vaguer the more distant from the centre. Consciousness of social identity reflects this same structure. An Iban would identify himself first as a member of the *bilek*-family to which he belonged, then as a member of the longhouse community of which his *bilek*-family was a part, then as belonging to a somewhat more vaguely delineated local society in which most of his kin (*kaban*) could be found, and finally, if need arose, as a person sharing the language (*jako'*) and 'way of life' (*adat*) of other people. As stated earlier, this last frame of identification had no verbal label and would slide into the remoter realm of non-identification. The realm of non-identification, and in certain historical conditions even that of those who shared linguistic-cultural characteristics, were the realms of actual as well as potential enemies (*munsoh*). Warfare and headhunting were the predominant relationships with them.

Although various theories have been proposed to explain the origin of headhunting as a cultural practice, it is commonly accepted that, in its aspect as a form of warfare, the principal function of headhunting is to be found in the ecological adaptation of shifting swidden agriculturalists [cf. PEACOCK 1973: 9]. Specifically concerning Iban practice, Freeman [1970: 150], Wagner [1972: 120] and Vayda [1976: Chapter 3] point out ecological factors involved in headhunting, and the role it played in their migratory processes and expansion. Wagner and Vayda examine the actual phases of Iban warfare in a historical perspective, and try to understand its transformation through the contacts of the Saribas and Skrang Iban with Malays (Vayda), and under the colonial rule of the Brookes (Vayda and Wagner). The 'development' of Iban warfare and headhunting can be briefly summarized as taking three forms or phases.

1) The 'primordial' form of headhunting: small-scale raids whose purpose, in Iban consciousness, was to acquire heads in order to enhance prestige and/or for ritual purposes.

2) 'Piratical' headhunting: large-scale raids particularly on coastal regions by the Saribas and Skrang Iban. The emergence of this type of headhunting raid is thought to have been an outcome of the 'hypersensitive' reaction of those Iban to coastal peoples (mainly Malays and Melanau) whom they encountered intensively for the first time in the late eighteenth century. This probably also caused the 'intertribal' warfare among the Iban, particularly that of Saribas and Skrang Iban with the Balau Iban who were allied with the neighbouring Malays.

3) 'Political' headhunting: large-scale, well-organized expeditions led or authorized by the Brooke government which mobilized the down-river Iban (initially the Balau and the Sebuyau but later involving the Saribas and lower Skrang Iban) to suppress 'rebellions' by up-river peoples, notably the Ulu Ai Iban. Anti-government up-river Iban began to organize larger scale war-parties against these pro-government expeditions, in a spirit of retaliation and emulation.

Of these three phases, the first is directly related to the mode of subsistence activity and its socio-political organization under specific environmental constraints; the second and the third are transformations of the first, twisted by historical con-

tingencies. However, it should be emphasized that the same undercurrent of ecological adaptation lies beneath all three phases and that the 'primordial' form of headhunting continued to be practised until the final extinction of all forms of headhunting.

Iban society in the pre-Brooke period was in a condition of perpetual, if often latent, warfare, which according to Sahlins [1968: Chapter 1] is an intrinsic condition of the 'tribal' mode of existence, essentially due to the absence of the state. The notion of 'enemy' (*munsoh*) is thus of special importance in Iban social consciousness. It is an element of cognitive style particularly relevant to the self-contained ego-centric world of the Iban in those earlier times. For it constitutes, however negatively, the definition of the outermost limit of the range of 'we-ness', and as such plays a role similar to that of an ethnic label. More significantly, the contents of this notion have changed through historical experience, reorganized in accordance with actual socio-political relations. Here the policy taken by the Brooke state was decisive.

It says much for the ingenuity of the Brookes that they took advantage of the highly evocative notion of *munsoh* when they mobilized Iban warriors. It not only heightened the morale of the warriors, but also had the more important effect of uniting troops of different regional origin, some of whom had previously been enemies. Thus a kind of ethnic consciousness was generated among them. The single ethnic label Dayak, under the banner of the unitary Brooke state, created for the Iban 'a new sense of identity so that they thought of themselves as a group transcending their traditional parochial loyalties' [KEDIT 1980: 58]. Yet, paradoxically, while the Brookes enhanced the growth of ethnic unity of various Iban subgroups, at the same time they relied on the traditional allegiances of more circumscribed regions. For in most cases the *munsoh* of the Brookes were ethnic Iban 'rebels' in up-river areas. There were only two major exceptions: the Chinese Rebellion in the First Division in 1857, and the Great Kayan Expedition in 1863. The most serious consequence of this use of Iban against Iban was the amplified antagonism between pro-government Iban and 'rebel' Iban. As mentioned earlier, their repeated mutual raids had devastated large up-river areas of the Second Division around the turn of the century. This situation contrasted sharply with the undisturbed area of the Saribas and Krian, where considerable economic development took place later in the 1920s and 1930s. The use of Iban warriors within the state apparatus thus eventually led to intra-ethnic collision, and gave rise to mutual suspicion which still lingers today, and to differentiation of life environments between regions. In this respect, Brooke policy towards the Iban prevented as much as it enhanced the formation of Iban ethnic consciousness.

