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THE PEOPLE OF CENTRAL BORNEO**Jérôme Rousseau**

Central Borneo can be defined according to geographic, historical, cultural, linguistic and social factors. These factors are related, but they sometimes diverge from each other and must be considered separately. In a first step, I will try to identify the people of central Borneo, and in the second part I will focus on the central features of their traditional social organization. In recent years, profound — and sometimes alarming — changes have affected central Borneo, but this is not the topic of this paper.

THE PEOPLE OF CENTRAL BORNEO

by

Jérôme Rousseau

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Part I

THE PEOPLE OF CENTRAL BORNEO

'Kayanic' groups

The Kayan place their origin in the Apau Kayan. In the Mahakam, they are known as 'Busang' or 'Bahau'. Ironically, there is in the Mahakam a group called 'Kayan', whose language was radically transformed under the influence of the Pin, who belonged to the linguistic group of Kalimantan Tengah. To prevent confusion, I will refer to them as 'Mahakam-Kayan'.

The people who are called Ga'ai, Segai, Modang, Long Glat and Long Way belong to the same ethnic category (to which I will refer here as 'Segai-Modang'). Their language is Kayanic, but very distinct phonologically and lexically from Kayan.

Kenyah

The Kayan and Kenyah have close cultural and historical relationships. The Kenyah migrated from the Usun Apau to the Apau Kayan. However, 'Kenyah' covers diverse groups who do not necessarily all have a common origin. In the Baram, a distinction is made between the Lepo' Pu'un, considered to be autochthonous, and the Kenyah who immigrated from the Apau Kayan. Some of the Lepo' Pu'un have cultural similarities with the Kajang.

Kajang, Lepo' Pu'un

'Kajang' refers to the inhabitants of the upper Rejang basin at the time of the Kayan expansion. Some of its components are culturally related, while

the Punan Bah and the Sihan speak very different languages from each other and from other Kajang. The Punan Bah language is related to that of the nomadic Punan Tubu and the Saja Basap in kab Bulungan.

Sago played an important part in their economy. The presence of secondary burial among them sets them sharply apart from the Kayan and Kenyah. The Melanau are relatives of the Kajang who moved towards the coast, where they underwent major economic and cultural transformations.

Penihing, Aoheng

The Penihing of the upper Mahakam call themselves Aoheng. Aoheng is closely related to languages of Kalimantan Tengah with heavy borrowings from Kayan.

Like the Kajang, the Penihing combined several distinct ethnic units, some of whom were nomadic, others agriculturalists. This grouping arose as a defensive federation because of warfare during Kayan, Busang and Long Glat migrations to the Mahakam. The Aoheng are still absorbing new groups: the Bukat of Long Apari are now becoming part of the Aoheng, despite the fact that there are Bukat in the Kapuas and the Baluy who maintain their ethnic identity.

Kelabitic Murut

Like the Kayan, Kenyah and Kajang, the Kelabit are swiddeners with a stratification system, but they differ from their central Borneo neighbours in several ways. With some exceptions, they have lived in relative isolation from the other central Borneo groups. Alongside shifting cultivation, they have developed irrigated rice agriculture, which is absent elsewhere in central Borneo, and they raise cattle, which other central Borneo groups also lack. Another characteristic of the Kelabit is their megalithic tradition.

Other central Borneo agriculturalists

A number of small central Borneo groups are not readily classifiable in the above categories, such as U. Apun, Laham, the Murik and the Seputan. Most of them are in the process of being assimilated by larger groups.

Nomads

Nomads lived in the whole interior of Borneo, except in Sabah. In Kalimantan Timur, some nomads live near the coast.

Central Borneo as a geographical unit

Central Borneo is the area from which the Kayan, Mahakam, Kapuas, Rejang and Baram rivers originate. Geographically and socially, central Borneo is the area above the rapids, but some groups who are culturally part of central Borneo have moved closer to coastal areas, especially in the Kayan and Baram basins.

While coastal areas are an attraction for migrations and trade, central Borneo people are not hemmed in by the river basins they occupy: established paths exist across watersheds. Population pressure and other historical circumstances have brought about major migrations across watersheds.