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**Ikat sequences and social-cultural patterns:
the impact of industrialization on the
lives of Iban artisans in Sarawak**

Thesis submitted by

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in December 1993

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**in the Material Culture Unit at
James Cook University of North Queensland**

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L.L. Chalmers
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ABSTRACT

This thesis concerns the relationship of ikat artwork and social practice, in the context of industrial society. It brings into focus the connections between making and using ceremonial cloths and specific systems of social thinking. Of special interest is the role of women artisans in the making of pre-state Iban culture. The thesis explores ways in which sequences of ikat work overlap with and serve to reproduce systems of social knowledge.

In its attention to relations between makers of ikat artwork and cultural brokers in Sarawak in the 1990s, the study questions the impact of external cultural brokers on the agency of Iban women.

It is a participant-observation study which draws on the competencies of the writer as a textile artist, and her earlier post-graduate fieldwork among indigenous weavers in Latin America. An ethnographic approach is based on extended longhouse stays in the early 1990s, principally in two rural communities - one of which is remote and the other marked by much closer historic ties to outside socializing groups. While considerable questionnaire use is engaged to cross-check basic materials, the methodology is consistent with the development of empathy and qualitative data through living with key informants.

The conceptual grounds are informed by the approach developed by *modes of production* theorists. In this case it is used more as a guiding principle than a rigid framework. It results in close scrutiny of continuities in access to the means by which indigenous artists reproduce their social practices. In the context of industrial society, the approach points to ways in which Iban women are denied direct agency in the making of their culture in the 1990s.

The dominant theme of everyday practice draws on social-historical variables, in particular, patterns of pre-state land tenure and subsistence activities. In the 1990s, even the most remote Iban are increasingly engaged in wage labour and commercial agriculture. The analysis unravels capitalist

relations with rural artisans, and identifies negative consequences in terms of the intellectual and aesthetic value of pre-state ikat artwork.

At issue are ways in which cultural brokers impinge on the opportunities of rural women to make critical decisions regarding art practice - a situation, the thesis argues, which undermines the wider agency of Iban women. *Cultural brokers* refers to both private patrons, and public bodies which include vocational training programs and national women's organizations.

The thesis analyzes the relationship of cultural brokers and development programs, and specifically, evidence that cultural brokers subsume rural artisans as wage labour. It finds that wherever rural women undertake craftwork which is discontinuous with everyday experience, the connection between ikat artwork and social practice is negatively affected.

The implication is clear, that contemporary artwork which transmits the ideologies of external socializing groups, contributes to the loss of agency of the maker in her own community. A more general connection is made with the malfunctioning of indigenous systems of cultural knowledge.

The thesis makes a specific contribution to the anthropology of art, from the perspective of art as social practice. It does so by building on ethnographic understanding of intellectual and aesthetic elements which constitute indigenous artwork. In emphasizing this value, the thesis refutes assumptions in Western art theory concerning the marginality of indigenous women's practices in the domain of fine art.

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PREFACE

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.

Since the 1936 publication of Haddon and Start's research on Iban textile arts, most researchers in this field of interest have been content to reproduce these findings. This attitude has contributed to the freezing of 'traditional' practices concerning textile artists in Sarawak. At issue is scholarship - both as dominating discourse and socializing agency in Iban lives - which conveys an idealized image of Iban ikat weaving and celebratory practices. My position is that wherever studies overlook contextual consideration of Iban textile arts they serve to deny crucial alterations concerning the industrialization of Iban lives in Sarawak.

This problem I identify stems from the proposition that textile artists were instrumental in the reproduction of cultural understandings in *pre-state* Iban communities. Clearly, much more needs to be known about this crucial relationship, in respect to elements of cultural understanding now being lost through the process of industrialization.

This is the subject matter of my thesis. On the other hand, the assumption that individuals continue to play an instrumental role in the making of Iban culture - solely on the basis of reproducing ancestral cloths - shifts focus away from the lived experience of Iban women in the 1990s. Industrial changes affect the large majority of Iban women. To assign instrumental influence or cultural agency to contemporary Iban textile artists, is to conceal or overlook the intimate relationship which exists between Iban textile arts and *lived ways*.

In the 1990s, most individuals in most longhouse communities are involved in cash cropping or wage labour - activities which evoke nothing of consequence for symbolic representation of customary shared experiences. This refers to specific subsistence patterns and associated beliefs which underlay the reproduction of *pre-state* Iban culture.

THESIS OBJECTIVES.

The thesis investigates the contemporary practices of Iban ikat artists in Sarawak with the objective of identifying changes that occur in the 1990s. These alterations concern the influence of cultural brokers as specific external forces responsible for the implementation of programs of training, production and distribution of Iban ikat design-work. I test the proposal that the changes wrought by cultural brokers impinge negatively on the instrumental capacity of Iban textile artists to reproduce their own culture. I test this by focussing on what social-cultural aspects of customary practice are being altered in the context of current interest in continuing this Iban art.

THESIS APPROACH.

I work towards developing an empirical basis to the notion that everyday ikat practices renewed cultural understandings, in respect to particular numeral and aesthetic skills. An ethnographic approach centres on an intensive qualitative study of individual artisans. The data concern field observations of processual sequences and specific design qualities relating to ikat work. I observe connections with social thinking represented in the art of making sacred offerings (*miring*). I look for continuities between the respective art forms, and specifically, evidence of women's agency in the making of pre-state Iban culture.

My subsequent focus on changes wrought by outside social agencies - the influence of cultural brokers - is guided by the approach of modes of production theorists. Analysis is at the level of effective control over the means by which Iban women produce ikat work in rural communities. Again, this refers back to the problematic of Iban agency - questions of access to materials, for example. Ultimately, the question is one of whether or not ikat artists are in a position to replicate the means of production increasingly determined by cultural brokers.

RATIONALE.

Textile arts were (and are) highly valued in their own right. Yet these skills were continuous with other social practice, such as the art of making sacred offerings. By focusing on this connectivity I underscore the degree of numeral and aesthetic understanding carried in these practices. Accordingly, I investigate the relationship between what individuals are doing in the way of textile art and their everyday lives in rural longhouse communities - to evaluate the *relevance* of the practice of textile arts in the 1990s.

As a *cultural end* in pre-state Iban communities, the textile arts constituted a crucial element of communication. This process concerns the Iban perception that "there's a divinity that shapes our ends" (e.g. Freeman 1981:39). Accordingly, those who practised the arts were an integral part of Iban reality construction.

While some women derived greater inspiration from the work than others did, Iban ikat textile arts were not a specialist activity. Consequently, the practice was an important *cultural means* by which Iban women developed personal prestige and achieved social status.

It is this derivative aspect of Iban textile arts which gives rise to the issue that there remains a causal link in the late 20th century, between Iban women who practice textile art and the making of Iban culture. The assumption overlooks specific historical factors as follows.

In the 1990s, Iban participate in a society where the means of establishing eminence and influencing Iban culture occur within socialising agencies which are *externally-situated*. I refer to business networks and political party memberships in the Malaysian state of Sarawak.

For the majority of rural Iban, who one generation back were more or less isolated from the everyday influence of outside socialising groups, there is increasing reliance on cash income and wage labour in the early 1990s. Iban textile arts are by no means dead, but the *raison d'etre* reason is transformed by industrialization. Yet, there is a significant persistence surrounding Iban ikat art. This survival

quality sets ikatwork apart from perhaps all other Iban arts. The same quality, survival, indicates a relationship of motivation and the *processual* elements of textile work - as opposed to evaluation of the textiles as objects.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The thesis affirms the agency of Iban women in the making of pre-state cultural systems. The productive value of these findings, accordingly, is of vital concern to both Iban studies and women's studies. Viewing the outcome of the study in a more general sense, the context (craft commercialization) indicates there is relevance to studies of social change. In respect to the latter, I underscore the importance of a crucial finding: the increasing reliance by Iban artisans on cultural brokers in the 1990s exacerbates a more general loss of agency on account of outside socialising forces. It is a critical factor, made more so by its frequent neglect in Iban studies.

In this study I address the loss of instrumentality of Iban artists through a direct line to studies of the Industrial Revolution (e.g. Marx 1967, 1867; Thompson 1963). These teach the lesson that the disappearance of household craft production in Britain was ultimately due to the expansion of capital and wage labour relations of production.

Simply put, the factory system produces relatively cheaper manufactured goods. Craft studies in industrializing societies insist that serial reproduction of handcrafts within the household is an anachronism when evaluated in bald economic realities such as factory cost effectiveness (e.g. Graburn 1963). Although household craft production can provide work for rural women as a means to make money, it remains a poorly-paid sector when viewed against female hourly wage workers in urban situations. Fixed costs are similar across urban and rural populations. Actually, fuel for lighting, cooking and transport, foods and clothing are often higher for the rural women due to transportation costs. This points to a deep-seated conflict in the production of ritual ikat cloths by Iban women in the 1990s. On the one hand there occur

decreased subsistence options, reliance on the national economy for purchases of staple foods, and consequently the need to re-train numeracy and literacy skills towards industrial employment. On the other hand, Iban females are encouraged by cultural brokers to revive and pass on the customary craft skills of their grandparents.

The issue ultimately is one of relationship between serial reproduction of 'ethnic textile badges' and the homogenization of Iban culture by external socializing forces. The notion of a tribal Iban 'Tradition' is fundamentally incongruous with ethnographic understanding of pre-state Iban lives. This thesis contributes to this understanding by explicating the impact of serial reproduction of cloths on the relationship of makers and significant others in the 1990s. The latter concept refers to members of the artisan's family and longhouse community, but it also identifies cultural brokers such as craft training strategists and industry entrepreneurs.

I focus on the issue of alteration at the level of production in order to explore different social situations in which Iban textile arts are practised in the 1990s. My intention is to shift analysis away from abstract qualities of 'ethnic art' objects and emphasize social relations of production and use. The finest Iban reproductions may appear to be the same as older ancestral cloths, but the social context within which they are imitated or occasionally new designs are conceived, is profoundly different to that in which ancestral pieces were produced.

This thesis contributes to research which negates scholarly preoccupation with 'ethnographic objects'. In the first place, Iban ikat cloths did not serve as primary *ends* in pre-state Iban cultural behaviour. To argue otherwise is to overlook Iban belief in divine purpose which guides social practice. Consequently, it can be said that the making of ikat cloths in pre-state lives connects with communication of ultimate causality. This identifies a process or a means through which individuals and groupings renew a sense of place and time. The underlying value concerns the cloth as process, as opposed to ethnographic object.

Further, pigeon-holing Iban artwork as so many 'ethnographic objects' isolates productions from makers' lives, enabling analysts to ignore the overlap with so-called fine art in Western societies. Ultimately this point of view refuses critical differences between ways in which Iban women lived in pre-state groupings, and today, in the 1990s - when parallels are evident with contemporary Western lives.

By relating changes in Iban textile activities to pressures of a world capitalist market, my research contributes to cross cultural comparison with other fourth world situations and to questions of social change. As noted, I have drawn on studies demonstrating that household craft producers do not simply 'persist', but that they are exploited as an opportunity for cottage industry by public and private entrepreneurs. Such studies investigate ways in which artisans adapt to and are constrained by the pressures of the tourism sector for example, within the national economy and the world market (e.g. Graburn 1976, Littlefield 1978, Ribeiro 1983).

With regard for Iban studies and specifically for the field of Iban textile art, this study provides substantial understanding of Iban artisans' cultural-aesthetic as well as social-economic relationships to their art work in the context of contemporary Malaysian society.

BACKGROUND TO THE FIELD STUDY

I bring to the study of Iban textile arts previous anthropological training and field experience among backstrap weavers in Guatemala, Mexico and Peru. I have also at various times practised as a professional textile artist in North America and Australia. In this respect my experience is continuous with Iban artisans concerning the problematical relationship of art and industrial capitalism.

My Master of Arts thesis explored variations in the social organization of textile handcraft production in the highlands of Guatemala and Peru, where backstrap loom activities in the 1980s were practised alongside a more capital intensive footloom industry (Chalmers 1985). In

these situations rural textile artisans, many of whom were women, competed with men who began to dominate the commercial sphere of textile production through producing cheaper footloom versions of customary cloths.

Although in the 1990s Iban women produce ritual cloths for commercial sales, they are not in an identical situation with Latin American women in regard to time and place. Yet I present data in this doctoral thesis which demonstrates certain resemblances with Latin American conditions, specifically ways in which Iban are reliant on wage labour to supplement agricultural produce.

This ethnographic fieldwork approach was undertaken to affirm ways in which pre-state cultural customs, specifically those related to textile arts, connect with the wider process of reproducing lives - within the elementary household unit and the longhouse community. Research necessarily began with a social-historical overview. Then, to develop understanding of the process of cultural variation within Iban groupings, I focussed on activities and decisions relating to relationships within artisans' families, and connections between making textiles and their group or ritual use.

Through investigating social-cultural activities which contextualize the making of textiles the thesis foregrounds artisans' expectations and motivations as indicated by various social roles such as agronomical specialist, ritual host, healer, bard - and increasingly student and wage worker¹. The implication is that the notion of Iban *artisan* is a composite, in much the same way that *intellectual* is in the West. An *intellectual* is not in all cases endowed with imaginative skills, and is not always an empiricist. Similarly, the Iban artisan is not always pre-disposed to practical action - nor always to ideation (e.g. Radin 1953). Yet each social role carried by Iban artisans revolves around specific practice which defines and renews social identity through day to day life in longhouse communities.

¹I use the term 'social-cultural' purposely to balance the two concepts, in contrast to 'socio-cultural' which presents one as a modification of the other.

Decisions surrounding artisanry develop with respect to the experience of discrete individuals; but decisions also have an impact on and reflect the interests of the small group. Iban ikat cloths represent a complex art form which develops from a connectivity of economic and intellectual skills and associated functional values - over many generations.

Accordingly, audience interest in Iban textile arts was not confined to the makers. It was a lively concern of all Iban. As illustrated in this thesis, men and women, young and old, acquired knowledge of textile arts on the basis of its connectivity with the spectrum of Iban social knowledge.

A basic assumption which this study addresses is that new values connected with wage labour, urban lifestyles and introduced consumption patterns critically affect the inspirational bases and qualitative work of Iban artisans. Consequently, as will be demonstrated, the significance of their work impacts negatively on personal development and social status within longhouse communities. The corollary is that imitation of the finest ancestral work, while consistent with the relationship of ethnic identity and static iconography, is increasingly a market- and product-oriented activity. And the social identity that connects with textile practices in the 1990s is discontinuous with the roots of pre-state Iban lives.

The thesis covers a range of social situations across settlement districts where cloths are made and used in the 1990s. There is evidence of customary gift giving and exchange of textiles with neighbouring groups², but the key variable relating to exchange of textiles and knowledge generally concerns residential members of a household and networks of kindred groupings. Such exchange customarily operate through provision of marriage partners and attendance at social functions which bring dispersed cultivators physically together. However, although I take into account

²Cloths were apparently traded or taken by neighbouring groups (e.g. Maloh, Apo Kayan) who used such ikat cloths as foundations on which to apply bead work. Examples exist in Kalimantan, the Sarawak Museum, the National Museum in Jakarta, the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden and the British Museum, London. Further study is needed to determine the extent of and how such textiles were used in trade within Borneo.

variations in ways that individuals learn and practise textile arts in the 1990s - as I will show, my findings all too often proceed towards nationalist objectives of conserving Iban Cultural Legacy.

To summarize underlying assumptions in this thesis, there is more at stake in Iban weavers' lives than the survival of a particular textile form. Neither Iban women nor rural communities are dependent on textile weaving as a mode of cultural transmission - yet personal and social development is invariably contingent on the imaginative and numeracy skills which inform and renew aesthetic literacy. In the final instance, Iban women remain connected with the economic activities they choose to practise. Where this practice does not link back to the reproduction of knowledge which sustains autonomous longhouse life, serial reproduction or similar activities provide stripped down economic gains, ultimately inadequate in respect to human needs.

This is the condition under which most Iban labour in the 1990s. While older women in most Iban communities continue to grow crops of hill rice and imitate symbolic expressions which are consistent with this work, the longhouse audience is increasingly alienated from these objectives. Hence performance involving textile artistry falls on stony ground. The work does not link back with community demand in the context of industrial wage labour.

Iban individuals are subject to increasing costs of raw materials for their textile works. And, wherever artists are selected for national programs of training or competition they are distanced by means of cost from reproducing this kind of work as autonomous artisans.

SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH.

The starting point for the Bornean fieldwork in this thesis entailed focus on ways in which the textile practices of individuals inter-connect with day to day activities. The period of fieldwork comprised three phases. An initial brief orientation in March/April, 1990, was followed by a principal season of study in Sarawak from November, 1990 through January, 1992. The emphasis during this period was on living

in rural Iban communities where residents were actively engaging in the creation and ritual use of ikat textiles. A third period, November, 1992, through February, 1993, was included to cross-check and elaborate on findings revealed through analysis of my data. At this time I revisited communities in Sarawak as well as explored Iban weaving situations in Kalimantan, the Dutch-Indonesian territory of Borneo. Half of this field period was allotted to an investigation of historical Iban materials held by museums in Kuching, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Leiden, Delft and London.

The significance of undertaking an ethnographic field study was that it enabled me to focus on the specific situational quality of social-cultural phenomena. But my concern with this approach was that one's perspective easily becomes community-bound despite knowledge of the anthropological tenet that change neither happens in all places simultaneously nor in identical ways. To enable a more general view over a 'particularistic explanation' of one historical situation, my overall approach was regionally-specific and comparative within settlement districts.

The regions selected were Kapit District within the former Seventh Division (now Kapit Division), the Districts of Saratok, Betong, and Sri Aman in the former Second Division (now Sri Aman Division), and the capital city of Kuching in what was known as the First Division (i.e. Kuching Division). Iban live throughout Sarawak today, as urban professionals, off-shore oil workers and plantation labourers. The districts selected were those of predominantly Iban settlement in an historic sense, characterized by remoteness on the one hand (Kapit) and close contact with Malay socialization on the other (Sri Aman).

In the former situation (i.e. Kapit Division) commercial cropping and wage labour (logging) activities increasingly inform social-cultural patterns. But continuities in textile arts are prominent. In the latter districts (i.e. Sri Aman Division) commercial cropping and agricultural wage work predominate; and textile arts are undergoing a revival under the careful watch of public policy strategists.

Kapit district is a relatively isolated riverine region - a frontier settled by pioneering Iban groups during the late nineteenth century. In the early 1990s it is a focal point for aggressive logging operations. While it can be said there has occurred the least interruption of customary practices, male members of most longhouse communities find periodic and sometimes high-paying work in logging and related service industries.

A strong reason for selecting Iban settlements in this area for research was the existence of substantive historical documentation arising in Derek Freeman's research in 1949-55. Freeman was the first anthropologist to undertake an in-depth study of Iban communities at a time when they were still relatively autonomous groupings.

By contrast, the former Second Division is accessible by a network of roads and relatively calm riverways. It includes Iban communities that have been settled for more than two centuries in the midst of Malay civilization, and subsequently with closer contacts with Malay, British and Malaysian administrations. In the 1990s agricultural plantations are the focus of development schemes in this area. There occur both greater accessibility in terms of agricultural machinery, and historic ties with the political party system in Sarawak. These factors inter-connect on the basis of entrenched political-economic Iban Tradition.

While the literature credits both areas of study for making ritual ikat cloths, the Saribas district has been foregrounded, particularly for its intricate *classical* design work (pl.47,48) and less so but more significantly for skills in supplementary weft designs. The corollary is that Baleh artisans are slighted by political opinion for their markedly animated and vital renditions in the genre of grotesque realism (pl.45,53).

I selected a longhouse community on the Baleh River in Kapit district as my primary base for participation and observation over extended periods between 1990 and 1993.³

³For ethical reasons, names of informants and communities have been altered in the interests of privacy and to minimize the impact that this study might otherwise make on particular individuals. Future studies will not be hindered on the basis that communities have been chosen as

Selection criteria included its large population size and frequency of textile art activities. Women in all but a few households were actively involved in ikat weaving both for customary ritual uses and for sales. In the 1990s the ethos of the community arises within a continuum of practices including individuals who adhere to ancestral or pre-state customs and those who value urban and nationalist ways.

My main method of data collection was through observation and participation in technical textile work and ritual ceremonial life as these events occurred in the courses of daily life throughout the calendar year in 1991. Of particular importance was the use of video for recording sequences in such events which enabled detailed analysis. Two anticipated problems with such a tool were first, that the camera would impose and alter the subject matter and second, that my observations would be narrowly focussed.

To offset the first problem I used a small hand-held camera and made do without the added imposition of glaring spot lights. I was careful to use this tool only amongst people with whom I had established rapport and only after discussing my objectives and learning from my hosts whether they had any objections to my work. To my benefit was the realization that most Iban individuals were familiar with video and not particularly concerned about it, with the exception of older persons who did not want to be filmed because they were observing mourning restrictions.

The second problem the camera imposed was that one could not both participate fully and perform the role of filming. This was not only offset by the fact that my husband and I were often working together and could take turns in these roles, but also by the fact that one of our hosts in the Baleh community also became an adept camera man. He added, literally, an 'insider' focus.

Another benefit was that, because most communities had at least one television set, I was able to provide instant play-back for my hosts who not only received the pleasure of

representative of various current forms of textile activities; replication therefore is possible through selection of any communities with similar and/or new/different forms to gain further understanding of how textile arts are being reproduced.

viewing what we would be 'taking' away with us as data, but who were also then able to discuss, in retrospect, each event.

While most of the information gathered through conversations was based on informal discussions, I followed a basic structure to ensure a consistent core of data was collected on such questions as access to materials, production procedures and intentions. From time to time I also employed more formal surveys in the form of short written questionnaires, but only where my role was already cast in a more formal situation such as on visits to schools or on an occasion when I accompanied a rural health group and another as a guest at a government craft project. Such surveys were conducted primarily to give a wider regional perspective and to cross-check qualitative data collected through more intense community studies.

I was able to collect a comparative set of data on technical aspects of more than 240 textiles held in various museums and an equivalent number of cloths in longhouse situations. This data provided a basis on which to assess changes in technique, motifs and design composition. Not surprisingly, information on the social context of the cloths in museum collections was scanty compared to the rich source of data available for textiles shown by family members or the artisan herself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .

This thesis gained organizational and substantive impetus from numerous associates and friends in the focus community on the Baleh River, as well as others in Kapit and Sri Aman Divisions. For professional reasons I prefer to preserve the anonymity of these individuals. I extend deeply-felt gratitude to them for many kindnesses and lessons taught.

I am also grateful to members of my own family who accompanied me in the field. My husband conducted his own doctoral research on Iban arts, which meant that when two or more events coincided we could share experiences, as well as

enjoy the more usual situation of collaboration and cross-checking my own observations.

Our sons aged six and nine years broadened and gave depth to our social activities while the birth of my third son in the Kapit region opened yet other doors - to otherwise private bodily experiences of recent mothers and midwives. On the whole our family ensemble invited sociological commentary and insights - we were seldom in danger of being able to forget our student status as textile artists and human beings.

Many individuals gave generously of their time, helping me to participate more fully and interpret characteristically lyrical responses to questions on their arts. The latter help enabled me to digest local meanings rather than rely on translations made by outsiders back in urban situations. There was rarely a time when an English-speaker was not available, a situation which spared me the initial need to travel with a translator.

While Iban language is an area of interest in my work it is neither my native language nor my specialization. Accordingly I leave to others the crucial ethnohistorical study of stories, dreams, motifs and designs and their symbolic explanations. At the same time, while *meaning* is transmitted by lyrics and motifs it arises in the aesthetics of performance. In this respect my research coincides with the work of cultural analysts whose concept of *cultural behaviour* refers to *symbolic representation* (e.g. Wuthnow 1984).

To this end I emphasize contextual elements of aesthetic practice. For example, I focus on *sequence* in performance, as opposed to ways in which artisans *order* their dye-stuffs, threads and offerings. The notion of *sequence* is used to signify conceptual reasoning that 'arithmetic order' is but a means of Iban knowledge. On the other hand, the context in which specific ordering of elements occurs (*sequence*) has implications for over-arching aesthetic and economic behaviour. Accordingly *sequence* as indicated by procedures in ikat work and sacred ritual exchange has further implications for human relationships.

For my understanding of both the rudiments and the possibilities of anthropological research I am particularly indebted to Marilyn Gates and Philip Wagner of Simon Fraser University, British Columbia. I am grateful to Phillip Courtenay, my initial Associate Supervisor prior to his appointment to Rector, James Cook University, Cairns. Through his regional experience he was able to suggest that in the 1990s I would find artwork in Sarawak still offered a rich field for anthropological study. More recently I am grateful to Barrie Reynolds, my supervisor at James Cook University, who wholeheartedly encouraged this project and opened up considerable research resources at the Material Culture Unit. I appreciate the support of Maria Wronska-Friend my associate supervisor who had the unenviable task of sorting out my drafts at an advanced stage of the work.

I thank those agencies which provided funding to enable both field and museum study. Specifically I thank James Cook University for funding my initial survey work in Sarawak and subsequent Merit Research Grants in conjunction with the Australia Research Council which helped to fund the major fieldwork period and the final fieldwork stage. Other generous awards and grants came through the Australian Post-graduate Research Award program and the Joint Netherlands-Australia Academies of the Social Sciences. Again I acknowledge my gratitude.

Finally, I thank Lucas Chin and Peter Kedit who, in their successive positions as Director of the Sarawak Museum, supported my application for visas to carry out research and who made museum staff, archival material, and ethnographic collections available to assist me in this work. In this regard I also thank Tazuddin Mohtar, Tuton Kaboy, and Peter Siman. I am also grateful to staff at the National Museum of Jakarta. Likewise, I thank Peter Bettenhausen of Museon in den Hague, Pieter ter Keurs and Maria Laman of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden, and Anneke Veldhuisen-Djajasoebata in Rotterdam for the time they made available during my work in The Netherlands.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION.

Finally, turning to the organization of the thesis, it has been divided into five main sections. Section One begins with a lengthy orientation to the regional context. Although the study is ultimately quite specialized with regard to textile procedures, it is my intention in the opening two chapters in this section to sketch a detailed backdrop to these practices. Iban no longer live as autonomous groupings and decision-making influences can no longer be observed wholly within the community. For this reason my initial analysis concerns pre-colonial, imperialist and currently national socializing forces. It is historically-grounded with respect to patterns of land use in the northern region of Borneo where most Iban live today. In the second chapter I elaborate on this regional picture through a social historical profile of Iban livelihood.

In Section Two I present a review of current literature and a discussion of theoretical approaches and issues which contribute to the formulation of this thesis. Chapter Three focusses on a review of Iban studies while Chapter Four concerns issues of social change and more general studies of craft production and artistic practice. This section provides a detailed account of assumptions, objectives and conceptual framework of the thesis.

Section Three turns from the more macro-view of the preceding sections to micro-analysis of field data pertaining to Iban textile art with particular regard for how it is practised in Sarawak in the 1990s. Chapter Five provides an introduction to the kinds of textiles and technical terminology either which Iban employ in the 1990s or inherit from ancestral artisans. Chapter Six includes a profile of Kapit district and Iban longhouses in the Baleh region as they were experienced in 1991. Chapters Seven and Eight focus specifically on technical and aesthetic processes of ikat textile art to illustrate both the complexity of this work as well as to add information which has not been elaborated on in the literature.

In Section Four analysis continues in a similar vein, but with the focus moving from making to using ritual cloths

in the 1990s. Chapter Nine focusses on a major Iban celebration and a selection of smaller ceremonies observed in the Baleh region of Kapit District to show how training in Iban ikat weaving carries over into ways in which rituals are carried out. The chapter illustrates that despite the need to conform to general Iban ritual behavior, individuals customarily maintain a sense of independence and responsibility for their acts and decisions. Further documentation of various ritual events that occurred in 1991-93 in the District of Sri Aman are presented in Chapter Ten. The analysis develops a wider perspective of the role of textile art in Iban communities in other regions of Sarawak.

Section Five addresses the issue of social change, bringing the study back to a more macro-level view. In Chapter Eleven I investigate urban situations in regard to government and private institutions which are actively engaged in handicraft projects. The implications which emerge from this study are summarized in the concluding chapter.

SECTION I

DEFINING THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

The primary interest of this study is to gain an understanding of how Iban artisans are involved in ikat textile artwork in the context of an industrializing nation state. In this regard, particular concern is given to continuities and discontinuities in customary practices which relate to both the making and using of ceremonial cloths. To address this question of social-cultural change, the thesis begins with a macro-level analysis of the social-historical situations within which Iban individuals have developed this art, before turning to detailed analysis of particular situations in which individuals are engaging in customary textile practices in the 1990s.

This first section is introductory in the sense of locating Iban communities in space and time within the region of South East Asia. However, the main objective is to provide a critical understanding of how Iban, who at one time lived in small autonomous groupings as shifting cultivators, have become increasingly subjected to non-Iban interest groups which have taken control over the access and use of regional resources through imposing externally legitimized rule over Iban livelihood.

Chapter One presents a geo-political and economic profile of the island of Borneo with particular regard for current economic interests in Sarawak. Chapter Two then elaborates on this current economic situation through an historical account of how external rule has been imposed on Iban, who have thereby been increasingly integrated into the current national economic system.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE REGION

Iban individuals have developed their textile arts and customary patterns of living in a specific social-historical context in the island of Borneo. The objective in this initial chapter is to outline the political-economic conditions which inform the social background against which individuals create and use ritual ikat textiles in the 1990s.

The chapter begins with the geographical setting and political boundaries which divide the region today. A profile of contemporary patterns of land use and major economic activities in Sarawak is presented to illustrate how Iban are subjected to the interests of a larger sociality dominated by industrial capital.

THE ISLAND OF BORNEO: A GEO-POLITICAL PROFILE.

Borneo, which is home to a large number of different peoples including Iban, is the largest island within the region of South-East Asia. Borneo is located in the South China Sea off the east coast of mainland South-East Asia (Fig.1 below). Islands which today make up the Philippines lie to the north east and those which make up the Republic of Indonesia encircle Borneo to the south. This Indonesian archipelago stretches from Sumatra in the west (off the southern tip of the Malayan peninsula) to the Moluccas (Spice Islands) and Irian Jaya (the western half of that island divided between Indonesia and New Guinea) in the east.

The southern two thirds of the island of Borneo (approximately 547,379 sq.km) is also part of the current Republic of Indonesia and is generally referred to as Kalimantan. The northern third of the island comes under the political-economic mantle of Malaysia. Sometimes referred to as East Malaysia, this term refers to the Bornean states of Sarawak (123,156 sq.km) and Sabah (73,700 sq.km), both politically

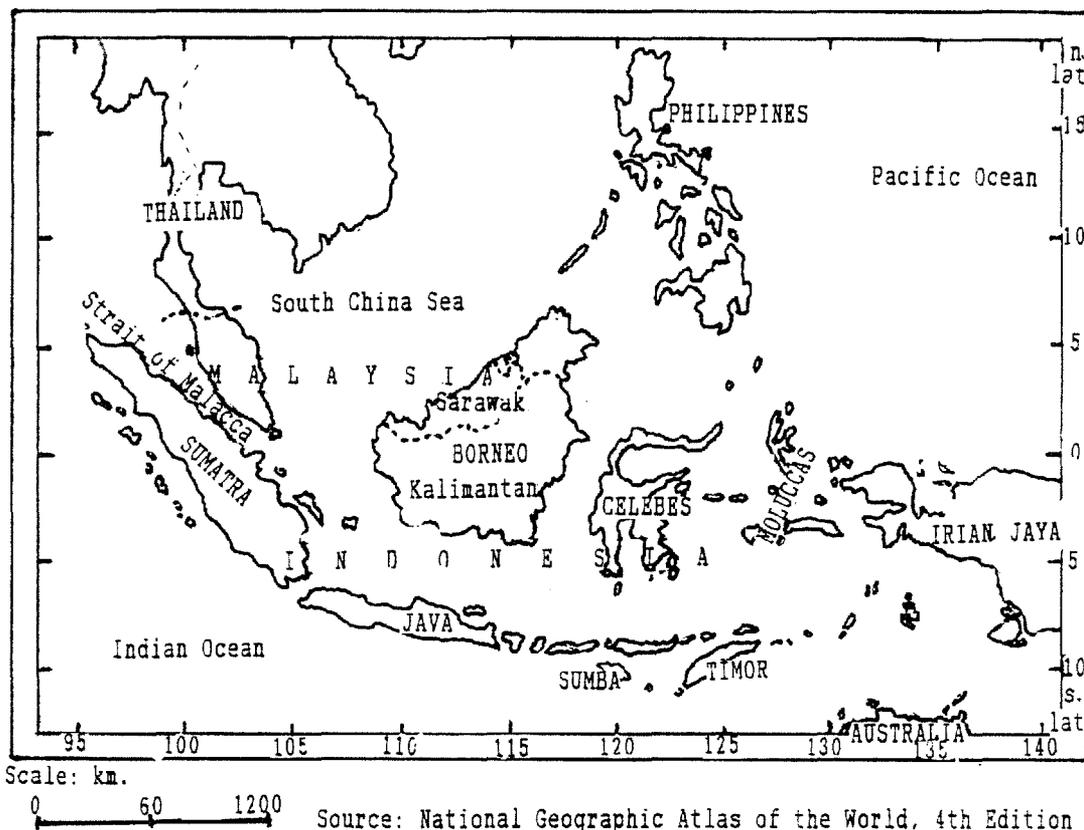


Figure 1. Map of S.E. Asia.

federated with Malaya in 1963 as part of the Republic of Malaysia. The northern region of the island of Borneo also includes Brunei Darussalam, a small, independent, oil rich sultanate. Brunei occupies a mere 5,765 square kilometres on the north west coast wedged between Sarawak and Sabah.

Altogether Borneo comprises approximately 750,000 square kilometres. This is about six times the land surface of Java and almost twice that of Sumatra, two of the larger and politically dominant islands of Indonesia (Ave & King 1986:3). Although Sarawak and Sabah make up almost 38 per cent of all land incorporated into the Federation of

Malaysia, this northern Bornean region accounts for only about 10 per cent of Malaysia's total population (ASB 1991).

Borneo cannot be said to constitute a politically dominant force in the region but the island's size and central location have not enabled it to be ignored by entrepreneurial parties. Borneo's resources have long attracted foreign interests in trade for jungle products, in some cases involving direct political control of the land and its people.¹

The island's physical terrain is characterised by a formidable mountainous jungle interior. Access to the interior has primarily been gained via great river systems which flow outwards on all coasts. The main mountain chain runs from north to south with its highest peak in Malaysian Sabah, Mount Kinabalu (4,175 metres). Part of this mountain chain forms a 'natural' physical marker for the political frontier dividing Malaysian and Indonesian territories.

The international boundary has created historical problems since it divides the territories where indigenous communities such as Iban have concentrated. Consequently the border imposes differing political loyalties and restricts freedom of movement between neighbouring communities. Today, while most Iban live in Sarawak and are subject to the ruling interests of the centralized government of Malaysia, many of their Iban relatives live in the upper reaches of the Kapuas River (Bohang) of Kalimantan. Kalimantan Iban live under the rule of the Republic of Indonesia. Although Iban on both sides of the Indonesian-Malaysian border share a common Iban language and similar cultural heritage, they do not share the same social historical experience.

Common to Iban communities in Kalimantan are social historical experiences of Dutch colonization, followed by the institution of Java-centric Indonesian rule. By contrast, Iban in the region defined as Sarawak share experiences of British administration, and more recently control by the Malaysian state. The social-historical situation which is the subject matter of this thesis concerns Iban individuals living on the Malaysian side of this political barrier.

¹Foreign influences are discussed in the historical section.

SARAWAK: THE PEOPLE AND THE LAND.

In area Sarawak constitutes the largest of Malaysia's thirteen states. However, Sarawak's population of 1,648,217 persons account for only about nine per cent of the total population of Malaysia in 1991 (ASB 1991:12). According to the *Preliminary Count Report* for the 1991 census, 30.5 per cent of the population (i.e. 503,878) live in urban centres. The capital city, Kuching is the largest with 147,729. Sibul, on the lower reaches of the Rejang River, is the largest commercial centre and a major forestry enclave with a population of 126,384. Miri is the third largest city with 87,230. After these three centres the next largest centres appear small by comparison. Sarikei, another commercial logging enclave below Sibul has 19,256; Bintulu has 11,415 and Limbang in the far north near Brunei has 10,940.

Urban centres as they are defined in this government report include small bazaars, many of which may have only 300 to 500 residents. Although some bazaars are smaller than some rural longhouse communities, they are distinguished by the fact that they have been built as commercial centres. Residents of such bazaars are 'urban' in the sense that they generally rely on full time employment in family shop houses, schools, medical centres and various other government offices.

While these figures suggest that about two thirds of the population live rurally, this does not mean they do not engage in various urban and/or rural industries. However, from the figures above it can be estimated that more than 70 per cent of Sarawak's population continue to be actively involved in some subsistence agriculture and so contribute to a substantial portion of what food is produced in Sarawak.

Iban make up the largest group of those peoples in Sarawak who share a common language, religion and oral history. Figures from 1990 show Iban represent about 29.5 per cent of Sarawak's population (see Table I below). Chinese make up 28.9 per cent but unlike Iban, this category includes more than a dozen different dialect groups including Hokkien, Cantonese, Foochow, Khek and Teochow. Malays

account for 20.8 per cent. However, while Malays share a common language (i.e. which has been institutionalized as the national language), today the label *Malay* essentially refers to a heterogeneous mix of peoples who have converted to Islam (Ave & King 1986). All other indigenous peoples, including Melanau and Bidayuh make up 19.7 per cent.

Table I. Population by Ethnic Groupings, Sarawak, 1960 & 1990.

<u>Ethnic Group</u>	1 9 6 0		1 9 9 0	
	<u>Population</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>%</u>
Malay	129,000	17.4	348,000	20.8
Melanau	45,000	6.0	96,000	5.8
Iban (Sea Dayak)	238,000	31.9	493,000	29.5
Bidayuh Land Dayak)	58,000	7.7	140,000	8.4
Other Indigenous	38,000	5.1	91,000	5.5
Chinese	229,000	30.8	483,000	28.9
Others (includes European, Indian)	8,000	1.1	19,000	1.1
Total population	745,000	100.0	1,670,000	100.0

(Source: Table 2.2: Population & Population Distribution by Ethnic Group, Sarawak. p.9. In 1991 Annual Statistical Bulletin, Sarawak.)

This table indicates how the population distribution in Sarawak has changed since federation with peninsular Malaya. Most notable changes can be seen in the Malay sector. Malays increased their representation by 3.4 per cent while Iban and Chinese sectors have decreased by 2.4 and 1.9 per cent respectively.

While in the past all inland indigenous peoples in Borneo were termed *Dayak*, a name which continues in Indonesian usage, the political expediency in Malaysia concerns different ethnic labels as follows. '*Bumiputeras*', a Malay word which translates as *princes of the land*, was introduced to incorporate all Dayaks and Malays under one category. This terminology puts *Malays* in a category which represents 68.1 per cent of the total population in contrast to Chinese with only 30.8 per cent. The official designation of Chinese groupings as *non-native* means that even if a Chinese individual is the third or fourth generation born in Sarawak (i.e. born long before the formation of the Republic of Malaysia), that person continues to be excluded from many indigenous social rights. An example of this from pre-confederation times is the reality that Chinese, many of whom immigrated to Sarawak under direction of the British

Brooke family's rule to establish cash cropping, have been permitted only limited access to land.

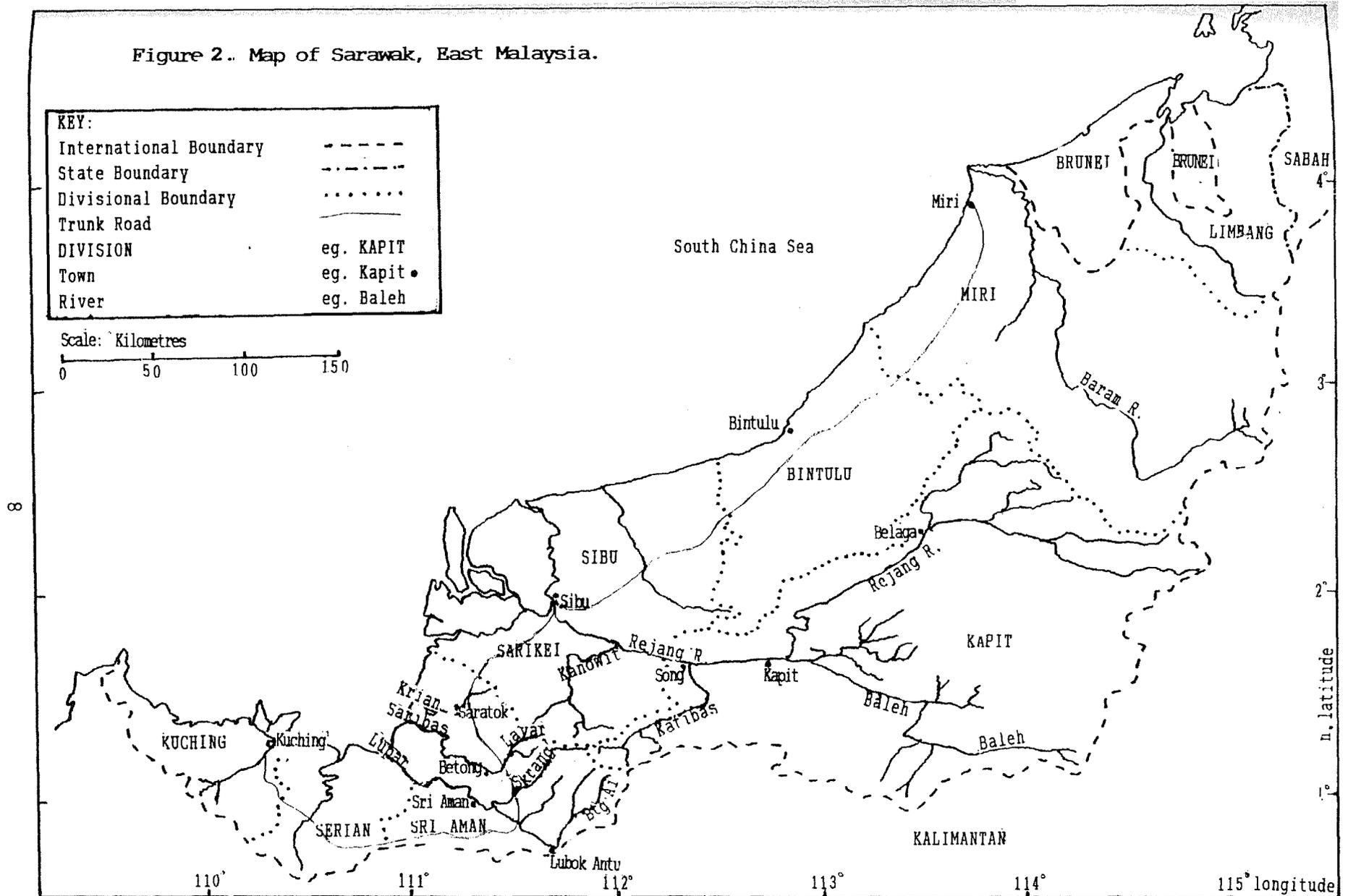
At the same time, the usage of *Bumiputera* arises in the political realities of peninsular Malaysia and those specifics of the numerical ascendancy of the Chinese as a polity. As political categorization *Bumiputera* is usually viewed as less relevant to the cause of Malay elites in Sarawak, where *Malay*, *Chinese* and *Iban* constitute a balance of power on account of equal population numbers amounting to roughly 33 per cent respectively.