Nonetheless it is still true to say that the present ethnicity of the Iban is essentially a product of Brooke policy or, more precisely, of the Iban-Brooke interaction. The Brooke state treated the Iban as a definable entity, gave them a single ethnic label and, more importantly, it allocated to them a privileged status within the state system. Except for the Malays in the Second Division, they were the only Sarawak subjects who were, when necessity arose, obligated to serve on government military expeditions. For this reason, all the Iban in the state received special treatment

in taxation. They paid a 'door tax' (*pupu pintu*), that is a tax levied on a *bilek*-family of one dollar per year, while other indigenous peoples paid two dollars a year per adult male [PRINGLE 1970: 162]. It is noteworthy that this rate, which was fixed in 1881 when one bushel of unhusked rice was valued at one dollar, remained constant until the end of Brooke rule [PRINGLE 1970: 163]. According to Freeman [1970: 254], a good yield of paddy is about 80 bushels per household; so that, despite fluctuation in yield, and the need to pay in cash, we may say that the burden of the door tax was relatively light, even in the earlier years.[5)]

The formation of Iban ethnicity during the Brooke period, as reviewed above, took place without radical socio-cultural disjunction of the Iban. The Brookes relied more on traditional Iban values in their use of Iban as the major state force than on any new forms of organization more pertinent to a modern state. This fact alone may explain the striking absence among the Iban in the Brooke period of anything like the nativistic or millenarian movements which occurred elsewhere in South East Asia. The numerous 'rebellions' in up-river areas lacked any ideological content other than a vague notion of a form of freedom which could only be found in a stateless society. In fact most 'rebellions' were retaliations in response to prior government military action, and seem to have had no intention to establish any new order. Of course, the lack of disjunction does not mean the absence of transformation. It simply means that the actors were able to rely on pre-existing socio-cultural practices and idioms in order to cope with changing socio-political environments. Transformation took place not in the form of the overthrow of the old socio-cultural systems, but as the distorted persistence of those systems under entirely new circumstances.

Let us now return to present-day Iban consciousness of social identity, especially of ethnic identity. It is not certain to what extent we can speak of specifically *ethnic* consciousness of rural Iban, particularly in everyday life situations. Despite the now ubiquitous acceptance of the ethnic label Iban, its relevance to Iban social identity is still very ambiguous. Probably we have to speak of a 'pre-reflective' consciousness of ethnicity, rather than of an elaborated conscious form. As Smith [1981: 68] puts it, an 'ethnic category' may be a mode of existence and of consciousness distinct from an 'ethnic community'; the former referring to the absence of any sense of 'community', which in turn is characterized by memories of a common fate in past history, by a shared sense of liberation from former afflictions, and by some form of unifying agency or organization. Applying these indicators to the present case, we can say that the Iban have not yet formed an 'ethnic community'; at least this is true for those in the Second Division. Of particular importance is the near absence of

5) We have to add, however, that various fines were imposed on *adat* (customary law) offenders as well as on transgressors of state decrees. The former category of fines was arbitrated and collected by longhouse headmen or government appointed regional headmen (*penghulu*, instituted in about 1883). Half of such fines was retained by the headmen, half being submitted to the government. This may have been a considerable burden to those who were fined.

