

**The Sarawak Museum Journal****Vol. XL No. 61****December 1989****ISSN: 0375-3050****E-ISSN: 3036-0188**

Citation: Datan, I. (1989). A Brief Ethnography of the Lun Bawang of Sarawak. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XL (61): 143-156

A BRIEF ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE LUN BAWANG OF SARAWAK**Ipoi Datan****INTRODUCTION**

The Lun Bawang are one of the earliest occupants of the island of Borneo (Runciman, 1960: 6) and the first to settle the interior highlands (Harrison, 1959a). To the outside world there are no such people as "Lun Bawang" for they are known as "Murut". Before we discuss further the nature of the Lun Bawang society, it is necessary to look at the term "Murut" and other labels used by the Lun Bawang as terms of self-reference.

A BRIEF ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE LUN BAWANG OF SARAWAK

by

Ipoi Datan

INTRODUCTION

The Lun Bawang are one of the earliest occupants of the island of Borneo (Runciman, 1960: 6) and the first to settle the interior highlands (Harrison, 1959a). To the outside world there are no such people as "Lun Bawang" for they are known as "Murut". Before we discuss further the nature of the Lun Bawang society, it is necessary to look at the term "Murut" and other labels used by the Lun Bawang as terms of self-reference.

LABELS AND THEIR IMPLICATION ON ETHNIC IDENTITY

"Murut" is used by outsiders as an ethnic term of reference for the people who consider themselves as Lun Bawang. However, the Lun Bawang use several other labels such as *lun dayeh*, *lun lod*, *lun ba*, *lun tana luun* and *lun bawang* as terms of self-reference (Langub, 1987). I want to discuss each of these terms separately for the purpose of analysing their implications on ethnic identity.

Crain (1974) notes that the term "Murut" is used by outsiders to refer to a varied assortment of mountain peoples in northern Sarawak and the interior district of Sabah. In Sabah, "Murut" is used as an ethnic term of reference for groups known as Timungon, Nabay, Baukan, Paluan, Sumambuq and Alumbis (Prentice, 1972) and in Sarawak the people who call themselves *Lun Bawang* and sometimes *Lun Dayeh* (Crain, 1974; 1978). The use of the term "Murut" for two sets of people, one in Sabah and another in Sarawak, who are completely different from one and the other has created much confusion. As others have discussed this issue in details elsewhere¹ suffice it for me to mention here that the Lun Bawang have abandoned the term "Murut" for the simple reason that the term does not lend itself to any meaningful connection with the reality of ethnic identity.

Several labels are used by various groups of Lun Bawang as terms of self-reference. For the Lun Bawang of Kalimantan, Sabah and interior Lawas district, Sarawak, the term *Lun Dayeh* is used. "Lun" literally means "people" and *dayeh*, "upriver" or "interior"; "Lun Dayeh", therefore, are

"upriver people" or "people of the interior" (Langub, 1987: 293). Langub (1987: 293-294) further states that "For these groups of people, the label *Lun Dayeh* identifies themselves in a most satisfactory way because they live in the interior and upriver to other groups, except for the Kelabit of the Kela-bit Highlands."

However, the same group of people who occupy the Lower Trusan, Lawas and Limbang Rivers do not identify themselves as *Lun Dayeh*; they refer to themselves as *Lun Lod*. *Lun Lod* or "downriver people", is the exact opposite of *Lun Dayeh*, "upriver people". The term *Lun Lod*, however, has a specific application; it is applied as label of self-reference to *Lun Dayeh* who have left the interior or upriver areas to pioneer the lowland areas in the eighteenth century (Langub, 1987).

Those groups who cultivate wet padi prefer to call themselves as the *Lun Ba*, meaning "people who practise wet padi cultivation". Sometimes they are referred to as the *Nan Ba* or "they of the wet padi field". The *Lun Ba* people are those people living in Ba Kelalan and the Bawan-Belawit valley in Kalimantan, who practise wet padi cultivation. Then, there are those groups who cultivate hill padi and call themselves *Lun Tana Luun* or "people who practise dry padi cultivation" or "shifting cultivators". The people referred to as *Lun Tana Luun* are both *Lun Dayeh* and *Lun Lod* who practise dry padi cultivation. However, *Lun Lod* who practise wet padi cultivation in the lowland areas are not called *Lun Ba* because their farms are not considered as *lati ba* or "wet padi fields", but *tabur* or "swamp padi fields".

Before the 1960s the labels *Lun Ba* and *Lun Tana Luun* were used as important distinction between the two groups. However, as more and more *Lun Tana Luun* are abandoning shifting cultivation and adopting permanent wet padi cultivation, the use of *Lun Ba* and *Lun Tana Luun* as terms of self-reference are slowly being discarded.

Finally, the label *Lun Bawang* is also used. The word *bawang* has several meanings: it means country, as in *bawang Malaysia*, the "country of Malaysia"; it means a city or town, for example, *bawang Kuching*, the "town or city of Kuching"; it may also mean a village, as in *bawang Ba Kelalan* or the "village of Ba Kelalan"; and it can simply mean a place, as in *bawang Kuching* or "the place of Kuching". *Lun Bawang*, therefore means "people of the land", or "people of the place" or "people of the village".

There is a general feeling of agreement among the people falling under the descriptions of the labels *Lun Dayeh*, *Lun Lod*, *Lun Ba* and *Lun Tana Luun* that the term *Lun Bawang* is applicable to them. The reasons for this are obvious. First, the term *Lun Bawang*, unlike the other labels is used in the generic sense because the primary referents are "place", "country" and "village". Second, "The semantics of the term enables it to accommodate other more specific labels of self-reference" (Langub, 1987: 297). For these reasons the *Lun Dayeh*, *Lun Lod*, *Lun Ba* and *Lun Tana Luun* otherwise known as the "Murut" of Sarawak prefer to call themselves *Lun Bawang*.

DISTRIBUTION AND HISTORY OF MIGRATION

The *Lun Bawang* are found in all the four political states of Borneo. It is estimated that 25,000 of them are found in Kalimantan, 2,000 in Sabah, 300 or more in Brunei (Crain, 1978) and 10,000 in Sarawak (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1980).