On the other hand and less commonly argued, as a political device *Bumiputera* stands in opposition to the re-emergence of *Dayakism* among a growing number of indigenous individuals in Sarawak (and Sabah). This manifestation of tribalism constitutes a particular unwelcome political reality for Bornean Malays. Under the tribal *Dayak* mantle Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau and other smaller groupings represent 50.7 per cent of Sarawak's population. *Iban* already enjoy certain advantages of their dominant numerical position in Sarawak with 31.9 per cent of the population. However, given the evenly-matched numerical split between Iban, Chinese and Malay polities even a small gain is significant in Iban terms.

The advantages of tribal affiliation are distinct for other smaller indigenous Sarawak groupings. *Other Indigenous* peoples represent a minority of only 5.1 per cent of the total state population. This marginality is further stamped through the growing usage of *Orang Ulu*, a label which translates as *up-river people* or *the hill people*. Increasingly the term is derogatory, designating *un-cultured*, indeed *hill-billy* cultural groupings. This terminology points to an underlying official drive towards ethnic homogeneity, over and against tribalism which arises in political-economic realities. Entrenched in issues related to land tenure, this subject is taken up below.

The equator crosses the island of Borneo so that the region presently defined as Sarawak falls entirely within the tropics between latitudes 0.5 and 5 degrees north (Fig.2). With the exception of the highest mountain peaks, there is little variation in temperature which averages 25.6

Figure 2.. Map of Sarawak, East Malaysia.



Source: Land and Survey Department, Sarawak 1989.

degrees celsius, ranging from about 22 to 32 degrees at sea level, and slightly cooler in the higher inland areas. In 1991, the principal fieldwork period for this thesis, daily temperatures averaged 31.5 degrees celsius and ranged from 20.9 to 34.8 degrees celsius.²

Borneo is one of the most humid places on earth. Some areas with primary jungle canopy maintain humidity levels at 100 per cent. In 1991 the average humidity was recorded as 68 per cent. An average rainfall of 3,814.4 millimetres was recorded for a total of 224 days that year. Most regions receive between 3,000-4,000 millimetres of rainfall each year.

Although rainfall varies little, Sarawak, which is on the north-western face of the island, has its main wet season between October and March when the north-east monsoon blows. The dry, or less wet, season usually falls sometime between May and September, when the south-west monsoon predominates.

Sarawak is characterized by three main topographical regions; divisions which relate to different concentrations of human groups and patterns of land use.

1. **The coastal plain** makes up about 20 per cent of Sarawak's 124,449 square kilometres. It comprises low lying, badly drained alluvial plains crossed by sluggish, meandering rivers. The coastal plain is about 725 kilometres long and varies from 60 to 190 kilometres wide at the estuaries of Sarawak's larger rivers, the Baram, Rejang, Saribas, Lupar and Sadong. All of these rivers rise near the Kalimantan border and flow northwest into the South China Sea.

Areas where this relatively flat land is well drained have been favoured for cash cropping as plantations can more easily be developed there with the help of mechanized technology. Borneo's largest towns are located on this coastal plain along the lower reaches of these navigable rivers.

²All statistics are based on the 1991 Annual Statistical Bulletin (ASB), Dept of Statistics, Kuching, Sarawak, unless otherwise noted.

Sarawak's main highway is still under construction today with large stretches still to be sealed.³ This road runs the length of the coastal plain, cross cutting numerous rivers, flood plains and hilly ridges, to connect the capital city of Kuching in the west to its commercial hub of Sibü on the Rejang River and its oil rich enclave, Miri, on the Baram River in the north east. Prior to this road, transportation between these points relied heavily on coastal shipping which is frequently hindered by dangerous seas due to monsoon conditions.

This coastal plain is home to three main groups of people, Malays, Melanau, and Chinese. Malays have concentrated on fishing as well as some cultivation of wet rice and coconuts. Given the predominance of Malayan states which make up the Federation of Malaysia, it is not surprising to find that this group today dominates administrative jobs and concentrates in urban centres. Melanau have concentrated in sago production. Today, however, a large number of Melanau have become known as Malays, through intermarriage and/or conversion to Malay ideology.

Due to a combination of limited land and personal preferences, Chinese concentrated on commercial trade, establishing many of the first shophouses throughout the country. Thus Chinese families generally came to dominate the commercial sectors and, like Malays, have concentrated in urban centres.

2. Rugged hill country forms a broad belt made up of a sequence of ridges and river valleys. The land here is generally about 300 metres above sea level and supports rain forests of dipterocarps, which have become the focus of the logging industry (e.g. Ave & King 1986:68). As early as 1947 the introduction of mechanical logging opened some areas in this hill country to such exploitation, later in the more rugged mountain interior.

This rugged hill country has a thin layer of soil, generally high in acidity, which means most areas are only

³In 1991 the road between Sri Aman and Saribas district was under construction, completed in 1992. Highway between Sibü and Bintulu is still to be sealed.

marginally suitable for agriculture (Bugo 1984:34). The land has further degenerated through severe erosion due to concentrated logging which strips large tracts of protective jungle cover. Increased river traffic of company ships and log booms also contributes to erosion and pollution of the waterways (pl.1-3). Fish, jungle animal and plant life have notably declined due to the impact of industry.

It is along the river valleys of this region that most Iban communities are concentrated. Most families here continue to rely on customary agricultural activities based on shifting cultivation of dry hill rice, combined with hunting, fishing and the collection of jungle produce for subsistence. Neighbouring groups within this topographic region include Kayan, Kenyah and Punan Bah, amongst others, who also rely on shifting cultivation and jungle resources. Cultivation of family farms involves intense human effort to cut down and burn off jungle growth, and to plant and harvest crops by hand on plots of land on steep slopes and often several hours away (pl.4-6).

The majority of people living in rural communities in this region continues to use the rivers as the main means of transport. The rivers are swift and often cut through gorges with dangerous rapids. During prolonged dry periods the water level quickly drops, exposing large river boulders which make many tributaries virtually unnavigable.

Since the 1970s logging companies have increasingly pushed through more roads in order to exploit vast areas of the interior but most of these dirt roads are impassable for much of the year due to the wet, except for heavy machinery. Government funding for inland roads is limited to urban centres and major industrial development interests. One such government plan is to develop the dirt road which logging companies pushed through from the interior logging region of Belaga to the coastal town of Bintulu, which has recently been developed into a major industrial centre on the central coast between Miri and Sibul. Road work is both difficult and expensive and so with limited funding is generally slow.

3.) **The mountainous interior** is in the eastern region of Sarawak, adjacent to the Indonesian border. Most of this region is above 1,200 metres and relatively less accessible

than the hill country just described. Logging companies have only recently introduced industrial technology that is capable of exploiting this area. But already, the logging industry threatens the life ways of nomadic, hunting and gathering Penan people who rely on the virgin forest habitat of the interior (e.g. Hong 1987, Colchester 1985). Mountain peaks are interspersed with broad alluvium-filled valleys, settled by farming populations such as Kelabit and Lun Bawang who cultivate terraces of wet rice.

Generally, it is not the method of cultivation which is the main problem for subsistence farmers but rather, their limited access to resources: particularly to primary jungle lands for agriculture. Whereas in the past Iban and other shifting cultivators could abandon farm lands after one or two years of use, today legal restrictions force them to use only the surrounding lands which have been registered as belonging to their existing longhouse community. This forces families to cultivate their fields for longer periods. This not only decreases rice yields but also contributes to the infertility of soils for future years. Few families are able to grow sufficient food to meet household needs. Virtually all families must now supplement household needs with some permanent cash crops such as rubber, pepper or cocoa, or through some form of wage labour.

The Land Code which is recognized today is basically the same as that set out in 1958 during the British colonial period just prior to federation with peninsular Malaya (Ave & King 1986:72, Bugo 1984:12). It includes:

Mixed zone land - for native and non-native use, with private titles (surveyed) which anyone can buy or sell.

Native customary land - all land held and registered as under customary tenure.

Native area land - land reclassified from customary land which gave titles to some individuals.

Interior area land - State lands that are 'unoccupied'. ie. interior/primary forest over which no customary rights exist.

Reserve land - State reserves, forest & public lands.

While the Land Code supposedly guaranteed indigenous communities their rights to customary lands, individuals cultivating so-called *customary lands* were in fact restricted to land they were currently using. But such land would customarily be used for only ten or so years before the entire community would likely shift to another uncultivated jungle region. It was this aspect of customary life (i.e. their future) which was taken away with the Land Code. It essentially froze a dynamic cyclic system.

The Land Code also effectively bars many families today, who attempt to adapt to this new system of land tenure by introducing more permanent cash crops on customary land, from the possibility of procuring bank loans for seed, fertilizers or other agricultural equipment because of the state's communal definition of their land. According to customary practice, lands are not used communally but as independent plots which have been cleared and cultivated by individual family households and so are considered to be theirs as long as they reside in that particular region (Freeman 1955). However, according to the state land code, people who might thereby appear to be 'land rich' in fact have relatively infertile holdings with no formal individual land titles. This means they can neither use it as collateral, nor sell it to raise cash (e.g. Ave & King 1986:72).

While few changes have been made to the land categories in the Land Code, the few amendments that have been made have rendered it virtually impotent with regard to people's 'rights'. In 1991 the 'Land Acquisition Act, Section 3' passed an amendment which "empowers the State Authorities to acquire any land needed by any person or corporation for any purpose which in the opinion of the state authority is beneficial to the economic development of Malaysia" (*Aliran Monthly*, Dec 1990:12). This amendment not only gave the State "unfettered powers" but it also removed a person's right to seek legal redress in court, even if the proposed reason for acquiring such land was subsequently changed (*ibid.*).

Overall figures on land use in Sarawak for 1991 reveal that approximately 65.5 per cent of all land was identified as forested, compared to 32.5 per cent being used for

agriculture (ASB 1991:2). Of the agricultural land, 29.5 per cent was identified as shifting cultivation of dry hill rice compared to only 0.5 per cent under cultivation of wet rice and another 2 per cent for permanent cash crops which include sago, rubber, oil palm, coconut, cocoa and pepper. Urban settlements accounted for about 0.3 per cent which is slightly more than half the amount used for wet rice.

ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN THE 1990s.

Government statistical information set out in Table II below indicates that agricultural produce accounted for only 6.6 per cent of Sarawak's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Subsistence crops apparently are not formally accounted for in terms of dollar (i.e. Malaysian Ringgit) amounts as part of the government's GDP.

TABLE II. Gross Domestic Product: Distribution percentage represented by major industries, Sarawak - 1991.

<u>Industry</u>	<u>% of GDP</u>	<u>Industry</u>	<u>% of GDP</u>
Agriculture	6.6	Electricity/gas/water	1.5
Fishing	1.7	Manufacturing	14.5
Forestry/logging	13.7	Wholesale/retail trade	7.2
Mining/quarrying	34.3	Restaurant/hotels	.7
Construction	3.3	Other	11.7
Transport/communications	4.8	Total	100.0

(Source: Compiled from Table 11.2. Gross Domestic Product by Kind of Economic Activity in Producers' Values, at Constant Prices (1978=100), Sarawak. p.171. In *1991 Annual Statistical Bulletin, Sarawak.*)

Aspects of the state's economic reliance on subsistence farming can be gained from the figures in Table III below. While cash crops constitute a relatively small part of the formal 'domestic product', food accounts for only 8.8 per cent of Sarawak's imports.

Table III. Major Imports - Sarawak 1991.

<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Value M\$ (mil.)</u>	<u>Percentage of Total Imports</u>
Machinery & transport equipment	4,377	52.1
Manufactured goods	2,433	29.0
Food	741	8.8
Petroleum/petroleum products	433	5.2
Other	409	4.9
Total Imports:	<u>M\$8,393 mil.</u>	<u>100.0 %</u>

(Source: Figure 1(d). Major imports - Sarawak 1991. p.ix. In *1991 Annual Statistical Bulletin, Sarawak.*)

The current focus in cash-cropping is on four basic commodities, rubber, pepper, cocoa and palm oil. Rubber was one of the first cash crops to be promoted. In 1960 this commodity accounted for 25 per cent of Sarawak's total exports (Bugo 1984:19) compared to a mere .2 per cent in 1991 (Table IV below). While rubber was in great demand during the Korean and world war periods, it declined dramatically in the 1960s, with some increase between 1973-4 coinciding with an increase in the petroleum industry (*ibid.*:9).

TABLE IV. Principal Exports - Sarawak 1991.

<u>Commodity</u>	<u>M\$ (mil.)</u>	<u>% of Exports</u>	<u>Commodity</u>	<u>M\$ (mil.)</u>	<u>% of Exports</u>
Sawlogs	3,143.9	24.1	Rubber	28.9	0.2
Sawn timber	383.9	2.9	Cocoa beans	50.3	0.4
Wood dowel/ply	300.0	2.3	Pepper	85.1	0.7
Liq. Natural gas	3,280.0	25.2	Crude palm oil	88.6	0.7
Crude petroleum	2,902.4	22.3	Urea (fertilizer)	237.6	1.8
Petroleum products	712.0	5.5	Other	1,813.3	13.9

Total Exports: M\$13,026.0 million = 100%

(Source: Table 6.4. Principal Exports, Value & Percentage Distribution, Sarawak. p.111. In 1991 Annual Statistical Bulletin, Sarawak.)

Rubber trees have generally been planted on small holdings of four to six acres along with subsistence rice crops in Sarawak. Trees take years to mature which means families have a considerable investment before gaining any return. Once planted, the trees require little upkeep, and although tapping can be done as cash is needed and temporarily discontinued during slump periods, the situation is only open to families who have access to alternative means of livelihood.

Pepper and cocoa crops are also suited to small holdings but compared to rubber, require more constant attention and more regular harvesting. And, like rubber, they are also subject to fluctuations of the world marketplace. Pepper was first introduced as a commercial crop by Chinese farmers (Bugo 1984:9,64). Bugo noted that Chinese farms averaged 0.66 acres on which farmers usually planted an average of 800 vines per acre on flat lands in the coastal plain region. By contrast, an average Dayak farm was both smaller and planted with fewer vines per acre (300 average) in hilly areas which often required laborious hand labour to clear

and terrace, as well as providing shades and hardwood support stakes.

Despite the time required for pepper and cocoa farming, Iban and other hill farmers have increasingly introduced this crop to supplement subsistence (*ibid.*:64). By 1960 this crop accounted for 3.5 per cent of all exports increasing to 7.9 per cent in 1973. However export figures for 1991 above show it accounted for only 0.7 per cent of exports earnings. Cocoa was introduced more recently but it too accounts for only 0.4 per cent of all exports today.

Oil palms, like rubber trees, require more time to mature. This crop has been the focus of recent government development programs which have encouraged the establishment of palm oil plantations in such accessible coastal regions as Saratok along the main state highway.

Although government has attempted to increase cash cropping through various land development agencies, cash crops still accounted for only two per cent of the value of Sarawak's total exports in 1991 (Table IV). One such agency, SALCRA (Sarawak Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority), is a statutory body founded in 1976 to develop land 'in situ' rather than opening new land to act on behalf of 'poor' families (Ave & King 1986:68-71).

Figures by industry reveal that Sarawak is dependent on raw products from only three industries (liquid natural gas, crude petroleum and sawlogs/timber) to generate 75 per cent of all earnings from exports (Table IV). This emphasis on extracting raw resources explains, in part, why machinery and transport equipment account for such a large portion (58 per cent) of Sarawak's imports (Table III). However, this also means that Sarawak industries not only have access to and are able to exploit the land's raw resources, but also are particularly vulnerable to boom/bust effects of fluctuations in world demand and prices.

It is significant to note that while natural gas and oil related industries alone account for 47.5 per cent of Sarawak's exports in terms of government revenue (industry taxes), at least 90 per cent of all royalties go to the federal government of Malaysia while as little as five to ten per cent remain in Sarawak (Bugo 1984:45, Colchester

1985:29). By contrast, all revenue gained through forestry concessions remains in Sarawak's provincial coffers (*ibid.*). It is not surprising therefore to find local government favouring logging activities as long as it is such a major source of revenue.

Hamid Bugo (1984:45) points out that prior to 1 April 1975 the petroleum industry was "completely foreign owned and the company had a great deal of freedom under the Concessionary Agreement which gave Shell the right to explore and freely export any oil found". He also observes that although all forests belong to Sarawak, financing of the logging industry is also largely repatriated outside the country (*ibid.*:47).

Logging for commercial purposes is permitted only through government granting of forest concessions (or licences) which are issued either to an individual, a group of individuals or to companies. Not surprisingly, most concession holders are relatives of political figures.⁴ However, concession holders usually contract out the actual logging and export to companies which are predominantly Japanese owned and which are also the main importers of the timber (*ibid.*)

Regrettably, government statistics on the constitution of the labour force employed in major industries lump agriculture, hunting and fishing together with forestry work (Table V below). Together they account for 81.4 per cent of the 'labour force' in 1960 but only 47 per cent in 1991. However, the official figures do not reveal the percentage of the population relying on subsistence activities versus wage labour through forestry work, nor how many persons working in forestry also rely on some subsistence through agriculture.

According to Bugo (1984:53), agriculture involved 75 to 80 per cent of the population in the 1980s. However, according to the overall distribution of the labour force⁵ in 1991, figures show an increase in employment in services, commerce and forestry or

⁴During the run up to the 1987 elections in Sarawak opposing political parties exposed government favouritism in a series of newspaper articles. eg. "Timber freeze" in *New Sunday Times* 10 April 1987 and "Who owns what in Sarawak", *New Sunday Times* 12 April 1987.

⁵As noted in Table V, 'labour force' includes both wage labourers and unpaid family workers (i.e. subsistence farmers).

construction and transportation related work. While this does not mean that the majority of the population do not continue to engage in agricultural activities, it does point to both an increase and widespread occurrence of wage labour today.

Table V. Distribution of Labour Force by Major Industry, Sarawak.

<u>Major Industries</u>	<u>1 9 6 0</u> <u>% of Total</u> <u>Labour Force</u>	<u>1 9 9 0</u> <u>% of Total</u> <u>Labour Force*</u>
Agriculture/Forestry/Hunting/Fishing	81.4	47.1
Services	5.5	19.4
Commerce	4.7	14.3
Manufacturing	3.9	9.1
Construction	1.6	6.0
Transportation/Communication	1.9	2.8
Electricity/gas/water/sanitary	.2	.8
Mining/Quarrying	.8	.5
	100.0 %	100.0 %

* 'Labour force', defined by the 1990 Labour Force Survey as economically active persons aged 15-65 in private households said to be 'employed' (included work for pay, profit or family gains as unpaid family worker). 1960 figures included all 'economically active population' aged 15 & over.

(Source: Table 8.6 Percentage Distribution of Labour Force by Major Industry, Sarawak p.145. In 1991 Annual Statistical Bulletin, Sarawak.)

Male labour is generally dominant in primary industries which exploit state reserves of raw materials and employ construction workers in related jobs. Figures from 1980 break employment figures down by gender. At that time 53.3 per cent of men in the labour force worked in agriculture, hunting/fishing and forestry (ASB 1991:145). Statistics relating to women in the labour force that same year indicate that 73.6 per cent worked in this same category. In contrast to the figure for males, it can be assumed that the number of female workers primarily relates to agriculture, and possibly fishing. However extremely few women are involved in hunting or are employed in the logging industry except for a few in clerical positions.

The next biggest employer is the service industry which accounted for 17.5 per cent of the male labour force that year. A further 8.5 per cent of men working were employed in commerce, 6 per cent in mining, construction and transport related jobs, 6 per cent in manufacturing, and the remaining 1.4 per cent in other miscellaneous industries. Like men, the other main sectors employing women were service industries with 12.4 per cent, commerce with 7.2 per cent and manufacturing with 4.6 per cent. Only 0.5 per cent of the

female labour force were employed by construction and/or mining companies, again probably in clerical rather than labouring positions.

According to 1991 figures relating to Sarawak's Gross Domestic Product (Table II), local manufacturing contributes only 14.5 per cent of the total domestic product. The lack of local manufacturing accounts for the fact that manufactured goods represent the majority of Sarawak's imports (81 per cent including machinery and transport equipment).

Regarding women involved in the production of textiles, figures in Table VI below indicate that the textile industry employs less than one per cent of people employed in the manufacturing sector in Sarawak in 1991.

TABLE VI. Manufacturing by Major Industries, Sarawak, 1990.

<u>Major Manufacturing Industries</u>	<u># of firms</u>	<u># (,000) employed</u>	<u>Avg. (M\$) Pay/mth*</u>
Food processing	150	4,781	385
Beverage	16	402	672
Clothing (excludes shoes)	11	187	297
Wood: Sawmills (incl. framing/planing)	137	12,558	467
Furniture	59	766	426
Paper products	10	325	396
Publishing/printing	47	1,887	619
Rubber products	23	300	356
Plastic products	23	495	436
Pottery/ceramics	8	131	373
Non-metallic mineral products (eg.cement)	61	2,200	430
Petroleum refinery	1	94	3,952
Misc. petroleum/coal products	3	58	1,171
Industrial chemicals	7	1,185	3,700
Other chemicals (eg.soap,paint,medicine)	3	32	417
Iron/steel basic industry	5	396	512
Fabricated metal (eg.wire,furniture)	77	1,374	560
Electrical machines/appliances	4	134	621
Transport equipment	39	1,527	600
Other mfture (incl. 1 batik, 1 textile metal/machinery etc.)	16	21	371
Total:	700 firms	29,047,000 persons	

*Avg. pay per month = total monies paid out as salaries & bonuses in 1991 divided by total number of employees. Intended only as a rough indicator of the disparate range in monies paid out. It does not relate to actual pay scales for labour which would be lower as figures include salaries/bonuses paid to owners, management and technical specialists.

(Source: Compiled from Table 5.4. Principal Statistics of Manufacturing Industries by Industry, 1990 - Sarawak. p.67-78. In *1991 Annual Statistical Bulletin, Sarawak.*)

Although indigenous women in the past were responsible for weaving all their family's clothing needs, today these needs are met through purchase of commercial clothing. Despite their skills in this area, only eleven clothing and two other textile firms have been established in Sarawak. James Jesudason notes that the Malaysian textile industry

(including peninsular Malaya) in 1983 employed as high as 18 per cent of the manufacturing labour force (1989:179). Moreover, textile firms belong to that group of industrial establishments which pay out the lowest amount of earnings to employees in salaries and bonuses (*ibid.*).⁶

Cheap imports during the British colonial era "fore-stalled development of a strong textile industry" (Jesudason 1989:176). Handicraft production that existed in pre-colonial Malaya was also displaced with the exception of various exotic products such as ritual objects which were not effectively substitutable by machine made imports (Sundarem 1988:219). With the advent of Sarawak's 'independence' which took the form of confederation with Malaya, local industrialization focussed on import substitution.

According to Jesudason, the initiative for textile development however, came from East Asian investors, particularly from Hong Kong (*op.cit.*:179). Between 1960 and 1970 only fifteen textile firms were established amongst the pioneer industries, representing 6.6 per cent of employment in the Malaysian manufacturing sector.

In the 1970s investors from Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong began to relocate their textile interests in even cheaper labour and land situations using obsolete equipment and new synthetic materials. Jesudason goes on to point out the enclave nature of the Malaysian textile industry was characterized by foreign firms which bought almost all their intermediate products such as fabrics, fibres and chemicals, outside the country, particularly from parent companies (*ibid.*:179).

In a similar vein of analysis, out of 579 directors in the leading one hundred corporations, 67 per cent were non-Malaysian (*ibid.*). Further, in the late 1960s a mere 5 per cent of large establishments controlled 78 per cent of the total gross value of sales in the Malaysian manufacturing sector (Lim Mah Hui 1981:33). A 'New Economic Policy' (NEP) was introduced in 1971 to counter foreign control. The

⁶Although the figure M\$297 (Table V) under 'Average pay per month' does not represent actual wages it illustrates that this industry is amongst lowest paid -even management salaries cannot compare to money paid out in the petroleum industry.

objective was to re-capture a minimum of 30 per cent 'Bumiputera'/non-Chinese' Malaysian equity by the end of 1990 (ALIRAN 1990). The strategy comprised establishment of public enterprises including various State Economic Development Corporations (SEDCs). This becomes an important issue in the ensuing discussion of textile industrialization.

By 1987, public corporations accounted for more than one third of the public sector's foreign debts (*ibid.*) To resolve the problems created by inefficient management and over-burdened public funding generally, the government turned to a policy of privatization which promised Bumiputera preference. Privatization tactics frequently engaged less than open tenders (*ibid.*). Not surprisingly this led to political patronage and perpetuation of the pattern of ownership in a small group. For example, with the aid of privatization the government or its dominant party UMNO, "owns or controls all of Malaysia's television stations and most of its leading newspapers (*Rocket* 1991 Vol.24:4).

The so-called 'domestic product' figures relating to manufacturing do not reveal the 'foreign ownership' aspect of the textile industry. Nor do the figures on monies paid in salaries and bonuses reveal domestic patterns of ownership. While there is some indication that wages paid to textile workers are low, quantitative figures do not reveal the equally poor human working conditions that are implicit in the way industries like textiles have been developed. In a repeat of the intolerable conditions of the British industrial revolution, batik dyers today sit over vats of steaming chemicals in small confined spaces. Likewise, in a weaving factory, as many as forty or more looms operating in one large room subject individuals to high levels of noise and lint, conditions which most workers must endure throughout long work periods (cf. Marx 1948, Thompson 1963). Similarly, inadequate consideration is given to safe work conditions in the major timber industry, which accounts for 47 per cent of people employed in manufacturing in 1990 (Table VI).

The next biggest employer according these 1990 figures is the food processing sector which employs 4,781 persons. Although the petroleum industry pays out the most money in

salaries and bonuses, it is represented by a single refinery which employs only 94 people. Together with its offshore oil rigs this forms the most obvious enclave in Sarawak which dominates the northern coastal town of Miri and more recently, the central coastal town of Bintulu.

The preceding discussion of current patterns of land use and economic activities in Sarawak helps clarify the extent to which foreign interests and the world 'marketplace' continue to dominate local government policies. Iban and other indigenous peoples who have customarily relied on shifting cultivation have extremely limited access to land and other resources to meet household needs. By contrast the recent interests of comparatively few forestry concession holders have gained access to enormous tracts of primary forest lands.

Although the logging industry currently provides opportunities for wage labour in rural situations, it offers at best short-term gains for some few among the rural population, and more generally an unstable source of livelihood for most workers. The speed with which operators can clear-cut large areas of forest means that a local community is only briefly indispensable in order to gain access to an area.

Forestry workers are drawn from local indigenous communities. While Iban are not unusual in pending their hopes on the possibilities of wage labour, experience of boom/bust cycles in rubber and other cash crops generates little confidence in the long-term benefits of wage labour. In forestry, too, labour turns out to be a short term prospect in that companies shift operations when local forest resources are depleted. And while in the area, labouring is unreliable in that operators maintain profitability by cutting back on costs during slump periods by employing day labour.

This chapter has drawn outlines of the contemporary world in which Iban weavers operate to set the scene for developing an initial orientational framework of the thesis. The next chapter investigates historical patterns of trade and settlement, factors which bring about (obligatory) integration of Iban into the national social-economic situation.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOCIAL-HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF IBAN LIVELIHOOD

Small groups of Iban came to settle in different areas within the northern part of Borneo at various times in recent history. This chapter identifies ways in which individuals in successive generations and in distinct areas of settlement adapted to different social and economic pressures they encountered in the form of British and Malay rule. The discussion concerns ways in which earlier mercantile interests have been turned over to the industrial interests of the government of today. In respect to Iban experiences of profound alterations to customary patterns the study focusses on various restrictions which constrain access to resources in Borneo.

The objective is to illustrate how the livelihood of Iban groups in Borneo has changed from situations of autonomy to subordinated positions in which local decision-making is constrained by external industrial ideology underpinning national economic objectives. A social historical perspective provides a basis from which to consider the consequences of altered practice of beliefs. Of particular relevance to this thesis is the understanding of how subsistence decisions made by different families relate to variations in the involvement of individuals in textile arts in the 1990s.

IBAN MIGRATIONS IN BORNEO.

Iban are commonly acknowledged to be indigenous on the basis that they are amongst the first of current settlers in Borneo. However, Iban are believed to have migrated to Borneo from Asia via the Malay Peninsula, and possibly via Sumatra (Jensen 1974:18, Sandin 1964:513).

Linguistic evidence links the Iban language to the Malay group. Anthony Richards (1988:7) notes that the Iban language most resembles the Sumatran Malay dialect. But while many words are the same or similar, he points out that

it is sufficiently different that it is not immediately intelligible to peninsular Malay nor Indonesian Malay speakers (e.g. Glossary, Iban weaving terms).

According to Iban oral history, the lakes and river basin of the Kapuas water system in Kalimantan are considered by Iban to be their ancestral homelands in Borneo. Apparently, the first Iban began moving into Borneo up the Kapuas River some time before the advent of Islam in the thirteenth century (Freeman 1981:5).

Benedict Sandin, one of the earliest Iban to become a published scholar, and subsequently a director of the Sarawak Museum, recorded numerous accounts of Iban customs and beliefs which he collected from Iban specialists in oral literature and personal histories. According to Sandin, Iban oral genealogies from his homelands around the Paku and Saribas suggest groups of Iban had moved from the Kapuas area about sixteen generations ago. These early migrants moved into the headwaters of the Batang Ai and downstream to the middle reaches of the Batang Lupar and the adjacent Saribas-Layar river system. This settlement concerns two major river systems in what was to become known as the Districts of Sri Aman and Betong within the Second Division of Sarawak. Assuming each generation is at least identical with an average of twenty to twenty-five years, the preceding movement would equate roughly to the mid-sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries (Pringle 1970:39).

Oral genealogies cannot be literally interpreted as 'historical' facts since actual ancestral figures blend with charter myths. Stories of cultural heroes re-present links of mortals and gods and symbolize spiritual origins and customary beliefs. It is important to note that the people in the Saribas districts on whom Sandin focussed are Iban living near Malay communities. Accordingly Sandin's informants who foreground specific ancestral linkages over sixteen generations are over-represented among Iban dominated by the Malay elite with its political ideology founded on hereditary claims to class rights.

In contrast to cultural alterations affecting Iban in the Saribas, Derek Freeman's research among remote Baleh Iban in the upper reaches of the Rejang reveals a disposi-

tion to recall only five or six generations before connecting with Iban gods (Freeman 1955:13).

At the same time, contained within this difference is an indication of a fundamental aspect of Iban cultural heritage. Groupings who live in the Kapuas region of Kalimantan as well as those who migrated north and now live within the various parts of the politically defined territory of Sarawak, share an ancestral and cultural heritage which is distinct from their Malay neighbours. In contrast to stratified Malay society, Iban heritage is usually characterized in the literature as *egalitarian* - a term which will be elaborated in the course of this chapter (e.g. Freeman).

INFLUENCES OF TRADE AND COURT CULTURES.

While origins generally remain vague, clues to predominant economic and political influences over the local practices of indigenous groupings in South-East Asia are available in the written records of merchants. As early as 400 B.C. Chinese traders noted that Indian influences were evident in the Mekong Delta of peninsular South-East Asia where merchandise included gold, silver and silk cloths and that "sons of great families cut brocade to make themselves sarongs" (Fraser-Lu 1988:9).

Reference to royal patronage of such arts as weaving, woodcarving, metal work as well as performing arts of drama and dance on the Malayan peninsula was evident as early as 502 A.D. with the rise of the Langkasuka kingdom (502-66 A.D.). Probably centred near present day Patani in Southeast Thailand, this kingdom extended its influence south into Kelantan and Trengganu on the east coast of the Malayan peninsula (Fraser-Lu 1988:139). Chinese travelling along this coast noted that men and women wore sleeveless garments of cotton while nobles were distinguished by additional pieces of red material (*ibid.*:9). Chinese merchants also noted that cotton weaving was present on the island of Sumatra in 518 A.D., but that the 'king' wore silk (*ibid.*:9).

These observations clearly associate textiles with class distinctions but give little information regarding the extent and nature of local production of textiles. As

discussed below, with later dynasties it becomes evident that full time craft specialists were retained in the court centre where they would be 'freed' from agricultural work in order to concentrate on the production of elaborate textiles for the court's elite. By way of contrast, rural cultivators produced both their own food and clothing. In addition, individuals were required to produce surplus goods in order to come up with contributions of food and materials including cotton thread and cloths as demanded by local rulers. In this way rulers supported both themselves and their courtly retinue.

Court craft specialization in the South-East Asian region took place against a backdrop of centralized rule by different elites who embraced respective ideological systems of external origin. The influence of Hindu and subsequently Buddhist art and architecture culminated during 600-1200 A.D. in the court of Sri Vijaya (near present day Palembang in Sumatra). The centre of court culture in the region shifted to Java with the rise of the Majapahit dynasty in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, monumental shrines on Java, particularly Prambanan (a Hindu centre built in the 8th century A.D.) and Borobudur (a 9th century Buddhist site), remain as early evidence of the assemblage of labour on a colossal scale and the honing of specialized skills in the service of a centralized dream.

Meanwhile Arab merchants from the Persian Gulf and India had established local representatives on the basis of several centuries of trading contacts. By the fifteenth century the sultanate of Malacca had gained commercial pre-eminence over the region, its ruler having embraced the Islamic faith of Arab traders who had established contact there. On Java, the Islamic kingdom of Mataram replaced Majapahit. The "gradual demise of the power of Majapahit was accompanied by, and probably to an important extent was the result of the spread of Islam through island South-East Asia along the trade routes" (Ave & King 1986:19).

By this time Iban had established themselves in Borneo. Although the precise place of origin and reasons for migrating remains vague, one can speculate that all agricultural or semi-settled Iban groupings in the region had

experience, directly or at least indirectly, of the domination of regional court cultures. Iban demonstrate an extraordinary toleration for new ideas (e.g. Freeman 1981). Against this backdrop William Howell (1909:17) observes in Iban religious terminology frequent borrowings from Indian traditions. Yet the social origins of Iban textile arts will remain unknown on account of the destructible quality of cloth in humid conditions. Certainly the ikat design work on the oldest existing Iban cloths rivals Indonesian court textiles in technical complexity but there is no evidence to indicate any influence.

With the spread of Islam on Sumatra and the Malayan peninsula, Borneo too came under the influence of Arab political and economic interests. By 1500 A.D. the Sultan of Malacca formally granted the Sultan of Brunei the right to rule over people living in the northern region of Borneo which extended west to the Saribas and Sarawak Rivers (Pringle 1970:43). This Brunei sultanate imposed an increasing sphere of influence along the northern coast and adjacent territory into which Iban families were moving during the seventeenth century.

Later, another major sultanate was established further to the west at Pontianak on the mouth of the Kapuas River. The sultanate at Pontianak gradually imposed its authority from 'behind' as it extended its trade interests from the lower reaches of the Kapuas River inland along the migration route of Iban cultivators. Thus, Iban and other indigenous groups already living in north western Borneo gradually came into contact with, and were subjected to increasing encroachment by these comparatively new court administrations.

With the establishment of sultanates in Borneo, local Arabic records were kept which included references to political economic conditions in Borneo. Eighteenth century Brunei scribes confirmed that rice and cotton were collected as tribute from the Saribas and Lupar River districts (Pringle 1970:43). While some nineteenth century British reports suggested that such tribute was probably only collected from Malays in lower river and coastal areas, Pringle (*ibid.*) went on to say that Saribas Malays attempted

to collect a tax of one pasu (4 gallon tin¹) of rice per Iban family per year in the name of the Sultan of Brunei (a pattern which European administrations would later continue) (*ibid.*:63). Iban were settled in the lower reaches of these rivers amongst Malay communities and it was probable they would have been subjected to tribute payments.

The Brooke administration observed that the Brunei sultanate was in the habit of raiding Iban and other inland communities for labourers to work in their antimony mines and to acquire young women as domestic workers (Low 1848:-112). Through the resources of his residency in Sarawak in the early nineteenth century, Hugh Low noted that as far as local Bornean people were concerned, "all were obliged to labour to satisfy the demands of the [Brunei] nobles" who would distribute only a very small amount of beads and brass in return for their labour (*ibid.*:17). Low also noted that by occupying the mouths of the rivers the coastal groups held the Dayaks in some degree of subjection by controlling the salt trade which inland peoples required (*ibid.*:97,186)

The historian Porter (1969:3) explained how ruling Malays operated a system of economic oppression, *serah* which translates 'to surrender'. Under this system "Dayak communities and particularly the gentle Land Dayaks, paid tribute in the form of goods, surrendered possessions for nominal payments and bought goods at exorbitant prices" (Porter *In Colchester* 1985:11). However the large number of rivers made it difficult for any one chief to institute a trade monopoly or effectively control Iban and other inland groups (Pringle 1970:64).

Economic interests and political influence of the various sultanates in Borneo are summarized by Jan Ave and Victor King who note:

when Europeans began to arrive at the coasts of Borneo from the early sixteenth century, they were confronted with a scatter of Muslim states which controlled the trade routes, and which collected the forest produce coming down the great rivers of Borneo from the interior ... these states presumably emerged from earlier small settlements, which were

¹Pasu is a dry measure which equates to about 8 gantang (size of a 4 gallon kerosine tin) (Richards 1988:256,94).

founded at strategic river-mouth points specifically to control the movement of Borneo trade items. The leaders of these groups of traders also consolidated and increased their power and influence by marrying the daughters of native chiefs and headmen from neighbouring interior villages, and by cementing alliances, again often through marriage, with other trading centres (1986:20).

Europeans, who came to South-East Asia in search of products from the Spice Islands, wanted "initially to establish relations with, and ultimately they managed, often by force, to wrest the control of commerce from Muslim hands" (*ibid.* 1986:20). Control of commerce ultimately meant control over the sea and the land, its resources and its people. The starting points were the sultanates which currently assumed the right to control the region and thereby had access to jungle resources.

Portuguese merchants first took control over the sultanate of Malacca in 1511 establishing close commercial ties to the sultanate of Brunei (*ibid.*:20). Neither the Portuguese nor the Spanish merchants who had established a commercial base in the Philippines generated permanent control over Brunei or other parts of Borneo. From the late 1500s the Dutch East India Company and the British East India Company also became active in attempting to control trade in Borneo. But at that time the British were more interested in trade with India and China. Thus, three centuries of European interests in Borneo had relatively minimal effects on the way of life of the indigenous peoples compared to the impact of local sultans who were intent on securing tribute and loyalty of their 'subjects', and which involved conversion of coastal peoples to Islam (Ave & King 1986:21).

It was not until the 1800s and the rise of industrial capitalism in Europe, together with the need for raw materials and new markets for their manufactured products, that increased European efforts began to establish colonial control over large regions of the world. In this context Borneo's land and its people were extensively and formally subjugated under centralized foreign rule (*ibid.*:21). For example, as Dutch merchants increased their efforts to take control of the Indonesian archipelago and southern regions

of Borneo, the British took control of Malacca and Singapore (ibid:21-26). These two strategic positions not only secured British interests in trade between India and China but also increased British influence over Sultanates in northern Borneo.

Up to this time textiles of the court cultures served as a currency in that they were widely used both as forms of tribute and as significant items of trade. Indian *patola* cloths which were prized for their soft weaves in silk and their intricate double ikat floral designs in bright clear colours were readily traded for spices and other precious goods from South-East Asia. In this way textiles serve as an early example of the wide transfer of technical knowledge and ideology through trade.

Influences of *patola* cloths on local textile art are most noticeable in coastal areas, particularly in commercial centres where Islamic ideology is most dominant. Design composition is characterized by a large central field filled with finely patterned repetitive motifs. The ends are framed by two to three bands of simple floral-like elements or line of triangles in a saw tooth pattern, and side selvages are bordered by narrow stripes which may or may not enclose smaller ikat figures.²

The predominance of intricate floral and geometric compositions in coastal Malay textiles reflects fundamentals of Islamic ideology which prohibits representations of human and animal life. The latter design properties are central to Hindu art which features imaginative likenesses of Hindu gods and goddesses. The Islamic aesthetic is also oppositional to the primary quality in indigenous art which grounds in realistic depiction of gods in animal form, favouring the imitation of malevolent spirits in grotesque humanlike figures (e.g. plates 45,46,53). Weft ikats made from silk threads in bright colours and brocades using gold and silver threads were favoured as court textiles. These

²Some of the finest double ikats are the silk *patola* clothes (or *cinde*) from Gujarat province north of Bombay, India, today found only in the town of Patan (e.g. Fraser-Lu 1988:12). Double ikats are also found in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, India, in Bali, Indonesia, and in Japan (e.g. Larsen 1962:130-133).

features generally distinguished coastal textile art from the more sombre warp ikats characteristic of inland indigenous textile art produced by rural cultivators from local cotton fibres and jungle dyestuffs (cf. Fraser-Lu 1988, Gittinger 1985, Kahlenberg 1977, Larsen et.al. 1976).

Weft ikat was widely practised by Islamic people in South-East Asia, most of whom are coastal Malays who came under the direct rule of various sultanates. By contrast warp ikat was practised by Iban weavers and other indigenous people of South-East Asia. And while most coastal weavers used frame looms with treadle operated shafts, generally referred to simply as a Malay loom, other inland groups used basic back tension stick looms (e.g. Emery 1979).

It has been suggested (e.g. Fraser-Lu 1988:45) that not only design elements and imported materials but the very technique of weft ikat may have been introduced to South-East Asia via Indian and Arab traders around the 14th century in contrast to warp ikat which appears to predate it. In support of this speculation based on diffusion theory, while Iban and other inland groups lived relatively independently from each other and from regional court rulers, evidence exists that they too engaged in the active sea trade of Chinese and Arab merchants, at least indirectly. Cotton fibre and some indigenous cloth have been mentioned as items of local tribute but the most valued trade cloths appear to have been those in more exotic materials, especially silk.

Merchants' interests in Borneo tended to focus on aromatic woods, bird of paradise feathers, birds nests, and hornbill ivory from inland regions which they procured in exchange for such exotic wares as ceramic jars and glass beads valued by inland groups as heirlooms and mediums of exchange within Sarawak (e.g. *Beads* 1984). Dragon motifs on gongs and jars are also an example of Chinese design influences found in Bornean carvings and Iban ikat cloth designs (e.g. Fraser-Lu 1988:9).

While the warp ikat cloths for which Iban are known are distinctly different to Malay weaving traditions, warp ikat is not confined to Iban communities. For example, intricate warp ikat cloths reminiscent of Iban are made by groupings

which include T'boli of Mindanao, Philippines (e.g. Casal 1978), Toraja of Sulawesi (e.g. Spertus & Holmgren 1977) and Sumba of the Lesser Sunda islands, Indonesia (e.g. Adams 1969; cf. pl.58,59,64).