agencies which could thematize or articulate the potentialities of ethnicity in continuous social and political processes. Among small educated groups in urban centres, such as Kuching and Sibu, there may perhaps be some signs of such agencies, For example, the Sarawak Dayak National Union, based in the state capital, is actively engaged in propagating forms of traditional Iban culture among the younger generation living in the town and its vicinity. But these efforts are not directed at unifying actual Iban communities, whether urban or rural. Rather they make use of stereotyped cultural fragments, presented as traditional—such as folk dance, music, and imitations of festivals—in order to attempt to connect urban Iban with their cultural roots. Such cultural elements may have some symbolic value for ethnic identity in the culturally plural urban milieu, but they have no relevance for the development of ethnic consciousness among rural and especially up-river Iban, who would at best regard them as impoverished forms of their living culture. The same is largely true for the Iban language programmes of Radio Malaysia Kuching (formerly Radio Sarawak), and to a lesser degree for the Iban language publications of the Sarawak Branch of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (reorganized in 1977 from the former Borneo Literature Bureau). The radio is already an almost indispensable part of everyday life of rural Iban, and the publishing house enjoys some limited popularity among those young people who have received primary education. Yet the emphasis of both these information organizations is mainly on preserving, out of context, traditional, even fossilized cultural fragments. There is no conscious endeavour to relate historical experience to the interpretation of present socio-political conditions. Significantly, there is no Iban language newspaper, either daily or weekly, which could carry out this task.

It seems therefore that we have to draw rather negative conclusions. The genesis of Iban ethnic identity was largely due to policies imposed by the Brooke state, while the Iban themselves had not developed a perception of ethnic unity beyond an ambiguous unthematized level. In other words, the Iban did not substantially develop their identity as an 'ethnic category', given by their incorporation into the state system, to the level of 'ethnic community'. This parallels the conspicuous absence of nativistic movements during the Brooke period. I have mentioned a number of possible reasons for the 'failure' of the growth of ethnic consciousness, all derived from the specific historical experiences of Iban with the Brooke state. Ethnic consciousness, if it is to be able to serve as a driving force for social reformation of any sort, must be formed or transformed through struggles with opposing power, usually of other ethnic origin. A curious paradox is that the Iban did not nurture this kind of ethnic consciousness despite their repeated 'rebellions' against the Brooke state. The defeated 'rebels' were easily drawn into the state order, and thereafter often took an active part in government military operations. The 'paternalism' of the Brookes, as is often pointed out, was certainly a significant factor. The Iban could safely, and maybe also falsely, feel that they were allied with, rather than subjugated by, the Brooke state.

SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

One way in which the Iban define themselves is by stressing their traditional hill rice cultivation. It is the core of the Iban 'way of life' (*adat*) as against hunter-gatherers in the past, and as against modern town dwellers. The majority of up-river Iban are still emotionally involved in this subsistence activity, and are even ready to sacrifice time and labour, which could possibly be used for the more profitable work of rubber tapping and pepper growing, for the intensive work necessary in the rice fields. As for basic cultivation techniques, one can see scarcely any traces of change or improvement from what could have been observed in the last century. It is as if subsistence rice cultivation had been trapped in this backward corner of the world, unable to find a way out.

Iban consciousness, or rather pre-consciousness, of their own mode of subsistence is deeply embedded in religious notions and activities. It can even be said that rice cultivation forms the core of the entire religious system of the Iban. It thus defies the narrowly developmental study approach, though this is not totally irrelevant. We need to remind ourselves of the fact that for those who adhere to the traditional religion, the rice plant is something like a reincarnation of their ancestral spirits who return from the Land of the Dead [JENSEN 1974: 108; UCHIBORI 1978: 253ff.]. The Iban have an attitude almost of veneration towards the souls or spirits of rice (*semengat padi* or *antu padi*) on the various ritual occasions which mark the stages of growth of rice plants. Such an attitude has an important bearing on activities usually regarded as strictly economic. The following episode reported by Freeman from the Baleh area provides an interesting example:

> At Rumah Nyala in the Sungai Sut, the first [rubber] trees to be planted date from about 1924. Some years after this a strange series of events occurred. The story spread, among the Iban, that rubber trees had a strongly deleterious effect on their *padi*; the spirit of the rubber trees (*antu kubal*), so it was said, was able to attack and drive away the *padi* spirits (*antu padi*). Many Iban came to believe this extraordinary tale (which had sprung from a dream), and so deeply that they were persuaded to cut down the rubber trees they had planted. Today they bewail their stupidity, but because of it, many Iban families in the Baleh region are now without productive rubber plantations [FREEMAN 1970: 268].

It is possible to interpret this seemingly odd episode from an angle entirely different from religious notions. If the event reported above occurred sometime after the mid-1930s, it was curiously and significantly coincidental with the prohibition of new rubber planting imposed by the Sarawak government under the terms of the International Rubber Regulation Agreement in 1934 [cf. PRINGLE 1970: 334]. There is an unproven possibility that the dream revelation was fabricated and spread with hidden intention. Or it may have been an expression of anxiety, finding a channel in a dream, among those Iban who were faced by the government's decree. Whatever the case, the extremely sensitive attitude of the Iban towards rice plants is the premiss behind the occurrence of this event.

