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'SEA DAYAK' AND 'IBAN': THE HISTORY OF TWO ETHNONYMS

Allen R. Maxwell

INTRODUCTION

The current ethnonym 'Iban' was not always used to refer to members of the largest ethnic group in Sarawak. There is now available enough material to be able to try to clarify the history of the ethnic labeling of this group. The ethnonym 'than' is a classic example of an exonym, that is, an ethnic label used originally not by the people themselves, becoming an endonym (or autonym), an ethnic label used by the people themselves to refer to themselves (Rousseau 1990: 11, 52).

Before modern times, there was no single term used to designate this large population. As Pringle, author of the major work on the Ibans under Brooke rule, has put it: "... before the Ibans came into contact with Europeans they had no word which expressed their own relative cultural unity, any more than did the members of the other tribal societies in Sarawak" (1970: 19; see also Hose and McDougall 1912 II: 249)¹ Howell and Bailey put it more specifically (1900: 34):

The Sea Dayaks call themselves, as a rule, after their river or country (e.g., *Kami Undup*. We are *Undup Dyaks*. *Kami Balau*. We are Balau Dyaks. *Kami Ulu Ai nitih ka adat aki ini*. We Up-river Dyaks follow the customs of our ancestors), and occasionally, when contrasting themselves with the Malays speak of themselves as Daya and of the Malaysas Laut.

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Allen R. Maxwell

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THE ETHNONYM 'SEA DAYAK'

Before the use of the ethnonym 'Iban' became widespread in Sarawak, another exonym, "Sea Dayak", was used, especially among Europeans. Pringle has suggested that the ethnonym "Sea

Dayak" was apparently coined by James Brooke (1970: 19). This surmise appears to be correct. In "the first volume professing to treat of the inhabitants of Sarawak," written during 1847 (Low 1848: iii), Hugh Low has written (1848: 165):

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

Exactly when James Brooke first made this distinction, between 'Land Dayaks' and 'Sea Dayaks' is uncertain. In what appears to be James Brooke's first writing on Borneo, an essay, 'Proposed Exploring Expedition to the Asiatic Archipelago', he did not mention "Land Dyaks" or "Sea Dyaks" and spoke only of "Dyaks". This essay, written before Brooke left England in 1838 (Templer 1853 I: 2), has been reprinted a number of times (Keppel 1846a II Appendix I, pp. i-xv, 1846b: 373-381; Templer 1853 I: 2-33; Jacob 1876 I: 70-89; St. John 1899: 259-290).

It would appear that Brooke had made the distinction between 'Land Dayaks' and 'Sea Dayaks' at least by 1846, or before. Keppel writes (1846a I: 189, 1846b: 119):

The difference between the Malay and the Chinese, between the sea and the Land Dyak, and even between one tribe and another, presents a variety of elements out of which a consistent whole has to be compounded, and a new state of things to be established in Borneo.

This passage, written by Keppel, appears in chapter 9, just after he had produced a passage of James Brooke's journal dated "Jan. 8th, 1841" (Keppel 1846a I: 171, 1846b: 108). In the second volume of the same work Keppel himself says: "The Dyaks are divided into Dayak Darrat and Dyak Laut, or land and sea Dyaks" (1846a II: 174, 1846b: 336). This second passage occurs after James Brooke's journal entry for Sept. 19, 1845.

What we do not seem to find is the phrase 'Sea Dayak' in James Brooke's own hand, in the published portions of his journals produced by Keppel, Jacob, and Mundy. There is, however, some suggestive evidence that James Brooke's journals may have been "sanitized" by his editors. In Keppel's later work, he took pains to defend Brooke against Hume (on Hume's attack on Brooke, see Runciman 1960, ch. 4, 'The Years of Tribulation,' pp. 92-118), and indicates that Mundy had made "a simple error of transcription" (1853 I: 191) in confusing the Land Dayaks and the Saribas people. Brooke had lent his journals to both Keppel and Mundy (Keppel 1853 I: 191). Keppel quotes both from Brooke's manuscript of the journals and Mundy's published version (Keppel 1853 I: 192 – I have quoted directly from Mundy, and ignored Keppel's editorial emendations):

Brooke ms. (Keppel 1853 I: 192)

The Land Dyaks are inferior to those of the coast, *they* are darker than the Serebas. *They* are by no means so warlike as the others; and, from their great dread of firearms, may be kept in subjection by comparatively a small body of Malays.

(Mundy 1848 I: 237)

The Sarebas are by no means so warlike as the others, and from their great dread of firearms, may be kept in subjection by a comparatively small body of Malays.

It seems Keppel himself may have contributed to the difficulties we now face in utilizing the published versions of James Brooke's journals. Runciman reports that Keppel consulted with Henry Wise about whether to publish "certain passages which seemed to glory in the battles that James had fought with the pirates. Wise advised against their publication but kept copies of the relevant passages. He had sent Hume extracts which, divorced from their context, certainly gave a very bloodthirsty impression" (Runciman 1960: 99). A modern and more accurate edition of James Brooke's journals might help rectify these problems and might yield the date that he first used the term 'Sea Dayak'. By 1866, James Brooke did indeed use the term "Sea Dyak", in his introduction to Charles Brooke's memoir