Curiously, warp ikat weaving is practised by a mere sprinkling of other Bornean groups, such as the Ot Danum in Kalimantan. An important implication in terms of ethnic identity is that ikat weaving is visibly missing as a medium of symbolic representation in the majority of Bornean indigenous groups. Maloh groupings, Kapuas neighbours of the Iban, acquired Iban ikat trade textiles for use as foundation cloths on which to construct elaborate beadwork. At the same time no evidence has surfaced that Maloh developed skills in warp ikat weaving (cf. Maxwell 1980).

Adding complexities and discontinuities to the diffusion issue is evidence that while textiles and ideas have been exchanged in the region, they have not spread evenly to all areas nor were they necessarily adopted by all who were exposed to them. The latter point is illustrated below in examples of various weaving activities currently practised in different Iban communities.

The lack of material evidence of widespread practice of ikat weaving in Borneo gives rise to various speculations: a) this art had possibly been more widespread and has already declined; b) the skills were introduced by Iban but not diffused due to the relatively short time span that Iban people had been in Borneo; c) warp ikat developed as a specialization by groups to mark their differences from others who specialized in particular skills such as wood carving or metal work (e.g. Ave & King 1986). Cultural-historical patterns in South-East Asia which might otherwise lend weight to any of or other than the above possibilities remain vague.

What one can say with certainty in respect to diffusion and the origins and development of ikat in South-East Asia, is that Iban textile artists are highly innovative in their work - an observation which is developed in this thesis and which is supported by Derek Freeman's insight into the primary value of inspiration in Iban groupings:

Such a people, I suggest, with a social organization based on the kindred, that encouraged the emergence of individual talent and creativity, and in which participation in group activities was *by choice* rather than prescription, is of the greatest anthropological interest and human value.

(Freeman 1981:50)

IBAN COMMUNITIES AT THE TIME OF BRITISH RULE.

In 1839, when James Brooke sailed from the straits settlement of Singapore to Kuching on the northern coast of Borneo he found a power struggle between contending royalty of Brunei. At the same time indigenous rebellions were widespread against the Brunei sultanate and its dominance over their lives and the resources of the land and the sea.

Iban living along the Lupar and Skrang and adjacent waterways of the Saribas were known to join Malay 'pirates' to raid coastal shipping routes (Pringle 1970:50). Iban, whom the British referred to as 'Sea' Dayak, made forays into neighbouring 'Land' Dayak (Bidayu) settlements, west along the coast to the sultanate of Pontianak on the Kapuas River, and north east to Melanau and other non-Iban territories (*ibid.*:46).

Two major migrations of Iban were underway at the time of Brooke's arrival. According to British records, inter-tribal confrontations consisting of 'retaliatory headhunting and marauding' frequently broke out between Iban and other groups such as Kayan, Kenyah, and Punan living in areas where Iban were seeking primary forest lands suitable for cultivation of hill rice (Pringle 1970:46).

One migration just prior to Brooke's arrival in the 1800s involved groups of Iban living in the rugged and remote region of the Batang Ai, who were in need of new land. The Batang Ai, which lies near the current Indonesian frontier, is a tributary near the headwaters of the Lupar River down which the first groups of Iban migrated into present day Sarawak. As they would be unlikely to find land downriver, many Batang Ai Iban returned to their ancestral homelands in the Kapuas region of Kalimantan. From there

they proceeded via the Embaloh (Kanyau) River to the Katibas, a tributary on the middle reaches of the Rejang. They had reached the largest river system in Sarawak which was basically north east of the Lupar/Batang Ai river system. Some of these 'Batang Ai' Iban gradually moved up the Rejang and into the Baleh River which is the main area focussed on in this study.

The other focal area of this thesis, the Saribas-Layar and adjacent river systems of the Lupar and Krian (i.e. districts of Betong, Sri Aman, and Saratok) was where a second major migration of Iban originated. These were Iban from families which had been settled the longest amongst Malay villages. By the 1840s land was needed by descendants of the growing population of Iban there, particularly along the lower Lupar River, its tributary the Skrang, and Saribas-Layar river system. Iban migrating from this lower river region moved east towards the lower reaches of the Rejang via the Kanowit River, a tributary of the Rejang below the Katibas River and not far from the present commercial centre of Sibiu.

James Brooke initially established himself, together with British influence, in Borneo when he was granted rule over the Kuching region of the Sarawak River. The settlement at that time had a population of about 8,000 of which 2,000 were Malays (Low 1848:111). Brooke procured his 'rights' in Borneo by providing the Brunei sultan with advanced technology in the way of fire-power for use against dissident 'subjects'.

Brooke's association with the British government was transformed early in his rule in the wake of British public outrage over reports from Sarawak. It became increasingly impolitic for Britain to be visibly supportive of Brooke's strategies which had resulted in the extermination of hundreds of gun-less natives.³

Despite withdrawal of British government military support, three generations of Brookes, spanning a century from 1841 to World War Two, expanded their control over Malay and

³See Pringle (1970:97) and Colchester (1985:15) on scandal of Battle at Beting Marau.

Dayak peoples. As white rajahs, the British family ruled over a region that reached the size of present day Sarawak.

As Brooke gained control south of Brunei, merchants working for a private British firm succeeded in convincing the Brunei sultan to cede territory north east of Brunei to them (Ave & King 1986:23). The British North Borneo Company was subsequently established in 1881 and administered this territory under the name of British North Borneo (Sabah). British influences in Borneo were essentially mercantile, controlling interests concentrated in private sources whose businesses and families were based in Britain.

James Brooke established his rule by establishing control over indigenous groups nearest Kuching. His primary concern however was to vanquish Iban along the Lupar, Skrang and Saribas rivers whose acts of 'piracy' posed a major hindrance to British sea trade (Pringle 1970:321). Charles Brooke, James' nephew and successor, employed the well-tested strategy of opposing a group of Iban against other Iban from different river districts (*ibid*:259). This expediency was made easier by the political reality that Iban had not historically organized themselves formally as a tribal entity. Rather, Iban identified primarily with smaller local kin groups occupying a contiguous river system (Freeman 1955:74, Pringle 1970:19).

Iban recognized no formal tribal structures and no institutionalized positions of chief. Groups of Iban were most likely to come together through personal kin loyalties. As Freeman emphasises:

Under Iban *adat* all men are equals. During his life-time a man may acquire high prestige and become an honoured leader, but rank is not inheritable, and there is no institution of chiefship. Iban society is classless and egalitarian and its members, untrammelled individualists, aggressive and proud in demeanour, lacking any taste for obeisance.
(1955:54).

James Brooke assumed full rights to the region. In so doing he denied indigenous rights to the land and its resources, administrative objectives which undermined Iban values of egalitarianism and autonomy. Not surprisingly Iban opposed external controls over their land and their lives.

James Brooke increased his control over inland groups by establishing a series of administrative forts, a move which had not been made by the sultanates. The Rejang, which is the longest river in Sarawak (562 kilometres), was particularly isolated from Kuching. When Iban groups on the Katibas began migrating further up the Rejang in the 1870s, Charles Brooke who had just taken over as the second rajah from his uncle, established a fort just below the point where the Baleh joins the Rejang, to become the administrative centre of Kapit (e.g. Freeman 1955:134, Pringle 1970:251-264).

Charles Brooke imposed his authority over fervently independent Iban groups by ordering the Baleh to be closed off to settlement, forcing Iban to move below the fort at Kapit (Freeman:135). Further 'illegal' migrations eventually resulted in 1922 in a government sponsored scheme of limited settlement in a section of the Baleh (e.g. Freeman 1955:140, Pringle 1970:263). Brooke gained influence in remote regions by 'favouring' select Iban individuals who were allotted prime pieces of land in return for 'discouraging' or reporting any illegal migrations by any Iban groups (Freeman 1955:141, Pringle 1970:263).

Within Malay communities British administrators could employ leaders recognized by the Malay sultanate to carry out British rule. Iban, however, had not been formally subsumed by the sultanate and did not recognize any institutional positions of leadership. Therefore Brooke selected Iban based on their informal but pragmatic positions of influence, as official *penghulu*, a new position of local power created and imposed by his British administration (Freeman 1955:141).⁴ The Rajah also appointed a select few Iban as *temenggong*, or paramount chiefs, to coordinate between the *penghulu*. Both titles were adopted from existing Malay institutions (Colchester 1985:18).

Iban *penghulu* were expected to collect a 'head' and 'door' tax of one dollar per Iban household from the groups of longhouse communities within their district which was

⁴Robert Pringle (1970:151) notes that the position of *penghulu* was imposed by Brooke rule, possibly around 1883 when the term was used officially in administrative records by Hugh Brooke Low at Sibiu.

defined by contiguous river ways. To ensure these duties were carried out, each *penghulu* was personally rewarded a commission of ten per cent of taxes collected.

Thus, from the beginning of Brooke rule the independent and egalitarian basis of Iban livelihood was severely undermined through the imposition and legitimization of privileged Iban positions of authority.

The argument is convincing that in their attempt to stop warfare and headhunting at the same time the Brookes promoted it. They did so through their tactic of employing warriors to lead confrontations against groups resisting Brooke rule. They further entrenched warfare by setting Iban against Iban through the introduction of favouritism and institutional positions of authority noted above (e.g. Pringle 1970:322).

Iban who had managed to resist domination by Malay chiefs upon British intervention were not only subjected to external rule but also integrated into the external system - since some of their own people were now in the very positions to which Iban communities previously had been opposed.

Iban communities along the lower Lupar and Layar rivers, adjacent to Malay villages and more direct influence of Islamic rule during the previous 300 years, were also exposed to the most direct impact of British rule. With the exception of the first fort which was built on the Kanowit in 1849, most of the earliest forts were concentrated in this district and it was here that Charles Brooke trained as a District Officer in the early years of his uncle's rule.⁵

While Iban can be found living throughout Sarawak today, from the early days of Brooke administration through to the present time those individuals wanting to move to any other region were required to carry government permits.

Evidently there were no Iban communities east of the Rejang prior to 1866. Migrations to eastern rivers such as the Baram were associated with Brooke's interest in extend-

⁵The second fort was built on the Skrang where it joined the Lupar in 1850, which was later moved down river in 1864 to Simmanggang (presently Sri Aman) on the Lupar; another in 1852 at Lingga on the lower Lupar, 1858 at Betong, 1865 at the mouth of the Krian (Saratok district) and 1868 at Lubok Antu on the upper Lupar (Pringle 1970:142).

ing control towards Brunei. By introducing Iban to this region Brooke effectively diverted Rejang Iban who were rebelling against land restrictions and in so doing Brooke increased his level of control - since newly settled farmers were duly 'registered'.

Through government sponsored migration Brooke not only reinforced his physical presence near Brunei, he also created a local labour force. Brooke employed the workers to exploit jungle products on the Baram and to labour in new extractive industries, oil in particular (Pringle 1970:266). The export of raw materials (agricultural and mineral) formed an important part of Brooke's revenue. British-Dutch Shell Oil was the only major 'foreign' company that became established during his rule.

During the 1880s sago, antimony and gold, most of which was produced from regions around Kuching and the Rejang Rivers, accounted for 66 per cent of total exports from Sarawak (Pringle 1970:267). Jungle products, including wild rubber, rattan, camphor and damar, accounted for the remaining 33 per cent.

The Brooke rajahs are seen to have discouraged the establishment of large plantations, preferring to have local cultivators continue to work their own land rather than allow other European or Asian capitalists gain control of the land (e.g.Cramb 1988:111). For Brooke this also meant that his government coffers did not suffer as drastically from boom/bust cycles as occurred in other colonies - those economically-dependent on monocropping and accordingly more subject to world market fluctuations (e.g.Pringle 1970:344).

Nonetheless the big economic picture obscures a local reality brought about by the goals of the Brooke administration. Clearly, small landholders could reduce their involvement in rubber or coffee crops and fall back on subsistence agriculture. However, this strategy meant that individual families faced the hopeless challenge of reverting to customary agricultural practices on impoverished soils. New laws forbade free movement in respect to felling new forest, a practice long-held in accord with swidden agricultural patterns.

Iban on the Saribas and nearby Paku rivers were the first to be persuaded to adopt commercial agricultural activities, beginning with coffee in 1889, followed by rubber and later, pepper crops (e.g. Pringle 1970:206).

Cash crops provided a means of continuing the cultivation of increasingly poor soils in this region, overworked during years of immobilized settlement and no longer capable of generating adequate yields of rice to support subsistence. Rubber exports, from crops planted and harvested during boom years in the first decade of the 1900s, became the Sarawakian economic linch-pin. While such cash-cropping made some Iban individuals rich, others, who planted later, suffered when the world market dropped off during the Great Depression of the 1930s (Pringle 1970:267).

Brooke discouraged Malays, Chinese and Iban from living in the same communities. Brooke formally instituted a land code stating that Iban native lands could not be alienated which meant they could not be sold to non-community members such as Chinese immigrant farmers. As seen in the previous chapter Brooke's policy regarding indigenous lands remains in effect with the current Sarawak Land Code.

Brooke reinforced differences between ethnic groups. He generally favoured Malays for administrative work whereas he drew on Iban mostly for military support, recruiting them for his 'Sarawak Rangers' (Pringle 1970:199). Access to administrative skills which centred on writing were limited to a few Iban individuals. Although Anglican missions were established by 1850 in the Lupar and Saribas-Layar river districts, by 1913 they administered just two schools with a total of about thirty-three Iban students (e.g. Pringle 1970:140). Roman Catholic missionaries established a school on the lower Rejang by 1882, but in the upper Rejang it was not until after World War II, at the end of Brooke rule, that schools became available to Iban following the work of Methodist Missions.

Thus, Iban communities were first introduced to European values and Christian beliefs through schools in the Second Division. According to Pringle (1970:88), the rajah "insisted that no attempts should be made to proselytize among the Moslems, fearing that such efforts might upset the delicate

and still evolving relationship between Brooke and the Malay aristocrats. But he felt that Christianity would serve as a stabilizing influence among the pagan Ibans".

While many scholars have characterized Charles Brooke as a supporter of Iban culture, I have argued that his actions demonstrate that the economic and political interests of his State came first. Brooke admired Iban courage and individuality. But while he made efforts to record aspects of what he and others saw as a fascinating culture, he imposed radical changes to their way of life. As seen his policies undercut customary means of subsisting by limiting access to virgin forest lands. Through commercializing agriculture and the bestowal of chieftainships which instituted a new stratified social order Brooke effectively consolidated economic and political inequalities within Iban communities, as well as between groupings.

Successive Brookean strategies to control the movements of the Iban population not only resulted in limited access to land, but set the basis for political favours which essentially meant unequal access in which only a few individuals gained power and at the expense of the majority of the indigenous population.

Related ideological moves comprising schooling and religious ministry were blows struck at the soul of customary beliefs refined over centuries of unpredictable jungle life with its forces "tamed" through dance and music, weaving and story-telling.

THE FORMATION OF AN 'INDEPENDENT' STATE.

In the 1990s Sarawak was currently divided into nine 'Divisions' which were further divided into 'Districts'. The original political boundaries were formed during the Brookean era. In that period the administration saw each major river system as a separate political and economic entity, each of which should "pay its own way" (Pringle 1970:266).

The first division originally coincided with Kuching. Today Kuching Division comprises three Districts: Kuching,

Bau and Lundu. The Sadong river system to the east, once included as part of Kuching Division, is now recognized as Samarahan Division, presently made up of three Districts: Samarahan, Serian and Simunjan.

The next major river system to the east is the Batang Lupar where Brooke, in 1864, established a major fort at Simmanggang (today Sri Aman). From here he administered lands which he would eventually incorporate in the form of his Second Division. In the period 1990-93 this Division was generally referred to as Sri Aman being composed of four Districts: Sri Aman which includes the lower reaches of the Batang Lupar up to and including the Skrang (Sekerang) tributary; Lubok Antu which includes the upper Lupar with its main tributaries the Lemanak, Engkari and Batang Ai; Betong which administers the Saribas-Layar River regions; and Saratok which administers the Krian (Kerian) River region.

To the north east, Brooke established his third administrative division which originally included all of the Rejang river system. This was later divided into two: Sibü and Kapit Divisions. What remained as the Third Division (Sibü) has been further reduced to four Districts: Sibü (the Division's administrative centre), Kanowit (the tributary of the Rejang above Sibü), Dalat and Mukah (to the north of the lower Rejang). A further division, Sarikei Division, was defined to administer the region south west of lower Rejang up to but not including the Krian District of Saratok.

Kapit, previously the hinterland or up-river region of Brooke's Third Division, is currently Sarawak's Seventh Division. It is subdivided into three Districts: Kapit, Song and Belaga. This is the largest Division in Sarawak with 38,934 square kilometres which accounts for 31 per cent of Sarawak's total area. By comparison the Third Division of Sibü now makes up only 10 per cent (12,639.7 sq.kms), the Second Division of Sri Aman 7.7 per cent (9,647 sq.kms) while the First Division of Kuching has only 3.7 per cent of all land (4,565.5 sq.kms).

The Second Division of Sri Aman is one third the size of Kapit but has double the population with 165,252 persons accounting for 10 per cent of the total population. Kapit

Division incorporates only 96,265 persons who represent 5.84 per cent of Sarawak's total population. By contrast, Kuching Division which has the smallest area has a population of 429,511 which alone accounted for 26 per cent of Sarawak's people in 1991.⁶ Sibü Division which is only somewhat larger in size than Sri Aman District, has 259,127 persons accounting for 15.7 per cent. Like Kuching, Sibü's population is concentrated in its capital city.

The political divisions which make up the remaining region to the north of the Rejang include Bintulu, Miri and Limbang. Together they make up 37.5 per cent of the total land and about 24.5 per cent of the total population of Sarawak.

As discussed previously, these regions are important to a macro-analysis of the political economy of Sarawak given the enclave nature of the oil and gas industries which are concentrated there. However, the focus of my ethnographic field study concerns Iban individuals living and weaving within Kapit Division, Sri Aman Division and the administrative capital, Kuching.

Both Kapit and Sri Aman represent regions where large numbers of Iban are involved in textile related practices today. These two Divisions alone account for about 37 per cent of Iban living in Sarawak. Figures on ethnic composition from a 1980 survey however (Table VII below) reveal striking variations regarding the distribution of Iban as well as confirm the difference in numbers of Malays living in these two areas of study (ASB 1991:16).

In the Districts of Kapit and Song, in 1980, Iban made up 85 and 91 per cent of their respective populations while Belaga, which is further inland, had predominantly Kayan, Kenyah and other indigenous peoples. Chinese and Malays made up a relatively small proportion in all three of these districts. By contrast, in the Second Division, while Iban dominated the Districts of Lubok Antu and Sri Aman which have 84 and 62.7 per cent Iban resident, in Betong Iban

⁶1991 statistics in this chapter are based on the "Preliminary Count Report" of the Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, 1991, Department of Statistics, Kuala Lumpur and the 1991 Annual Statistical Bulletin, Sarawak (referenced as ASBF).

represented only 44.2 per cent while Malays represented 47.7 per cent of people there.

The predominance of Malays in Betong District (Saribas/-Layar) has been noted in respect to political-economic influences and demands by the sultanates for tribute. Malay cultural influences grounded in Islamic ideology more directly encroach on indigenous peoples of Sarawak today given the dominant Malayan position within the confederation.

Table VII. Population distribution of ethnic groups (1980) by District for Kapit and Sri Aman Divisions.*

<u>Districts</u>	<u>D I S T R I B U T I O N</u>				<u>P E R C E N T A G E S</u>			<u>Total</u>
	<u>Iban</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>Malay</u>	<u>Melanau</u>	<u>Bidayu</u>	<u>Indiq.</u>	<u>Others</u>	
Kapit	85.3	5.2	1.8	0.7	0.2	3.6	0.2	100%
Song	91.2	5.2	2.6	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.1	100%
Belaga	4.1	3.0	2.2	0.8	0.2	89.3	0.4	100%
Sri Aman	62.7	14.2	21.8	0.4	0.6	0.1	0.3	100%
Lubok Antu	84.0	11.4	3.7	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.3	100%
Betong	44.2	7.7	47.7	0.2	0.1	0.05	0.05	100%
Saratok	57.7	9.1	32.6	0.2	0.2	0.05	0.05	100%
Kuching*	5.8	44.9	35.1	0.5	11.1	0.4	2.2	100%
Sibu*	19.2	62.1	10.2	7.3	0.4	0.5	0.3	100%

*Includes comparative figures for two major urban/commercial districts.

(Compiled from 1991 Annual Statistical Bulletin - Sarawak, Kuching: Dept of Statistics Malaysia. p.16.)

When Sarawak was occupied by the Japanese during the Second World War, the third white rajah Vyner Brooke fled the region. As Bob Cramb points out (1988:117), the Japanese Occupation (1942-45) brought a virtual halt to the development of cash cropping as Iban who had adopted new agricultural practices reverted to shifting cultivation of hill rice. On the defeat of the Japanese, faced with a destitute treasury and a war ravaged countryside, the third Rajah Vyner Brooke ceded Sarawak to Britain. Cession occurred with the condition that Sarawak eventually be granted independence (an inconvenient and over-looked condition as it turned out).

During its short stint British colonial rule did no more than the Brooke administration to promote local industrial maturity -Sarawak provided raw materials and a market for British goods. After a decade and a half as a British colony, appointed members of Sarawak's Council Negri passed a narrow vote in favour of joining the Federation of

Malaysia. In this manner Britain reneged on the independence issue. In taking Sarawak into confederation the British cast their former colony into constitutional links with Sabah (formerly British North Borneo), Singapore (which subsequently opted out of the Federation) and the Malayan peninsular sultanates.

The intention in this chapter has been to generate a macroscopic view of the transformation of customary lives that has occurred over approximately six generations of Iban. Under external Malaysian rule Iban individuals have been directly affected by accelerated industrial transformation - through participation in and subsequent reliance on wage labour activities. But as the discussion has shown, prior to the extended nature of changes wrought by successive five year industrial plans, Iban confronted fundamental political and social changes under three administrations of the Brooke Raj.

SECTION II. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

With this page commences a two chapter review of the literature which contributes to the conceptual grounds of this thesis. Chapter Three concerns Iban studies as well as South-East Asian studies which have contributed to the current knowledge of Iban textile art as it was customarily practised and which has raised the question here of the significance of 'traditional' textile art for Iban in the 1990s.

To provide an understanding of the critical approach taken in this study, Chapter Four presents a wider range of literature from which the conceptual framework for this thesis has been drawn. This includes sociological and anthropological studies which focus on theories of social change and studies of craft production in other regions such as Latin America. The discussion goes on to address theories on the practice of art as well as approaches to interpreting cultural phenomena.

The objective of this section, like the previous one, is to provide background to the assumptions and to the analytical approach which are central to this study of Iban ikat artwork.

CHAPTER 3

THE LITERATURE ON IBAN ART

This chapter concerns the uncovering of 'traditional' elements of culture - in order to identify parameters of the significant world of the weaver. The discussion addresses this question by first focussing on the significance of studying 'material culture'.

Two main approaches which concern 'traditional' Iban material are considered. On the one hand there is the historical focus of museum collections and archaeological research and on the other, social-cultural studies of contemporary or 'living' groups of Iban.

From this review the discussion leads to the problem of imposing a static conceptual view of 'traditions', with particular regard for Iban textile art. The objective of this chapter is to provide a conceptual basis from which to consider issues of social change.

SIGNIFICANCE OF MATERIAL CULTURE.

Material culture studies focus on what individuals make which means ways in which they transform their environment. Barrie Reynolds defines material culture as "the tangible phenomena of a human society that are the purposive products of ideas and behaviour that are learned, not instinctive" (1987:163). Reynolds notes how both portable and fixed objects such as clothing and shelter, as well as landscape features such as a cultivated field or a logged hillside can be seen to be intentional "products" of a human individual or group.

While ideas are not tangible in the sense of being material phenomenon, they cannot be separated from human products except in a theoretical or conceptual sense. Since they are embodied and expressed through acts, whether as behaviour, spoken words or human material products, ideas are readily observable.

Accordingly, the concept of *culture* is used in this study to refer to both material products and the non-material ideas, knowledge and beliefs of the people which give rise to the products. Following Peter Berger's (1967:6) definition of *culture*, the non-tangible aspect of culture includes socio-cultural formations such as the institutionalized roles of wife, healer, priest or chief that guide human behaviour. In this sense cultural artefacts and ideas expressed in them and through practice generate reflections of an individual's social world - insofar as it is contained within human consciousness (Wuthnow 1984:35).

An assumption is made concerning human sociality on the grounds that human infants cannot survive in the world on their own. Survival depends on social interaction as well as a stable or hospitable environment to protect the infant as well as the parent(s) from the threat of extinction. Humans produce specific means of ensuring this survival. A complement of tools and methods is developed by which a shelter can be constructed and food obtained.

Berger notes that through products the maker's ideas or knowledge are objectified or externalized. It is through this externalization that products "manifest the subjective meanings or intentionality of those who produced [them]" (*ibid.*:73). In this way the shelter, tools and knowledge are made available for others to internalize through the process of socialization. This refers to a life-long process whereby individuals from the time of birth, are initiated into ways of interacting with the natural environment and with each other; that is, the process of 'socialization'.

While a desert and jungle environment each provides an immediate set of resources and so determines to a great extent the kinds of products possible, the physical environment clearly does not determine all human activities. Human modes of action, in turn impose particular constraints and patterns (*ibid.*). Whereas in Borneo, for example, Iban hunt wild pigs as a source of food as well as for ritual offerings, Malays place a taboo on pork.

With regard to weaving skills, technology does not determine how all activities are carried out. For example, in accord with the practice of Iban custom all women were

expected to weave and maintain a stock of ceremonial textiles. This ethos contrasts vividly with the practices of socially stratified groups characterized by formal hereditary rule. In the latter, restrictions frequently occur reserving all or some aspects of the ceremonial arts to individuals within ruling families or to a select group of specially trained 'court' retainers.¹ Following Berger culture can be seen as:

"an all-embracing socially constructed world of subjectively and inter-subjectively experienced meanings. Without the intended and subjectively meaningful actions of individuals, there would be no such thing as culture. Culture, as artifact, emerges out of the stuff of subjective meanings" (*ibid.*:25).

Assuming artefacts "manifest the intentionality of those who produced [them]" subjective meanings are thereby empirically available for analysis (Berger 1964: 202). In concurrence with Robert Wuthnow the problem is seen to be one of reproducibility and empirical verification, since interpretations from one social scientist or anthropologist to another can vary considerably.

As Wuthnow (1984:9) points out Berger does not offer a formal theory in that neither testable hypotheses nor operationalization of his concepts are made explicit. Berger argues the need for an orientational approach to cultural analysis. He emphasises descriptive research which moves towards empirically grounded understanding of the ordinary perceptions and intentions of social actors in daily life.

While this thesis draws generally on the preceding assumptions it is indebted primarily to the belief that "the common-sense knowledge of everyday life, the ways in which people organize their daily experience and especially those of the social world, is the background in which inquiry must begin" (*ibid.*:29).

In marked contrast to this orientation, studies of material culture are often based on material artefacts which

¹As noted, this study shares Freeman's assumption that prior to British rule Iban communities generally were egalitarian, not stratified. Some writers (e.g. Jabu:1991, Sandin:1967) suggest that some Iban communities in the Saribas district have a recent history of stratification characterized by slaves and privileged families which reserved exclusive rights to particular textile designs.

have been collected from the field and stored in museums. In other words portable material culture has become the domain of archaeologists and museum curators (e.g. Reynolds *op.cit.*:1). Research on materials which are physically isolated from their original social cultural context tends to be technology-bound and in the case of textiles, costume-descriptive. Information on various ceremonial uses, and symbolic interpretations of motifs are often limited to brief descriptions, which like the artefact are also in effect lifted out of their social cultural context.

MATERIAL CULTURE AND MUSEUMS.

An advantage inherent in museums as cultural institutions is the capacity to house together and so provide access to an enormous range of cross-cultural material. Archival records may also be available regarding social-historical background relating to collections.

Museum registration entries are usually brief due to lack of written or verbal information available when an object is initially accepted into a museum's collection. For example, Iban textiles are usually recorded as originating from Borneo. Today, the artefact may be recorded as *Iban*, although historical records are more obscure and refer to an item as *Dayak*. Seldom is a particular longhouse community identified, and even more rarely is reference made to the maker. However, as historical artefacts in themselves, registration entries are more than descriptive records of an object. They include clues to the social-historical period relating to when, and how, an object was collected.

In this sense acquisition records also point to the reality that a collection of artefacts is not a wholly representative sample of a culture (e.g. Newton 1982:268). Through the selection process an object comes to embody and reflect specific aesthetic and political ideals and budgets of the collectors as well as those of the institution in which they are housed. Further clues to the cluster of subjective impressions which attach to a particular artefact can be uncovered in archival materials associated with other

objects related through being collected during the same period.

Significant differences occur in the major collections of Iban materials held by different museums. This point has critical implications wherever the study of Iban culture proceeds by way of isolated objects. For example, the exceptionally large collection of Iban textiles acquired by the Sarawak Museum is composed of old textiles, most of which have been acquired in the past three decades. The major collections of textiles made by European government officials during the nineteenth century were taken away either as private collections or to British and Dutch museums.

As the Sarawak Museum collection of Iban cloths exemplifies, the size of a collection conveys a weighty impression of 'traditional' Iban culture. However, the picture carried by a large collection of old pieces is not identical with more accuracy concerning the realities of cultural heritage. For the researcher the selection process gives rise to analysis of specific tastes and preferences of collectors as well as the relative density of these preferences in regard to the period over which items are acquired. In addition to questioning possible motivations of indigenous sources from which items are gained, there is the critical issue of historical purposes underlying acquisitions and exhibitions.

The challenge of studying a culture through its material culture as selected by a museum or gallery gains further clarity in the following example. A current bias associated with the Sarawak Museum collection of Iban textiles involves the collection and exhibition of large ritual cloths (*pua' kumbu'*). Conversely, the institution gives less attention to acquiring and showing other forms of weaving, such as ceremonial ikat skirts or men's loin cloths, which include a wide range of weaving techniques on their finely patterned end sections.

By way of contrast, the National Museum in Jakarta, which also holds an extensive collection of Iban textiles, reveals an emphasis on Iban ceremonial ikat skirts. The museum has, in 1992, only two examples of the larger ceremonial ikat cloths (*pua' kumbu'*) - items which are given

current pride of place in Malaysian Borneo. It will be recalled from earlier reference that while Iban are among a small number of weaving groups who specialize in warp ikat in Malaysia, within Indonesia they are only one among many groups.

Of the preceding points one that warrants special emphasis in terms of this thesis is the current preoccupation in Iban studies with the large *pua' kumbu'* cloths. These items have become the singular most important quality of Iban *cultural heritage* in regard to issues of ethnic pride, national identity and cultural tourism. While the importance of *pua' kumbu'* relative to other Iban ritual ikat textiles is a recent external cultural creation, this does not diminish the quality of the objects. The observation simply points to a transformation in value brought about by external forces, concerning perceptions of a specific item of material culture - the *pua' kumbu'*.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND PRE-HISTORICAL MATERIAL.

In terms of archaeological investigation an artefact as a fragment of material culture is a key surviving indicator from which to interpret and theorize. Related theories concern the ways in which early humans have constructed their worlds and how they may have interacted within that world. Regrettably, in South-East Asia prehistoric information about textiles is limited, for reasons of insects, humid climate and the organic nature of the dyes and fibres of textiles.

Unlike burial tombs in dry desert areas like Peru from which a rich variety of textiles have survived in excellent condition, only tiny remnants of cotton fabric have been recovered in Borneo or South-East Asia generally.² While these fragments provide evidence of specific usage of a fibre (cotton) and knowledge of spinning and weaving by

²At present the earliest example of warp ikat (circa 14th century A.D.) is from Banton Island, Philippines (e.g. Fraser-Lu 1988:42). Tokyo National Museum has older, more elaborate warp ikats in silk attributed to the Japanese Asuka period (552-644 A.D.), which may have originated in China (e.g. Larsen 1976:134).

Bornean peoples, few clues have been unearthed regarding social conditions of their creation and use.

The discovery of a skull in the Niah Caves provides evidence that *Homo sapiens* have been present on Borneo at least as far back as 35,000 years ago (Ave & King 1986:14). Burial sites at Niah contained clues of a rich culture in the remains of painted and incised earthenware pottery, bone, shell and stone ornaments, bamboo and wooden caskets. Also found were *pandanus* mats and cotton textiles which have been dated between 1,800 and 400 B.C. Several cave paintings in the genre of 'ships of the dead' provide some evidence of early burial practices and beliefs.

Analysis of these materials also demonstrates the existence of agricultural practices by early inhabitants of Borneo. Of particular significance is the appearance of iron tools around 1,000 A.D. and evidence of early knowledge of iron ore extraction in Borneo. Utilizing this resource individuals could more easily cut down hardwood forests and cultivate hill rice (*ibid.*:15, Chin 1980). More recent historical records indicate that Bornean iron became an important item of trade, valued for its rust resistant quality (e.g. Ave & King 1986:16).

EARLY HISTORICAL IMPRESSIONS OF IBAN LIVELIHOOD.

In contrast to the approach of archaeologists, social and cultural anthropology emphasises 'living' social situations - in the context of urgency concerning cultural survival. The tendency to record voluminous detailed descriptions of the material culture of indigenous peoples reflects a preoccupation with the imminent demise of aboriginal culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Associated with the sense of urgency was the attempt to record and make collections of artifacts in the realisation that entire groups were being wiped out, or radically changed through European colonization.

Just as artefacts embody subjective intentions and meanings of the people who make and use them, written records also transmit the intentions and ideas of the writers. Much of the earliest information about Iban culture

comes from journals and reports by district officers and missionaries who were resident there under the direction of the British Brooke family. As already observed the primary objectives of the Raj between 1841 and the Second World War lay in instituting hegemony over indigenous peoples. Literature from the Brookean period arises in this context and comprises detailed accounts by individuals directed by Charles Brooke to learn the local languages and to observe the indigenous way of life (Appell 1976:8).

Charles Brooke required that all Resident officers to submit "a regular monthly report of all the domestic and foreign events which occur in your province together with such information as you are able to give of the political and social conditions of the people" (Pringle 1970:368). The Rajah also instructed his officers to publish articles on folklore and ethnographic details of communities with whom they interacted in the course of their often lengthy residences in remote outposts (Appell 1976:8).

In 1866 Charles Brooke personally authored *Ten Years in Sarawak*, a two volume account of his early years as an administrator. During that period Rajah Charles served under his uncle James Brooke, who was the first of the three white rajahs. Charles' wife as well as the spouse of his successor, published books of their impressions and observations as Ranees. These works included some material on dress and cultural aspects of Malay and indigenous ways of living.

The establishment of the Sarawak Museum by Charles Brooke in 1886 provided a local centre for Bornean studies.³ Impetus for the museum's research interests came from the naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace and for ethnographic collections by British administrator Hugh Brooke Low. These included numerous Iban artefacts. An archival resource was established and, in 1912, curatorial staff began producing a local publication, the *Sarawak Museum Journal*, which is still published annually today.

³The museum continues to be a major centre for cultural studies. Technical colleges were set up the post World War period to train local people for work in agricultural and industrial development projects but not until the 1990s was a university in Sarawak established at Bintulu to provide local training in the humanities and the social sciences.

Detailed items on Bornean material culture were recorded in the two volume publication by Ling Roth, *The Natives of Sarawak* (1896). Roth's study, which covered a remarkable range of topics and Bornean groups, included several references to Iban weaving and dyeing technology.

Roth's interest in weaving enabled him to publish his notes on Iban technology in a later cross-cultural study of primitive stick looms (1918). Charles Hose, whose collection of Iban cloths made up the core of older specimens in the Sarawak and British museums, also published notes on tools, materials and methods of making and using textiles as part of a second two-volume publication on Bornean peoples (Hose & McDougall 1912).

These pioneering efforts, while easily criticized for their subjective and often naive interpretations, prove to be an invaluable record due to their detailed drawings and descriptions of the vast array of 'exotic' material culture which they, as Europeans, confronted for the first time.

The Reverend William Howell published a short article in the Sarawak Museum Journal in 1912, which remained one of the most detailed and oft-quoted accounts of Iban methods of spinning cotton into thread, tying, dyeing and weaving. Howell was particularly interested in the less tangible aspects of Iban culture. He inquired into religious beliefs and ritual behaviour, as well as the significance which Iban placed on dreams and physical omens such as the appearance of specific birds. Howell published numerous articles in the Sarawak Gazette on various ceremonies relating to such rites of passage as pregnancy, childbirth, and burial. He also helped to produce one of the earliest dictionaries of the Iban language (Howell & Bailey 1900).

This dictionary, and a recent one compiled by Anthony Richards, a British administrative officer resident in Borneo from 1938 until 1964, considerably assist investigation into material and symbolic aspects of Iban practices.⁴

⁴For my study, I draw on the more recent publication, *An Iban-English Dictionary*, compiled by Anthony Richards (1988).

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY.

One of the most comprehensive studies of Iban textiles was published by the early anthropologist Alfred Haddon and Laura Start, thirty years after Haddon visited Borneo during the Torres Straits Expedition in 1899 (1936,1982). In contrast to the 'fieldwork' focus of resident Bornean scholars and administrators, Haddon's work concentrates on museum textiles which he studied at the Sarawak Museum, in addition to others he purchased from Charles Hose. Most of these textiles were subsequently acquired by the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.

Haddon and Start focussed on detailed analyses and classification of costume construction, weaving techniques, and textile motifs. Haddon acknowledged that more than 1,500 motifs were identified by Hose in note form, many which Hose had attached to the cloths themselves. Haddon and Start categorized these as plants, animals, anthropomorphs, natural phenomena and objects in daily use.

This taxonomic analysis, Sarah Gills pointed out, reflected Haddon's interest in biological science classification (1967). Haddon's approach resulted in all "human-like" forms to be categorized as anthropomorphs and subsequently did not differentiate Iban figures carved in wooden statues (*engkeramba'*) and other spirit helpers (*tua'*) which may have appeared in dreams from representations of major gods, spirits of demons or giants, and mortals (i.e. Iban warriors). The final category, "objects in daily use", was more of a 'catch-all' considering that it included items such as fire-tongs to which only superficial observation would render mundane meaning. (The fire-tongs represent both strength and spiritual connections to the Iban god *Selempandai*, said to have created humans with an anvil).

At the same time, discussion of symbolic and ritual meanings was essentially beyond the objectives and scope of Haddon's study which he noted was only preliminary. Nevertheless their work, which included detailed descriptions, drawings and Iban names, has proved to be an important basis for subsequent studies such as this thesis (e.g. Gill 1967, Gittinger 1985, Ong 1988).

It was not until after the Second World War and the end of a century of rule by the Brooke rajahs that the first formal, in-depth anthropological studies of indigenous Bornean groups were undertaken in Sarawak.

In 1947 Edmund Leach produced a report for the British colonial administration encouraging a social-economic survey of the peoples of Sarawak. In response to this report Derek Freeman undertook an ethnographic field study of Iban groupings in the remote Baleh River region. He focussed on communities which had been under the direct control of the Brooke administration for less than thirty years. Although even the eldest members had been strongly influenced by the atmosphere of resistance to European rule, these communities represented relatively autonomous groups, the individuals of which continued to rely on their own customary methods for their livelihood.

In his *Report on the Iban* (1955) Freeman concentrated on Iban land tenure and customary methods of shifting cultivation of dry hill rice. Although Freeman did not focus on Iban textiles nor on religious and symbolic meanings in his report, ethnographic studies like Freeman's are important to craft studies because they illuminate the access enjoyed by families to land, food and raw materials. In addition, the study details the range of customary activities that individuals were obliged to meet in order to answer subsistence needs. Such information enables comprehension of the relative significance of innovation in respect to the production and use of textiles among other art forms - as an integral part of a way of life.

Whereas Haddon's early museum work is exemplary in the field of Iban textiles, Freeman's fieldwork is a classical example of research into customary social and economic organization. In more ways than one Freeman's study provides invaluable details and insights for investigation of the impact of recent social change. For example, while some of Freeman's subjects are still alive, they no longer act in the same ways nor in the same social environment.

In 'ethnography' the focus is on detail in order to discover the subtle characteristics of a particular social group. A common criticism of past ethnographers is that

their observations are "community bound." This quality arises in the disposition of ethnographers to define the community as their basic unit of study and so treat their community as though it were an independent (or at least a separate) socio-economic system.

Hence the critique of ethnographers, until more recently, that they did not adequately integrate their community of focus and its particular activities such as craftwork into larger national economic systems. Consequently many misconceptions have been perpetuated. As noted in my earlier study of Latin American weaving communities (Chalmers 1985:42), a "community-blinkered approach tends to obviate investigation of horizontal and vertical linkages (e.g. social-economic relationships that individuals establish with other community members or with government and commercial agents outside the community), which integrate the community into the national economic system."

Freeman avoided this bias in the sense that while he focussed on three main communities, he also surveyed the wider Iban region. Freeman's objectives concerning Iban social organization produced results which contrast vividly with findings in stratified neighbouring groups, while his background in British social anthropology produced analytic emphasis on social relationships.

Interested in the customary elements of Iban ways Freeman observed that British mechanisms of rule had been introduced as institutionalized positions of 'headman' (*tuai rumah*) for each longhouse community as well as regional 'chiefs' (*penghulu*). His study emphasised the customary fluidity of physical bounds for Iban communities long used to mobility through shifting agriculture. Mobility was further accentuated by individual freedom to leave one group for another (e.g. Freeman 1955, 1981).

From the time of Freeman's *Report* there has been little issue-oriented anthropological study in response to the impact of industrialization on customary ways. In particular there has been no indepth study of weaving activities which addresses a contemporary Malaysian context.

IBAN TEXTILE ART TODAY & THE CONCEPT 'TRADITIONAL'

Inspiration for much of the serious academic approach to exhibitions and associated publications of South-East Asian textile art has arisen in the 'Round Table' seminars conducted by the Washington Textile Museum (e.g. Emery & Fiske 1979, Gittinger 1980, 1989). In a similar productive vein, the Sarawak Museum has hosted seminars which focus on Bornean material culture (e.g. *Seminar tekstil dan pakaian tradisional 1991*, Borneo Research Council Conference 1990).

However, more specifically, recent papers concerning Iban textiles have been limited by intention to short, introductory or summary accounts, generated as part of a catalogue to accompany textile exhibitions of the Indonesian or greater South-East Asian region (e.g. Spertus & Holmgren 1977, Palmieri & Ferentinos, 1979 Gittinger 1985). This points to an obvious limitation related to the reality that an exhibition is predominantly object-oriented and further compounded by the type and number of materials appropriate for display. The respective writers' interests included the less tangible practice of beliefs and accordingly the social significance of cloths. However, the broad regional scope which the collections engendered predetermined the information possibilities concerning any one culture.

In what are more explicitly *Iban* studies in recent times the tendency has been to reiterate this information collected by Haddon and earlier 'pioneering' individuals stationed in Borneo. To be fair the aim of such catalogues has been limited: to make available to a wider audience historical information on a 'traditional' art form. For example, an exhibition catalogue on Iban textiles entitled *Pua, Iban weavings of Sarawak* (Ong 1988), contributed almost 100 photographs of textiles from private collections. While new perspectives were presented through short profiles on the life histories of three master weavers, the introduction and general discussion of Iban weaving techniques and designs relied almost exclusively on the classic work of Haddon and Start.