The self-image of the Iban as hill rice planters persists with unusual stubbornness not only among the up-river Iban but even among the down-river Iban who are heavily dependent on rubber and, more recently, pepper production for their daily income. Portentous were the words uttered by a Krian Iban who lived on the outskirts of Saratok bazaar town, contrasting his own way of life with the traditional way: 'We are now not genuine Iban, being half Malay' (*kami diatu' ukai Iban bendar, setengah Laut*). He was a member of a longhouse community which was intending to celebrate the religious festival *gawai antu* (Festival for Ghosts) in August 1975, and therefore a community of firm if not fervent adherents of 'pagan' Iban religious practices. So what he meant by those words was not deviation from the proper ethnic religion, often a mark of changed identity in the Malay-Indonesian world, but deviation from the traditional mode of subsistence economy. Their community had concentrated on pepper production for several years in order to meet the huge cost needed for holding the lavish festival. In addition to that, they had long been engaged in wet rice cultivation which had been promoted by a government subsidy. There was no pride in the speaker's tone, and I interpret his words as a reflection on his own identity in terms of these deviations. Although such a reflection may be an ephemeral and not fully articulated form of consciousness, it points to the gap between the subjective (and also ideal) model of the Iban world and actual Iban existence in the real world.

Nevertheless, the persistence of a largely subsistence economy in up-river areas has to be explained in historical terms, particularly in view of the contrast with the degree of economic development (remarkable by Sarawak standards) and perceptible transformation among the lower Saribas and Krian Iban. The single most important historical factor is to be found in the violent turmoil endemic in up-river areas from the end of the nineteenth century well into the 1930s. This was in retrospect a period of crucial importance for the economic transformation of many rural areas in the Malay-Indonesian world. The introduction of the rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*) into the region, and the subsequent rubber boom after 1900, led peasants in various parts of Malaya and Indonesia to engage in rubber production on smallholdings (for the case of Minangkabau in West Sumatra, see the paper by Oki in this volume). The boom was naturally carried over to Sarawak. First introduced by the government, rubber planting quickly spread to the Saribas Iban. Pringle [1970: 203] states that it was in about 1909 that a Saribas Iban first planted rubber on a large scale. In 1911, we read a report in the Sarawak Gazette,

> Certain Para rubber plantations belonging to Dyaks in the Paku and Saribas rivers were visited and Mr. Lang reports them in good condition and well kept; the gardens range from 7,000 trees to 100, and altogether there are approximately 40,000 rubber plants of various ages [SARAWAK GAZETTE 1911: Simanggang Monthly Report, 1 July 1911].

The Sarawak government, or more personally Rajah Charles Brooke, endeavoured to foster smallholder rubber cultivation in the state. It did not encourage the introduction of large-scale plantations, particularly by foreign (European) investors [cf. a letter from Charles to Harry Brooke, 5 March 1910, quoted in CRISSWELL 1978:

136–137]. The smallholdings of the Saribas Iban were thus protected by Brooke policy. Profiting from rubber plantation, the Iban of the Saribas River—the Paku referred to above being one of its tributaries—prospered in later decades, and they and their children, who received relatively advanced education, contributed considerably to post-war and especially post-independence Sarawak politics.

The Iban of the upper Skrang were not ignorant of the merits of rubber plantation. In early 1930s, when the majority of them were temporarily—if for as long as ten years—resident in the upper Layar (Saribas), many of them were employed as wage labourers, or worked on a share-cropping basis (the tapper and owner each taking half the product) on rubber plantations in the lower Saribas. It is said that a number of upper Batang Ai Iban also went to work there. However it is only after the new rubber boom in 1950 that the upper Skrang Iban finally managed to transplant saplings brought from the Paku, where they had once again been working. This turned out to be a fatal delay, if we regard the introduction of a cash crop as a necessary initial step towards wider social development. For in the 1970s the price of rubber continued to remain at a very low level and the proceeds from rubber production were little more than a supplement to daily consumption. This re-emphasized the reliance of local Iban on a subsistence economy based on rice cultivation.