A major work by Matiebelle Gittinger, *Splendid Symbols* (1985), was published to complement an exhibition of South-

East Asian textiles. This work was associated with many years of research and exposure to materials from wide cross-cultural resources through her work in the Textile Museum, Washington, D.C.

Gittinger's and other regional studies (e.g. Fraser-Lu 1979, Maxwell 1990) moved beyond description to address questions of origins. Similarities found in design elements, techniques and other cultural traits were related to patterns of trade and migrations of peoples to indicate diffusion of materials and ideas through time and space. Gittinger provided a cultural orientation by organizing her work according to geographical regions (1985).⁵ By way of contrast, Robyn Maxwell (1990) favoured a thematic, rather than a geographical approach to textile art. While this approach raised intriguing questions and so provided a useful heuristic device, as an organizational device it resulted in a disjointed space-time view of discrete materials.

In a seminar publication of the Washington Textile Museum (Gittinger 1980), Cornelia Vogelsanger presented a short paper on Iban textiles based on a weaver/actor focus exploring the social and religious meanings of Iban ritual fabrics. Her analysis was based on dream stories and ritual occasions shared with her by Baleh and Batang Ai Iban women during field research in the 1970s.⁶

On a similar theme, but based on library research towards an anthropology M.A. thesis, Valerie Mashman's "Warriors and Weavers" (1986) took the analysis of social status further. She addressed the understanding that 'traditionally' Iban women enjoyed the choice of achieving enhanced social status and developing spiritual guidance through skills related to mordant dyeing and tying ikat cloths.

Mashman examined the implications of female social status alongside mechanisms and uses of male identifications, namely social status men could achieve through acts

⁵Cf. Mary Hunt Kahlenberg (ed.) *Traditions of Indonesia*, 1977, which includes similar introductory discussions of major island groups.

⁶Further documentation of dreams would contribute to understanding of the creative and inspirational aspects of Iban textiles. As a form of oral literature it is a study in its own right. While I do accentuate the importance of dreams, dream interpretation is not a point of focus.

of bravery, leadership and taking enemy heads in warfare. Mashman drew on translations of oral literature to interpret Iban values, chants which predominate in celebrations honouring Lang, god of war, and in particular references to warfare and weaving activities.

Mashman's is a thoughtful study, issue-oriented. A limitation concerns the binary quality of the structural approach. Categorization which grounds in male-female categorization ultimately explains away individual variations. My criticism of this approach is illustrated by Freeman with regards for his insight of the root quality of encouragement of *innovation* in Iban ethos (e.g. Freeman 1981).

To sum up the review of literature on Iban textiles: a general criticism concerns the romantic preoccupation with 'traditional' ideas and meanings which Iban textile skills formerly conveyed within respective autonomous communities. There is no doubting the value of studies which gather ethno-historical materials while elders in the community can still recall their 'old ways'. However, the critical task of recording cultural material benefits from issue-oriented research rather than from reaction to change in itself. And reaction to historical changes in the case of Iban textile research refers to a denial of the stony ground on which falls the cultural knowledge transmitted by contemporary weavers (see Ch.11). Innovation in art connects with a fertile receptive capacity, and this communication link is fragile - as is the plight of all urbanizing peoples.

An historical tendency exists in material anthropology, as previously observed, to indulge in 'salvage' work in the face of cultural demise (e.g. Cantwell 1982:2). In its pristine form salvage anthropology is traced to work by American cultural anthropologists who trained under Franz Boas in the early to mid-1900s. Urged by knowledge of the imminent extinction of the practices of American Indian groupings the anthropological intent was to filter out the intrusions of European trade goods to isolate and record the aesthetic patterns of customary lives.

Running counter to theories prevailing at that time regarding the diffusion of ideas grounded in change as an independent variable, early ethnographers and historians

developed the view that pre-European contact patterns were 'traditional' in the sense of a pristine human condition frozen in space and time. The methodology was descriptive, often written in an ethnographic present tense.

The implications of that approach, as carried by its contemporary descendants, can be viewed in an example which is specific to the intentions of this thesis. Indigenous textile arts which women perhaps revive or otherwise continue in the present day are discussed by salvage anthropologists *in terms of past cultural significance* - but rarely in terms of *the lived ways* of those who practise them today.

The salvage approach not only limits the discourse to a static, ahistorical view of primitive art, it can also be faulted for overly subtle screening of symbolic representations and social patterns - towards presentation of a picture of *traditional significance*. In this sense *tradition* presumes a monolithic cultural system. Readers are asked to assume the existence of a *cultural system* comprising a corpus of ideas and beliefs, activities and more tangible aspects of cultural behaviour, universally shared by a cohesive or tribal group of pre-contact people.

This premise is not tenable (e.g. Wuthnow 1984). It ignores relations between knowledge and power; in short it serves to obscure the social and economic context of industrial society and mystify experiences of modernization.

In the past two decades the salvage approach has occurred in the guise of *cultural heritage* research. This lens is commonly applied in writings on contemporary Iban weaving and ritual use of textiles in the service of official cultural reformation - to construct a 'continuity' of cultural forms in terms of what is valued as relevant to a 'traditional' image.

As Eric Hobsbawm (1983:1) points out, while *tradition* implies continuity with the past this concept is more accurately seen as *invented tradition*. The qualification is required to account for the dependent variable of *motivation*, referring to those who record 'traditions' and the objective to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.

Hobsbawm identifies some "invented" traditions as recently introduced, such as symbolic clothing and behaviour surrounding a football club. He also refers to new forms that are revivals of older ones, which can be taken to include the creation of a national costume as a composite of various ethnic dress items (*ibid.*:7). The selection process involves the abstraction of exceptional aspects of a culture and terminates in the creation of stereotypes.

James Nason (1984) observes the process of recreating 'tradition' in the revival of Melanesian handcraft skills, emphasizing current political and economic interests in marketing ethnic crafts to tourists. In a similar example, in studying tourism and its impact on culture and ethnic identity, Robert Wood notes how "cultural productions" such as the Polynesian cultural centre provide "a model culture that selectively attempts to portray the best of those tangible, believable aspects of Polynesian culture with which the tourist can identify". Wood observes that such constructions are by definition statements of the officialdom which constructs them (1984:366).

Accordingly, *traditional* is employed as a critical term in this thesis on the basis that the invention of traditions freezes aspects of a dynamic process involving the transmission of cultural knowledge. *Customary practice*, or its short form *customary*, is used to refer to specific social-cultural patterns of Iban groupings, as will become clear in the following pages.

In coming to a working definition of what is meant by an Iban *customary practice* I am led by Howell, Freeman, Sutlive and others in their understanding of the profound importance of inner cultural variability. At the same time certain recurring patterns are identifiable within what Pringle (1970:34) terms the "almost formless" features of Iban social structure. It is *customary* in Iban communities, for example, to delimit political authority to within discrete family units.

It is also *customary* to encourage the development of choices in respect to the kin group (the husband's or wife's relatives) in which a family takes up residence. And within this community of choice it is *customary* to expect encour-

agement of one's creative development - over and against ossified invented traditions (e.g. Freeman 1981).

This chapter has been primarily concerned with the significance of material culture and current literature in the field of Iban studies. The following chapter introduces more general theoretical literature regarding issues of social change and various approaches to studies of craftwork which contribute to a critical analysis of the social implications of continuing to practise Iban textile art.

CHAPTER 4

STUDIES OF HAND CRAFTS AND PRIMITIVE ARTS

In orientating the reader to the background against which the subject of Iban as weavers will be centred, various theoretical problems have arisen and necessarily been put aside for a more appropriate moment. This chapter provides an opportunity to address such issues which occur within a range of paradigms. These pages also enable expansion on the definitional qualities of *customary practices*.

Specifically, the objective here concerns the thesis approach to the field of *indigenous art*, identified through a survey of principal studies of hand craft activities and non-European arts. An integral aspect of this objective involves the explication of conceptual grounds regarding *social change* in the context of industrialization. The discussion begins with this issue.

STUDIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE.

Theories of 'social change' address problems that arise with industrialization. These include technical and social changes within household craft production and subsistence activities of rural peoples. Literature by anthropologists studying peasant cultivators (e.g. Ennew, Hirst & Tribe 1979, Scott 1976, Wolf 1966) contributes significantly to changing perceptions of indigenous groups, particularly in respect to the latter's relationship with the urban industrial interests of national governments.

The term, *peasants*, generally refers to rural persons who engage in agricultural production on small landholdings, primarily to meet subsistence needs (cf. Worsley 1984, Ennew et.al. 1979, Wolf 1966). They make up the majority of the world's population. *Peasant household* is a term commonly used to define the basic unit of production and consumption, including a reliance on unpaid family labour. However, peasants are not seen as autonomous producers but rather as interdependent - as well as subordinate parts of a larger

society. Household needs actually include a surplus that must be transferred to the dominant outside locus of power, as well as the family's own immediate food and shelter.

To expand on the notion of *peasant* with reference to the regional interest: In Borneo, as well as in the Malayan peninsula and Indonesian archipelago, a number of sultanates extended political and economic domination over coastal Malays prior to British arrival. Rural Malay cultivators can be seen to fit the above definition of *peasant* in that their households were required to provide, to the sultan, a portion of their agricultural crops and in some cases other forms of tribute such as handwoven cloth.

Direct control of indigenous peoples such as Iban living in the jungle interiors was more difficult. Iban individuals were indirectly subjected to the local sphere of power - the sultanate of Brunei - through taxes on the salt which the Iban had to acquire in trade. Iban were also subjected to raids in which Iban men and women were captured and forced to labour in the Sultan's antimony mines or as domestic servants (e.g. Low 1848:17,112). Iban livelihood, however, was not formally administered as long as they resisted domination by the sultanate.

Iban, therefore, occur among other important anthropological examples of autonomous pre-state groups of people who relied on cultivation as a main way of meeting their subsistence needs. But unlike *peasant* peoples, Iban were not subsumed in a larger politically dominant state until quite recently. Nor were Iban individuals subjected to rule by local chiefs or a local elite, as were neighbouring indigenous groups such as the Kenyah whose social organization was based on prescribed stratified classes (Freeman 1955).¹

However, from the time of British hegemony over the north western region of Borneo in the mid 19th century, Iban have been increasingly dominated by outsiders. Direct

¹Rousseau (1980) argued that Ibans have hereditary strata based on Benedict Sandin's suggestion (1970) that Ibans did recognize stratified groupings of elite, commoners, and slaves but as Freeman (1981) points out, this refers primarily to Ibans living in Saribas-Layar region and a recent development of local power being legitimized through Malay forms of social stratification which was imposed on Ibans and subsequently adopted through living in close proximity to Malays.

political rule was imposed first by a British expatriate, who assumed the title Rajah Brooke, followed by formal British colonial administration. In 1963, the Confederation of Malaysia meant that the governing bodies set up to rule Sarawak and Sabah were formally brought together with 11 peninsular Malayan states. Iban thereby became subsumed within the national-economic interests of a Malay elite as constituted by centralized rule from Kuala Lumpur on the Malayan peninsula.

Nonetheless, just two or three generations ago a majority of Iban continued customary social-cultural patterns described in the literature in terms of autonomous and egalitarian (e.g. Freeman 1955). In a profound way this has recently changed.

Today, communities of Iban which still rely on subsistence agriculture have been subsumed within the national economy. Iban in the 1990s face two conflicting waves of pressure: one constrains individuals to take part in wage labour to meet inflating costs of taxes, gas, electricity, clothing and education; the other to continue somehow to grow enough food in the interests of customary autonomy.

Modernization theorists.

In the 1950s Latin Americanists characterised countries within that region of study in terms of 'dual societies'. Agricultural communities were seen as continuing their 'traditional' ways of life alongside urban centres which were developing an industrial based economy. This conceptual framework coincided with the development of a trend in the anthropological discourse to undertake ethnographic descriptions of rural communities - steeped in the implication of 'discretely bounded' entities.

'Duality' was conceived in terms of a 'centre' and a 'periphery'. Theorists explained the 'duality' through a *diffusion* model which proposed that all societies change from undeveloped to more developed stages. Further, the progress towards modernity could be measured by such indices as gross national product and per capita income (Fitzgerald 1981:5). According to *modernization* theorists, development

became possible through outside aid which spread modern technology and capital to backward areas. Hence the assumption of a centre-periphery foundation.

In one criticism, Everett Rogers (1969) suggested that planned social change programs were likely to fail due to an inability to communicate with the rural peasants and failure to change peasant attitudes to modernization - that is, resistances to change. This critique assumed development to be a unilineal progression from a less to a more developed situation. A further problem was evident in Everett's assumption that resistance to change is simply due to an inherently conservative peasantry.

In contrast to the 'conservative' hypothesis, the anthropological literature on Bornean groupings imparts the researchers' intrigue concerning adaptability in the face of altered physical and social environments - usually understood as undergoing constant change (e.g. Appell 1976b:15). Although the notion of *adaptability* lends itself to *conformist* hypotheses, there is substance to the observation of Iban as innovative, competitive, mobile and open to change.

There has been a tendency to explain away these behavioral qualities, for example in the simplification of Iban *bejalai*. This practice is characterized as a customary long journey young men make in order to gain worldly experience and material goods through work (or more recently through university training). It has become a commonplace to interpret *bejalai* simply as an 'adventurous nature'. In such thinking can be perceived echoes of the *modernization* theorists' neglect of particular social-economic pressures that account for individuals' behavior. More seriously the perception of adventurism lacks any substantive biological basis.

To sum up *modernization*, the 'centre-periphery' model begs questions of imperialism and 'backwardness' of colonial countries in terms of productivity gains accumulated by the 'centre' at the expense of the 'periphery' (e.g. O'Brien 1975).

Dependency theorists.

Dependency theory was developed by Latin Americanists in response to the *modernization* theorists' failure to account for the exploitative relationship between industrial metropolises and the rural hinterland (i.e. the centre-periphery issue). In the 1970s *dependency* theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank (1967) emphasized that it is dependency on the metropole that perpetuates 'underdevelopment' and not so-called 'peasant conservatism'. Dos Santos explained the concept of *dependence* in the following way:

By dependence we mean a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. The relation of interdependence between two or more economies, and between these and world trade, assumes the form of dependence when some countries (the dominant ones) can expand and can be self-sustaining, while other countries (the dependent ones) can do this only as a reflection of that expansion, which can have either a positive or a negative effect on their immediate development. (In Chilcote & Edelstein 1974:26)

Underdevelopment is brought about by the expansion of capitalism in the developed countries as capital is drawn out of colonial countries through means such as repatriated funds, interest on loans and fees for royalties. According to *dependency* theorists, development is feasible only when internally-generated and self-sustaining, and that requires revolutionary social change to equalize access to resources and power, not simply more modern technology.

The *dependency* model, with its emphasis on relationships, is significant in its explanation of how third world countries are dependent on an unstable world market. At the level of the community, *dependency* theory emphasises how socio-economic changes there are related to and not independent of more dominant industrial and political interests of the state and international powers. Even the most isolated groups in remote areas of Borneo are required to participate in the cash economy in many different ways. While they may appear to have minimal requirements for cash, they too are affected by world market prices for oil, electricity, coffee and cotton thread.

Sarawakan examples of metropole-hinterland situations concern the establishment of 'enclave economies' in which strategic products such as off-shore oil are concentrated in restricted areas, and controlled by a small number of enterprises. Such situations result in a rich metropole (e.g. the urban centre Miri) which is mostly foreign-owned (the *enclave*) and employs only a small percentage of the local population. This situation contrasts markedly with the contiguous establishment of a large poor hinterland subjected to inflationary prices of the metropole.

Andre Gunder Frank's (1967) work on the metropole-hinterland relationship has also been criticized for its focus on geographic (i.e. spatial) analysis of distribution and the level of exchange, which tends to obscure class relations of production (Fitzgerald 1981). Clearly there is value in the *dependency* model in regard to the attention it draws to unequal relationships in exchange between economic classes. However, the conceptual base of the theory serves to deny the active role played by the dominated party, (i.e. the developing country or rural community). Emphasis on perceptions of dependence on an outside force generates an unwanted consequence - maintaining that situation.

As Norman Long (1975) points out, there are also problems with operationalization of the dependency relationship - it is not easily made relevant to the experience of individuals. Nevertheless the critical approach of *dependency* theorists provides a significant break from earlier, less critical studies of modernization.

Articulation of modes of production.

The *articulation of modes of production* approach of French theorists such as Godelier, Rey and Meillassoux (1972), attempts to overcome the weaknesses of the dependency relationship by addressing both the level of production and the level of exchange (Foster-Carter 1978:212-218).

A *mode of production* is conceptualized as a dialectical relation between:

1. a particular set of 'factors of production' (eg. land labour and capital) which includes technological aspects (tools, materials, techniques), and

2. specific 'social relations of production' that indicate who does what, who owns or has access to what resources, who controls the production process, and who owns and controls the products of labour, their distribution, exchange and consumption.

'Production' refers to the process by which individuals through their labour, tools and technology, transform the object of their labour in order to gain some material or economic return. 'Mode' refers to a method of doing - stressing the process such that it would be misleading to consider 'a mode of production' as though it were an object (Chalmers 1985:32).

'Modes' are objectified however in the sense that theorists have attempted to define various modes, (e.g. a capitalist mode, feudal, primitive, foraging modes etcetera). The 'articulation' concept is the key, as it emphasizes the relationship between differing modes as a 'process in time'. It helps explain how a mode of production might change as it is sustained and replicated over time. Different modes of production are initially linked through the sphere of exchange, and as the dominant mode (i.e. capitalist) eventually subordinates other existing non-capitalist modes, they are transformed and eventually disappear (Foster-Carter 1978:218).

An immediate contradiction is evident however; the very generation of a typology of 'modes' results in static categories, for systems of production that are assumed to be undergoing rapid changes due to influences of industrialization. This contradiction points to the fact that theorists cannot agree about the relevance of various modes (e.g. Lee 1981, Ennew et al. 1979, Sahlins 1972). Further, there is no evidence that non-capitalist modes such as forms of household production involving only family labour will die out (e.g. Chalmers 1985:220).

The *articulation of modes of production* approach has been developed from Marx's critique of the capitalist system. The 'capitalist mode' is defined by a system where the actual producers do not own their means of production and where production is based on wage labour. The owner of the means of production is not necessarily a producer himself, but is the owner who controls the production

process and the products of the worker's labour. Marx (1867) noted how the owner appropriates the "value-added" component through production in the form of items to sell as commodities. While the actual producers receive some set fee or wage, the owner keeps all "surplus value", usually to reinvest as capital to increase production towards greater profit-taking. By contrast non-capitalist production is conceptualized as production not contingent on outside wage labour.

Further, the articulation of modes of production approach has conceptual problems regarding adequate identification and explanation of non-capitalist forms. Yet it is productive in its application to empirical studies of craft production within the context of industrializing societies wherever it is envisaged as an organizational tool.

In sum, the theory is open to criticism on grounds both of economic- and capitalist-centred thinking. Yet as an organizational tool its usefulness is particularly strong in studies: 1) which focus on the impact of industrialization (which involves capital intense technology); and 2) where industrial development is assumed to reflect the dominant ideology that prevails in the region of study (e.g. Malaysian government economic policy).

I employ this approach in my study of Iban textile art as a guiding principal for micro-level analysis of particular production processes.² Such a frame of reference which focusses on social relations of production, (defined in terms of ownership and control of the means of production, production process and products of labour), enables a critical understanding of the craftsperson's relationship to their craft. And further, it generates questions concerning political-economic classes (e.g. capitalist owners, wage labour) which dominate national interests. An important implication is that this approach emphasises identification

²From here one can proceed to investigate processes by which the surplus product is created and extracted. However, it is not an objective of this study to attempt a formal economic cost analysis which entails investigation of personal income and expenditures for individual households.

of the heterogeneity which characterises the craft sector (Chalmers 1992:67). The point is highly significant in the context of the inner cultural variability of Iban groupings.

A second implication is this approach also facilitates cross-cultural analysis of activities of individuals involved in handcrafts in other countries where individuals' lives are also subject to similar influences of industrialization. Such cross-cultural comparisons are not possible if restricted to 'culture-specific' labels. While culture-specific terms are crucial to an understanding of Iban meanings, conceptual definitions are less than useful which are restricted to subjective stratification based on descriptive *occupation* such as farmer, doctor or artisan which do not critically address questions of access to resources or control over how these activities are carried out.

In the case of craft work, the prevailing interests of traders, art patrons and tourists imply a product- or commodity-centred analysis. An *articulation of modes of production* framework overcomes this problem through connecting observations of culture-specific activities to the production and use of cultural phenomena and ultimately articulating this relationship to external forces.

STUDIES OF CRAFT PRODUCTION.

Alienation is a central theme in studies concerning the impact of industrialization on the life of artisans (e.g. Read 1967, Fischer 1963). Erich Fromm (*In Finnigan & Gonick* 1972) observes Marx's definition of *alienation* in the context of felt experience under capitalist working conditions: "[One's] own act becomes to him an alien power, standing over and against him, instead of being ruled by him". The implications relate to situations where workers no longer carry out the whole process in production, but due to machinery, are only required to push a button or similar menial task.

In this sense technology heavily determines experience. The way in which one works establishes the structure and meaning of one's experience. Pfaffenberger (1988:239) explains this with a quote from Marx:

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the means of subsistence they actually find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of these individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are.

While identity is determined by deed rather than thought, to focus exclusively on technical aspects of mechanization overly determines the causality of technology.

Similarly technological over-emphasis terminates in the thinking that technology, particularly 'high technology', determines how production is carried out. Such an explanatory framework overlooks, or at least obscures, the social or human relations involved. Work practice is not dependent on nor overly-shaped by the machinery. As does the concept of *dependency* the idea of *alienation* implies the alienated party has no active role. Moreover *alienation* as a concept serves to obscure relative degrees of such alienation and importantly, to gloss over the felt experience of one working under specific conditions (e.g. Alvim 1983).

All too often studies of industrialization simply assume that modern technology represents a unilinear process of development, that technical *capabilities* justify the position that life is better with, than without, this 'advance'. Such thinking ignores questions of non-sustainable development, resource depletion, environmental ruination, intolerable workplace conditions - issues which indicate the mono-causal quality of 'technological progressivist' arguments (e.g. Pfaffenberger *op.cit.*).

A tendency can be observed in one-dimensional theories on progress to reduce issues of industrialization fallibility by invoking notions of 'rapid scientific discovery'. In this way readers are asked to accept that out-of-control technology is a problem of user deficiencies thereby conserving belief in the theory of one road to development.

Pfaffenberger notes the importance of defining technology to clarify how it is "a system, not just of tools, but also of related social behaviours and techniques":

Technology, then, is *essentially* social, not 'technical'. When one examines the 'impact' of a technology on society, therefore, one is obliged to examine the impact of the technology's embedded social behaviours and meanings" (Pfaffenberger 1988:241).

Turning to the experience of indigenous artisans in relation to the introduction of technology: stated baldly, household handcraft persists. Despite the emphasis on mass production through increasing industrial technologies, household handcraft production not only persists but in many rural areas it has been officially encouraged. The rationale is explicit. Household craft production is a means by which families might supplement their income where families are not able to meet subsistence needs through agriculture, and where alternative work opportunities are not available.

In the face of the unexpected resiliency of household craftwork production some researchers in this field have been attempting to learn more about the pressures of industrialization on the social and economic roles of traditional artisans (e.g. Novelo 1976, Littlefield 1979, Alvim 1983, Morrissey 1983, Ribiero 1983, Chalmers 1985).

Focussing on the indigenous commercial production of handcrafts in Brazil, Ribiero (1983) was concerned with the issue of distribution of economic benefits between producers and middlemen, and the impact this situation had on the quality of craftwork.

Maria Alvim approached the study of crafts from the level of production and analysis of the relations of production. Alvim (1983:76) saw craftsmanship as "a form of production where the worker has an important role in the productive process of making the product, since it depends on his ability and on his know-how."

Alvim addressed the evident loss of artistic content in connection with the artisan's alienation from their work. She noted how jewellers working in a factory saw themselves merely as workers, working "for the salary". However, she observed complexities within the 'piece work' situation. She noted that an employer supplied the materials and directed the process and products. However, because the person worked at home and carried out all of the production processes on

a personal skill basis, the artist owned the 'art' even if the actual product did not stay with him.

She argued that the craftsperson (here male jewellers) saw the art as something he controlled since it became possible only through personal knowledge and skills. Nonetheless, the artisans were also aware that while the employer did not have the art, he has the trade. Consequently the monetary rewards were insufficient for the artisans to encourage their children to become craft producers.

In my study of weaving communities in highland areas of Guatemala and Peru (Chalmers 1985), a mode of production framework was productive in unravelling social variations in ways in which craft production is organized in that regional context. Of particular relevance were the consequences of respective decisions made by artisans and craft producers in response to commoditization on the one hand, and household priorities related to subsistence needs on the other.

However, as in the case in Alvim's study, a mode of production analysis was much less useful for explaining non-economic aspects such as creative or 'artistic' rewards. Accordingly, investigation of *motivation* was channelled through analysis of the subjective observations of craftspeople and researcher respectively.

Nonetheless, acknowledging the limitations of an economic approach it remains productive, for reasons of what are cautiously termed primary needs of subsistence. It is a premise which does not seek to isolate economic from aesthetic factors, since the approach involves the artisan's own value systems. The aim is to attempt to connect wholly with the modernization experiences of artisans: the felt quality of everyday lives including relationships with others in the family and community.

Another way of expressing the same objective is that the persistence of traditional handcraft production is related to motivation at the level of production and use value. Nelson Graburn (1973:13) makes this observation in *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*. His study develops identifying qualities in the

perpetuation of handcraft against a backdrop of industrialization (*ibid.*). These variables include:

- * **continued demand** for craft products by the community to which the maker belongs (e.g. through the role of the items in supporting belief systems and ritual or gift exchange systems);

- * **rewards** which include material goods or services through exchange use; physical or spiritual strength through use in healing etc.; personal prestige and social status, including how the role of the crafts-person is perceived by peer-group members, including family, friends and neighbours;

- * **time** availability over and against other activities such as agricultural work or wage labour;

- * **availability of traditional raw materials;**

- * **active cultural transmission** of skills and aesthetic elements within the maker's community.

Motivation is used in this thesis as a social-cultural concept, in contrast to paradigms which aim at identifying certain predispositions of individuals. As a social-cultural construct, *motivation* concerns the place of weaving skills in a community and how individuals live *through* a world in which weaving is a primary element in cultural transmission. The implications for the meaning of art are expressed in the following passage from Paul Wingert (1962:26):

... before the full significance of an art that is so completely a part of its cultural fabric can be perceived, it is necessary to examine insofar as possible the *motivating* forces that led to its creation, the manner in which it functioned within the cultural setting, and the meaning it had for those who used it.

Wingert goes on to say that while *motivation* addresses the question 'why' an object is made, the issue of 'how' an object is used evokes questions of *function* (1962:64).

Consequently, the meaning of a particular art object can be said to include its representative qualities, its decorative effects that have a wide, perhaps universal audience, and the ideas, feelings and interpretations it conveys. Graburn's research demonstrates concern with the integrity of indigenous art objects in terms of retention of not just form, but of ideas and messages. He notes how tourist arts convey changes in the sense that they embody a

craftperson's intentions. Intentionality that changes over time both affects production processes and can be read in the finished object.

Graburn is critical of the negative influence of commodity or serial reproduction, a situation which again can be read in the craft object:

When the desperation of poverty and the forces of the market cause people to churn out items that have no connections with their traditional belief systems and do not reflect their previous standards of craftsmanship, one feels that the messages conveyed do not express pride and joy, but instead are saying: 'We are forced into this to make a living; this is not us, these are not our standards, this is you using us for cheap labour'. (1973:27)

To emphasise an earlier point, craft studies frequently concern rural people who have difficulty meeting subsistence needs. In those studies where a bald *economic* variable is foregrounded, one frequently encounters the generalization of the necessity of commercializing craft skills, given the need to meet family subsistence needs. This kind of thinking commonly proceeds by isolating craft skills from the indigenous social-cultural fabric, attaching stripped down *economic* factors to the infrastructure while relegating aesthetic aspects to superstructural realms. Overly determined economic schema, whether marxist or classical, leave little conceptual space for considering the meaning of indigenous art - as an end in itself.

In some such cases, while the analysis is not intended to devalue 'non-economic' factors, the terminology ('production', 'product', 'value', 'supply', 'demand') pre-determines blindspots in the interpretation of indigenous artwork. For example, craft 'production' usually implies a value of creating and possessing a 'product' for some material or economic gain.

The risk of alluding to an unintended discourse through the use of economic indicators occurs in Graburn's suggestion that the perpetuation of 'traditional' handcraft production is dependent on continuing *demand* by the local community. While the term *demand* is understood as inclusive of religious, aesthetic and other cultural pressures, for

other readers it will trigger de-contextualized economic ideas.

Common remarks in the Iban literature might be seen as confirmation that Iban perceive their textiles as products in the sense that many are treasured as heirlooms which are passed on at death. Again cloths are viewed as valuable *items* in that they are given during marriages or for critical healing services. It is the intention in this thesis to show the complexities of these situations, in respect to the social role of activities related to making and using textiles. That is, social and economic benefits are not merely accessed through textiles as 'end products', but through the production process itself.

Thus, by considering a *mode of production* approach in analyses below, an attempt is made to make explicit the economic bias of the terminology.

TEXTILES AND ARTISTIC PRACTICE.

The development of the conceptual grounds of this thesis continues by turning to the field of art and society. The relevance of this interest, as will be clear from the above discussion, concerns the attempt to complement a *mode of production* approach. More generally, the issue-oriented studies of handcraft production constitute an economic discourse. And a Western-centred cultural analysis stands opposed to fruitful investigation of indigenous experiences of craftwork in the context of industrialization.

Studies of non-European art include research under the heading of terms such as 'primitive', 'tribal', 'traditional', 'folk', 'native', and 'indigenous' art. In a recent paper Eric Casino (n.d.:1) reflects on Haselberger's attempt to avoid such labels through two anthropological concepts. One category is 'Ethnographic art' which implies a descriptive approach to art of specific socialities with a 'common cultural system'. The second is 'Ethnological art' which identifies an analytical or cross-cultural approach.

The origin of this specific preoccupation with labels is historically accounted for, by the reality that indigenous 'arts' are generally not included in European studies of art

history and the western concept of 'fine art'. 'Fine art', which implies the separation of fine artist from the craftsman, is a European conception deriving from eighteenth century Renaissance art theory.

Lucie-Smith traces the concept of 'fine art' to the Royal Academy and a European perspective aimed at giving their specialists 'professional' status, a higher position than mere tradesmen (1981:165).³ This distinction between artists and craftspeople has developed into a debate about what forms do or do not qualify as 'art' - focussing on 'the medium'. Painting, sculpture and architecture are examples of selected media whereas forms ultimately excluded involve such skills as ceramics and tapestry - both tainted by domination of the factory system with the impact of industrial revolution.

The categorization terminates in whether or not a social grouping had developed painting technology (i.e. paper) or had established a factory system. Consequently, artwork arising in and carrying the knowledge of groupings through media such as clay or wood or cloth (including hand painted ones), has historically been under-valued by the majority of analysts of 'fine art'.

This discourse, accordingly, developed little appreciation of the subtle qualities of inner variation in many ethnographic artefacts - assuming imitation instead. In part the origin of the problematic Western perception of *originality* can be traced to European distress over the loss of human input and originality through the factory system of mass production.

Turning to another usage of the word art, it sometimes refers to the institutionalized sphere (trade or craft) that applies a particular system of principles and methods. The interest in textile arts influences a focus on the *arrangement of colours and forms*. Further, an adherence to Iban aesthetic-economic values pre-disposes an emphasis on *innovation*. In a related context, Iban reliance on dream

³ Cf. B. Reynolds study of the status of Kwandu craftsmen (1967:304) noting that a simple definition of crafts in terms of European cottage industries is not feasible either - that "to achieve a definition it is necessary to examine the craftsman from the viewpoint of his own society".

sources for their artwork determines analytical interest in *intuitive faculties* which cannot be learned solely by manual practice. At the same time, these defining qualities of *art* include a focus on *technique* in the understanding that experience and practice are vital aspects of the mastery of the skills and thereby basic to the artform.

With reference to the quality of *intuitive* or *immediate experience* in Iban textile arts, Herbert Read explained:

art is not concerned with the struggle for existence in the economic sense ... but rather with the mystery of existence in the human and metaphysical sense (1936/1967:35).

Read teaches that the more vital a work of art the more powerful are the ideas it suggests. Informants in Iban communities confirm this sense of the meaning of an art object. Some cloths are more powerful than others depending on motivational qualities of the maker. Only an accomplished weaver dares to tie particularly 'dangerous' motifs while only some of these individuals draw upon dream images rather than existing cloth patterns. The greater the store of the maker's energy carried in a ritual cloth, the more potent the textile as a protective cloth or signal announcing an event to an audience of gods. Only the finest cloths would be used to receive an enemy head, for example. At the same time this power is not perceived as a static store within the object, but is renewed in subsequent activities which fulfil the purpose of the artwork.

In regard to the intentionality of the artist, prior to the making of the object, John Dewey (1934/1958) noted, there is felt experience. The writer referred to an *immediacy* that inheres in the created piece and is implicit in its purposive use. Consequently, Dewey argued, art objects intensify the human environment; they are "enhancements of the processes of everyday life" (*op.cit.*:6).

Dewey understood "the arts by which primitive folk commemorated and transmitted their customs and institutions, arts that were communal, are the sources out of which all fine arts have developed". At the same time "they were more than just art" (*ibid.*:327).

Ernst Fischer's *The Necessity of Art* (1963) emphasises the social properties of art. Art is a social activity "par

excellence, common to all and raising all men above nature" (Fischer 1963:13). In some indigenous groupings, art expresses experiences shared by all, other than the impaired. While it reflects the ideas of a community, it is the product of individuals.

The concern expressed by the preceding writers for the creative content of artwork informs the *intuitive* element of the usage of art in this thesis. The quality of immediacy returns the study of Iban textiles to the sphere of the maker, and away from concerns with 'cultural heritage' and related nationalist purposes. The *purposive* quality of the cloths are not separable from community needs, but *purpose* precedes social significance in its intimate connection with the process of innovation.

The preceding variables constitute conceptual grounds for the preference of identifying Iban cloths as 'textile art' over 'handcraft production'. The emphasis on the *process of intentionality* (as in 'artwork') is crucial to my objectives since the *process of production* as a defining quality (as in 'handcraft production') perpetuates an economic view of the maker's *intentions*, in addition to its wider social implications (unassisted by machinery, etcetera). To focus on cloth weavers as 'craftspersons' pre-determines a reader's expectations of manual expertise whereas accenting the artwork, critical analysis addresses cultural knowledge.

The intention is not to imply that cultural transmission is wholly the domain of innovation in Iban communities. The preceding argument *accentuates* creativity on the grounds of Freeman's insight. In his seminal study of Baleh Iban communities in the 1950s the writer learned the elementary importance of *pun* or creative qualities in the life of Iban individuals:

The root meaning of *pun* is that of a *fons et origo*, or stem, as of a tree, from which the development of any-kind of activity springs (Freeman 1981:31).

At the same time, most Iban weavers *imitate* the design work of others. Yet, the utmost value is placed on elaboration however minor. And, ultimate honours fall on those who originate symbolic representations. Further demonstrating

the value of creativity is the 'universal' capacity to respond critically to the making of a new design. This observation refers to the critical capacities of women, certainly, but also men who rarely make the cloths.

The world of the Iban weaver is highly uncertain. An annual crop of hill rice is fraught with potential problems. The upper Rejang hillsides are steep. Below, Rejang rivers run wild in the wet season and the exposed boulders are treacherous to negotiate in dry times. Dreams, sickness, injury, disaster, emergency, and mistake "all reveal the unreliability of the social world; all present a menace of various degrees to the paramount reality of everyday life." (Berger in Wuthnow et.al. 1984:27)

This is the stuff with which Iban ceremonial textiles have connected in Iban experience; dreams to gain assurance, guidance and permission to attempt original designs, dreams which warn a person of danger, and the need to attend to one's actions, and assure responsibility by carrying out proper rituals.

Ethnoaesthetics is an approach to art analysis which comes out of the anthropological tradition of ethnography. *Ethnoaesthetic* theory grounds in the premise that an adequate appreciation of art objects of other cultural groups is dependent on gaining an understanding of the frame of reference of the group within and for whom it was created.

Drawing on the usefulness of ethnoaesthetics in this thesis does not imply the belief that there can be no macro-level concept of art which humans can 'universally' learn to share. Simply, my objectives cluster on more microscopic analysis. The aim in applying ethnoaesthetics as a guide is towards greater subjective understanding of culturally specific meanings.

An important implication is that within any ethnographic collection of artefacts, some belong to a category of art and are not appropriately lumped together with other 'ethnographic material'.

Ethnoaesthetics is not only equally relevant to all cultures, as an approach it refuses precedence to 'European' concepts of 'fine art'. Yet it includes art from various

'European' or 'western' cultures wherein it emphasizes the heterogeneity. It achieves this aim by focussing on particular social historical situations which are commonly subsumed under the more general concept of 'fine art'.

The following is a brief example of the significance of applying ethnoaesthetic methods to analysis of Iban textile arts. *Repetitiveness* is the common denominator applied to a collection of 'surrealistic' style ikat cloths by the untrained Western observer. The comment is translated as 'variations on a single theme' and 'a singular combination of colours reflecting a lack of individual creativity'. However, in Iban perception which guides ethnoaesthetic empathy, each cloth represents a specific theme. And the colour combination of red, white and 'black' is revealed as polysemic, that is, that the theme determines the meaning of the colour. Red for example might represent the potency of birth blood or the aesthetics of decay as in blood spilt.

Accordingly, an ethnoaesthetic approach to Iban textile arts emphasizes affinity with the value system of the makers and users. It is noteworthy that most individuals in Iban communities customarily learn to share an awareness of this form of art whether they practise it or not. Every individual making cloths, novice or other, is encouraged to innovate and modify as opposed to blindly imitate.

The majority of individuals, weavers and others, customarily learn to differentiate between skilfully crafted cloths. They point out with ease and pleasure those pieces perceived as more potent. *Potency*, as will become clearer as the discussion develops, refers to both an active as well as a receptive quality - usually likened, not quite accurately, to a *shielding* process. A shield suggests armour-like whereas the cloth acquires a more dynamic or fertile nature in addition to a more nurturing capacity.

On these conceptual grounds it is possible to see why a cloth has acquired fame among Iban as a body covering during critical moments in the personal life cycle and a shrine covering during similar liminal moments in the life of the community (e.g. after a death, during construction of a new longhouse and during festivals generally when, at night, Iban gods and spirits are welcomed into the longhouse).

As a further example of *ethnoaesthetic data* in the same context, Iban individuals commonly perceive excellence in respect to experience. *Immediate* experience enables development of excellence in respect to the granting of assistance by spiritual guides. Only a weaver who thereby has the physical, as well as spiritual strength, will know to attempt particular designs. These motifs are not necessarily the most technically difficult nor the most elaborate ones. They are simply believed to be appropriate to an experienced individual, and hence 'dangerous' to others and capable of causing illness or death.

It will be clear from previous observations that the Iban aesthetic system values novel symbolic representations. Significant, too, are new cloths which transmit, and at the same time *renew*, an old design which originates from a particularly skilled ancestor.

Thus, old cloths that might appear merely ragged and faded to an untrained eye sometimes belong to a highly valued category - because they 'shield' the memories of the spirits of their makers and past ritual uses. The cloths in which the makers have developed skills enough to attain a rich red tone are also valued. This achievement is considerable when using plant material as do Iban dyers.

INTERPRETING CULTURAL PHENOMENA.

The intention here is to generate conceptual grounds which explain the preceding ethnoaesthetic data, as well as inform analysis in data to be presented below.

In that they relate very closely to Iban cultural transmission, textile skills do not simply reflect aesthetic speculation but serve to renew social-cultural practices. They do so both through use and through specific activities relating to their production. In particular, Iban social-cultural activities are borne by individuals in their roles of weavers, ritual specialists and celebratory hosts. Each of these sets of skills serves the individual in the sense of personal development, but also generates an 'educational'

role model for others.⁴ In her study of symbolism, Nancy Munn identifies the dynamic aspect of the process of transmitting cultural literacy or *value* in the following terms:

actors construct meaningful order in the process of being constructed in its terms (Munn 1986:6).

I draw on this understanding of *cultural value* in my work. The adjective *cultural* is used to identify an aesthetic as opposed to an economic sense of quantitative worth.

Efforts in my thesis at uncovering the meaning of Iban ikat textile art connect intimately with learning more about the world of the weaver. Towards the latter primary objective, ethnoaesthetics guides enquiries into the basis on which Iban individuals customarily measure their personal social position in the community.

In the sense that Iban customary practices develop within an ethos of *choice* (e.g. Freeman 1981), the following observation of Goldschmidt (1963:26) is productive: values are social-cultural phenomena which arise in and represent the development of individual *choice* in the face of alternate modes of *action*.

Munn (*op.cit.*) concurs that investigation of *value* begins by looking at overt forms of action and practices on the basis that these constitute elements of culturally meaningful forms. *Meaning*, accordingly, is a "cover term for the relational nexus that enters into any given socio-cultural form or practice and defines that practice" (Munn 1986:6).

As elements of artwork and other *practice*, ideas and intentions become embodied in the object as meaning. These elements are reflected in the artefact but are not 'facts' - they invoke *cultural* interpretation. That is, the meaning is decoded by members of a community through socialization skills, into the knowledge and practices of that particular cultural grouping. Ethnoaesthetics is grounded in the decodification of culturally specific meaning. This process

⁴Iban roles as farmers are obviously central to personal development and cultural transmission. While fieldwork is carried out on isolated farms, much of the winnowing, drying and related food preparation are performed in the community.

of entering more fully into the practice of artisans via their value systems enables interpretation of the art object. And conversely, a productive interpretation of the art object generates meaning of cultural practice.

The conceptual approach in the thesis to the question of *de-codification* takes its outlines from Peter Berger's phenomenological writings. Berger understands that the reality of everyday life presents itself as normal, self-evident, ordered, objective, shared with others (e.g. Wuthnow 1984:32). Within a cultural grouping, individuals share a common *stock of knowledge* that differentiates things of 'reality' and provides the necessary information to be productive in everyday life.

This body of knowledge varies in that individuals develop relative degrees of precision concerning comprehension in the context of diverse concerns and priorities. Importantly it is the *historical uses* of this knowledge which ultimately determines its meaning. It can be said that a corpus of knowledge is determined by *pragmatic motive*, whereby *pragmatism* identifies the contextual quality of knowledge (e.g. *ibid.*:32).

For example, customarily a highly skilled Iban textile artist developed social status through the use of her aesthetic literacy. A culturally literate Iban who practised socially irrelevant art gained little social status. Practice that was relevant to the community renewed the cultural knowledge of that grouping. Berger's observation was this: *cultural meanings* identify "meanings people share inter-subjectively; but that are also objectivated in a variety of cultural artifacts" (*ibid.*:37-8).

This observation throws light, too, on the defining qualities of *social status*. The relationship between art skills and social standing has been explained in terms of value attached to the use of cultural knowledge in ways which renew a system of knowledge. In sum, the notion of the *indigenous artist's social status* incorporates both the lived or immediate experience of the artist and the social role of artistic skills, in the context of cultural transmission.

To explain further, John Dewey (1953) observes that prior to artifacts becoming group property they constitute the experience of individual makers. On becoming ritual objects the artistic skills and ritual talents involved in their use speak of human actions *carried out in the form of social roles*. The social dimension of art practice gives rise to increased status wherever this practice is relevant to the group; this much has been expressed above. Developing this notion further: 'social roles' identify responsibilities structured around specific rights and duties in the context of particular social situations.

It is fruitful to invoke from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* his understanding that social rights disguise or serve as a sugar-coating for the prescriptive or obligatory elements of group life. At the same time, customary social roles were relatively sweet-smelling in the case of Iban artists, such was the choice operative cultural knowledge they helped construct (e.g. Freeman 1981).

Nonetheless, social roles are *intentionally* carried out, though *naively* grasped, by most humans in the course of their daily lives. Social roles can be seen as providing sets of institutionalized activities and behavior so that the actor does not have to think about what to do and how to carry out daily activities. Roles represent the characteristic and expected social behavior of an individual. Important here is that social roles are contextualized by power relations which, in binary terms, can be seen in the relationship of mother/child, teacher/student, employer/employee. These are not restricted to binary categories however. This point is demonstrated by the earlier definition of the dynamic quality of Iban cultural transmission. The social role of an Iban individual who develops a high degree of skill in weaving both reflects and develops value and meaning for activities that are observable phenomena in the cultural setting.

There is a primary assumption in this thesis that each individual creates his or her reality while their actions and artefacts both reflect and renew intentionality. Through an individual's objectified social reality the person learns and is socialized into their family and social community.

And in the case of an Iban woman who is a textile artist with highly developed skills and social standing, her specific construction of reality becomes a significant component of the *group's* body of understandings.

ECONOMIC BROKERAGE.

An assumption is made that an Iban individual's values and behavior are governed by (or even embrace) *change*, hence these behaviours can not be said to represent static beliefs in the way that 'traditional' or 'institutionalized' behavior implies. Again, uncertainty, conflict and change are assumed to be the singular constant in Iban lives.

Yet, not all changes are of equal quality. I refer to Iban experiences of modernization. There are parallels with the impact of industrialization on artists in Europe although an obvious difference relates to the rural situation of Iban weavers. In Europe and Borneo individuals experienced abrupt alterations. With the technical and social changes, the different values connected to such new roles as employee/employer, producer/buyer of tourist arts, Iban artists also currently undergo a process of socialization into urban industrial society.

Where individuals appear to be working independently, 'economic brokers' have increased their presence in Sarawak today. As *brokers* individuals carry out their particular roles as traders, school teachers, missionaries or health officers. In another sense, as intermediaries between the local community and outside institutions they can be conceptualized as cultural, religious or political brokers.

Brokers include Iban who leave their local community, temporarily or permanently, to be educated and employed outside of their longhouse community. They also include local Chinese or Malay nationals, foreign residents, and international tourists.

An individual who may be classified, say, as an 'economic broker' through their role of commercial trader, also carries out a combination of other roles which can include any like father, brother, friend, art patron, a particular religious or political party representative. A study of

brokerage, like a study of particular modes of craft production, suits an actor-oriented perspective.

While an exhaustive study of the various roles of the various brokers who interact between an Iban longhouse and urban industrial society is beyond the scope of this paper, exploration of significant 'others' with whom longhouse weavers interact is central to understanding the means by which changes in personal values are evaluated and integrated into contemporary practices and meanings of Iban textile art.

A study of brokers such as professional traders who establish and maintain relationships with local producers and external markets provide insight into the mechanisms by which economic surplus is extracted; that is, help to explain how independent producers and their particular methods of production are articulated to the capitalist system (e.g. Long 1975:273-5).

SUMMARY.

This study basically draws on an anthropological approach which centres on ethnographic fieldwork to uncover the various practices of Iban beliefs concerning textile arts. Focus is on various social roles carried out by individuals who make customary Iban ikat textiles and significant others who influence their decisions regarding how they structure their weaving activities in relation to their daily lives.

Emphasis is applied to personal networks and identification of various types of brokers who act as intermediaries between a weaver and the interests of the local community as well as between the local community and larger more complex values of urban industrial society.

There is a strong interest in the identification of recurring factors and aspects of change in the production and use of Iban ikat ritual cloths in the context of industrialization. This focus requires a social historical understanding at a more macro-level and a critical analysis of values and meanings that are not confined to one specific community.

While the fundamental level of explanation remains grounded in micro-level analysis of individuals and cultural specific material, findings are articulated with a more macro-level analysis of a wider social historical context by using a mode of production framework as an organizational tool.

In the following chapters, data relating to Iban weaving activities are presented. The materials concern current practices observed in Iban longhouse communities and within new social settings in urban centres. The intention is to develop an understanding of the experiences of individuals practising textile arts against a background of industrialization.

SECTION THREE

IBAN TEXTILE ARTWORK

Before moving on to a technical investigation of Iban textile work, it is appropriate to set the change of scene since the different quality of language in this section is a part of a lengthy microscopic analysis of ikat work which extends over several chapters.

In a recent publication entitled *Sarawak Cultural Legacy, a living tradition*, Empiang Jabu (1991:76) observes that the cloths "represent the quintessence of Iban culture". Her comments are widely heard in Sarawak through her roles as patron of the arts, president of *Sarakap Indu Dayak* (a Dayak women's organization) and wife to a state deputy chief minister. This observation becomes a starting point for all ethnographic Iban art research in that the creation and use of ikat cloths serve an active and primary role in customary ritual activities within longhouse communities.

My objective is two-fold: firstly to contribute to this body of ethnographic data by providing detailed descriptions of how ikat cloths are being made and used in an Iban longhouse in the Baleh region in the period, 1990-1993; and secondly to contribute to a critical understanding of the current Sarawakian context of Iban textile arts by foregrounding the significance of external influences of culture brokers, particularly with regard for the loss of agency of women as artisans.

In pre-state Iban communities, *within* the longhouse community a leading weaver's public comments were 'official'. Iban weavers played an active role in creating and renewing the genre. In a crucial way this is not entirely true today. As will be demonstrated in this thesis, the 'official' voice in the 1990s is increasingly an *outside* agency. In this regard the purpose and meaning of Iban cloths and the roles of the weavers are being significantly altered.

Iban textiles, as they are made and exhibited in the 1990s tell a story of a nationalist and industrial overlay. These cloths are shown here to be 'invented traditions' and as such, are understood never to be static (e.g. Hobsbawm 1983). However, the romantic strain which predominates in the literature insists on a more permanent and absolute story, one that portrays Iban ikat cloths within an idealized historical context. Obviously, designs which are inspired within the context of industrializing society which is characterized by rising costs of living and unemployment, can not express the same vitality as those generated within the context of jungle warfare.

Intricate ritual cloths made and used by Iban people in Borneo are amongst the finest examples of warp ikat textiles produced in South-East Asia. Examples of Iban textile art are treasured by major museums and art galleries throughout the world.¹ The invented traditions or historical styles of the cloths vary from time to time and place to place, but the most significant weavings narrate free-flowing dream tales.

Yet within the story-telling, as is the case in Western surrealist art, specific elements in the overall design are highly condensed symbolic representations. One reason for this density is the close-knit fabric of customary Iban communities of kith and kin - to whom a simple motif conveys complexities of an art genre with a long history.

But discontinuities in these practices are occurring in a profound way. Current government focus on increased industrialization (productivity and revenue) imply, and are resulting, in a fundamental transformation of the relationship of rural individuals and the national political economy. Wage labour and reliance upon manufactured goods are no longer preoccupations of the few Iban.

With the introduction of relatively cheap, sharply coloured, easily washed and worn fabrics, and the repeti-

¹Major Iban collections include: Sarawak Museum, Kuching, E.Malaysia; National Museum, Jakarta, Indonesia; British Museum, London and Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, U.K.; Rijks-museum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, Netherlands; Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago and Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles, U.S.A.

tious promotion of styles worn by official leaders and representatives, the commonsense and practical reason for producing everyday handspun cloths has diminished. Accordingly the ritual associations which spring up around everyday practices have been altered by industrial influences.

While *ritual* cloths are made and used for special Iban ceremonial occasions, with the end of headhunting the demand for the most ritually significant designed cloths faded. Not surprisingly, the creation of handwoven textiles, once an activity expected of and embraced by all Iban women, is taken up by only some women today.

The question arises: in what ways are individuals continuing their interests in, and thereby influencing in one direction or another the ways in which Iban customary textile arts are transmitted in the context of industrial society? Accordingly, while the subject of the following chapters is the nature of individuals' craft arts the study addresses wider issues relating to hand craft production, women and social change.

CHAPTER 5

IBAN TEXTILES, TECHNIQUES AND TERMINOLOGIES

The objective of this chapter is introductory in respect to textile art technologies - relevant Iban terminology is identified by way of clarifying their relation to English weaving terminology.¹

TYPES OF IBAN TEXTILES.

Contemporary Iban textile arts comprise ceremonial pieces. I begin by distinguishing the more elaborate textiles reserved for ritual uses from among every day clothing and the ritual cotton 'blankets' or *pua kumbu*. In outline form the main ceremonial cloths used today include:

A. Ceremonial clothing:

Women's skirts (*kain* or *bidang*); shawls (*selendang*); (pl.15,127,128).²

Men's loin cloths (*sirat*), jackets (*baju* or *kelambi'*); and shoulder cloths (*dandong* or *dangdong*); (pl.16-18,128).

B. Ritual cloths - *pua'* or *pua' kumbu'*: range from small place mat-sized single-panel pieces to large, blanket-like covers composed of two-panels, some three-panels and a few older ones composed of four panels (pl.21,39).

Ritual cloths were used extensively in customary Iban practice as forms of protective bodily cover, as covers to wrap around ritual shrines erected for special ceremonial occasions, as ceremonial ground covers on which to make ritual offerings accompanied by spiritual prayers and

¹See Glossary for technical and/or foreign terminology. As the objective is to gain an understanding of Iban approaches to weaving, Iban terms are often required (included in the text in italics). However, English equivalents are favoured for fluency in the thesis, except where there is no adequate English equivalent, (eg. *pilih*).

² Photographic plates (138 total) have been included as data. Because a single plate provides comparative information on a number of diverse points they cannot be referenced in sequential order, despite having collated them to follow the main outline of the dissertation.

blessings, and as banners to acknowledge events (pl.101-113, 121).

Iban individuals, makers or otherwise, characteristically make reference to a textile not simply as a 'skirt' or 'jacket' or 'ritual cloth', but by the name of the specific technical process by which it has been made.

While the principal objective in this thesis addresses the practice of ikat process (and hence *pua kumbu* ritual cloths), it is important to emphasize that some ritual cloths involve other weaving techniques. Accordingly, the wider spectrum of techniques is noted in the discussion of terminology which follows.

Technical terms.

A schematic account of technical aspects of Iban textile arts is fruitful in terms of later analysis. As devised for the purposes of this thesis the classification and terms employed are summarized here:

<u>English Weaving Terminology</u>	<u>Iban Term</u>
A. Resist Dye Designs	
Warp Ikat	(Kebati)
B. Woven Designs	
1. Warp-wrap weave.	(Sungkit)
a. Brocade	"
b. Tapestry	"
2. Supplementary float weave	
a. Finger work	(Pilih)
b. Pattern sticks	(Karap)
	. . (cf. Malay Songket)

Miscellaneous techniques which are not central to this study include:

- twining, characteristic in basketry but in textiles used as a herring bone stitch (*kelalin lambai*) to decorate and to strengthen the ends of ritual cloths (pl.96);
- applique or sewing (*jait*) and embroidery (*sulam*);
- warp float weaves, found among older textiles, referred to generally as weaving (*tenun*); and
- twill weaves, referred to as interlacing (*anyam*), in the 1990s more characteristic of off-loom weaving of fibrous mats and basketry than of Iban textile weaving (pl.29,33).

My classification is grounded in the observation that Iban weavers distinguish two distinct technical approaches to making ceremonial textiles. While both approaches involve

hand weaving, it is the creative aspect of patterning which is acknowledged by weavers as the significant process (e.g. Vogelsanger 1980) and which distinguishes two sets of weaving activities as follows:

A. one approach is essentially a dyeing technique which involves intense preparation of warp threads and binding or *ikat* design work prior to the actual weaving, which is a small part of the overall process;

B. the other approach is essentially a weaving process involving the manipulation of warp and weft threads and application of coloured design threads to create elaborately woven patterns.

The term 'weaver' is used in this Iban study as a general referential to individuals (usually women) who are experienced in making any of the above handwoven textiles. The term *weaver* is not an Iban classification. There is an Iban term for weaving *tenun* which signifies the *process* of weaving, but Iban do not customarily refer to individuals who make handwoven textiles as weavers.

In a community where all women customarily made handwoven cloths, the social significance of a specific 'weaving role' is distinguished from another by the particular technical (and related ritual/social) knowledge and skills artisans have developed in that field of 'specialization'. The reason why it is inaccurate to gloss all Iban textile artists as 'weavers' is that different individuals profess proficiency in one or more of these skills: ordering the warp onto the loom sticks (*ngirit ubong*), tying *ikat* designs (*ngebat*) by imitating other *ikat* designs (*neladan*), creating original designs (*nengkebang*), mixing the ingredients for dyes and mordant (*tau' nakar*) and performing dyeing rituals (*tau' ngar*) valued as essential in gaining the desired deep rich red colour. The steps which comprise the making of a customary *ikat* cloth are discussed in detail in Chapters Seven and Eight.

IKAT: RESIST DYE DESIGN WORK.

Ikat design work, which fits into a discrete technical category in Iban textile art, is the focus of my study. The word 'ikat' has been adopted into the English language as a

technical term to describe a resist-dye method of patterning threads. The term 'ikat' derives from *mengikat*, an Indonesian-Malay verb meaning 'to bind, tie or wind around'. The Iban noun for ikat is *kebat*, from the verb stem *ngebat* which means 'to bind or to ikat'.

In essence *ikat* is a resist-dye technique involving the selection and binding of bundles of threads that have been measured off ready for weaving. The tightly bound sections resist penetration of colours when the threads are submerged in a liquid dye solution, so that when the bindings are removed, undyed areas are revealed as 'negative' patterning on the dyed yarn (pl.22, 34, 84-86). The dyed threads, which have been carefully secured in a prescribed order, are then woven into cloth.

There are three ways in which different human groupings have developed ikat processes: specialization concerning either warp ikat or weft ikat or a combination of both - double ikat. Warp ikat is a widespread technique of patterning cloth among South-East Asian groupings (Ch.3 above).³ Similarly, when Iban speak of ikat (*kebat*), they refer specifically to warp ikat textiles.

Warp ikat, as the name identifies, involves tying and dyeing the vertical warp threads into which horizontal threads will later be woven to make a cloth. To highlight the designs in the warp, a warp faced fabric is the preferred cloth for warp ikat (pl.96). Warp faced fabric is produced by setting the warp elements close together on a weaving frame or loom so that when horizontal weft threads are interwoven these are concealed between the dominant warp threads. This technique requires more warp threads per centimetre than weft elements. Weft threads may be, though are not necessarily, finer than the warp threads to facilitate their concealment. Warp faced ikat cloths are usually woven in a plain or 'tabby' weave in which the horizontal weft threads are simply inserted over-under, over-under alternate warp threads.

³See also, Larsen, Buhler & Solyom (1976), who focus on ikat along with other resist-dye methods of patterning cloth and include their geographic distribution in *The Dyer's art, ikat, batik, plangi*.

Weft ikat, by contrast, involves binding the weft threads to produce resist dye patterns and then weaving them into a warp set to permit a weft faced fabric. *Double ikat*, the third and least common form, involves binding both warp and weft threads. A square set is preferred, to enable a balanced weave and hence equally reveal patterns on the warp and weft threads.

SUNGKIT, PILIH AND KARAP: WEAVING IN DESIGN WORK.

The second category of Iban textile techniques includes a range of weaving practices for patterning textiles. Although Iban artisans are renowned for their elaborate warp ikat cloths, some of their most important textiles include tapestry work and the application of supplementary weft threads. A comparative classification of Iban and English weaving terms is devised as follows to correct blurred observations in the literature concerning technical terms and attributes that distinguish one practice from the other.⁴

1. *Sungkit*: warp-wrapping weaves.

Iban artisans refer to one of their weaving methods - only rarely done today - by an Iban term *sungkit*. This term is frequently confused by students and informants alike with the Malay term *songket* which describes a Malay weaving technique. Because the terms differ minimally in sound and spelling, it is somewhat predictable that *songket* is used instead of *sungkit* and vice versa. On the other hand the techniques to which the terms refer bear no resemblance.

The translation of *sungkit* is 'to prise open' or 'lever up'.⁵ As a weaving process, *sungkit* involves the application of various colours of discontinuous weft threads inserted with a needle so that they can be interwoven or wrapped about groups of warp threads, to create a weft faced

⁴See Irene Emery's *Primary Structures of Fabrics* (1966) for a clear, comprehensive study of English weaving terminology and methods of constructing cloth.

⁵Clarification of Iban words essential to fieldwork is credited to A.Richards' *An Iban-English Dictionary* (1988).

pattern. The needle is needed 'to prise open' spaces between groups of warps, each of which is usually composed of six fine cotton threads (i.e. three double stranded warp threads).

When the cut ends of the various discontinuous weft threads are drawn down inside the web, the front and back surfaces of the woven textile are identical. However, on many new examples and on old panels encased in a jacket lining, weft ends are often not secured and trimmed but are left hanging on the reverse side of the cloth, resulting in a one sided finish.

a. Warp-wrapping to produce brocade.

Sungkit is an Iban term used to refer to two distinct weaves. The first method involves patterns which appear as discrete motifs on a plain background (pl.23-25). This is most aptly described as a form of two sided brocade work. The point being made is that, like brocade, *sungkit* is a method of applying design threads at the time of weaving the foundation cloth. There is an erroneous tendency by non-specialists to identify *sungkit* brocades as embroidery.

In actual practice, similar motif work can be created by embroidery but this involves the application of such design threads with a needle **after** the weaving process. Embroidery, which is known in Iban as *sulam*, is commonly used on commercial factory-made fabrics. Where it appears on handwoven fabrics, it can be identified by the fact that design stitches are not restricted to, nor are they likely to follow, the precise order to which brocade must conform, concerning horizontal weft threads which, pick by pick, inform the foundation fabric.

A form of brocade, *sungkit* is accordingly a supplementary weft technique in the sense that the design threads are 'extra', or supplement, to the elementary set of vertical warp threads and horizontal weft threads interwoven to produce the foundation or ground cloth. In *sungkit*, design threads are usually inserted and secured between every two shots or picks of foundation weft threads. The foundation

weft can be difficult to see in areas where the *sungkit* patterns cover all or most of the foundation cloth.

b. Warp-wrapping as tapestry.

Sungkit, as an Iban term which refers to warp-wrapping technique employing a needle to insert various discontinuous threads, is not de-limited by this usage concerning extra or 'supplementary' wefts. It is also the Iban signifier used when referring to a form of tapestry design work where the design threads constitute the sole, or basic, weft element. Therein, the design threads are inserted, pick by pick, with each change of shed, not woven in addition to a separate set of foundation weft threads.

This tapestry form of warp-wrapping is most easily distinguished where two colours meet at the same point, pick after pick. Each time two different coloured threads are inserted into the web so that they will meet, they are each wrapped about adjacent warps and then fed back in the reverse direction for the subsequent shed. Thus, the coloured design threads gradually build up in a vertical line so that a small hole or slit results. By way of contrast, in the brocaded form of *sungkit*, where coloured threads are wrapped about warp threads to reverse back across a patterned area, no slit results as the foundation threads maintain an uninterrupted web and subsequently, a more solid cloth (pl.26, 27).

Slit tapestry design work in Iban textiles, however, is usually limited to small motifs within small badge-like areas on jackets and loin cloths, and is often set off by other supplementary weft patterning. By way of contrast, the brocade form of *sungkit* may form large overall patterning on large ceremonial cloths such as those known by the Iban name *Lebur Api* (pl.23).⁶

⁶*Lebur api*, *bali belantan* which features *sungkit* at either end of a solid red central field, and others of the best ikat cloths generally referred to as *pua' menyeti'* (pl.48,55) were used in the past to receive ritually enemy trophy human heads (pl.48,55). *Pua' menyeti'* include *bali belumpung* which, like *bali belantan*, also features a solid red central field but with ikat designwork at the ends and *bali kelikut* with a lattice-like design which features horizontal bands (pl.61).

2. Supplementary float weaves.

A second method of creating woven patterns is widely used in the 1990s for Iban ceremonial cloths, particularly for skirts, scarves, vests and loin cloths. It comprises a technique of applying continuous supplementary weft design threads, inserted from selvedge to selvedge between every one or two shots of foundation weft. The designs are created by floating the supplementary weft threads along the top or underside surface of the web, so that the patterns on the front and back sides of the cloth result in a reverse or positive/negative effect.

The design threads which float but are held in place by the foundation weft are usually thicker or used in multiple bundles to enhance their dominant position. The foundation weft elements on the other hand are inserted in a plain weave and virtually concealed within the vertical threads, being set close enough together to produce a warp dominant foundation cloth.

Where the areas covered and not covered by float threads are more or less balanced, a clear positive/negative effect results on front and reverse sides. Where the intention is to expose in use just one side of the cloth, the maker is free to create an unbalanced float resulting in an apparent chaos of long threads on the hidden side - which are otherwise neither secure nor clear enough to be featured. This method is usually restricted to small panels on the back of a jacket which will be protected by an inside lining.

Iban weavers currently distinguish two distinct methods of creating continuous supplementary weft patterns, *pilih* and *karap*.

a. *Pilih*.

Pilih is an Iban verb meaning 'to choose' or 'to pick out'. Like *sungkit*, a wooden needle or porcupine quill is used to pick up the fine warp strings for each horizontal pick of weft patterning. However, unlike *sungkit*, discontinuous weft threads are not then wrapped about small

bundles of warps which have been picked up. Rather, a continuous shot of supplementary weft is fed in from selvedge to selvedge to float across all except selected warp threads, which are held up section by section across the width of the cloth. Depending upon the number and sequence of warp threads picked up, design threads will float either on top or underneath designated design areas, usually resulting in a two sided cloth with negative/positive patternings (pl.30-32).

Pilih is distinguished by the variable that Iban textile artists choose to feature the side of the cloth on which supplementary design threads highlight the background - not the motifs. That is to say, the coloured design threads are intended to cover the foundation cloth so that motifs appear as the negative or uncovered areas of the cloth. These areas appear as quite fine patterns in light, undyed or yellow cotton threads of the equally fine warp faced ground cloth.

Another distinguishing feature of *pilih* is the widespread practice of alternating two colours of supplementary weft threads - usually a combination of red and black - which all but cover the creamy white, or yellow, warp-faced foundation cloth. The background is composed of the application of three, four or more shots of red design threads and subsequently the same process in black, which generates narrow horizontal stripes. On skirts the latter are usually one or two centimetres wide, and on large cloths the stripes are wider.

An interesting implication is the parallel colour composition relating to ikat and *pilih*, informed by negative motifs (i.e. white undyed and uncovered) projecting from within a "shadowy" red/black background (pl.28, 30).

A further observation in respect to composition - overall design and respective motifs - is that on the basis of technique one might characterize *pilih* by the tapestry-like practice of building up patterns in a 'free form' manner. The implication concerns innovative composition of asymmetrically shaped images: the tapestry-technique enables varying design intentions at will or accidentally. The fixed geometric logic of the weave sequence is hence alterable. Although some patterns may be geometric and follow an

orderly sequence, the point is that *pilih* is not restricted to repetitive blocks of patterning as are those woven with the aid of pre-threaded design sticks.

b. Karap.

Karap is an Iban verb used widely to refer to the process of inserting continuous supplementary design threads using a set of design or laze sticks to construct an additional set of heddle rods (*karap*). This method enables greater loom control or assistance in weaving patterns. Each heddle rod is encased in a heddle string which has been alternately looped about the stick, and between specified warp threads on the loom that are picked out according to a desired pattern. In this way each heddle rod facilitates lifting different combinations of warp threads simultaneously for each new shed opening (pl.35).

Prior to weaving this means discrete warp strings only need to be picked out once, and for only one small section (i.e. one repeat) of the overall design. Then during the actual weaving process, by lifting the rods in sequence a section of design can easily be created, and subsequently repeated as many times as necessary to produce the required length of cloth.

Reversing the sequence in which the heddle rods are raised produces mirror images (pl.36). Thus, for a motif that requires thirty or forty picks of weft, only half as many rods need to be threaded by hand to weave one - or one hundred - bands of that same motif. Either commercially dyed cotton threads or silvery or golden threads are generally used in the 1990's for the supplementary design threads.

Karap is comparable to Malay *songket*. The main technical difference between the two processes is the different types of loom used. Iban artisans produce *karap* textiles using the customary back strap loom while Malay weavers use a larger floor loom (e.g. Emery & Fiske 1979).

According to Haddon's observations (1982/1936:14) in the early 1900s this method of employing heddle rods (i.e. pattern sticks or laze rods) to pick-up float weave patterns was not "typically Iban". On the other hand, there is

artefactual evidence in major museum collections that both *pilih* and mat and basketry methods (pl.29) of picking out float weave designs by hand (i.e. not with pattern sticks) were practised widely during the last century at least.

Karap, like *pilih*, produces a two-sided positive-negative effect (pl.37a,b). As with *pilih*, Iban choose to feature the side on which motifs appear as pale outlines within a dominant red ground, again resembling ikat motifwork. But, regarding the repetitive forms in *karap* motifwork (pl.37), *karap* has affinity with those found in Iban mats.

The practice of float weave patterning of both mats and cloth persists in Iban and other cultural groupings in Borneo. By 1991, however, the use of heddle rods and gold and silver threads had become a preferred method of patterning ceremonial textiles for many Iban weavers in Saratok, Saribas, and Sri Aman districts (pl.125-127). Predictably, these districts are home to Iban who have had the closest and longest contact with Malay groups. Hence, the social significance and cultural qualities which distinguish Iban ritual ikat cloths in respect to cultural preferences, innovations and borrowings, occurs within the regional spectrum of textile making and use. This observation refers to the crucial importance of historical analysis of cultural 'traditions' (see Chapter 2 above).

CHAPTER 6

WORKING AND WEAVING IN KAPIT DIVISION

Kapit District is a rugged inland region predominantly settled by groups of Iban early in the 20th century. The focus in this chapter concerns field data accumulated there during 1990-92, particularly in longhouse communities of the Baleh region. I investigate continuities of customary ways in which weaving practices are inseparable from individuals' family roles and household subsistence. A related objective concerns problematic implications of modernization. The intention in detailing the environment of Rejang Iban artisans is to develop explication of the various worlds of the Iban artist, in the context of industrial society.

Against a backdrop of steep planting and gathering grounds and torrential river systems, interest focusses on the cultural geographic issue of how Iban women manage access to the materials and tools which are fundamental to their cultural representations. The chapter also addresses the issue of alterations to subsistence patterns of everyday lives together with implications for the renewal of skills related to aesthetic customs.

KAPIT DISTRICT.

Measured in spans of 25 years, just over one generation of Iban has passed on since Derek Freeman published his seminal study on customary livelihood of Iban communities in the Baleh region (1955). On his arrival there in 1949 most Iban longhouse communities had been established for only thirty-five years or less.

Freeman was directed in his work to focus on "a traditionally based, stable, Iban community based on shifting dry rice cultivation and not subject to undue land shortage" (1970:xiii). Freeman noted that Edmund Leach suggested he choose the Baleh River region of Kapit District (1981:25). Although Freeman discovered instances of cash-cropping (e.g. rubber) and the recent introduction of 'chieftainships in

the form of local Iban civic heads or *penghulu*, he was able to identify, to his satisfaction, communities which adhered to customary practises for their day to day subsistence activities due to the minimal presence of outside interests there. In particular, he noted the existence of autonomous communities in which individuals grew rice on steep hill-sides informed by a cult of rice fertility.

Freeman has developed a notion of 'the anthropology of choice' in respect to his work within Iban settlements in the 1950s.¹ He writes (1981:50-51)

[s]uch a people, I suggest, with a social organization based on the kindred, that encouraged the emergence of individual talent and creativity, and in which participation in group activities was by choice rather than prescription, is of the greatest anthropological interest and human value.

Of special interest here is Freeman's emphasis on the social encouragement of creativity in Iban customary practices.² Freeman's study is a rich vein of social-cultural data, insights and analysis - an invaluable and unequalled source for subsequent studies of Bornean cultural groupings. It is commonly used as 'a base-line study of Bornean societies' (King 1978:6) in that it generates data that enable identification of *customary patterns* - continuous in essential qualities with pre-state ways. The historical and comparative objectives of this textile thesis are particularly indebted to Freeman's ethnographic observations.

The Baleh district continues to be settled by predominantly rural Iban individuals. However, many Iban in the 1990s are employed in wage labour in this region. This alteration is crucial to understanding the place of textile arts in Iban lives, as will be made clear in the following pages.

Kapit District is divided into nine sub-districts represented by nine *penghulu* who report periodically and

¹ Derek Freeman (1981) refers to having written his paper, 'The Anthropology of Choice' (1979), as a Presidential address to the Anthropology, Archaeology and Linguistics Sections, 49th Congress, Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, Auckland.

²See also my discussion of Freeman's understanding of Iban egalitarian social organization in Chapter Two above.

administer minor judiciary decisions relating to some 279 Iban longhouses.³ These longhouses range in size from four to sixty-one household units (i.e. *bilik* apartments). Comparative analysis of Freeman's 1947 study and District Office statistics for 1990 reveals that while only 13 per cent of longhouse communities were composed of more than 20 household units, this figure had increased to 35 per cent 43 years later, while the top 13 percentile now equated to communities housing 30 households or more.⁴

While the increase in size is not surprising given natural population growth, an increase in density is a critical issue related to swidden agriculturalist practices in steep equatorial secondary forest areas, compounded by restrictions on migration. The implications for economic-aesthetic underpinnings of cultural transmission (fertility cult of rice) are critical, considering inherent uncertainties of growing hill rice.

Travel from the administrative capital of Kuching has become comparatively easy for individuals who can afford to pay public fares. In 1991 many people continued to rely on sea-river travel. An ocean express economy ticket, Kuching to Sibuluan cost about M\$25 (A\$12.50) and Rejang express on to Kapit costing M\$15 (A\$7.50).⁵ The travel time was about eight hours from Kuching to Kapit.

River express boats have powerful semi-trailer truck engines and force their long low narrow hulls through the water at dangerous speeds up to 65 kilometres per hour. The danger refers to pollution by dead wood from river-bank logging operations and dense early morning fogs in areas of

³Data from an unpublished list of communities in use at the District Office in 1991 (prior to the 1991 census). Although undated, figures appeared to be reasonably current (eg. included 1990 amendments and on cross checking the number of doors at longhouses personally visited figures verified it to be generally accurate except in a few cases which were out by only one or two doors).

⁴Freeman (1955:62) noted a total of 61 longhouses in two of Kapit's sub-districts, (lower Baleh/Gaat, Baleh/Merirai). 1990 District Office figures for same increased to 69, and for Kapit District as a whole: 279 longhouses (39% composed of more than 20 households).

⁵In 1991 one Malaysian Ringgit (M\$1) was equivalent to half an Australian dollar (A\$.50) or just over one third of one American dollar (M\$1 was about US\$0.38). In 1993 the Malaysian Ringgit strengthened its position relative to Australia, M\$1 equating to about A\$.60)

bee-hive timber burners. During monsoon season the ocean route is slower if not wholly inadvisable.

With the completion of the main highway through the Second Division of Sri Aman, express buses could connect Sibü to Kuching for roughly the same cost as a sea fare in the early 1990s. However, it was not until 1993 that the road was all sealed and buses were able to reach Sarikei in time to connect with boats to Kapit. For individuals who could pay a M\$70 (A\$35) ticket there were daily flights to Sibü, two and three quarter hours by fast public boat from Kapit. In 1993, on two days a week one could connect by air plane between Sibü and Kapit.

Once a day an early express boat from Sibü to Kapit continued further up river to the Baleh. Other public express boats would leave from Kapit to up-river Rejang settlements and logging camps, and further on, to the Baleh for example.

The perception in Kuching in the period, 1990-1993, was that Kapit was remote and perhaps a dangerous journey and destination in the sense of any frontier town. In 1991 Kapit's population was 7,446 making it the seventh ranked urban population in Sarawak. The small sizes of nearby towns explain Kapit's relative significance: Kapit's neighbour Song had 1,070 residents, Kanowit 849, and Belaga on the upper Rejang a mere 445 residents in its commercial centre.

Kapit town is home to about thirteen per cent of the population of the District of Kapit. Statistics on ethnic composition from 1980 record that the town was made up of 49 per cent Chinese, 36 per cent Iban, only 5.5 per cent Malay and 9.5 per cent others (ASB 1991:16). The town's population has more than doubled in a little over a decade since 1980, from 3,256 to 7,446 in 1991.

The town's growth relates in large part to the recent acceleration of logging operations and its subsequently increased importance as a local distribution centre and administrative capital. Tied up to Kapit's wharves by night are as many as twenty river cargo ships. But all day there is a constant coming and departure of logging workers, overnight shopping trippers, maternity visitors and of-

officials - by small canoe-like *perau'*, public express boats and private speedboats (pl.7-8).

Kapit, established in its present form as a Brookean fortress town and subsequently a few wooden shop-houses and Methodist Mission, was badly destroyed during Allied fighting against Japanese occupation forces during World War II. According to Malcolm Macdonald (1956) the entire bazaar area was burnt to the ground but had been rebuilt by 1949 with cement and wood shops.

In the early 1990s the town featured more than one hundred small shophouses as well as a daily market with numerous permanent food and dry goods stalls (pl.9-10). In 1991, 634 government licenses were issued to traders operating in Kapit District. While they were not all based in Kapit, most business would come through the town in some way.

A startling number of twelve small modern hotels were operating in Kapit by 1993, all but one built over shop houses in three storey concrete buildings. At least five of the inns were opened between 1990 and 1993 with single tariffs ranging from M\$18 (A\$9) to about M\$50 (A\$25). Eating places included two chain-operated 'fast food' businesses. The largest bank was equipped with automatic teller machine. Entertainment spots included three Karaoke lounges with imported song and dance routines catering to those on rest and recreation from logging camps, as well as to a few local professionals, business and government employees.

As the administrative capital of the Division Kapit had several large government buildings. A three storey concrete block housed the Resident and other local state government functionaries. In 1992 a second state government building replaced the old fort as the local District Office (the place of officials such as *penghulu* and their superiors).

Federal government offices of immigration, information, radio and television, health, youth sports, and culture constituted a third complex. A police complex with barracks was close by while army personnel were housed a few kilometres out on the airport road. District Kapit Council offices and a Telecommunications building were situated behind the fort.

The town had a small Post Office near the marketplace. A monumentally large civic centre was recently built facing the town's small man-made lake, adjacent to the State government complex. This complex served as an occasional ceremonial venue for helicopter-transported officials and local guests. It included a small museum featuring ethnographic items. The town also had a new impressive public library and a small gymnasium.

Kapit Divisional Hospital served the wider region. While further building was in progress, in 1991 it had about 100 beds and employed a total of seven doctors. The hospital began as a Methodist Missionary hospital in the 1950s; the present block built in 1960 consisted of a cluster of four single storey buildings and a separate Out Patients' building in a separate location beside the fort.

Kapit medical records noted that twenty-one per cent of admissions were for normal baby deliveries in 1990 (1,206 total). The other leading causes for admission were respiratory disease and logging accidents (168 total). For many others, the hospital was a busy pre- and post-natal clinic as well as a dental clinic. It coordinated thirteen rural mobile clinics in addition to twenty small rural clinics, which had no trained doctors but employed individuals trained in basic health, first aid and midwifery skills.

In the 1990s the Methodist Church was running an active rural missionary service (CHEMPRO) which included basic community health services for remote Iban communities. A Catholic Church based in Kapit also served outlying communities in religious matters.

On market days, clinic days and pay days there was a noticeable influx of Iban, Kayan, Kenyah and other rural peoples who came to use the services provided by the town. Few of the visitors were employed in salaried jobs. The latter held government positions and involved Malay, some Iban and other indigenous individuals. Kapit town was otherwise predominantly composed of Chinese families which operated shop-houses and small supply centres for commodities such as outboard motors and motor-bike servicing.

Few of the rural peoples who came to town for the market or hospital treatments had cash for hotels. Many slept out

(in warm though wet conditions) near the wharf area. Not far from the hospital an Iban hostel recently added a second building to provide inexpensive dormitory shelter for rural individuals travelling for hospital, legal or other personal matters.

Kapit had two roads leading out of town in 1993, one past a few longhouse communities to a timber camp, the other past the airport and communities on the Kapit River. Despite the few possibilities of distance driving, the town had an unusually large number of vehicles, many new. 1991 government records of licensed vehicles for Kapit Division stated a total of 1,126 motorcycles, 222 cars, over 90 public passenger and private goods carriers (ASB 1991:189).

The public school system began as a Methodist Mission service in 1949. The original hill-top Methodist school was destroyed in a war-time bombing. Re-built after the war, the new building catered to a "score" of Iban children aged 8 to 18 years old (Macdonald 1956). Each of the Mission's subsequent rural branch organizations was located at the longhouse community of the district's recently appointed *penghulu*. Not surprisingly the children of the various *penghulu* were amongst the earliest students in the mother school in Kapit. Significantly, in respect to customary Iban social patterns, the first Iban students included daughters as well as sons.

In 1991 Kapit district (excluding Song and Belaga) had three secondary schools with 2,391 students. Two of the three were in Kapit town and one was on the Baleh River near the Gaat tributary. The district had forty-four primary schools with an enrolment of 7,820. Nearly all were located at various rural longhouse locations which still required most longhouse children to board away from their homes. Some could go home at week-ends but the end result of the elementary schooling was consistent - a thoroughly-altered socialization of Iban children.

Children as young as six years old were removed from family life and fundamentally schooled in the practice of external values. While some of the teaching staff were Iban, many teachers were from peninsular Malaya in the period of this study, from 1990 to 1993.

IBAN COMMUNITIES IN THE BALEH REGION.

Travelling upriver to Baleh River districts in 1991 boats pass a number of Iban longhouses spaced along either bank from five to fifteen minutes apart. Almost as frequently, they go by large areas scarred by the short-term operations of loggers (pl.1-2). Many longhouse communities have new buildings set on concrete slabs, often on land bulldozed by logging operators in compensation for access to adjacent lands and longhouse labour force (pl.11).

Two longhouses are of particular interest to this study. They are referred to by fictitious names, Rumah Ata and Rumah Balang. Rumah Ata is an exceptionally large kindred grouping of about sixty households which puts it in the top 3.5 percentile in 1991. Thirty-two discrete family groups comprise one 'house' while the remaining households make up four adjacent separate structures.

Rumah Ata can be reached by express boat from Kapit in three to eight hours, depending on river currents, the age of the boat and number of stops (particularly related to logging camp life). At low water the larger fast express boats stop running and large cargo boats combine cargo and passenger services. The journey *down* river to Kapit is usually a fast two and a half to three hours. A few families from Rumah Ata own small speedboats with outboard motors. Many own outboards for use on small private boats, *perau'*, fashioned by hand from logs using customary Iban methods. A new thirty horsepower motor costs about M\$200.

In 1991 individuals travelled to Kapit on a regular basis, a situation related to increasing consumption patterns and varying widely according to financial circumstances. An elderly woman with a privileged family background recalled that as a young woman she visited Kapit but annually. The journey took two or three days with five or six people rowing. Her daughter, born in 1947, mentioned that her father was among the first to have a motor for his longboat, a nine horsepower engine used only for a long trip.

The cheapest public fare to Kapit in 1991 was M\$10. The most regular express arrived well before dawn. Later boat

services were unreliable although smaller public speed boats operated at twice the price. Many elderly people were now accustomed to visiting the hospital in Kapit about every month. It was more difficult to generalize on younger persons who were more mobile and whose choices were broadened by wage labour situations.

Rumah Ata was the site of one of the first rural schools which attests to its official influence within the community. The longhouse was reconstructed in the 1980's on a concrete slab with aid from a logging company with interests in a local timber camp. A public generator was being installed in 1993.

By contrast, Rumah Balang was nearer the average size of Iban communities with twenty-nine households in 1991. It was an older, highset, wooden construction located on a small tributary which had no express boat service. However, plans were in progress to reconstruct the longhouse on a new site a few kilometres down river, 'assistance' accredited by a logging operator. School age children board for long periods at a school near the mouth of the tributary at the Baleh River. The trip in low water can take over two hours of strenuous work, pulling heavy wooden canoe-like *perau* over long stretches of rocky river. At high water treacherous rapids, rocks and snags bedevil the passage of boats.

Unlike the longhouse structures of neighbouring Kenyah communities - relatively substantial buildings - Iban longhouses were customarily more roughly built. This situation reflected a primary element of pre-state Iban social-cultural patterns: longhouse communities were constructed as part of a grand cycle of swiddening practices and lasted about one generation, more or less depending on accessibility to primary forest land for cultivation.

With the foundation of a longhouse individuals could farm nearby plots which suited living permanently in the longhouse. In successive farming seasons and with increasing distance to the garden individual families built small farmhouses, either independently or in conjunction with one or more families working adjacent farmlands. The logistics of swiddening are such that the lives of individuals develop ever more discrete patterns as the years proceed towards the

end of a grand cycle. In customary lives longhouses are both ceremonial centres and ever-changing in their influence on the development of individuals and their relations with others.

Brooke's 'enclosure' legislation through which the Land Code restricted Iban mobility, as previously implied, was the beginning of a more permanent and thoroughly group-oriented pattern of personal development in Iban communities. One development has been that many longhouses are empty, now, on account of increased wage labour to supplement subsistence.

The Annual Statistical Bulletin (1991) demonstrates that subsistence farmers are heavily dependent on cash income for staple foods. One implication is that soil nutrients are depleted through deprivation of the option to practise swidden mobility. Accented today is cash cropping (pepper, cacao) with its contingency on synthetic compounds of fertilizer.

Farmhouse life is an altered situation today. Some families build farm houses as permanent structures. With increasing pressure to find wage work and the concentration of higher education facilities in town, a tendency developing among Rumah Ata families is to build a second Kapit town-house to be near new work priorities as opposed to building farm-houses.

While many men leave their longhouse through demands of wage labour, some are able to travel locally from the longhouse to labour at timber camps or navigate log booms by *perau*'. Others board at the camps, often with their families, some returning home on weekends to attend to these interests. Because most logging jobs are based on un-salaried day labour, the longhouse is also a base for 'temporarily unemployed' men who do not carry out subsistence farming activities. In sum, the group centre holds a different kind of influence, motivated by outside employment pressures and qualities which are crucial to the creative life of individuals - an observation which connects closely with the analytical thrust of the thesis.