We may therefore speak of a phenomenon almost of involution in this outdated and heavy reliance on the subsistence economy. There is a real difficulty for the Iban to get out of this impasse. One possibility is to take the opportunity to switch drastically from hill rice cultivation, to the exclusively commodity production of a cash crop, especially pepper, which maintains a high price level. There are a few exceptionally adventurous young people in the upper Skrang who express their intention exclusively to produce pepper, provided that conditions permit. The generation gap between those young people, often married couples, and the old who are sentimentally attached to the subsistence economy, is not acute for the present. A number of reasons can be given for this apparent lack of gap between generations. The major reason is that transition to exclusively commodity production cannot be carried out all at once, if only because of lack of initial capital. Unlike rubber, pepper plants are extremely delicate, requiring intensive care especially during the three years before the first harvest. Chemical fertilizer, for example, is a necessity. Therefore, most up-river inhabitants begin by planting no more than one or two hundred plants. What is worse, even this modest attempt is often in contradiction with the labour cycle of rice cultivation; for quite often the busiest seasons of the two cultivation cycles coincide. Households which have enough hands may cope with such a situation, but many small households are unable to manage. Thus the vicious circle closes. The majority of people, even if they want to engage in pepper cultivation instead of rubber tapping, are compelled to return to rubber. Another reason for the lack of a generational gap is more a question of social ethics. Not even those Iban youths who have an adventurous spirit can freely dismiss their older parents' aspiration for success in rice cultivation as being simply old-fashioned. The social ethics involved in the unity of the *bilek*-family as the unit of production are still solid.

It is evident, therefore, that the Iban in up-river areas who seem to be clinging to a traditional subsistence economy are in a sense being compelled to do so. Surrounded by a predominantly cash economy, and themselves willy-nilly encroached upon by it, they are trapped in the impasse of an involuted subsistence economy. At the same time it is true that they are also consciously attached to traditional Iban subsistence ethics.

The upper Skrang Iban are the least Christianized of all non-Muslim communities in Sarawak. They are active adherents of old religious practices, especially those surrounding rice cultivation. They are unshakeable believers in inspirations and warnings which come in dreams as messages from supernatural beings. They strictly follow omens which are manifest in various forms, for they are believed to be sent by benevolent gods. Perhaps the only major religious practices which have been abolished, or have simply disappeared from their stock of religious notions, are those which were formerly connected with headhunting. Significantly, one of the upper Skrang religious practitioners (*lemembang*, who chant long religious songs at various festivals), who was reputed to be knowledgeable in traditional lore, once confidently asserted to me that the gods who send omens were Pulang Gana and his sons-in-law, while the orthodox would say that they were Sengalang Burong and his sons-in-law. Pulang Gana is the god who presides over human agricultural activities, and Sengalang Burong is the god of warfare and headhunting. Here we see an instance of a tendency to transform the organization of traditional knowledge in ways pertinent to the subsistence economy.

One might even say that the up-river inhabitants in question are, in their consciousness, subsistence cultivators *par excellence*. And yet this form of consciousness is a reaction, a kind of anxiety reaction, to their own transformed and threatened existence. The meaning of subsistence economy, both subjectively and objectively, for these 'traditionalized' cultivators is totally different from that of the genuinely traditional cultivators of former days. Once again, a most profoundly significant transformation in Iban life has taken place, and yet has been occluded from consciousness by the apparent persistence of earlier forms.

CONCLUSION

The paper has dealt with two major fields of consciousness of the Iban, those of social identity and of subsistence economy, in terms of their transformation under Brooke rule. Without accepting a simplistic dichotomy of 'tribe' versus 'peasantry', we might for convenience use these terms to indicate approximately the different degrees of involvement in the market economy and state system.

The Brooke state brought about a completely new situation for the 'pre-contact' Iban world. The state emerged literally *ex nihilo*, at least to Iban eyes. The repeated Iban 'rebellions' were in fact attempts, barely consciously pursued, to escape the net newly thrown out by the state. As one by one these attempts were crushed, the Iban were gradually incorporated into the state system. Some Iban subgroups, notably the Saribas and Krian Iban, followed rather straightforwardly the route of peasant-

ization, successfully adapting themselves to cash crop cultivation. Others remained painfully at the fringe of the market economy, and even overemphasized forms of consciousness pertinent to a subsistence economy. This was largely due to the historical contingencies of the interaction between the Iban and the Brooke state, a unique formation among colonial regimes.

Iban ethnic consciousness, too, is a unique historical formation. In order to elucidate the present-day ethnic consciousness of the Iban, it proved useful to distinguish two moments of ethnic consciousness: 'ethnic category' and 'ethnic community'. The 'ethnic category' Iban was first formed through ambivalent interactions with the Brooke state which imposed the very label Sea Dayak (Iban). Ironically, however, the Iban were unable to develop consciousness of an Iban 'ethnic community', precisely because of the nature of their interaction with the Brooke state.

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