In the wake of aggressive expansion by Iban associated with migration into Borneo, the longhouse became a refuge

for young and old alike, providing social security for its resident kindred. Today, for different reasons, it has become a similar kind of safe place, but for individuals who are outer-directed in respect to subsistence practices.

Individuals generally live as members of discrete families in separate household units within the longhouse building. Each apartment, or *bilik*, contains its own separate cooking hearth, washing, storage and sleeping areas. Customarily, each apartment (*bilik*), as residential base, connects with the subsistence practices of each of these discrete family units or *bilik family* (e.g Freeman 1955). Individuals in each *bilik* family assume responsibilities for clearing and cultivating family plots through rights acquired from the general river area by the resident longhouse members (identified in the Land Code as 'customary native lands').

The *bilik* family essentially comprises wife and husband, children and grandparent(s). With pressures on land and cash income and where space permits, the *bilik* family increasingly includes married children and their spouses and offspring. Such 'extended' family situations, which include married children, are more accurately seen as two or more nuclear units for, although they may share a common *bilik* apartment, members of each nuclear family within such a *bilik* increasingly seek independent wage labouring situations, account for their own expenses and plan to build their own separate *bilik* apartment and to clear and cultivate their own land. However, one daughter or son, not necessarily the eldest nor the youngest, will be selected by the current *bilik* family to eventually take charge of their ageing parents' existing *bilik* apartment and lands (Freeman 1955 on social organization).

At Rumah Ata, the average household size in 1991 was 9 persons. Neighbouring longhouses downriver averaged 7.2 and 6.3. The average for Kapit District in 1991 was 7.5 persons per household as recorded by current District Office registers. These statistics contrasted markedly with 1947 patterns: Freeman recorded an average household size of 5.75 in the Baleh (1955).

The increasing size of household units (*bilik* families) today is not solely determined by birth rate but reflects external social-political realities. Building onto a longhouse in the 1990s is both more difficult and more expensive given the use of new building materials such as concrete, and the required infrastructure which includes water pipes, pumps, electrical conduits and factory-built furniture (pl.11-14). The household size statistics also reflect the reality that many people register their natal longhouse as affective 'place of residence', even when physically based at a logging camp or other place of labour, especially in order to maintain their customary land rights.

Variations in household composition is heavily weighted by both the number of children a couple produces and the particular stage in their family's developmental cycle (e.g. Chayanov in Thorner et al. 1966). Given that a basic Iban household unit comprises more than one nuclear family, variations in the composition are related to the marriage of a son or daughter, and the subsequent addition of a spouse to the natal *bilik* or the departure of a married child to the spouse's *bilik*.

However, married children continue to follow the customary practice of leaving the natal *bilik* within a few years, with only one child, either a son or a daughter, remaining (or returning) with spouse and children in line with expectations and responsibilities of eventually assuming the position as head of their parental *bilik*.

The head of the family household (*tuai rumah*) may choose, in consultation with his or her family members, any one of his or her sons or daughters to take over rights to specific farm lands which have been worked and so assumed by the longhouse community to belong to that household unit. Whereas this individual is encouraged in farming skills the other siblings are often encouraged to concentrate on formal school education so that they can seek work in urban centres. A few families have financial resources to base their children in a family town house. Other families have gained the option of boarding children in town with a relative or at the school.

Freeman's work (e.g. 1955/1970, 1958) demonstrates that Iban social organization is exceptional in that they recognize cognatic ties, not lineages, and not corporate groups. Iban kin relationships are based on personal, ego-centred kindreds. No two individuals have the same set of 'kindred'.⁶

Freeman (e.g. 1981) also emphasises the significance of fluidity or choice surrounding individual participation of nuclear families in small, cognatic, kin based communities. Membership in these communities was exceptionally manoeuvrable in that an Iban born into a longhouse community inherited optimal choices regarding their eventual place of residence upon marriage. The options included any longhouse community where either spouse had a paternal or maternal relative.

While younger individuals continue to move, their choices of place of residence are critically eroded by land/space constraints and learned desires to seek urban employment over and against customary subsistence patterns.

These customary ways centred in egalitarian group membership (e.g. Freeman 1981, Sutlive 1978, Pringle 1970). Iban individuals recognized no institution of authority beyond the 'nuclear' family into which they were born. Individuals were socialized in seeking group security in loose personal networks of cognatic kin which linked them to neighbouring groups - but which did not constitute tribal organizations in terms of economic-political-symbolic variables.

The Iban societal model contrasts vividly with identification of social-cultural structures in which corporate group or tribe is established as a constant, perpetuated through time 'over and above' particular members. Iban groupings existed only in terms of the individuals who

⁶While the kindred of unmarried siblings from the same two parents will include the same individuals, provided they were not adopted, but the relationships are not identical given that each kindred centres on a different ego.

currently composed them.⁷ An individual was expected to develop independent decision-making skills - in the context of customary laws grounding in "the fervent conviction" that "there's a divinity that shapes our ends" (Freeman 1981:39).

The implications of Freeman's insights are of the utmost value to studies such as this of Iban symbolic representations. The primary value accorded by Iban to individual possibilities (within complexities of interpersonal responsibilities) is highlighted by the evidence that social conflict are taken very seriously in Iban groupings. Dream content is an elementary defining quality of customary practice of Iban textile arts. A strong positive relationship exists between this variable and the interest of a grouping in resolving conflict (e.g. Radin 1953).

While Iban families customarily gathered in longhouse communities for ceremonial occasions, much of the work and decisions of individuals were carried out in isolated situations on family farms. Many skills and values, developed and applied in textile arts, were passed from one person to another and from one generation to the next against a background of *discrete family households* defined above in terms of residence as *bilik* families.

A major constraint on individuals today, and one reinforced through the State Land Code, is the requirement that at least one member of each *bilik* must take responsibility for tenure of the garden plots ascribed to that *bilik*. This condition sustains bald economic attachment to customary livelihood. It also induces resentment among young individuals. Socialized by nationalist codes and values, they perceive they have inherited a disadvantaged situation vis a vis others in their nuclear families and/or their personal kindred groups.

Although families in the Baleh may appear to be 'land rich' in contrast to say Aboriginal Australians, the chances

⁷Freeman trained in British social anthropology at a time when theoretical emphasis was on social relationships, particularly institutionalized roles and activities relating to kinship, economic and political organization of 'tribal' or pre-state societies. His discovery of Iban cognatic kinship relations added a refreshing contrast to then current kinship theories which at that time concentrated on African data which resulted in conceptualization of kinship primarily in terms of corporate groups and patterns of lineal descent.

of meeting subsistence needs through cultivation of impoverished soils are improbable. Cash needs are heightened wherever generators are installed and outboard motors used. 'Land rich' assumes the kind of partibility which Iban do not have. The granting of official 'customary' native land titles to the longhouse group rather than to the individual family becomes problematic, since an individual's decisions are informed today by public policy directed from outside the community. Without individual titles to surveyed plots, Iban families cannot sell a portion of their land, or even use it as collateral for a bank loan, in order to gain cash which might enable them to purchase seed, tools or otherwise supplement their living conditions.

On one occasion, official 'development information' workers came to Rumah Ata to show a film on the benefits of cash farming. Audience mood was shifted by happy music to a focus on the lives of farmers acting out their ease in work using modern machinery and fertilizers. Yet the scene of flat lush fields was too de-familiarizing to transform opinions on this occasion and in this context of upper Baleh lives. With the dawn of the next day came the customary pattern of hiking up steep farm slopes with a shoulder-slung basket carrying a machete or *parang*.

Not surprisingly, given the overarching influence of a cash economy and the need for adult men to seek wage labour, increasing responsibility for farm work today is taken up by adult women, since younger people concentrate on school and a socialization which originates from, and directs them towards, urban life. Iban women continue to transmit both the agronomical knowledge and many of the planting and weeding tasks, as well as drying, cleaning and storing the rice crops.

Women also participate in the cash cropping of cacao and pepper, in addition to cultivating subsistence fruit crops and gathering edible ferns. It is common for women aged sixty and older to continue working in the fields and carrying heavy loads until such time as they are physically restricted to work in the longhouse. In the case of older individuals, men and women work together in farm and basket weaving work as they are accustomed to do. In other situa-

tions women work with an elderly parent. Men continue interests in hunting and fishing and some do work on rice plots. However, most male members of families in the Baleh region have worked in logging in the past or are currently employed in the industry.

WEAVERS IN BALEH LONGHOUSES.

Iban artisans practise sophisticated ikat design techniques in which they combine light and shadow effects. The pieces generate a sense of intermingling and movement which contrasts with effects created by simple banding or other symmetrical re-presentation of symbolic forms which characterises much of *ikat* weaving throughout the world.

In times when they are not involved in domestic tasks, gardening, gathering or food processing, healing or ritual preparations, many women in Rumah Ata take up their ikat frames or weaving looms. At some times of the agricultural calendar time is more available than at others (see Fig.3 below); other intervening variables are the number, age and health of family members at any particular time. The practice of ikat weaving requires persistent making of time in order to develop skills. Hence the proposition that *skills differ according to personal motivation, a variable ultimately determined by specific experiences and predominant social-economic conditions.*

The implications concern further demonstration of the dynamic quality in Iban cultural behaviour: differences within and across Iban groupings in symbolic representations. As will be clear by this point in the study, my intention is to explicate the process by which these differences arise in Iban textile arts.

The question of *motivation*, as previously defined in Chapter Four, is dealt with here in respect to rewards individuals receive for their efforts in terms of personal prestige, and increased social and economic status. Invoked by this question is how these reward qualities differ today when viewed in the context of elders continuing customary practices and aesthetic pleasures alongside younger women who have been subjected reading and writing skills and an

'urban' worldview and alien to the worldview of Iban whose longhouse activities centre on customary life. Of interest here is what impact outside influences of Malaysian urban, industrial society has on qualitative aspects of customary textile practices.

Figure 3. Agricultural calendar and related weaving & ceremonial events.

Jan. N.E. Monsoon	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July Driest Period	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov. N. E. Monsoon	Dec.
<u>Iban Customary agricultural practice (hill rice):</u>											
Weeding		Harvest thresh winnow & store rice			Pre-clear	Dry	Burn	Sowing		Weeding	
<u>General pattern of textile activities:</u>											
Time avail. for textile work		Little time for textile work				Most dyeing & textile work		Little time for weaving No ikat		Time avail. for textile work	
<u>Examples of Iban ceremonial events:</u>											
Matah (rites to inaugurate harvest)		Besimpan (rites to store rice)		Gawai Batu (affirm new sites)		Manggol (rites to initiate agri. cycle)		Nangkai (start sowing)			
		Ngelombong (Baleh wake)			Dayak Day (new Ntl. Holiday)		Ngar (mordant ceremony)		Nugal (Prohib. on ikat binding stifles rice)		Gawai Amat* (G. Antu & Gawai Kenyalang)

* In 1990s major celebrations (Gawai Amat) often coincide with November school holidays.
(Data compiled from Chalmers field data 1990-92 and Freeman 1970, Sutlive 1978, Jensen 1974)

In 1991, out of thirty-two adjacent households at Rumah Ata, every household had at least one, and up to four, female members actively involved in making ikat textiles. These figures demonstrate the *thorough* persisting quality of textile arts as a formative influence on personal and social development in the Baleh, notwithstanding fundamental alterations to ideological and economic structures. The question, of course, is to what extent textile arts still renew Iban cultural behaviour and the implications in regard to participation in the national economy.

The total number of sixty-three women who practise ikat weaving in the focal building at Rumah Ata represents an average of two weavers per household. Observations in the adjacent buildings at Rumah Ata confirm this statistic. The same pattern exists in Rumah Balang, which is several hours by boat from the Baleh location of Rumah Ata. A total of about thirty longhouses were visited in Kapit District during 1991-92 for this part of the study. In all cases women were observed actively involved in textile work.

The level and quality of interest in textile arts which persist in the next generation of Iban artisans was also assessed by means of a questionnaire. The questionnaire drew response from students aged 13 to 18 years old attending three district schools, one at Rumah Ata and two within Kapit town environs.

Of a total of 205 students representing 75 Iban long-houses in Kapit District, 118 respondents stated they had grandmothers who made ikat cloths (*pua' kumbu'*). Almost the same number (113) stated that their mothers made ikat cloths (*pua' kumbu'*). And, 50 students noted they had at least one sister who made these cloths.

An American preacher re-visiting Rumah Ata in 1991 after 40 years absence expressed surprise at the number of women still weaving. He and his wife had lived at both Rumah Ata and a Merirai Iban community for several years in the 1950s. Based on his impressions from that earlier period, he said that he felt there was present evidence of an arrest in the decline of interest among younger women. As evidence of decline in the 1950s, he recalled that members of a church in the Kanowit area had begun a weaving group there to encourage revival in textiles.

Sarawak Museum has a considerable number of textiles from the Kanowit area purchased from a special exhibition held there during the period to which my informant referred. Documentation in the museum register also indicates the existence, at that time, of an art society in Kuching, to which the remainder of that exhibition was evidently sold.⁸ It is not clear, accordingly, whether the preceding data indicate interest by Iban and others in revival, spectatorship or commercial exploitation - probably all three.

Although it is apparent that many skills relating to the use of local cotton fibres and natural dyes have generally lapsed with the introduction of ready spun cotton yarns and packaged dye powders, the eldest women remain in a good position to pass on many skills and the practice of related beliefs to younger women today.

⁸Heidi Munan (1991:245-248) refers to the formation of an art society in Kuching during the 1950s which is likely to be the same one.

To introduce an investigation of what artisans are making, most families at Rumah Ata store a number of large ikat cloths (*pua' kumbu'*), of which some are new and some are heirlooms (*pesaka*) made two or three generations earlier during the initial period of British rule. In 1991, many women are now making miniature *pua'*, not only for tourism sales, but also for gift giving and observing rites of passage. Despite their small size, Iban weavers continue to call these miniatures by the same name as the large ones: *pua' kumbu'*, which translates as a cover or blanket. This constitutes a fundamental difficulty in evaluating research data where the distinction is not otherwise explicit.

The other principal sphere of ikat textiles intended for use at Rumah Ata, in 1991, were ceremonial skirts. Haddon and Start (1936) referred to these as *bidang*. However, in 1991, most Iban weavers identified them in derivative terms of *kain*, which translates as skirt or cloth. Artisans referred to *kain kebat* (ikat skirts) which they were often seen making (pl.15,28), and to *kain pilih* (skirt with woven supplementary weft patterning), rarely made in 1991 (pl.30).

Only a few women were making ceremonial loin cloths (*sirat*) since the demand was slight compared to ceremonial skirts. While women and men encouraged women to wear ikat skirts for a variety of celebratory occasions, few men tied on the customary loin cloth except during paramount *gawai* celebrations. Even then, most men exhibited self-consciousness by adding a pair of shorts. However, when loin cloths were worn by bards (*lemambang*), say when hired for a *Gawai Kenyalang* at Rumah Ata in 1991, one observed the wider range of weaving techniques (apart from ikat) which was once mastered by Iban weavers (pl.16-18).

Apart from making ikat skirts for their own use as well as others in their household, many women in Rumah Ata made *kain* as gifts for relatives in the community. Other reasons for making *kain* included gift-giving to invited distant guests attending a major *gawai*. This reason often coincided with the factor that the invited guest was an urban Iban without the cultural resources to dress in appropriate ritual clothing. In the event of *Gawai Kenyalang* ritual clothing was not worn continuously throughout the week long

festivities. However, it was an appropriate responsibility for participants in a number of rites, such as the opening procession (*niti daun*) and at times of special offerings (*miring*) which families present to attending gods (see Ch.9).

For the 1991 *Gawai Kenyalang* artisans made both large *pua' kumbu'* for use in ritual shrines and small *pua'* for gifts to the *Kenyalang*. The *Kenyalang* effigy, while carved in the form of the Rhinoceros Hornbill and not the Kite (said to represent *Lang*, the god of war), is central to this celebration in which *Lang* is being honoured by feasting (pl.106, 108). On this occasion the major *Kenyalang* rites were sponsored by two host families. While smaller *pua'* were required as gifts for guests and as part of various ritual payments, metres of commercially printed 'Iban cloth' served both as ceremonial cloth and as part of the ritual fee for *lemambang* services (pl.103, 105).

Around this same time many weavers were making cloths for sales related to income needed for feasting. Sales would be made to traders and tourists visiting during the year. My observation was that all artisans were attempting to finish three, four or more textiles before the celebration which was to take place, several months later (pl.51).

Weavers said that they felt it was important to make ceremonial textiles to assure fruitful feasting. Success was brought about by adequate preparation of many things: sugar and rice for fermented rice wine *tuak*, pigs to sacrifice, food for human guests and for non-human guests, especially eggs, rice and fowls, a process which entailed twelve months of activities. Other co-requisites included jars, cloth, iron bars and money for payment to ritual specialists who would be called on to sing and dance ritual chants for three nights and three days.

Given the elemental significance of this particular celebration it receives further detailed analysis in Chapter Nine. I note in passing that while two families acted as hosts in the major rites for the *Gawai Kenyalang*, each separate household in the longhouse simultaneously honoured *Lang* with a discrete set of rites. Some rituals involved similarly significant chants as those noted above and

lasting one to three nights. Other lesser rites were hosted by families who did not retain the services of a specialist.⁹

All families in the longhouse, including those performing a minor rite, combined for the opening processions. That night they remained awake feasting in honour of the Gods and spirits who were being invoked in the respective chanting and dances. Members of each *bilik* proffered gifts of cloth, money and cigarettes to the wooden carved effigies of the Kenyalang (pl.108).

While the event ostensibly generated esteem for the senior member of the specific host families, even the poorest families had to budget for considerable extra outlay of cash and stores of rice and other food. Several women observed that they needed the cash from selling textiles to help buy the things their family would need to assure celebratory success. Some exchanged *pua' kumbu'* for ceremonial accessories such as silver (aluminum) belts (pl.118).

Predictably certain longhouses have become known to merchants as sources of textile sales. Some longhouses have established either private or government contacts who periodically commission work on behalf of craft merchants or wholesale outlets (see Ch.11).

While some women prefer to set up their weaving frames inside the main room of the *bilik* apartment or upstairs in the privacy of sleeping quarters (*sadau*), many prefer to do so in front of the apartment entrance. This space is more open in several different ways, including the quality of opening onto the large enclosed verandah or gallery (*ruai*) which extends the full length of the front half of Iban longhouses.

In Rumah Ata one commonly observes women tying designs or weaving while conversing with other women out along the *ruai*. The time refers to afternoons when most domestic

⁹In the case of a Kenyalang celebration, which according to custom is held to honour the status of men successful in war, it continues to be held in the Baleh region to honour men's achievements in the economic and political arena. The particular rites performed by each family therefore related to that household's composition: a mature adult male, around 50 years of age would perform a more rite than a household in which the head of the family is very young or very old.

chores are taken care of and some have returned from the fields. In the evenings this public gallery becomes even more of a social pleasurable situation. Women tie or weave textiles, perhaps make a palm fibre mat, basket or sun hat. Men might also process fibre for basket-making, construct basket rims or mend a fishing net. Other individuals sit and relax, smoking after the evening meal. Children play and dogs sleep - along a gallery the length of a small ball park (pl.12, 65, 72).

When women work on simpler aspects of winding thread into balls or unwinding ikat bindings from threads, other women and children join in spontaneously, with obvious pleasure in the process of their achievements. This co-operation not only reduces the time one must spend on a multitude of processual elements, but it also transforms the moment into a place of laughter and maybe gossip.

Such activities generate reasons for women from adjacent *bilik* to wander over to the *ruai* area of the neighbouring *bilik* household. Being a social centre, men - young and old - sitting around on the *ruai* see and hear what the weavers are doing and saying. Not surprisingly, men often add their own opinions, increasing the heat of many discussions.

Through casually watching and participating from a young age, children become familiar with handling the fine threads, aware of how they can tangle. They happen to see the various steps involved in processes such as tying and weaving, as well as the common sight of chemical dyeing. So children breathe in ways that things come together to form specific types of patterned cloths, and the preferred configurations of meaningful ideas - grotesque and swirling geometric shapes.

In pre-state lives young children observed and participated in all essential subsistence activities such as planting, gathering, and preparing food. In the 1990s, as already noted, at six or seven years of age children the requirement was that children go away to school. At Rumah Ata the school house was local. But children, from the age of six, were away from their parents by seven a.m. Therefore, they did not have the time to know the fields as apprentice farmers, hunters and gatherers. Although children

were home about midday, many children in upper primary classes returned to school in the afternoons for extra tuition, sports or to help with jobs in the school grounds. The process of Iban schooling had become a thorough socialization, not a modern rite of passage, as one sometimes hears.

In the evenings children join in family life, but with the introduction of generators, by 1991 some households had a television which meant many are now accustomed to watching. This results in fewer (younger) children playing, observing and participating. In the majority of longhouses (e.g. Rumah Balang) where children are away boarding at schools, this leaves present just pre-school aged ones. Older children return home for school holidays but during school terms few are able to go home for weekends, and then often only once a fortnight.

The survey of school children referred to above (pg.122) revealed that, of 25 girls in the upper primary classes at Rumah Ata, only four had made an ikat textile. Although 22 (88 per cent) observed that they want to learn, only 12 girls stated that they actively participate in the *pua'* textile work of their mothers.

Of 94 female students in Kapit secondary schools, only nine seniors had made an ikat textile. Although 74 (79 per cent) noted they wanted to learn how, only 29 girls indicated they had helped their mothers make *pua'*.

As revealed in subsequent analysis of technical processes of ikat skills, the customary way of learning the complexities involves many years of watching and assisting either a mother or grandmother with accomplished skills. This process of learning/transmission is now uprooted by the removal of a new generation into the houses of another kind of schooling.

ACCESSING MATERIALS.

While Iban children's socialization has been altered by agencies of nationalism and industrialization, so too has the economic spirit and logistics of the system through which women attempt to practise customary learned patterns.

In pre-state communities, the quantity and quality of cotton material available to any one individual was directly related to the amount of time she elected to spend in the rice fields in addition to relative skills and luck in locating wild plants or cultivating gardens of cotton (*Gossypium* Sp., *G.arboreum* L.).

Cultivation of cotton would necessarily follow, in priority, to the more urgent responsibility of meeting the family's subsistence food needs - but at the same time was inseparable from the latter. Customarily, textile skills were an essential activity in relation to providing an irreducible minimum of clothing for all within one's sphere of responsibility. While the heat was constant, so were the ultraviolet rays, the biting insects and their viral infections. Even in the tropics most people wear clothing.

Further social pressures were present for Iban women on whom families relied for elaborate ritual cloths which 'shielded' and renewed bodily powers considered essential for survival (Ch.9). Pressure related to family composition.

Supplies of cotton, like rice, are tied to annual agricultural cycles. Cotton plants require about six months from planting to reach maturity. Harvest usually takes place between April and July, after the rainy season ends. This coincides with termination of the rice harvest when women become busy drying and storing their food crops. With harvest complete and the dry season beginning, women can devote more time to spin, weave and dye their cloths (e.g. Fig.3. Agricultural Calendar, p.121).

Families able to break in more land due to the presence of males who could work enjoyed an advantage over other families, but almost all women in the past were capable of accumulating some stock of cotton fibres on the basis of everyday farming and gathering practices.

While textile activities in the 1990s continue to connect with an individual's work practices and thereby centre in the agricultural calendar, women no longer grow their own cotton. Commercially spun cotton threads are now purchased from traders and it is available in the shops the year around. But the core of the economic picture of accessing materials in the 1990s is not the cycle of the

seasons, but is the flow of available cash by which women can buy the thread as they need it. In this economic sense, many women are alienated from the means of producing textiles given the constraints of meeting subsistence needs and the high costs of thread.

In 1991, a cone of cotton thread weighing just under two kilograms cost approximately M\$30 (i.e. about M\$18/kilo). A tin of dye powder (which colours 60 grams of cotton) cost around M\$2.50. By way of contrast, locally milled rice purchased in bulk cost about M\$1.62 per kilo, sugar cost about M\$1.33 per kilo, and a small tin of condensed milk, M\$1.60.

As indicated by the Annual Statistical Bulletin survey of family expenditures in 1982, Iban households were at that time spending an average of M\$247 on food each month. Families spent another M\$176 on requirements including fuel, transport, clothing, furnishings (ASB 1991:167).

Families that were not dependent on cash earnings from wages faced the challenge of supplementing inadequate production of staple foods, prior to buying cotton thread and dye-stuffs. And returns for tapping rubber say, if the trees belonged to others, brought in a mere M\$2 a day on those days that were dry enough to work in 1991.

Women living in rural longhouses in the Baleh district rarely had open opportunities to engage in wage work, even when they went to live in Kapit town. An exception at Rumah Ata was a young woman who was working, temporarily, as a school teacher. A few families had set up small supply stores at Rumah Ata and sold canned goods, matches, cigarettes, drinks and sweets. A few young women were selling clothing and jewellery which they would bring from town. But cash-strapped families did not get into situations of the preceding kinds. Open to a few of them was the chance of selling surplus fruit and vegetables.

A health clinic was planned for the location of Rumah Ata but the indications were that local residents would not find wage work during construction. The government employed its own people for such projects, even to the extent of bringing drivers for clinic boats from outside the region - a procedure which puzzled the local men who knew, very well,

the dangers of the rapids. The point made here is that there are always inflated universal claims made regarding frontier areas, work opportunities and high wages gained. Some few earned fantastic figures for labour offered for brief periods. But the majority of individuals who wanted work had great difficulty finding it. Hence the exodus of workers to off-shore rigging jobs and the like - Bahrain via Singapore, or Miri if more fortunate and less ambitious.

At both Rumah Ata and Rumah Balang, women in families that did not produce adequate income through either cash crops or wage work, sometimes acquired cotton thread through the sale of an old inherited textile or cloths they made themselves. In this regard, many women financed their own materials - but their involvement in textile weaving was no longer an end in itself with ritual implications, but also a means to earn some surplus cash.

Individuals were sensitive about discussing the number of textiles they weave in a year for the purpose of selling. Some women admitted they did not have to sell weavings but were prepared to if someone wanted to buy from them. More than one individual observed that she felt lucky that she did not have to take her work to traders like others who needed money and who had to sell at low prices.

In 1991, table-runner sized ikat cloths (about 35cm. by 70cm.) were priced anywhere from M\$25 to M\$35 in most urban shops. However, government employees and private traders purchasing pieces were paying wholesale prices as low as M\$10 for the same pieces (pl.54).

One group of intimates at Rumah Ata noted that they were able, on occasion, and willing, to sell their textiles direct to tourists who stopped for short visits at their longhouse. However, since the construction of their new longhouse in the 1980s they have observed fewer tourists, since tourists seem to have the need to say they saw 'traditional' longhouses.

With reference to my development of a data base on continuity, a similar set of questions was asked of 32 children attending the district primary school at Rumah Ata in 1991. The initial objective was to establish numbers of mothers who continued to make *pua' kumbu'*. Children were subse-

quently asked, "Does your mother make *pua' kumbu'* to sell?" and "Does your grandmother make *pua' kumbu'* to sell?". Of 28 children who recorded that their mother continued to make ikat cloths, 11 respondents (39%) answered that their mother made *pua'* to sell. Of a total of 18 grandmothers who made ikat cloths, 8 respondents (44%) recorded that the grandmother made *pua'* to sell. The significance of this data was that, in 1991, of 46 women who made ikat textiles in the district served by that Baleh school, 29 artisans (63%) made *pua'* to sell. But, I emphasize that the survey result, in no way, implied a singular commercial purpose in respect to ikat activities.

In a complementary survey objective, student responses were gathered from the two Kapit schools representing the larger Kapit District. The results indicated that 32 per cent of 185 weavers made ikat textiles to sell. This control group comprised 100 'grandmothers', of whom 16 individuals (16%) made ikat textiles for commercial purposes, and 85 'mothers' of whom 44 individuals (52%) also made textiles to sell.

As a composite picture of Baleh and Kapit ikat activities, of a total of 231 women recorded in these surveys as making *pua' kumbu'* in 1991, 79 individuals (34%) made some of these ikat textiles to sell.

Noted earlier is the observation that brokers rely on certain longhouses and artisans within those communities. (To a large extent the preference connects with preoccupation with 'quality control', a point pursued further in Chapter 11). In sum, the commercialization of ikat practices in 1991 grounds in the influences of an external socializing group. The implications relate to decisions made by Iban with respect to subsistence patterns/needs and external social networks.

This does not suggest that individuals did not benefit from exchange of textiles in the past. Customarily, master dyers were paid highly. In pre-state times, Iban personal credit accrued on the basis of experience and authority which arose with the transmission of complex mordant practices and rites associated with alchemical processes. Those receiving knowledge and threads treated to enable a

deep red colour through sponsoring such rites, gave a large heirloom ceramic pot, a textile, a metal armband, and other goods such as eggs and rice used in the dye ceremony.

In a similar way, artists who accumulated experience and personal authority through the process of transmitting knowledge of tying were also credited, with payment due in some similar form to above for helping with difficult and dangerous motif work. But again, this process of exchange is not product or object-oriented in the way that a broker strikes a deal. The crucial difference is that customary Iban practices are grounded in mutuality where both parties benefit from similar qualitative knowledge through a shared experience.

To explain further, an artist sometimes would customarily 'sell' or lend a piece to her neighbour for a ritual fee for the purpose of imitating this work. This situation is complex. Firstly it negates any simple idea that Iban were acquisitive, in the same way that it adds complexities to the notion of plagiarism. The dreamcloth is valued for the originality of its design which, according to Iban customary belief, is transmitted to them from the spirit world. It manifests a system of numeracy in addition to aesthetic literacy. The numeracy skills become an important object of subsequent study below.

Today, women gain in different economic ways from trading their cloths. Against a backdrop of increasing use of commercial yarns and dyes, by selling cloths women maintain financial independence within the family unit in regard to being able to purchase materials and so maintain basic control over their textile activities. But at the same time, those who rely on selling the cloths become dependent on other than their husband and/or parent. The new reliance concerns external market conditions and purposes of local traders. This issue, too, will be studied below.

Turning attention again to continuities with particular regard for values which might help explain current motivation to undertake ikat artwork, I asked students attending high school in Kapit District the question, "Making *pua' kumbu'* is considered a valuable Iban custom in Sarawak" - "Why do you think that is so?" The question was framed with

qualitative intentions related to spontaneity in an attempt to disarm respondents. After all, they were faced with an overly-familiar 'test' situation, given the context of a schoolroom.

The majority of respondents felt that value lies in the Iban custom or tradition (*adat tradisi*) in itself. I would gloss this as *making pua' is an end in itself*.

The majority added an observation to the effect that 'Iban' need *pua' kumbu'* to use for various ritual occasions and that making the cloths is important so that these occasions will not be lost. The suggestion is that *pua'* are symbols of Iban identity. But more importantly, alluded to by the respondents is the means by which this identity is transmitted - *pua' kumbu'*.

These observations are valuable as they are made by objective insiders, a condition developed through distance, analytical training and continuing aesthetic-economic dependence on family. The lesson they teach students of Iban textile arts is that these practices are an end in themselves. These skills are also related directly to the cultural transmission of Iban practice of beliefs.

Further, a small percentage of respondents saw my question as constituting an issue - a significant result. This meant that some respondents saw discontinuities where the question ostensibly identified continuities. In this regard, some respondents focussed on *pua' kumbu'* as embodying beauty, originality, and as comparatively *fine* (e.g. "our fine art which is made by hand"). While some students suggested that *pua'* are important as decorative cloths, others pointed out that *pua'* are more than decorative, as they were needed in the past to receive skulls, and are *still needed* - for specific rites related to planting padi, many other offerings, and to 'shield' patients during healing rites. One student added that some bad omen would occur wherever one neglected to use a *pua'* when making offerings.

A predictable majority observed bald economic means, noting that *pua' kumbu'* could be sold to get extra income especially when families needed money. Some pointed out that *pua' kumbu'* could be sold for a high price, especially to

tourists. Others suggested that *pua'* could be made into wallets and bags and shirts and two students suggested a factory should be set up with machines so that they could make more ikat cloths, faster and cheaper.

Interestingly, a majority of students, whether concerned with western rational-industrial factors or customary aesthetic-economic values, took the question as implicitly critical of *the younger generation*. Addressing this inference, most students observed that it was difficult for the young individual to practise ikat since it took a long time and it required a lot of ingredients. A few added that, despite these problems, it was important to continue to learn the skills which had been passed on from generation to generation. One student added that 'it is one of the important relations between young and old generations'.

A young Baleh Iban girl, in the 1990s, who leaves high school (early by western rules) to return to marry and to live in her longhouse, will probably practise weaving. Her first weaving is usually made possible through thread she gets from her mother or other female member of her household. This thread may be a gift, or in some cases a reward for help given through such chores as ball winding, or simply an incentive to encourage participation in the work.

PROCESSING THE COTTON MATERIAL.

The question of relationship of artisan to her materials is altered in fundamental ways by industrialization. With the introduction of commercial yarns the changes occur in ways that artisans are distanced from many of the weaving processes.

To begin with the basic cotton material, in 1991 women no longer identified to it as an organic seed that is inextricable from human or any other seed - and subject to critical phases in its bodily life cycle demanding nurture (e.g. Freeman 1955). In pre-state lives, as was the case with rice growing, women spent time picking, sorting and processing each boll in every basket of harvested cotton. They would husk (*ngelesit*) or 'gin' (*igi'*) the fibre by feeding a boll through wooden rollers of a small cotton gin

(*pemigi*). The material would be given a further flicking with a stick or plaited rattan beater in order to open the fibres, prior to spinning it into thread.

As Howell (1912) observed, these ginning and flicking procedures were taken very seriously in the connections viewed with all other processes that affect the life of individuals in the community. They were strictly prohibited inside the longhouse building, probably I suggest, because of the perception that beating or altering the original boll might be misconstrued and offend the spirits and cause bad luck in the community.

The name of the beater, *pemalu' taya'*, itself alludes to a dangerous procedure. While *malu'* means 'to beat', according to Richards (1988) an almost identical Iban word, *malu'* means 'to be shy, ashamed, to hurt someone's feelings'. In this event, it refers to the feelings of the cotton fibre (*taya'*) which, if abused when removing the seeds, would not be taken lightly by divinities.

Iban customary belief accentuates how the plant, as does human life, contains essence which accompanies the harvested plant back to the longhouse. Care is taken to nurture this essence in the sense that good action will increase the potential of that harvest and conversely abuse will diminish the quantity and quality of materials grown (e.g. Freeman 1955).

In 1991, one older woman at Rumah Ata showed pride in her small basket of raw cotton which she had cultivated. But she did not own a spinning wheel. She would need to borrow an old one (*gasing*) from an elderly 'cousin' living at the far end of the longhouse to spin (*ngasing*) her cotton into yarn (*ubong*). No one apparently owned a gin in 1991. Likewise at Rumah Balang, women there had begun to grow some cotton but only one old woman had a spinning wheel. This item was in disrepair.

Several older women gathered to get it operable to demonstrate how the fibres are drawn onto the spindle (*mata gasing*) as one holds the cotton in the left hand and turns the wheel with the right (pl.73). They managed the operation with minimal problems and a few laughs. The women prepared the fibres by flicking it with a stick but there was

evidently no available ginning mill. They had only a small quantity of cotton, not enough for a small cloth at that time. The women explained that they had begun to grow the cotton for a special cloth and that it would take them a very long time to make it.

Only the oldest surviving Iban textiles from the beginning of the 20th century are commonly found to be made from handspun cotton. The handspun threads are single ply and very finely spun. However, because of inconsistency in hand spinning, these would be grouped two or three together. According to Howell (1912:62-66) skeins of handspun yarn were starched by dipping them into a sticky rice mixture (*kanji*). This process would both strengthen the fine threads by 'gluing' the fibres to each other, as well as make the threads stiffer and so more manageable for winding, tying and weaving processes.

By the end of the 1800s commercially spun cotton threads were being introduced to Iban longhouses via commercial traders. By the mid-1900s commercial thread had become the standard material used in ritual cloths.

In 1991 cotton yarn was available in two main forms. The preferred thread for large ritual ikat cloths was a commercially hand-spun, single-ply cotton which traders imported from India and China. This yarn, which generally came on cones in two kilo lots, was unbleached and most resembled the uneven texture of their ancestors' handspun material.

The second option was a machine-spun 'sewing' cotton. This thread was composed of a finer, smoother single-ply strand which had been bleached. It enabled more vivid contrast in colors and fine sharp lines on ikat design work and so was frequently used for smaller pieces such as a narrow scarf. However, because spool cotton could be purchased in a range of rich colours, it was sometimes used for outside striped borders in combination with cone cotton which was not available as a pre-dyed material.

While bleached spool cotton worked out to be more expensive for a large textile, it could be purchased in small quantities. A single spool cost as little as M\$2.50 compared to a minimal outlay of around M\$30 for a single cone. Due to the consistencies of spin in commercial thread,

Iban women generally used threads doubled, no longer needing to vary combinations to off-set thick and thin sections of handspinning.

Women preferred to have two cones of cotton available at one time so that they could take an end from each to wind together into continuous skeins of two stranded thread. If a person had only one cone, half the thread had would have to be first wound off by hand into a ball. This was not only time consuming, but it was more difficult to keep an even tension between the threads when drawing them off a cone and a ball, simultaneously, in the process of winding threads together.

These threads are not twisted into a single two-ply thread, but simply drawn together as a pair. Often, women will feed the ends through a hook or coat hanger attached to an overhead ceiling beam, and back down to a person sitting on the floor next to the cones - ready to wind the skeins. The worker ties these ends to one bar of an H-shaped wooden winder (*kalai*) onto which the thread would be wound. The winder is held in the left hand as the right hand guides the doubled threads onto the four tips of the frame in a rhythmical figure eight motion. Iban women describe this process as *niki ke ubong taya' ngagai kalai*; that is, the cotton thread goes up onto the winder.

After every fifteen rotations or so, a cord or plastic tie must be twined about the group of threads just wound. This retains the order of the threads which are building up at the centre in pairs of crossed threads - as these pass the centre initially at one angle and then the opposite. The crossed pairs are secured in small groups to assure the order of the threads is maintained; and this prevents tangling during later manipulation of the thread.

When the winder is full, the skein is pried off and the figure eight opens out into one large skein. The ends of a good *kalai* are shaped in a slight curve and those of an old one are worn smooth with use which enables the cotton to slip off more easily than from a new one. The experienced person is careful not to wind the cotton on too tightly.

The next step involves starching the skeins of commercial thread (*nganji ubong*), as the grandmothers of these

artisans did to their hand spun cotton. Many Iban artisans no longer bother with starch because the commercial threads are perceived as ready for use. However, Baleh women emphasize the importance of starching. Because the double stranded threads have not been plied together, the starch not only makes the thread stiffer and easier to work with, but it also reduces shifting due to stretch and sag during tying and weaving. In so doing, this helps the weaver to produce sharper lines in the ikat patterning.

Individuals who cut out this, or any other steps, are characteristically criticized by others for undue haste, which is perceived as a cause of less than fine results.

The starch (*kanji*) is made by cooking the sticky glutinous type of rice (*Oryza glutinosa*) referred to as *padi pulut*. This is kneaded into a creamy paste and mashed through a strainer into a bucket. Some water is added to make a soupy consistency, enough to wet the skein of cotton. The skein is worked with the fingers, pressing and squishing it in the soupy paste so that the cotton absorbs the mixture as evenly and thoroughly as possible.

Excess mixture is wrung out and the wet skein is stretched vertically between two horizontal bamboo poles (*buloh galah*) - which are sometimes referred to as a ladder for the thread (*tangga' ubong*). This 'ladder' is usually set up in a shady place outside, or inside a storage shed, for the initial drying period (pl.71).

In one example, at Rumah Ata, the poles were inserted through loops of strong cord which were attached to cross-beams on the ceiling and floor. Two small sticks were inserted into the bottom loops, one at each end of the lower bamboo pole, and twisted to shorten the length of the loop and so bring the cotton skein under tension.

The sticky threads are spread out along the poles, which may be up to 150 centimetres long, to allow maximum air to circulate and reduce sticking of adjacent threads to acceptable levels. The plastic tie is removed from one bundle at a time, taking care to work according to the order in which the bundles of paired threads were wound.

After three or four hours, when the thread is still damp but sufficiently dry so that the rice starch has begun to

stiffen about the thread, it is brushed.¹⁰ A piece of coconut husk is stroked down the length of the thread, from top to bottom along outer and inner surfaces of the skein to remove lumps of paste and bits of rice husk and to separate threads sticking to adjacent ones (pl.71).

The thread is left another three or four hours until dry. Then each double strand is picked out, cross by cross, to further separate the thread. A plastic tie is then reinserted around bundles of thread (which do not have to be as small as those required to withstand handling during the starching process).

The starched skein is set out in the sun. This assures it is not damp when either stored away, or wound into balls, for use in weaving as warp (*peniri*) or weft (*pakan*) thread.

While the actual starching, brushing and general handling of the yarn requires only an hour or less at the beginning, middle and end of the process, lapsed time for the process is a full day, from early morning to late afternoon. The textile starching process fits into a general domestic routine for women. Drier months of July and August are preferred for this work, when the thread will dry in one day. In brief, the implications of the preceding description are that customary textile arts mesh intimately with everyday lives.

IKAT WEAVING EQUIPMENT.

An observation transmitted in the Iban literature is that while weaving is always done by women, men customarily make the tools (e.g. Palmieri & Ferentinos 1979:74, Jabu 1991:79). While this is a usual pattern, in the 1990s, some influential Iban textile artists in Sarawak are men. It can be said that these males self-consciously participate in a predominantly female field of specialization. But these male artists exhibit equal confidence that they follow their

¹⁰The term *ngikat* is frequently used by Iban women to refer to the step of drying and combing the starched cotton prior to the binding process. It is also used by an Iban research officer in a Sarawak Museum video (n.d.) of Iban weaving processes). Although Anthony Richards (1988) notes *ngikat* is a word for ikat, that is, to tie, or bind in *An Iban-English Dictionary*, this is a Malay usage, whereas the usual Iban term for ikat is *ngebat*.

vocation - in that they are called into a specific field of work through attending to their subconscious needs. These needs arise in dream interpretation.

These situations speak for themselves in terms of the aesthetics of performance. There is a customary active involvement of men in the textile arts. Mashman (1986:24) observes an example of this in an Iban chant, wherein the male lover creates for Kumáng (goddess of textile arts) an intricate carved handle as part of a weaving sword (beater).

Further, men developed skills in fine pursuits related to basket and mat weaving, wood carving, tattooing, tool-making and others. But there remained much to be done in the way of heavy work related to shaping longboats from large tree trunks, and house construction.

While these preceding observations relate to pre-state lives, there is a whole other set of questions which are raised here concerning the encroachment of males into a customary sphere of women's art. The transmission of textile skills, and specifically the continuity of control over the means of reproducing customary work, invokes the issue of industrialization as a male dominated sphere of activity. This issue is not analyzed in this chapter but is reserved for subsequent discussion in Chapter 11. Noted here, it draws attention to the customary relationship of an artisan and her materials.

In pre-state Iban lives the connection of women's artistic skills and industrial or technological proficiency is less than problematic. The evidence in 1991 is that women artisans invariably turn to use their own knives. Many women make their loom and tying frame and to a western eye are astonishingly adroit at splitting down a stick to replace a missing part, or splitting rattan to make a basket or mat.

For example, one older woman was very critical of the poor craftsmanship of a set of new weaving implements and immediately set to work to transform the shapes and surfaces of a skein winder, a sword shaped beater and shed stick. She virtually remade the winder. She shortened and reshaped the ends by carving a considerable wedge off each, finally sanding and oiling it while still shaking her head and grumbling about the original faults. To an untrained eye the

original looked like any other winder, but to the user it was not in a workable condition. She remedied this.

The winder and other wooden implements used in weaving are often treated with the oil from a seed of the *kepayang* fruit (*Scaphium* spp.) which women collect from jungle near their farms. The seeds are smoked by hanging them above the hearth at the rear of the *bilik* for two or three months. When broken open and rubbed into the wooden implements, this oiling gives artefacts a rich black finish which becomes deep and smooth over years of use. Either bees or candle wax (*lilin*), is applied to new pieces of equipment which have not yet acquired a glass-like finish. Weavers esteem the worn hardwood pieces inherited from great grandparents.

A back-tension loom, a few wooden frames, and a wooden trough for dye baths are the main pieces of equipment needed by a textile artist - which resembles the picture of ancestors' implements. The Iban loom (*tumpoh*) is often referred to in Iban simply as a set of weaving equipment (*perengka tenun*). The set comprises a complement of sticks and a backstrap: two solid end beams, a thick round shed stick and a small companion rod for changing sheds, a sword shaped beater and a shuttle which is a stick or spool which may or may not be inserted inside a bamboo case, and a barkcloth belt (pl.12, 35).

Most of these artefacts are made from hardwood (*belian*), preferably an ironwood (*Eusideroxylon* spp.) which is yellowish-red when first cut but quickly turns black in air or water (Richards 1988:39). An additional set of lease sticks, or laze rods (*lidi*) which resemble bamboo slats are made from a strong flexible palm ribs (pl.74,75).

The loom sticks, which are assembled by winding a set of warp strings around them, also require strong cord to secure the end beam to a post and the breast beam to the backstrap which fits about the weavers waist. Customarily, cords and backstraps would be fashioned from barkcloth from the *tekalong* tree (*Artocarpus* sp.). In the 1990s women use commercial ropes and pieces of canvas or heavy plastic sacking to make into backstraps.

The frame on which artisans secure the loom sticks when a new cotton warp is in the process of being wound also

requires manufacture of wooden pieces (pl.72,79). Similarly, wood is processed for oblong frames on which warps are secured in preparation for binding ikat designs (pl.81). Two long thick bamboo poles are also needed on which to stretch skeins of starched thread for drying (pl.71).

At Rumah Ata, men sometimes helped by cutting wood into narrow boards or assembling the large frames. Women were observed making the free-standing skein holder/winder. They utilized a shorter bamboo rod set vertically onto a wooden peg or large nail. A set of four lease sticks were inserted through the bamboo axis as a top and lower cross. String was fed from tip to tip and top to bottom to provide a flexible hub on which to fit skeins of thread (pl.72).

Male members in the artisan's household have a non-altruistic interest in helping her make the tools since there is a perception that they stand to gain from the woman's weaving skills. This is demonstrated by lyrics of a chant associated with *Gawai Kenyalang* in which a skilled weaver is instructed to weave *Lang* (god of war) a special waistband for his sword. Five accomplished artisans at Rumah Ata were selected to act this out, each weaving a belt at the Kenyalang celebration held there in 1991.

Further, men gain, as do others, from the optimal accumulation of energy in cloths, renewed during ritual practices. Cloths have different degrees of potency for use as shields to regenerate bodily energy (*ayu*). This topic is taken up in Chapter Nine.

Returning to the relationship of artisan and equipment, while much of the wood was freely available, in 1991 rope and some of the best hardwood materials had to be purchased. Some women demonstrated readiness to sell inherited ancestral loom sticks for which they gave up affective need. Others had to purchase looms. A few families were observed making new sets of loom equipment and, while men used to prepare the barkcloth for the belt or back-strap, women were often observed, in 1991, taking up the work of fashioning this item with a needle and cord and a piece of plastic or canvas material.

Sometimes the looms were sold to local artisans and on occasion to traders or other artisans in the Kapit market

place. A set of loom sticks sold for about \$M40 to \$M60 in 1991, depending on the quality of hardwood used and craftsmanship, particularly with respect to the beater. A prized sword-shaped beater which featured a glassy finish and carved end could sell on its own for in excess of \$M60.

The evidence is strong that customarily artisans developed untrammelled access to materials through local forest availability and human resources from within her own economic unit. Some of the complexities of wife-husband relations within the family unit have been noted previously. Others warrant further investigation since the Iban discourse concerns egalitarianism as a factor of macro analysis of intra- and inter-kindred group connections.

Nonetheless, a critical difference occurs in the contemporary relationship of artisan and her material resources. Women have become dependent on commercial sources for both materials and value added to these items. Further reliance on traders has also been noted in the need to sell products in order to get cash to buy basic resource materials. The implications are far-reaching in terms of the aesthetics of textile practices, in addition to issues of inter-personal relationships within the family unit and the wider longhouse community. This issue is developed below.

This chapter was introductory in the sense that it posed the question of aesthetic-economic variables in Iban textile arts. It demonstrated ways in which the lives of textile artists are increasingly integrated into the national economy in terms of access to materials, tools and saleable products. A related objective informed the following two chapters - in respect to the relationship between the artist and access, to including historical, uses of knowledge.

The next chapter focusses on the technical processes of making ikat cloth as practised by longhouse Iban artisans. The intention is to demonstrate what it is an individual needs to learn, and how this knowledge is developed in skills which relate to creative, and particularly aesthetic, aspects of design work. While automatic reactions take over in the case of experienced artisans, there can generally be observed a mix of individual pride in accomplishment and

social grace, even in those who concentrate more as novices. Further, Chapter Seven presents details about the technical work of Iban ikat weaving which will demonstrate how the relation of artisan and her materials is intensive in respect to numeracy skills and abstract thought processes.

CHAPTER 7
PREPARING A WARP FOR AN IKAT TEXTILE

The stranger makes haste to start her weaving
She picks up a ball of cotton, like the egg of a
bird
Pulls out the white thread that leaps about like a
small fish
With care she inserts the two laze rods,
She presses against the backstrap loom,
She knows her shuttle like a fish darting through
still waters.

from *Timang Gawai Amat*
(trans. Masing 1981:354).

In the cycle above the singer honours the spiritual patron of textile arts; and in so doing pays tribute to the historical importance of weaving in Iban lives. The passage of time has seen fundamental alterations in the practice of textile arts including the current emphasis on *ikat* processes in the 1990s. The actual weaving in *ikat* work is a final process - the culmination of lengthy and complex processes of warp thread preparation.

According to customary Iban practice, prior to the weaving process, an accomplished Iban *ikat* artist develops the representation of her dream - through seeing in an abstract way how to arrange the tying of the warp threads. In this sense, weaving is an anticipated event in which creativity is finally realized through easy movements of the shuttle.

Textiles made at Rumah Ata in the period between 1990 and 1993 are virtually all warp *ikat* cloths.¹ Again, the *ikat* process constitutes an abstract way of seeing that contains specific possibilities for representing ideas and values. This chapter will attempt to make this point clearer by focussing on the complexities of ordering the threads, folding and binding them in ways that tame the chaos rather than negate it through linear skills. Tangles and mis-ordering jeopardize subsequent procedures and the quality of the final product. At the same time the artist attempts to

¹Although some older women say they make skirts patterned with supplementary weft (both *pilih* and *karap*), between 1990 and 1993 only *ikat* weaving was evident.

represent subconscious processes which speak of more than linear patterns.

The approach in this chapter, and the following one, is to follow the steps of an experienced Iban artisan, one who presumes responsibilities and pleasures of passing on and renewing that knowledge through tuition.² The rationale for including detailed descriptive data here is that the practical steps for binding ikat designs are given relatively little attention in the literature, compared, say, to the ritual dye ceremonies. Yet commonsense suggests that the vision and the skills to be able to represent that vision connect intimately with how Iban artisans proceed with the imagery. No elemental process is separable from the overall significance of ikat artistry; and dyeing studies demonstrate this point convincingly. Nonetheless, the implications of the warp tying process are profound in respect to Iban numeracy and aesthetic literacy. This is a complex study in itself; and the intention here is introductory in demonstrating merely the parameters of these skills.

As already noted, there is unequal need to discuss all steps with the same degree of detail. However, some attention is given to the dying process to emphasize the proposition that today, with the introduction of chemical dyes, it is the design work which distinguishes Iban ritual cloths from other forms of backstrap weaving.

PLANNING TO MAKE A WARP IKAT TEXTILE.

The first process in making an ikat cloth is to measure out the warp (*peniri*) thread to be wound onto the loom and into which the weft (*pakan*) will eventually be woven. At Rumah Ata women concur that an individual about to make her first Iban ikat cloth appropriately begins with a small piece, in respect to the level of trained energy or concentration, as well as relative finger-toe dexterity which the guideline takes into account. This commonsense guide implies concern for bodily well-being - a premise of successful

²The term tuition is used here to mean teach, but not in the formal sense of classes or paid tuition. The woman's 'students' range from younger family members to an occasional visitor who has asked to observe her work or, in my case, undertook to make an ikat textile with her help.

subsistence practices - as well as Iban expression of wisdom concerning patience and appropriate action.

As mentioned previously, most families at Rumah Ata had a number of large *pua' kumbu'*, new and/or old. These ritual ikat cloths generate a rich source of reference material. Many women were observed imitating or modifying designs from existing cloths.

Novices as well as experienced ikat artists usually choose to refer to an existing textile as an exemplary object. In that piece the artisan can read parameters of the intended textile dimensions: the length (i.e. how far to set the end beams apart), and the width (i.e. how much warp to build up around the two beams).

Warping, which requires careful ordering of the thread, is referred to by artisans as *belebas*, derivative of (Iban) *lebas* which means *to make distinct* or *clear*. This term emphasizes the fact that the threads are not indiscriminately wound onto the end beams. Threads are discrete and separate and take up an appropriate relationship to others on the beam. Further indicated is that the warping process (*belebas*) requires consideration of specific ikat requirements, which relate to manipulability both of warp groups on the tying frame and of individual threads on the loom.

Both the dimensions and the design composition need to be well considered prior to understanding how many warp threads to wind onto the loom and how to group them for the proposed design. As the top and bottom layers of a continuous tubular warp are always bound together, two identically patterned ikat cloths result. When these two identical panels are joined side by side to form the final composition, the overall design is informed by a vertical mirror image (pl.45, 58, 65).

The interpretation of ikat designs requires specific thought processes. An artisan sets out to translate cerebrally-viewed (or concrete reference material) that is *graphically representational*, bit by bit, onto horizontal bundles of threads (pl.22).

Individuals learn to do so through intensive practice, becoming *familiar* with handling the thread in its various forms and textures (starched, wet, discrete, combined), and

learning the qualities of each step taken - in the sense that the process synthesizes reproduction of complex visual imagery.

An Iban artisan is not required by the process, nor probably cares, to intellectualize ways in which customary ordering of threads into pairs and triplet groupings works out. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the process of interpreting and creating ikat design work is represented schematically below, to illustrate processual complexities and to emphasize the abstract nature of these practices.

Generally a large *pua' kumbu'* is physically composed by joining two panels vertically at the side selvages. An average size is about 230 centimetres long by 120 centimetres wide, although shapes and sizes vary considerably. What I refer to as small *pua'* are made from a single panel, often measuring only 75 centimetres by 45 centimetres. Some single panel cloths are larger, say 175 centimetres by 60 centimetres wide - the width resembling a half panel in a large *pua' kumbu'*. The single panel quality, and hence the appearance of a small cloth, gives it kinship with older ikat shawls (*dandong*) used during ritual occasions.

The other principal category of ikat cloth made by artisans at Rumah Ata is *kain* or ceremonial skirts. The width of these is related to the dress requirements of the intended user. An average adult skirt requires a piece of fabric approximately 98 centimetres long by 48 centimetres wide. The cloth is sewn into a cylindrical shape.

Less commonly made items include men's loin cloths (*sirat*), which require a particularly long narrow length of cloth anywhere from 200-400 centimetres by a mere 35-40 centimetres wide. In many cases artisans use a piece of commercial cloth for all but the handwoven end panels or tail flaps (*kelapong*). Artisans also occasionally make ikat celebratory jackets. As earlier discussion explains there is less contemporary use of loin cloths and jackets compared to skirts and *pua' kumbu'*, but they are still perceived as appropriate apparel during major *gawai* or feasting.

Artisans at Rumah Ata generally concur that deciding what textile to make is a personal preference. But the social-cultural background to development of these choices

includes 'givens' such as preparation for a *gawai*. For example, during the principal twelve month season of fieldwork the purpose of most artisans comprised creating cloths for the *Gawai Kenyalang* - as long as a year away. These activities included textiles for their own use but also smaller *pua'* for sales to raise the extra money demanded by *Gawai Kenyalang* festive responsibilities. In particular, by making extra textiles women raised money for heavy thread and aniline dye requirements.

Once decided on the type of cloth to weave, a person chooses how many pieces to make on one warp. A general constraint is the amount of thread/dyestuff she can afford. But even a person with only enough thread for a small warp makes the choice of making one double or two single panel cloths.

The maximum warp length manageable on an Iban stick loom is about 4.5 metres in length, from beam to beam. The continuous tube formation of the warp, as it becomes wrapped about the end beams, actually enables twice that length of cloth to be woven on one warp (i.e. 9 metres). However, a shorter warp is more manageable and is also suitable for most cloths.

In 1991, Baleh artisans generally warped their looms so as to produce end result combinations such as:

- 2 identical panels to make 1 large double panel cloth or 2 separate single panel cloths;
- 4 similar panels to make 2 smaller double panel cloths or 4 small single panel cloths.

Each of these combinations fits a warp tube akin in size to what customarily accommodates a large *pua' kumbu'* or ceremonial skirt. Where a large single panel cloth is to be made with the same dimensions as one of the two panels of a double sized cloth, the artisan can simply duplicate the number of ikat groups required to tie similar pattern work. However, in cases where the artisan reduces the size to a miniature 'place mat' she facilitates the process of reinterpreting a large cloth (she intends to imitate) in terms of the number of warp threads required (pl.39).

Although the width of a warp for a skirt may be the same as that used for a miniature *pua'*, the design work is characteristically finer and more intricate on ceremonial

skirts than on contemporary small *pua'* (pl.15,22,54). While the less elaborate design work directly relates to the commercial quality of the latter mats, and the corollary is that *kain* embody communication with divinities, the two types of work share this in common: they require a process of reinterpretation concerning the reduction in number and fineness of motifs. The significance of this 'reinterpretation' process is that *imitation* is not identical with copying, as will be made clearer in this and the next chapter (pl.39,44,46).

While the exact size of a *pua'* is not critical, the dimensions of a skirt are carefully worked out to the size of the person who will wear it. The width specifications for most ikat textiles are worked out in two stages. The initial warping process concerns only that part of the cloth which will be ikat-worked. After designs have been tied, dyed, and the warp re-applied to the loom beams, additional warp threads are then added to form striped side borders (*ara*) - and this way make up the desired warp width for weaving into fabric.

Figure 4. Design layout for *pua' kumbu'*.



Larger cloths are often given additional vertical band(s) of ikat designs within the side borders (Fig.4). These ikat bands constitute the anak or child(ren) of the parent configuration or central design (pl.48-50,52). Often anak designwork is informed by depiction of bird, serpent or other creatures. A warp to be woven into fabric for a single panel piece will consistently have striped or motif-dominated panels added to each side, while a warp which is to form a joined panel will require stripes on just one side since the other is seen as a centre seam (pl.41).

A large cloth can be seen as twin mirror images created by joining two identical panels vertically at their selv-edges, while the designwork within each panel is similarly composed of two, three, four or more 'repeats' which can also be seen as mirror images (pl.41,51-54). These repeats resemble a series of panels which reduce to one long, narrow, multiple layered strip when a cloth or set of warp threads is folded vertically in a fan or accordion fashion. By folding the warp over to form two, three or more layers, the ikat patterns can be bound simultaneously - much as paper dolls are cut in school art classes (pl.61,65).

Once folded, a multi-layered panel represents the optimal number of warp threads that are tied in order to create the larger overall design (pl.68,69). The number of folds varies according to the nature of the design.³ When questioned, individuals observe that the decision is personal whether to fold a panel in order to form three, four, five and even eight layers. The minimal vertical section of a design to be tied and the number of times it will be repeated (by folding, or layering multiple sections of warp threads) is generally determined by reference material. The latter refers to existing artefacts, or in the case of an innovative work, experience - in respect to similar design principles.

Analysis of various cloths uncovers variables which relate to the preceding decision-making process: In a

³The number of folds may also be determined by the size and number of cloths to be tied - artisans pointed out that ikat bundles are difficult to bind effectively if too few threads are included in each.

selected sample of 160 large two-paneled *pua' kumbu'*, for 138 pieces (86%) the maker has created the respective design by folding the warp in a three-fold Z-fashion to form three repeats/mirror images on each vertical panel (pl.43-44, 46-49, 58-60, 65-66). In 16 of the total of 160 two-panel cloths the artisans developed the design patterns in a two-fold, (doubled over V-fashion) to form a single mirror image within each of the panels (pl.62,63). Only six two-panel cloths were composed in a four-fold, or M-fashion, to form four repeats within each panel.

While large two-panel cloths are the predominating form of *pua' kumbu'* which survive from the past, field observations in the 1990s indicated a transformation. Although women continue to make two-panel cloths, the overwhelming tendency, at this time, is making smaller single-panel *pua'*. An analysis of decision-making related to constructing these small *pua'* reveals that, of a total sample of 26 single panel cloths: 11 constitute a two-fold in order to create one mirror image comprising two repeats; 8 cloths are based on a three-fold; and 7 on a four-fold.

The implication of the preference for even numbered (i.e. two and four) repeats relates directly to commercial realities. Predominating in this sample group are cloths which feature just two large figures of warriors - a tourism best-seller. For such bold realistic patterns, a single fold made up of two layers is easily translated visually since at least half, if not all, of a motif is exposed on the surface of the warp being tied. One need tie only one half of a symmetrical shape or human figure (e.g. a front view), but in the case of an asymmetrical one (e.g. a side profile) the artisan ties the full configuration (pl.45, 51, 53).

A current touristic demand exists for heroic realism in Iban cloths. What I refer to as *heroic realism* is de-vitalized imagery of consumer-friendly fierce warriors (pl.43,44,54). This style contrasts markedly with grotesque realism (pl.45,46,56), a custom which is now officially discouraged in Sarawak (e.g. Jabu 1991).

In contrast to the sample group of small *pua'*, the majority of ikat cloths folded to produce five or eight repeats comprise ceremonial jackets. In these cloths the

overall design is composed of repetitive narrow bands of birds and other motifs interspaced by bands of pin stripe (pl.40).

When larger pictorial patterns are tied in a three layered warp, as in the case of the style of heroic realism, a full motif is tied within one repeat to create a total of three repeats across the width of the woven cloth. Alternatively, where only half a figure fills the folded section, the result will be one and a half motifs due to the odd number of repeats (pl.51). However, when joined with the second panel the uneven number of repeats come together to make up an even number of repeats (halves) - the two half figures being sewn together to form a whole (pl.43).

Most large *pua' kumbu'* are made in two woven panels, each tied with an uneven number of three repeats so that when joined the total is an even number of six mirror images. Large *pua'* are developed as abstract representations of dream imagery - characteristically asymmetrical in design.⁴ The process of creating the more complex and intricate designs (those that depict tendrilly patterns either as background or a feature element) can be compared to the folding and cutting of a paper snowflake or lace doily. This analogy contrasts with an earlier one - the process of constructing a regimental row of paper dolls.

Moreover, due to the vertical configuration of the folds, the ikat construction of abstract geometric designs lends itself to curious (perhaps sometimes unintended) *gestalt*-effects. For example, a long zigzag serpent-like motif opens out into three long serpents - which alternatively one can bring into focus as diamond shaped fields between the reptiles (pl.59, 65). Where the artist makes a feature of such lozenge shaped fields in the overall design, the effect created is dominance over, or equality with, the serpent motifs. There is a distancing effect generated in this design quality.

⁴While some of the most striking *pua' kumbu'* patterns comprise complex and often subtle asymmetrical designs, some compositions are tied so that top and bottom are folded over to result in a symmetrical pattern.

A local trader, and student, of ikat cloths made the observation that while designs are often asymmetrical top to bottom and motifs not usually set out in distinct horizontal rows, within the most complicated compositions occurs a frequency of undulating patterns. This is an alternation, from top to bottom, of dominant motifs in combinations of say three, then two, then three (pl.47, 60). The pattern is partly the result of specific fold configurations. The undulation effect is also due to the limitations of space when tying a long narrow section where either more small motifs, or only halves of larger ones, are fitted between a series of major motifs.

In most cases, the overall effect artisans produce with single panels folded and tied in three layers is one of a subtly balanced asymmetrical composition (pl.39). Only in some of these compositions do the abstract patterns seem 'to beg' their other half (e.g. an unfinished lozenge or person) - perhaps because they were conceived as half of a larger *pua' kumbu'* composition from which a small one has been extracted (pl.51).

On ritual occasions users often hang the large two-panel cloths vertically. In the case of single panel textiles, the customary practice was to drape one over the shoulder (e.g. a man's *dangdong*), or fashion a skirt as a tubular shape (a woman's *kain*). In the latter form the undulating lines would run around the skirt in a cyclic fashion, adding to a sense of mobility within the asymmetrical composition.

Iban warp ikat cloths are interesting for their asymmetrical patterns which are different from top to bottom - even where at first glance resemblance is assumed (pl.44, 46, 61). *Pua'* tell dream stories. The design quality is achieved through fluidity and change. There is a dynamic, story-telling effect which belie an outsider's impressions of overly-familiar or traditional units of colour and basic structure.

While some weavers fold the warps of large cloths horizontally so that the top and bottom halves are tied identically, where this has been done, a slight smudge is usually discernible (pl.63, 65). There are also instances where this clue is indicative of a common method of folding

the long narrow bands of repetitive motifs tied for the *anak* component within the overall striped borders (pl.92), and for the multiple bands which make up the main patterning on ceremonial jackets, the *baju burong* (pl.40).

In regard to this blurred marking Haddon notes that about two-thirds down the front of several jackets in his sample:

there occurs in all the patterned stripes a very interesting blurred design, which consists of a brown blank space with an indistinct lighter smear in its middle; above and below is an irregular wavy line...This is labelled *kengkang lang*, the striped kite...The formless mass may be a naive way of acknowledging the impossibility of depicting the Supreme Being (1936/1982:33).

The observation is important. Yet the intentionality which Haddon explains away as 'naive', is that essence which predisposes meaning in Iban symbolic representations.

There is evidence that the "irregular wavy line...the formless mass", *kengkang lang*, is a highly purposive element in Iban thought systems generally, and textile arts specifically. The Iban word '*kengkang*' translates as 'to cut into sections' or 'stripes crossing at right angles' (e.g. *ngengkang* meaning striped). As a symbolic explanation of this design element, *lang*, the shortened form for the name *Singalang*, the kite, refers specifically to the Iban bird deity *Lang Singalang Burong* who is the teacher of customary practice (Richards 1988:179). In his dictionary entry for *singalang*, Richards brings attention to the Malay word *alang* which means 'beam'. With regard for the blurred section of cloth under question, this is the point at which the warp threads bend around the end beam on a tying frame and so is neither on the top, nor on the bottom section of the warp ikat design area. In a similar vein, the word *singalang* indicates a crucial quality of Iban systems of social thought; in his vital essence *Lang Singalang Burong* is neither one nor the other, a bit of both (e.g. Richards 1988:349).

The contextual meaning of *Lang* is identical with a process of endless growth which is continuous with the world of the rice plant. Hence it connects intimately with the growth and demise of material existence in its widest sense.

The significance of this assumption, that things are in a constant state of change and are not seen by Iban to be in a fixed sense, is crucial when interpreting Iban textile arts.

To return to a technical discussion of ways in which artisans approach the experiential question of making a single composition from multiple panels of cloth: through past practices an individual learns to identify the 'minimal' section of the design. To calculate the number of repeats to be bound and the configuration of the fold, most artisans select a combination which is most familiar on the basis it has worked for specific designs on past occasions.

Subsequently, the artisan considers how small and how fine the motifs are to be, in order to determine the number of threads to be bound together - to form patterned areas intended to resist the dye. Again, an individual may have an easy decision if she follows what she sees as a tried and true sequence.

Customarily, planning an ikat warp was more complicated since women spun their own cotton and so often had to vary the number of threads to off-set uneven thicknesses (e.g. Haddon & Start 1936). By contrast, the spin of commercial threads, that artisans use in the 1990s, is more or less consistent and individuals usually include the same number each time - three double stranded warps.

Three warps are the minimum needed in one group to create the important illusion of a straight line. Since the plan is to weave resist dyed warp threads into a plain over-under weave, if only two warps in a colour are used, the result is a wavy or zigzag line (or two broken lines if thick thread is used). By tie-dying groups of three fine warp threads, the dyed threads will weave into fine pin strips (pl.56).

Likewise for curves or diagonal lines: the fewer number of threads in the basic ikat bundles, the 'more minimal' will be the steps/jagged edges, due to the process of the artisan building up resist bindings one bundle at a time. The necessity of this procedure heightens in the case of ikat skirts (*kain kebat*) or ceremonial cloths (*pua' kumbu'*) which have many fine motifs in their design work. However,

for cloths with very large motifs the resist patterns may be made up of six or more fine warp threads (or three thick ones) - and still produce relatively smooth lines.

The groups of warp threads which make up the basic ikat bundles are the template or 'building blocks' of the design. An individual faces the decision of how many bundles are required to make up one repeat of a proposed design. These ikat bundles are referred to by Iban as *kayu'*, a term which arises repeatedly in discussions of technical aspects of Iban ikat design work.

In the 1990s, artisans characteristically identify ikat designs as made up of one of the following counts:

50 *kayu'*, 60 *kayu'*, 70 *kayu'*, 80 *kayu'*, 90 *kayu'* or 100 *kayu'*.

While a simple design composed of 50 *kayu'* involves sorting and manipulating fifty groups of warp threads, a larger, more complicated design requires the manipulation of up to 100 bundles. Experienced weavers carefully caution beginners to attempt a design for which a single 'repeat' is composed of only 50 *kayu'*, that is, 50 ikat bundles.

To consider a regional variation in relation to this question, in some districts in Sri Aman District artisans observe that, according to their ancestral custom, they are advised to adhere to the following work pattern:

1st work:	a person need start with a	50 <i>kayu'</i>	design
2nd "	may attempt	60	"
3rd "	may attempt	70	"
4th "	may attempt	80	"
5th "	need go back to	60	"
6th "	may attempt	70	"

Only after the seventh weaving is it prudent for an individual to attempt a design composed of ninety *kayu'*, and on an eighth project attempt 100 *kayu'*. Empiang Jabu (1991:83) puts it this way: on completion of nine designs an individual may then attempt 100 *kayu'* or *pua' nyeratus* (pl.49).

Women in both the Saribas and Baleh regions will point out that 60 *kayu'* is really 66, 80 is really 88 and 100 is really 110. This suggests that when referencing designs by number of *kayu'*, the exact count may not be as important as the principle which underlies the situation in relation to bodily well-being (and accordingly community welfare). The point is taken further below.

Commonsense in the Baleh was that a person ought to begin with a simple design - one with 50 *kayu'*. However, in the example provided below, an artisan's daughter began by making a small cloth based on 60 *kayu'* (pl.68). Rumah Ata artisans concurred that they could choose to copy designs "as they like". The limiting condition concerned designs which embodied motifs which were taboo or forbidden (*mali*).

Such motif work, which the teacher (e.g. grandmother, mother or aunt) intimates are dangerous, are forbidden to others than extremely skilled weavers who have the experience and knowledge to be able to make the proper offerings. *Skill*, in this case, is identical with guidance by dream sources. Some designs, such as the grotesque realism embodied in a headless corpse (pl.56), are taboo for all but the elderly, who having reached the autumn of their lives and are less vulnerable, or at least have less at stake, than those in their youth. In addition to this commonsense implication, a further observation is noted in passing - the implication of such taboos for maintaining the *status quo* in power relations (see Ch.8 below).

In accordance with customary practices, only those women whose weaving activities were socially legitimized in addition to being developed through dream guidance by the muses (e.g. Kumang, Meni, Segadu', Singgar) were authorized to create original designs. In respect to the process of cultural transmission, this situation identifies 'authoritative artisans' or 'artists' as those who are active both as receivers of ancestral systems of knowledge, and transformers of contemporary systems of knowledge.

A few women at Rumah Ata emphasized the significance of dreams in their artistry and referred also to charms or amulets they had 'located'. Predictably, most weavers, including some of the oldest individuals who were also identified as *highly skilled* by their peers, observed that their inspiration originated in the teaching of their parents or grandparents. Consequently they would imitate or modify designs from their respective heirloom pieces.

The importance of the numerical system surrounding the *kayu'* count (i.e. the basic units or groups of warp thread which are to be bound), is that it is the means by which all

Iban weavers interpret how an existing pattern has been tied. This does not mean that an untrained eye can easily foreground the *kayu'* within the woven cloth.⁵

At each end of a cloth, the artisan usually includes horizontal bands to separate the main body of the design from the top and bottom borders which sometimes include elaborate patterning, at other times a simple band of bamboo shoots (pl.46-50). The horizontal banding also serves to separate the main design from the plain ends of the cloth. The bands are a design quality in the sense of their name *selaku* which means a rattan creeper used as a rope. Hence, the horizontal bands serve to demarcate top and bottom parameters of the main design.

Yet a rope can also be viewed as a ladder. *Selaku* are usually composed of two or three bands (say white, black, white). In many cases one of these sets of horizontal bands is tied as a ladder-like representation. In this event only every second ikat bundle (*kayu'*) (or pairs of bundles) has been reserved white across the width of the panel. Subsequently, the opposite or diagonally aligned *kayu'* is also reserved white on a second adjacent row - which achieves a checked, saw-tooth or ladder effect. The latter are sometimes referred to as *kembai* (millipedes) in that they resemble the many tiny legs of this jungle inhabitant (pl.48-50).

The 'legs' of the *kembai*, or rungs in the ladder effect, provide a guide to both the number of warps included in a single *kayu'* as well as the number of *kayu'* required to tie one repeat of the design. Iban artisans throughout Sarawak observe that a function of these marks is to aid in the identification and counting of individual *kayu'*. In this way the lines are both a technical device (i.e. '*kayu'* counters') and a design element which frames the larger design.

⁵A warp which is actually composed of two threads is referred to as a single compound element. The fact that these double stranded warps are not plied means that when they are woven into a web, they may appear as if they are separate single stranded elements. This can be misleading and lead to inconsistency when counting the number of threads in one *kayu'* in a woven cloth and when counting the threads per centimetre in a cloth. Twice as many warps may be recorded than weft which is hidden and more likely to be counted by number of picks.

The *kayu'* are easily recognized on the warp once some bindings are in place during the ikat work of applying the resist-wraps to threads on the tying frame. At the tying stage, the horizontal bands can also be seen in their function as a starting point whence the artisan can pick out and bind each of the groups of warps which make up a single ikat bundle (pl.84-86).

Although the term *kayu'* is also used to refer to the bundles being tied, the number of warps included in a single binding is not identical with the number of warps counted in one *kayu'* on a cloth. Where only three warps make up a *kayu'* in the patterning on the woven cloth, on the tying frame each *kayu'* bundle comprises multiple *kayu'* to be tied the same. The number of threads in any one *kayu'* bundle relates to the number of panels or folded sections which are bound together to create the identical 'repeats' within the overall design.

For example, a warp which has been folded into four layers becomes eight layers when top and bottom layers of the tube are merged. By binding three adjacent threads from each of the eight layers, eight identical 'repeats' or *kayu'* are tied into one *kayu'* bundle. Whether referring to a single or a multiple *kayu'* bundle, the Iban term *kayu'* is used as a descriptive label for the 'minimal building blocks' in ikat work.⁶

To enable one to pick out and bind the appropriate threads on the tying frame, one secures the groups of threads which make up each ikat section, in counts of three, as they are wound onto the loom. The artisan secures the 'triplets' so that they remain discrete identifiable groups, which can be picked out and realigned with appropriate groups from other parts of the warped tube. In this way the tube will be folded and the top and bottom surfaces merged into a single plane.

⁶Confusion for English speakers may arise from the fact that Ibans do not necessarily specify plurality when using nouns such as *kayu*.

PREPARING A WARP.

For purposes of simplifying description, a small mat, which is the result of the first ikat attempt of a 17 year old girl, serves as a model in setting out the warping procedure for this section of my study (pl.68).

The girl's mother, whom I have identified here by the generic term Indai,⁷ was an experienced artisan who took exceptional pride in her teaching skills. The suggestion was Indai's to make the mat as an appropriate primer. Indai explained that the design was both simple to follow and the size means there is minimal tying - considerations relating to untrained concentration and dexterity.

Indai points out that the patterns are *fine* since only three fine warps (i.e. three double stranded warp threads) are included in any one section of tie dyed design work. Although the design incorporates only three repeats, she suggests to the student that she prepare a warp with four repeats, requiring an M-shaped fold. She explains that because the thread to be used is spool cotton is finer than the cone cotton comprising the cloth example, an extra layer will give more warp threads to create thicker, and so more manageable, bundles for binding. Further, in this case, the extra repeat adds to the symmetry of the overall design by completing one of two large diamond shapes (pl.68-70).

The small mat measures 34 cm. wide and 70 cm. long. Two mats can be made on a warp which is 90 cm. from beam to beam. The extra 20 cm. allows for space at each end between the top and bottom panels, when the warp is stretched on the tying frame. It also enables an adequate shed opening when weaving the last few centimetres of cloth. Indai observes that the current example is about the shortest warp that an individual is likely to weave. Any smaller and the 'waste' warp would equate to 'usable' space, not a desirable proposition given the cost of thread.

⁷Indai, which is the Iban term for mother, is used here as an Iban form of respect and, in this case, to represent the artisan's current age set and social status (with the recent birth of grandchildren she will soon be more commonly identified in her community as grandmother (ini'), and secondly, to keep the person's identity anonymous.

Warping utilizes the two end beams of the stick loom which are secured to a large wooden frame (*tangga' ajan*). The warping frame is made of strong hardwood poles joined in a rectangle. She sets one end on a bench.⁸ The breast beam (*rakup*) has been secured to the sides of the frame with cord to the bottom section of the frame, so that it is about level with the weaver's waist when she takes up a sitting position on the floor (pl.72).

Indai then locates two brace sticks (*dujul*) measuring 90 cm. long which she needs to hold the top and bottom beams apart at the appropriate distance for warping. The back beam (*tendai*) is now secured to the sides of the frame above the breast beam with the two brace sticks wedged between them.

Warping is a cooperative activity of two persons. And, like all activities, consideration is also customarily given to presiding spirits. Indai explains that before beginning to wind the warp threads for a new cloth (*ngirit* process), many artisans choose to make an offering of betel nut (*pinang*) so that "the unfriendly and selfish spirit *Engke-juang* won't spoil it." However, in the case of a simple mat, a ritual is not automatically performed - which attests to the thoughtful quality of ikat ritual observation.

Indai sits at the breast beam, within the weaving frame, to guide the warp strings into place. Her daughter stands or kneels at the right hand side in order to wind the ball of warp thread around the two end beams of the loom. As the warp is wound on, Indai guides each successive thread over and under a set of seven thin lease sticks (*lidi*).⁹

To begin, the lease sticks are laid out horizontally on a basket, with their pointed ends protruding over the loom frame in front of Indai where she can order the warp threads onto them. Her daughter places a ball of starched cotton

⁸Free standing frames include two additional upright posts (*bantang*) on which the top end of the frame can be propped at two or three different heights.

⁹Women at Rumah Balang demonstrated how they can accomplish similar results with only five sticks and a different method of turning the warp, beams and all, end for end. The sticks were the same, with smooth pointed ends to facilitate insertion between the fine threads. They resemble bamboo slats but I was told this material is never used, but rather a stronger, more pliable material such as *aping*, a wild palm (*Arenga pinnata* Merr.).

weave). The order is reversed for alternate threads to create crossed pairs on these first two lease sticks. These crosses are used later when constructing the heddles (*karap*) and a space for the shed stick (*bebungan*).

The remaining five sticks are used to mark off the groups of threads which Indai intends to include in each ikat/bound section of the design. She will bind together three warp strings for each section of the design. These have been identified above as the *kayu'*, or basic building blocks, which are tied and dyed to make up the design on the fabric.

During the warping process the *kayu'* are visible as 'triplets'. This refers to the three consecutive warp threads which Indai places in sequence over the third lease stick before continuing the basic alternating sequence under-over-under-over the remainder. The next three warp threads she passes under the third lease stick, then continues the alternating pattern over-under... In this way she creates specific crosses between each group of three warps on the back five lease sticks. These crosses enable Indai to maintain each triplet or *kayu'* as a discrete group.

The two different sets of crosses (*heddle* crosses and *kayu'* crosses) can be identified in Figure 5 and plate 74. It is at the point between the second and third lease stick, where the groupings change, that the artisan must maintain clear focus on the order of the warp. The artisan intends to float just the second warp thread, and then every third warp after that - either over or under two (the second and third) lease sticks - to alter the grouping on the remaining sticks.

Indai reserves the triplet grouping - for manipulation during tying. She does not weave the group of three warps (three up and three down). She will have no further need of the crosses once the ikat bundles have been dyed. She will then maintain the tie-dyed warps in the paired crosses, which she has marked off on the first two lease sticks. Previously held in triplet groupings, the dominance of the paired crosses now enables her to manipulate the threads individually, over-under, over-under...into a plain weave.

As her daughter winds the thread at the right hand side, Indai gradually draws the thread across to build up the left selvedge. Indai works each warp thread onto the ends of the lease sticks, moving the threads together so they are touching. As the ends of the lease sticks become crowded, she shifts the sticks to her right so that about eight centimetres of each stick extends to the right - on which more threads can be added.

When Indai is satisfied that the warp threads wound onto the beams amounts to about the same width as the proposed cloth, she temporarily secures the last warp around the breast beam. Indai then takes up a new lease stick. Although she refers to it simply as another stick, or *lidi*, this one serves as a 'counting stick'. On it, she counts out the number of triplet crosses that are required to make up the *kayu'* to be tied in order to create the four repeats of the ikat design.

She observes that the proposed pattern is composed of 60 *kayu'*, but that 60 *kayu'* "is really 66". The numerical marker '60' can be viewed as the key to how many multiple groupings of paired triplets (which represent *kayu'* or bundles to be ikat-bound) Indai will mark off on a 'counting stick'. The specific way the *kayu'* are grouped also depends on the number of folds.

Indai proceeds by inserting the lease stick (i.e. the counting stick) over and under six groups of ten crossed pairs of triplets. Each group of ten pairs of triplets actually contains 20 triplets or *kayu'*. A schema of the full sequence for the small mat follows. It reads: over ten [crosses], under ten [crosses] ...

o10/u10/o10/u10/o10/u10/o6/u1\o6\u10\o10\u10\o10\u10\o10

Near the centre point the sequence changes as the artisan passes the stick over only six crossed pairs of triplets, under a single pair, then back over six more crossed pairs - before she returns to the dominant pattern of over ten, under ten (pl.75).

The crosses separate, as well as maintain, the sequential order of each *kayu'* for the tying process. The isolated crossed pair represents the centre of the warp which Indai marks with a small tie. This will be the starting point or

hinge for folding, when Indai picks out ikat bundles (*kayu'*) which enable her to collapse the warp tube, accordion fashion, into a narrow four layered panel.

When she has counted off the last groups, the artisan can see whether she has too many warp threads, or if she needs to add more to make up the number she needs. She then twines a tie about each lease stick and knots these, close to each selvedge, to prevent the warps from slipping off the ends of the sticks.

Indai has worked out the number of warp strings and the number of ikat bundles by concentrating on groups of paired warps. She did not count individual warp threads, nor did she count the total number of triplets which make up the basic sections of warp in the cloth to be ikat-tied (*kayu'*).

Indeed, the total number of triplets in this example adds up to 266. Divided between four panels, this works out to 66 *kayu'* and two left over. When asked why there are two left over, Indai accounts for the extra crossed pair of triplets with reference to her mother's tuition, noting that they are needed to make the reordering "work out" for folding [i.e. not design-related].

ASSEMBLING THE LOOM FOR WEAVING END PANELS.

Having secured the warp elements in sequence on rigid lease sticks, Indai sets about weaving a narrow panel of cloth at each end of the warp, to provide a more flexible means of securing the grouped threads. She then removes the lease sticks, prior to folding the warp for the tying process. In the removal she inserts one pick of cotton weft thread in the place of each lease stick.

To replace the rigid sticks with cotton weft the artisan sets about assembling the loom for weaving. In the first place, Indai focusses on the weaving sheds formed by the first two lease sticks. She takes the first lease stick nearest the breast beam, tips it on its side, and inserts the sword shaped beater (*belia'*) into this opening. The opening is minuscule. She takes care to see that no warp threads are caught up with adjacent ones causing them to be positioned on the incorrect side of the beater.

When the beater is in place, she tips it to draw the warp threads apart. Indai uses a small porcupine quill (*bulu landak*) to stroke and pick at the warps. This helps release threads which are caught up with adjacent threads. She then lays the beater flat alongside the lease stick which she also leaves horizontal in its original position. Next she tips the second lease stick so that she can insert the thick round shed stick (*bebungan*) behind the beater.

Having thus opened up the two sheds (A and B) formed by the first crossed pairs of warps (pl.75), Indai proceeds to construct the heddles (*karap*). She needs these to be able to manipulate the warp strings when alternating from one shed to the other. She tips the beater, which is in the front shed, on edge - to create a wide opening. She intends to open this space, which forms 'shed A', by pulling up on a set of string heddles (pl.78).

Indai selects a strong, smooth thread as the heddle cord. She inserts it through the shed from right to left selvedge. At the left selvedge she ties this cord end in a loop. She inserts the tip of the wooden heddle rod (*karap*) through this loop. Holding the rod in her left hand, Indai uses the index finger of her right hand to pick out, and draw up, loops of the heddle cord which is lying flat inside the shed (pl.75). This she does with a quick, rhythmical motion. Her finger picks out the first set of crossed warps, then slips between it and the next set of crossed warps to hook and draw a loop of cord up onto the heddle rod.

Deftly, Indai slips the cord onto the heddle rod, drawing it up and over the tip in a clockwise direction, from front to back. She moves to the right of the next crossed pair to draw up another loop of cord, this time slipping it onto the heddle rod in a counter clockwise direction, from back to front. When she has drawn the cord up between all crossed pairs of warp threads, Indai cuts the cord at the right selvedge, leaving just enough to tie into a final loop at the cut end, which she slips onto the rod.

When the artisan raises the heddle rod she catches, in the cord loops, only those warp threads which formed the top layer of the shed in which the heddle cord was inserted - and are ultimately, the only ones she raises to create the

A shed (pl.78). This process leaves out the threads in each of the crossed pairs which passed beneath the cord.

However, as the threads cross over the second lease stick, the artisan secures a reversal of the preceding pattern. This is B shed, which Indai holds open by a thick round shed stick. Thus, the artisan is able to create A shed by drawing up all odd threads with the heddle rod. She can then change the order, creating B shed by lowering and drawing the heddle rod backwards, and drawing the shed stick forwards into the dominant position, thereby pushing the odd threads back down to the bottom position (pl.76).

To bring the heddle rod into play, she gently pulls it forwards, then backwards, along the warps to ensure the loops of the heddle string are all evenly distributed. A second rod, which is either attached to the heddle rod by ties at each end, or has carved ends into which the heddle rod is inserted, provides a more rigid handle. This arrangement also prevents the looped heddle string from slipping off the end of the heddle rod.

The time required to make the heddles can range from a half hour to two or more hours, depending on the width of the cloth to be woven and the experience of the person looping the heddle cord onto the rod. Indai estimates the time she needs to complete a particular task in terms of "one sitting". A wider cloth may take two sittings, especially if children or domestic tasks intervene.

WEAVING THE END PANELS.

With the heddles and shed stick in place, Indai now readies herself for weaving (*tenun*). She removes the brace sticks which have been holding the warp under tension and unties the breast beam from the base of the frame. She attaches the backstrap to this beam. Indai sets a wooden foot brace (*penumpu*) on the floor so her feet can rest against it when she is sitting with her legs stretched out in front of her. This wooden block is secured at each end by ropes, which are attached in turn to the bottom end of the weaving frame behind her back. In this way, she can push her

feet against it, in the motion of leaning back on the strap to bring the warp under tension during weaving.

Before she begins weaving, Indai explains that she must not speak, or be spoken to, while she inserts the first four or five picks of weft. One observes a general steadying of mood - in anticipation of a final phase in an extensive process that has involved distinct modes of quantitative thought and interpretation of design quality. In word, Indai has entered fully into the process in which she will accomplish her designwork on an original inert cluster of threads - now tensed before her.

Indai begins weaving by inserting the loom sword into the 'A shed'. This achieved, she places the beater on edge and then draws it forward with a rocking motion to help draw the warps apart. To assure a clear opening, she strokes the warp strings with her porcupine quill to separate threads which often cling together.

Indai leaves the first lease stick in its place, in the warp, as a temporary 'pick of weft' on which the warp can be even spread. She presses it firmly against the breast beam. Leaving the beater lying flat in the shed, Indai 'changes shed'. She begins this process by drawing the heddles back to the shed stick. This enables her to gain access to the B shed which opens by way of the thick shed stick, now in the predominant since the heddle strings have been laid flat, and so no longer function to pull up on the strings which created the opposite shed A.

Finally, in 'changing sheds', the artisan removes the sword shaped beater from the previous shed and inserts it into shed B, just in front of the heddle strings which now lie loosely in front of the shed stick. Indai leans back to bring the warp under tension as she draws the beater forward in a rocking motion. The motion assists Indai separate the warp threads which tend to catch on adjacent threads in the process of drawing them past each other during the change of upper/lower position. She presses the beater against the edge of the previous pick of weft, to assure the warp strings create a sharp clear cross - all in appropriate sequence.

Indai now brings into play the second lease stick which, for the moment, still shares the second shed with the shed stick. She presses the second lease stick firmly into place next to the first stick which was previously 'woven in'. She then removes the sword to leave the two lease sticks firmly in place and uses a porcupine quill to distribute the warp threads evenly along them, thereby assuring they are set close enough to conceal a cotton weft.

Indai is observed checking the warp threads to see that every alternate thread lies in its correct sequence, over or under the two lease sticks. Any warping mistakes she corrects by cutting the warp where necessary to alter the threading of the heddle loops.

Having thus adjusted the set on the two rigid picks, the artisan proceeds to weave with the cotton weft. To change back from shed B to shed A, she shifts back the shed stick - out of play - and brings forward the heddle rod. Indai leans forward to release the tension. She sets the companion stick across the top surface of the warp, on top of the shed stick. In this way she can hold down the warps on the top side of the shed stick as she rolls back the two sticks. She holds these sticks down with the right hand while she draws up the heddle rod. With this move she brings with it all odd numbered warp threads (pl.78).

During this process, Indai continues to sit forward allowing the warp to remain 'off-tension and causing the warp to form a loose triangular opening in which the odd threads are raised in a peak while the even ones are held down by the weight of the shed stick and its companion. She lets go of the shed stick and its companion stick to remove the sword shaped beater from the previous shed. She reinserts the beater carefully, from right to left, into the newly created shed.¹⁰

With the beater in place, Indai sets the heddle rod down on top of the warp. She then sits back to adjust the belt on her waist to bring the warp under tension. The woman

¹⁰It is important to note that the beater is normally left in the previous shed until each new shed is open. At this particular point however, it was removed to work on the two rigid lease sticks against which the cloth web will build up.

straightens the shed stick as she moves it back out of the way. Taking hold of the beater in both hands, Indai leans back and with gentle resolution, rocks the beater forward to separate the threads. She is observed carefully checking that she has clearly separated the warps. She focusses on the point where the warps cross from the previous shed at the edge of the web, assuring herself that the weave is firm and even.

After pulling the thread firmly into the previously woven section of the web with three or four 'beats', she leaves the sword tipped on edge to hold the new shed open. Indai takes up a spool of cotton weft and inserts it into the shed space from left to right, pressing it firmly into place with the beater. For the end panels she suggests that the weft must be thick (i.e. two or more double stranded weft threads) - in order to make a distinct weave in which the warp sequence can be identified.

To change shed once more, from A to B, Indai removes the shed stick's companion stick from its position on top of the warp thereby letting the heddles slip back beside the shed stick. She draws the shed stick forward to create the space I refer to as shed B. The weaver removes the beater from its position in the previous shed and reinserts it in shed B - just in front of the heddles. Leaning back for tension, Indai gently draws the beater forward by tipping it with a rocking motion to open the new shed. Two or three firm beats assure her that she has packed the previous pick and new cross firmly into place.

Once again the woman leaves the beater tipped on edge to hold the shed open as she inserts the spool of cotton weft from right to left. She adjusts the weft thread by hand to assure an even draw across the warp threads. She does not want to pull so hard that she causes a problem at the right selvedge. Ongoing care with her edges, she observes, prevents uneven selvedges caused by loose loops as she turns the weft about the outer warps. More importantly, close attention also assures that the width of the cloth remains as intended. A pulled or spread selvedge eventuates in a misshapen square or rectangular cloth. This is a technical

as well as an aesthetic problem in the case of weaving two panels to be stitched together.

In weaving the plain (tabby) web which constitutes the small end panels of her project, Indai needs to insert just five picks of thread. She then takes a strip of palm fibre and cuts it into two long strips the width of a lease stick. The two strips of palm fibre (*biris*) she inserts into the next shed, with a lease stick, to form a special pick of weft. The palm fibre strips serve as a casing, or sleeve, for the lease stick which helps the weaver hold the warp out flat. This sleeve enables Indai to remove the stick when she is ready to fold the woven ends, having realigned the warp tube into the four-fold configuration for binding; and later, to reinsert it when adjusting the warp for further weaving, once tying and dyeing are completed. When the palm fibre is in place the weaver adds another five or six picks of weft in the manner of the last pick - and she leaves the beater in shed A.

To complete the end panel Indai inserts two final picks of weft in the triplet grouping. To do this, Indai shifts back the shed stick and heddles in order to bring into play the next five lease sticks on which she has previously ordered the triplet or *kayu'* crosses. Indai brings the sticks forward one by one, then tips them to create a new shed - in which the warps alternate three up and three down in the "triplet" grouping for the tying process. This process is complicated, however, as the weaver must by-pass the shed stick to bring them into a front position (pl.76-77).

Indai leans back to hold the warp under tension as she draws forward the first of the remaining lease sticks (stick three), tipping it on edge behind the shed stick. With this stick she forms a four-section cross in conjunction with the shed stick. At this point two of the four sections, or sheds, are occupied by the shed stick and lease stick. Indai next adds two new lease sticks to the two empty sections - one in the top and one in the bottom position (pl.76). She draws forward the two new sticks, these now in positions that enable one to pass over the shed stick and the other to pass under it.

Once she has them in their new position, in front of the shed stick, Indai tips the two sticks to recreate the four-section cross that was previously at the back of the shed stick. To an outside observer only three of the four sections are immediately apparent: the top and bottom positions occupied by the two new lease sticks and the shed stick position behind. The weaver is yet to actually formulate the front position. /

Indai now tips on edge the beater, which has been left in the previous shed. The beater thus creates a cross with the two lease sticks (pl.77). The action uncovers a minuscule central section or opening. The tiny opening is the missing section in the four-section cross. Indai inserts another new lease stick into the aperture thereby duplicating the position of the first "triplet" stick (#3) behind the shed stick - the one needed to make a shed based on the triplet grouping. Once this final lease stick is in place, the woman removes the two sticks which were slipped over the shed stick.

She inserts the sword shaped beater into the newly created shed and pulls it forward, rocking. In this way Indai draws the warps firmly open at the web and firmly packs the previous weft thread into place, prior to inserting a new pick of thread. The artisan inserts and presses a new shot of weft thread firmly against the web and lays flat the beater, ready to bring the next triplet stick into play.

Indai now removes lease stick number three which was still in its original place. Having done this, she draws down the second lease stick (#4) behind the shed stick. She turns it on its side to create another four-section cross. The woman repeats the process above, inserting new lease sticks into the top and bottom sections. She slips them forward, one over and one under the shed stick. Tipping the beater, as before, the weaver creates a very small aperture which duplicates the position occupied by the second "triplet" stick. Indai then reinserts the sword into this aperture in order to open it for the next pick of weft.

She repeats the procedure a third time for lease stick five. After the third pick of weft is in place the weaver has completed the first end panel. Indai twines a plastic

string up and behind each selvedge of the woven panel to secure the ends of the sticks which she has woven into the panel.

She also creates a guide to locate the centre pair of crossed triplets, turning attention to the top counter stick on which the warp threads are sorted into ten pairs of triplet crosses. Indai locates and ties a short piece of string around the central pair of warp strings, close to the last pick of the woven section.

Lease stick number five, used for this last shed, she leaves in place behind the shed stick. The woman retains this stick and the two remaining lease sticks (#6 and #7) in their original positions - to be used when weaving the other end panel. She shifts them back out of the way, so that she can use the heddle rod and shed stick to weave in two lease sticks. These are needed to replace the original sticks one and two on which the warp had originally been ordered for plain weave. These, together with the three remaining triplet sticks, she will use for the second panel to be woven at the other end of the warp tube.

Indai is now ready to rotate the entire warp tube, end for end on the two loom beams, in order to weave the second end panel. The woman calls on someone to help. Working together, one person holds the breast beam and the other holds the top beam. They carefully rotate the beams so that the woven end winds down under the breast beam and then up the underside to the top beam. They begin by rotating the warp only slightly so that the woven panel is centred on the end of the breast beam. So positioned, the assistant draws a line across the warp, along the centre end at the top beam.

Indai gently shifts the sticks: the process refers to the counter stick, the three remaining sticks on which the triplets are ordered, the shed stick, heddle rod, and the remaining two lease sticks (previously woven into the warp to retain the plain weave sequence). Two or three times, she moves the sticks carefully upwards along the top surface of the warp so that they will not be accidentally rotated under the breast beam.

Indai positions the warp tube so that the line, previously marked on the warp across the top beam, is centred

evenly on the top surface of the tube - about six centimetres from the breast beam. The woven panel is now resting on the underside of the top beam. The weaver shifts the two lease sticks which were the last to be woven into the warp, in plain weave, past this 'centre' line to rest up against the top edge of the breast beam. Thus positioned, she is ready to weave the second end panel against these sticks. Indai gauges the process in such a way that the palm strips, when added after five or so picks of weft, will be inserted at the line and so mark the midpoint of this end panel.

The procedure she adopts for the second end resembles that for the first. This time, when she spreads the warp on the first two lease sticks, she is able to take the measure of the width of the first panel to ensure both ends are the same. However, once she has the cotton weft and palm fibre strips woven into place, the heddle string and shed stick will no longer be needed.

When Indai removes the heddles and shed stick, the three remaining lease sticks on which the triplet groupings are ordered are free to be used directly as shed sticks. The need is overcome for the complicated procedure of making the four-section cross, necessary on the previous end in order to by-pass the shed stick. The weaver is able to simply move forward the sticks, one by one, to create the new sheds into which cotton weft can be inserted.

The only stick remaining in the warp is the counter stick on which the triplets were grouped into sections of 10 crosses. Indai now draws this stick down to the woven end ready for the next step in which she will reorder the warp into a folded sequence.

RE-ORDERING THE WARP INTO A FOUR-LAYERED TUBE.

Although the ends of the warp are securely woven, there remains more to the layering of the tube of warp strings than simply folding. For the small cloth she makes, Indai is faced with layering the warp into four panels that requires an M-shaped fold. To maintain the exact warp sequence, she realigns the warp by picking out each triplet group, one by one, for each panel.

Indai releases the tension on the warp so that she can insert her right arm through the warp tube. The warp threads which form the top surface rest on her forearm. She inserts a long plastic string through the tube so that it lies across her legs on top of the lower section of warp.

This reordering process (*muai ubong*) basically involves sorting out the unwoven warps for each respective panel. This process involves picking out one pair of triplets from each of the selvages and one from the centre fold. Indai gradually groups together the remaining warps, building up from these three points (the bottom points of the M). Ultimately, the warps merge at the two fold points which occur midway between the centre fold and selvedge on each side of centre (the top 2 points of the M).

Indai begins this process by holding the warp across her right forearm while her left hand works from inside the tube to pick out and drop selected warps onto the plastic string below (pl.79). Her intention is to do this: to work the outside warp triplet (*kayu'*) from the left selvedge, the centre warp triplet previously marked with a plastic tie, and the outside warp triplet from the right selvedge, dropping them carefully onto the plastic string on her legs.

Indai is observed checking to see that they are all in the same top shed positions. If correct, their partners (when seen as crossed pairs) will all have been located in the lower shed to facilitate picking out in the second sequence. If one of the selvedge threads is a different position to the other, Indai is faced with deciding whether the mistake concerns the crossed order, whether there is one group too many or one too few. She must then take away or add more warp and, in this way, correct the problem before proceeding.

Indai secures the first small group of three triplet bundles by drawing the left end of the plastic string across to the right where she loops it temporarily around her right toe (pl.79). She crosses the right end of the plastic string over to the left side and loops it around her left toe. The plastic string thus forms a cross onto which she can drop the next series of warps.

The second series of warps she now picks out by working back from the right to the left selvedge. Indai now handles the tube of warp as two sections, holding them apart from the point where the centre warp was removed. She places the left section across her left forearm near the elbow and the right section on her left hand - so that the right hand can pick out the outer most group from the right side selvedge. Subsequently, Indai picks out the bundle on the newly created left side of this half (which is actually in the "right of centre" position). She checks the two warp bundles to see if they are both in the lower shed position. Satisfied that they are in position, she then drops them carefully to the string below - and this section of warp she shifts onto her right arm.

The remaining section she slips along her left forearm into her left hand. Her right hand then picks off the triplet from the right edge of this section (i.e. the "left of centre" position). She repeats the actions for the far left selvedge, checking that both are in the lower shed position. Indai then drops them down to join the two she has taken from the first half. She moves into her right hand the remainder of the warp in this second section.

These four triplets represent one *kayu'* from each of the four panels that Indai is layering. At this point, they lie together on the plastic string, above the previous group of three *kayu'* which form the middle fold point and bottom or outside edges of the M-fold.

Indai draws back the ends of the plastic string, careful that she does not twine them about each other. This action secures the new sequence within the crossed strings, as well as create a new space for the next four groups to be added.

She picks out the third series of warps, working from left to right. Indai selects the outside groups from the left section of warps which she holds in her right hand; she moves this section onto her left arm to enable her to pick out the two outside groups from the remaining section on her right arm. She then moves this section into her left hand.

The artisan quickly crosses the plastic tie over the threads she has just dropped. She repeats the procedure, working from right to left. Each time the direction changes,

the shed changes from which the four warp triplets are picked out. In this way, she can weave back and forth, the two ends of the plastic tie, as it encases the triplets, each of which remains in its original shed position. Thus, with the plastic ties, she achieves the formation of two parallel lines of weaving which separates the merged bundles in alternate sheds.

The woman moves the two sections of warp from arm to arm. On each occasion the sections become smaller until only three triplet bundles of warp remain in each section (pl.80). She removes one bundle from each side of the two sections leaving only one triplet in each of the sections. In this way Indai forms the top two-fold points of an M-fold. These now form the second of the two sides of the layered warp tube.

When she has laid the final warps on the plastic cord and tied them securely, Indai rotates the warp tube, end for end. In so doing, she brings the underneath surface to the top and the reordered section to the underside. Now she feeds a new plastic cord through the tube and lies it on top of the lower web, ready to secure the warps as they are reordered for the second side. The procedure for picking out the M-fold sequence is repeated exactly as before.

For cloths which require multiple layers, such as a ceremonial jacket with say eight repeats, the artisan begins the folding by picking out the warps from each of the two outside selvages, as well as from three mid points. The procedure is much the same as above except that the artisan needs to manipulate more sections of warp from arm to arm while keeping them apart.

If a panel is intended to have an odd number in a repeat - say three instead of an even number - the sequence is made with a slight difference. The artisan takes as her starting points warps from one selvedge and a fold point two-thirds the way across. She would pick out the warps from the left selvedge, from the left of the fold point, and then from the right of the fold point - until ending with the mid-point of the left section and the right hand selvedge thread.

Whichever the fold configuration, the woman realigns the warps in an accordion-like formation by carefully selecting

bundles from each panel, and assuring that each is both in the correct sequence and in the correct weaving shed. When she has re-ordered and secured both sides of the warp tube, the weaver is ready to collapse the woven ends into the folded formation.

To begin folding Indai removes the rigid lease sticks from one woven panel. She locates the centre point which is marked by the short plastic tie, previously attached to the middle pair of warp triplets. The woman folds the panel in half by drawing the selvages upwards. Then she draws the two sides back down to the fold in an M-formation, carefully aligning the selvages with the centre fold.

Indai presses the folded panel flat, then stitches the layers firmly together with a large needle and cotton using a running baste stitch. Next she rotates the warp tube to remove the lease sticks from the other woven panel. She folds and stitches this panel in the same manner. Now the artisan can safely transfer the warp tube from the loom sticks to a long narrow frame on which ikat patterns are customarily tied.

Indai is able to complete the warping process for one warp in one to two days, but only if she can essentially free herself from other chores. During such warping sessions, Indai, like many women, will proceed to prepare a second identical warp so that two tubes can be fitted, one inside the other - and tied at the same time. On this occasion, Indai plans to tie only one warp on which an inexperienced weaver will be able to produce two identical panels for two separate small cloths. But, she adds, she usually prefers to prepare two warps.

In fact, the next day, she proceeded to do just that and later created two large *pua' kumbu'*. During the same year, Indai also prepared two long narrow warps, from commercially dyed yellow threads. She transformed one into an ikat loin cloth (*sirat*) for her husband to wear at the Kenyalang festival. The second warp she described simply as extra - one she might sell - but would have to be carefully stored until she had time to work on it. Meantime, she exclaimed, she had many things to attend to for the upcoming festival as well

as attending to her son's wife and their first baby which was due that month.

SETTING THE WARP ON A TYING FRAME.

The artisan inserts short posts at the woven ends of the long narrow tube where the larger beams were previously positioned. These end sticks she attaches to each end of a long narrow tying frame (*tangga' ubong*), using loops of strong cord (pl.81). Into the loops at the lower end of the frame, the woman inserts two small wooden pegs. She twists these to bring the warp under tension. The pegs serve as handles to adjust the tension and provide a braking system by setting them so that one end rests against the side of the wooden frame.

With the warp tube stretched out flat, the plastic ties, into which the warp has been reordered, appear to the artisan as two picks of weft interwoven into the narrow panels (pl.82). The groups of warp strings alternate over and under, forming crosses between the two plastic ties. The crosses maintain the sequence of the merged groups of four triplet bundles (*4 kayu'*), one from each panel repeat.¹¹ The second set of plastic ties is visible in the same formation on the underside of the tube.

Indai gently separates the *kayu'* groups, drawing them apart by working from the ties to the woven ends. She then leaves the warp under tension on the frame for a few days to set the threads into position. She is observed taking up any slack by turning the tension pegs, once or twice, during this period.

Indai explains that the stretch process is important because it reduces the amount of shifting or loosening of individual bundles later, when the artisan pulls them up, one after another, again and again, for tying. Whenever the warp tube is left unattended on a tying frame, women generally release the tension and wrap it in a piece of cotton cloth to protect it from dust and insect damage.

¹¹The bundles at each selvedge contain less *kayu* however, as these include the folds, or pivot points, between the panels.

There is an additional sense of nurturing (and hopeful increase) likely in the consistent Iban pattern of careful storing. The observation derives from an Iban perception that all things, animate or otherwise, embody an essential force. In the case of stored rice cereal an individual anticipates increase (or decay) in the quantitative sense. On this basis one speculates a similar hopefulness - that by nurturing a textile an increase might occur. The idea is not unknown in historical Western systems of interpretation. For example there is the story of the shoe-maker and the elves; and the Rumpelstiltskin story grounds in the notion of open-ended change. What is clear is that the notion of *transformation* is a critical underpinning of Iban conceptual systems (e.g. Freeman 1981).

Before the artisan commences tying, she merges the top and bottom layers of the warp tube into a single plane. She does so by picking out the bundles - one from the top and one from the bottom - following the crossed sequencing on each of the plastic ties.

Indai props the tying frame on a basket at each end so she can sit on the floor with her legs extended in front of her under the frame. Just to the right of her legs are the crossed bundles, secured in the plastic ties. Indai inserts a round stick into the middle of the tube, to the right of the plastic, ties to distinguish the top and bottom crosses. She then inserts a small flat stick cross-ways under the warp tube to rest on the tying frame. Indai tips the stick on edge to lift the bottom layer up tight against the top layer of warp.

The woman uses two short lease sticks to merge the two sets of crosses into a single set. Working to the left of the plastic ties, she slides the first pairs of crossed warp bundles away from the others on the plastic ties, to begin inserting the two lease sticks (pl.82).

Indai feeds the first stick over the first bundle on each of the top and bottom layers so that she can tip it down to pass under the second bundle of the lower and top layers. She then tips it back up between the second and third bundles of each layer, to pass over the third, and tilt down under the fourth bundle of the lower layer and top

layer. In the same sequence as inserting this stick over then under the first two bundles, to its left, Indai feeds the second stick under the first bundles and over the next...and so on. In this way, she merges the upper and lower sets of crosses into one new set of crossed pairs along the two lease sticks - without disturbing the original crossed sequences.

Each of the merged bundles on the tying frame she refers to as *kayu'* since they represent the basic ikat bundles. However, in this case, I observe that one *kayu'* on the tying frame actually contains 8 *discrete kayu'* units (that is 8 groups of triplets). They derive one from each of the four panels on the top folded layer together with one from each of the four lower layers.¹²

Indai removes the plastic ties from their position on the top and lower crossed sequences, using one tie to secure the two lease sticks. She presses two layers of the tube together between two small lease sticks which she ties firmly together at each selvedge - close to the top beam where she will begin her ikat design.

RECRUITING ASSISTANTS.

Indai explains that although most girls begin by helping to wind a warp, many women continue to rely on more experienced persons to order the thread for them. Some, when they have finished tying the designs, may also call on help to do the weaving. She explains that her mother is currently weaving a textile that one of Indai's daughters had tied in Kapit.

In the case of the small mat described above, although her daughter tied the design and so claimed the right to say she had made the cloth, Indai completed the weaving for her daughter who has not yet learned to weave. In other cases, young individuals chose to help elderly artisans whose eyes or backs prevented them from completing this work.

In most cases, one who helps others in this work is usually a member of the household, although not necessarily.

¹²The number of *kayu* units to be bound in a single bundle is doubled to 16 if two such warps are tied together.

A person may call on help from kindred (e.g. a sister, daughter or cousin living in an adjacent *bilik*). Although there is no set pattern of cash compensation for textile work assistance, Indai notes that she often gives her daughter M\$2 for helping because her daughter is without a regular cash income. Her mother's acknowledgment of the importance of money in rural Iban communities illustrates a concern of women, generally, living in similar situations in 1991.

Indai, as well as her mother, also calls on the assistance of a middle-aged man who has no family and an impaired ability to do subsistence work. He helps with a variety of domestic chores in return for meals. When he helps wind their thread into balls, they pay him small amounts of cigarette money (pl.72).

While the work involved in preparing materials and designs is both time consuming and intensive, a cooperative context surrounds the activities - in respect to teacher-student relations but also student-student associations. However, when a skilled or unskilled person is "commissioned" to carry out specific tasks there is acknowledgement of debt accrual, which is discharged today by cash.

Iban artisans assume responsibility for, and evidently gain pleasure from, achieving their own works. But this does not mean that individuals are isolated in these activities. Even in the remoteness of farmhouses, the abstractness of the work grounds in the learned response capabilities of men and children in the family unit. In addition, individuals rely on some manual help, while others depend on being able to help out. Overarching the development of individualism or 'creative voice' in Iban art, is the dependence of younger individuals on considerable instruction to gain the initial technical skills.

It has been the aim in this chapter to demonstrate ways in which the nature of the work is extraordinarily complex. One might ask what drives individuals to such lengths in giving expression to their symbolic needs. There are easier ways, but perhaps none sufficiently precise to enable the same kind of scientific rigour and flights of phantasy - a

speculation which begs comparison with similar fetishization of expression in western cultures (writing).

In the next chapter I explore the technical process further - but with more concern for aesthetic components of the work. Up to this point, the significance of inspiration as well as constraints under which an Iban weaver works have been under-represented. There is a challenge of translating into linear thought craft processes which are more than linear and normally communicated very gradually over the space of many years.

However, the concentration on technical process in this chapter has been done with the intention of adding data which have not been included in the current literature on ikat textiles, and to underline the processual significance of Iban ikat work. The chapter began with a hymn to the weaving process. And, it moved towards a picture of the knowledge acquired and related possibilities inherent in ikat tying practices.

CHAPTER 8

CREATING IKAT DESIGNS IN AN IBAN LONGHOUSE

Realizing design intentions in ikat art involves exceptional visual powers of abstraction in addition to manual adroitness. As will be clarified in this chapter, ikat composition is achieved by reserving specific areas through binding, and subsequent dyeing of successive design elements. Analysis of the steps involved in creating such compositions in the literature is scanty. It is my intention in this chapter to contribute to a more complete documentation of the technical procedures involved.

The objective is to relate how Iban artisans draw on a repertoire of basic techniques to create and align various motifs which make up the elaborate designs in their ritual cloths. In addition, analysis of the creative process addresses the sphere of imagination, in respect to Iban perceptions of drawing on spiritual guidance through dreaming. Although very few artisan's in the 1990s create original designs inspired through dreams compared to those who work from existing patterns, these patterns were often the original work of a parent or grandparent. As mentioned previously, an in-depth study of oral literature, case histories and dream interpretations is beyond the scope of this thesis. The focus here is on performance. However, the uses of spiritual guidance are treated to a brief investigation of systems of power relations which predominate in different historical periods.

PREPARING TO IKAT.

The surface of the folded warp as it lies stretched on a tying frame (*tangga' ubong*) represents one panel on which the artisan will tie a single repeat of a design. This surface resembles the surrealist painter's canvas, except, in the case of the Iban individual, the ikat artist first applies abstract marks in the form of ties which bear only indirect visual identity with her ultimate comprehension of

the design she will reproduce. Related to this primary act of imagination, the Iban artisan peers ahead to the design consequences of weaving the weft threads into her 'canvas'. In this sense, the final representation is twice-removed from the intuitive method by which she applies her bindings in readiness for dyework.

Again, unlike the painter's easel, as she translates each symbol into resist bindings, through wrapping ties about the bundles of warps at selected places, the bundles tend to pile up and to slip out of order. This situation constitutes a 'given' in ikat work: the challenge of continually sorting and spreading flat the 'canvas', to re-determine correct position and to monitor how the tied patterns are taking shape.

Selecting the position for the first binding of any motif usually involves counting both the number of ikat bundles (*kayu'*) required for a particular motif, and the number of bundles between it and other motifs already or yet to be included in the surrounding space. Even the older, more experienced weavers, who work from memory or who create original designs for which they reproduce imagination in more random marks, can be seen counting from time to time.

Indai, like other weavers, begins tying at the left end of the tying frame. Although the binding of patterns is restricted to building blocks, as Indai applies the ties to one warp bundle after another, her fingers are free to move to any spot up and down the set of warp strings. But, in the same way a violinist or perhaps trombonist comes to anticipate disharmonics when the hand moves too far up or down the scale, an ikat artist learns familiarity and subsequently intuits the spacing and angles required to create the desired aesthetic in ikat patterning.

Indai works section by section, beginning with the most critical symbols in each. These may be tendril or lozenge shapes, or otherwise signify plant or animal life. Alternatively the critical shape she works with may be functional, designating large central focal points or demarcating main compositional areas.

The Iban artist's intentions concern *transforming* (not mastering or controlling) an existing chaos of cerebral and

fibrous images (e.g. Freeman 1981). Her overall design plan is asymmetrical. It is mobile in the sense that it embodies a myriad of sequential coherent shapes in which there is a careful fluid organization of curves, angles and straight lines.

Indai explains that, for each tie she applies, she is able to draw on specific techniques learned from her mother. Some of her methodology is discussed in the following paragraphs to illustrate ways in which artists practise their conceptual skills in this intricate design work.

When Indai sets out to imitate or modify an existing design, she folds the reference material lengthways to reveal one panel. A panel incorporates one full repeat of a design that she intends to translate, back as it were, into bound patterns on the folded warp threads. The artist then folds the cloth horizontally, to uncover just one end section of the repeat, to enable her to more easily focus on the details of the first motifs. The observation is commonly made: women sitting at their frames tying designs with a folded cloth, on the floor nearby, for reference. Indai's small cloth, which is used here as an example, is shown in plates 68-70 to illustrate the various pictures revealed by the folding procedures.

Continuing her preparation, Indai sets out a small knife and a skein of finely twisted plastic ties. She explains that only a few women at Rumah Ata (e.g. Indai's mother) continue to use bindings made from *lemba'* (*Curculigo latifolia* spp.), a broad-leafed stemless plant commonly found in fallow or waste land which yields a raffia-like fibre. Artisans process the *lemba'* by scraping the wetted leaves with split bamboo to expose the fibres. The fibres can then be twisted and waxed to be used as ties in ikat work. Users attach small skeins of the fibrous bindings to the end of the tying frame, making them accessible as individual strands which the artisan cuts off as required (pl.85).

Anthony Richards notes (1988:188) that there are many Iban stories (*ensera*) about the Iban goddess Kumang which begin with her looking for *lemba'*. Although *lemba'* can still be found in the 1990s, most women use balls of plastic

ribbon which is available for about R\$.80 to R\$1 at most small supply shops in Kapit.

The plastic is prepared in much the same way as the plant fibres. The plastic ribbon is cut into strips sized roughly twice that of a person's arm's length (say 150 cms). The artisan folds about 20 strips and loops them onto a short cord held out by her toes. Each strip, which opens out to a width of about two centimetres, is split into four, eight, or more narrow strands. Size varies to suit thick or thin ikat bundles and large or small areas of patterning to be bound (pl.70).

Subsequently, the individual strokes each strand with bee or candle wax and then twists it by rolling it with the palm of her right hand along her inside left forearm, from elbow to wrist. She repeats the motion a few times. She then strokes the rolled strand with a piece of wax, to hold the twist. The wax also helps the plastic to form a tight water resistant binding. The definitive purpose involves reserving areas of warp design from the effects of later dye baths.

When Indai has split and twisted four or five strips she secures them in a small skein. Having formed four or five skeins along the plastic cord held between her feet, she removes and ties the skeins in a loop ready for use.

As part of her preparation, Indai hooks the bindings onto the end of the tying frame so that designs can be tied with minimal interruption. Not all women choose to prepare the ties in advance. Others prefer to cut strips of plastic from a ball as they are required. This means taking a break in the middle of tying to split and twist each piece. Frequently, in this activity, artisans draw on the help of young children or older people with time to spare.

Most artisans observe that they are able to tie faster, and more carefully, when they do not have to stop repeatedly to prepare bindings. It is probably essential to prepare bindings in advance when tying a particularly complex or novel symbol. This statement refers, in large part, to the example in which tying concerns 'dangerous' symbols such as *jugah bedayong* (pl.57) - required to be tied in a single day during which time the artist will not leave the tying frame.

Indai begins by tying the two white horizontal bars which separate the end border from the main body of the design. She refers to the section as *lantang* which has an interesting connotation of *open-endedness* (e.g. Richards 1988:168). The Iban dictionary reference (*ibid.*) indicates a derivative meaning. *Penge-lantang* identifies a state of ritual assurance, confidence stemming from dream work concerning legitimacy at the start of a specific project.

Iban artists characteristically defer to charms or amulets they either mysteriously locate or inherit. One charm, valued by Baleh women, is called *pengerawang ati* which translates literally as "opener of the heart for better understanding" (e.g. Sandin 1967:380).

In this initial phase of ikat work many artisans make an offering of betel, rice and eggs to deities such as *Kumang* and *Meni* - spiritual patrons of weaving. Thus the artisan observes interdependence with her muses. Similar reverence characterizes the initial phase of weaving. Similar offerings are set beneath looms during the *Gawai Kenyalang* (e.g. observed at Rumah Ata, 1991) when the most respected artists receive instruction through bards' chanting to create a ritual belt (see Ch.9).

Several young women making ikat textiles in 1991 at Rumah Ata generally do not make such ritual offerings, also claiming that they do not receive spiritual guidance. However, they do choose to make a customary ritual observation when representing a particularly potent symbol. They do so on pain of illness - directly related to the degree of concentration and empathy that is required of an artisan. Their sacrificial action attests to the interdependence of individuals and the world of Nature. It also implies associations with the uncertainties of creative process and the hope of continuity concerning spiritual guidance and overall bodily strength.

Women who are known for the more thoroughly dream-oriented or innovative work are most careful in observing the spiritual component in their art. Although Indai generally observes such rites, as evidenced in her warning that she must not speak when inserting the first picks of weft,

in the case of this simple cloth she did not choose to make an offering.¹

Indai continues to prepare her work. To make the appropriate binding in the first rows of her design plan involves careful picking out and tying each group of warp threads, in the sequence each warp bundle occupies on the lease sticks. In this way the artisan achieves a baseline from which to identify all subsequent ikat bundles (*kayu'*) as she moves up and down the different warp strings, tying various sections.

Indai estimates the space that must be reserved at the end of the warp for an end border of bamboo shoots (*pemuchok tubo'*).² She explains that when copying a cloth, on the end borders a person ties as she chooses: a row of simple triangular shaped bamboo, more elaborate shoots, perhaps a simple line, or nothing at all until later - when she plans to weave in a row of weft twining as an end border (pl.96).

Some women simply use their eye to gauge the distance, others use the existing cloth as a measure, while others bring out a tape measure to make exact marks. Indai chooses to draw an ink line across the white warp threads approximately ten centimetres from the woven end, using a straight edged lease stick. She draws three more lines, each spaced one lease stick width apart (1cm.). She says the lines help her to begin and to end each binding at the same point. This enables her to create straight sharp lines as she moves across the width of the warp, from bundle to bundle.

APPLYING IKAT BINDINGS.

To begin tying, Indai selects a plastic tie, strokes it with wax, and then detaches it from the prepared skein of ties with an 'exacto' blade.³ She ties a small knot at one end and inserts it under the first bundle, to the right of the first line marking the horizontal bands. The artisan

¹In 1991 many young women making ikat cloths, particularly in government schools, did not follow this custom.

²Bamboo shoots are also referred to in Malay as *rebong* or *rebung*.

³In the past women used beautifully hand-crafted metal knives with design work on the handles, resembling the artistry of the wooden sword shaped beater.

holds up about one centimetre of the knotted end on the far side of the bundle and, simultaneously, flips up the other end of the tie - over the bundle to the left of the short knotted end. She then winds the tie a second time, this time to the right of the short end.

Indai holds the knotted tip between her thumb and index finger of the left hand as her third finger presses against the underside of the bundle to both secure the tie and hold the bundle up away from the surrounding warp bundles. In this manner binding proceeds: her right hand continuously feeds the tie around the bundle. The procedure involves a sharp pull as she draws the tie up, so that it flips over, ready to be guided under the far side of the warp bundle again. This clockwise rotational movement she performs in a fast rhythmical manner, producing a squeak of plastic each time that she pulls the tie snugly up and over.

Indai firmly winds the tie to the right, so it consistently rests close against the previous wrap. Continuously throughout the binding process Indai places her middle finger on the left hand firmly under the bundle. With this finger she not only secures the end at the outset, she also uses it to prevent the bundle of warp strings from twisting during the binding. The reason is that the bundle undergoes constant pulling by the plastic tie as the artisan firmly wraps it about the warp strings in a circular fashion.

Indai points out that only if she holds the warp bundle steady can she assure that the knots (customarily *tampok lembu'*) on all the bindings will lie on one surface where they can later be readily cut away. If she produces a twist in the warp bundles she faces a situation wherein many knots end up on the sides - where they rub against the adjacent bundles. And this can cause the knots to untie, as well as add to the bulk of the bindings which produces over-crowding. When she succeeds in preventing the bundles twisting, all the knots lie flat on the top surface in a sequential manner. This situation enables Indai to perceive the designs made by the bindings and thereby locate each new bundle as she requires it (pl.85, 93).

When the artisan has applied a binding to the desired length, which Indai has marked with a second ink line,

resolutely she then angles the plastic tie back to the left, leaving some space between each wrapping. Thus, while eight loops may be required to the right, as few as three or four loops are used to the left to return to the starting point.

Iban artisans secure ikat bindings with a triple-loop knot which appears to be a standard Iban procedure. Indai holds the binding on the underside of the warp bundle firmly with the middle finger of the right hand so that her thumb and index finger can form a clockwise loop in the tie near the bound section. She turns the loop and tips it over the short knotted end that she has held in position on the top side of the bound warp. Indai pulls the looped tie tightly to the right far side, away from her body. She forms the second loop in the opposite direction and subsequently tips it over the knotted end. She pulls it towards her body.

The artisan makes the third loop by drawing the tie in a clockwise circle around the knotted end and up through the circular loop. Indai uses her right hand to pull the tie firmly to the right while she secures the knot with her left thumb nail, to cause it to flip down and lie flat against the binding.

One tie may be sufficient for several bindings, in which case the artisan repeats the last loop in order to form a separate knot just to the right of that one which holds the binding. Thus, when she cuts away the unused piece, the last knot secures the end she plans to insert for the next binding.

If a tie runs out in the middle of a binding, Indai adds a new one by holding the binding with about a half centimetre of its end left sticking up. At this spot she inserts the new knotted tie under the binding. She holds it with the same finger so that about the same amount is held up.

Indai then proceeds with the wrapping using her right hand as before. She wraps the tie around to the left of the two ends once, then around to the right - as many times as needed to complete the rest of the binding. The woman wraps it back over the two ends to the far left where she then secures it in a triple-loop knot.

The bindings must be wrapped tightly, especially at the ends, to assure the warp fibres are squeezed tight so that

the dye bath will not be absorbed up into the bound sections. The artisan is also required to make tight knots and cut ends with care, to prevent them coming undone during the dye process. For, when dyeing, she will subject the bindings to considerable stress as the warp is squeezed and lifted in and out of the hot dye-bath.

Indai completes two bindings on each warp bundle before moving across to the next warp bundle. She notes that one can choose to tie one line first...then the second. Whichever the decision, the artisan selects warp bundles, or *kayu'*, by referring to the plastic strips which secure the merged bundles in the new set of crossed groups. Once the woman has put the first rows of bindings in place, she finds it easier to pick out which strands belong to which bundles. Although the bindings compress the areas on which they are tied, unbound sections bulge slightly so that the warp bundles tend to lie two or three deep. Hence it is not obvious which bundles are meant to be adjacent, due to the crowding on the frame.

To assure she picks out the correct bundles, the artisan creates the overall pattern in a systematic fashion. However, ikat work differs from tapestry (or *sungkit*), where the artisan builds up patterns pick by pick. The approach in ikat is more like embroidery in the freedom to move back and forth from one design element to another - and in the need to be precise as to location, size, shape and optimal distance of each element from other patterning.

When Indai has tied the two horizontal bands, she begins the more abstract main body design. She prefers to tie the outside border designs later when she has completed binding more of the warp strings. This procedure makes it easier to work up close to the end where the merged layers of the tube are under the pressure of the end beam.

The main pattern on the planned small cloth is made up of tendrils and rattan creepers (pl.68). The tendril motif, which is usually termed *gelong*, is one of the most frequently used motifs in Iban ikat design work.⁴ It may be

⁴The tendril or *foliate scroll* as Haddon refers to it, has also been referred to in literature on symbols (eg. Chin 1992) as a 'key'.

used as part of a dominant signifier such as a deer (*rusa*), leech (*lintah*), spider (*empelawa'*), bird (*burong*), or lozenge shaped fruits and flowers (*buah bangkit*). Alternatively it might merely serve to create the ground for dominant ideas.

The impact of the tendril motif is highly fluid and inter-connecting - evoking the chaotic space and familiarity of jungle life with its life-giving ferns (*paku'*) and highly valued creepers (*wi*). The process of tying a tendril is also useful for formulating the limbs of a creature, an ear lobe, a monkey's curling tail, an ornament on a headdress, and innumerable other hook-like shapes (e.g. Haddon & Start 1936/1982).

BASIC DESIGN ELEMENTS.

The *gelong*, or tendril motif, is one of the first motifs a weaver learns. Artisans, offering instruction, point out how to formulate respective tendril shapes in terms of the number of coils which lie, side by side, along one ikat bundle (*kayu'*) at the tendril's widest point. This *kayu'* bundle represents the tendril's *jerit* ('horizon'). Iban artisans refer to a *jerit* by the number of resist areas which are tied, side by side, along the single warp bundle (*kayu'*) marking this point.⁵ These resist areas represent what will become, or remain, the undyed white coils of the tendril motif when the cloth is later dyed red and subsequently highlighted with 'black'. A small or simply curled tendril with only three resist bindings on the middle warp is referred to as *jerit tiga*. A tendril with more curl may incorporate six, eight or more bindings (pl.47,56,70).

Indai identifies the four tendrils she plans to tie on the end section of the small mat as *jerit empat*, noting how each horizon line is composed of four resist bindings or white coils (pl.70). The black tip of the tendril is also located on the middle warp. However, the four resist areas along the central warp bundle marking the tendril's horizon

⁵Counting the number of coils to be bound (*jerit*) can be compared to tapestry technique of counting spools of thread to be inserted in a pick of weft at the widest point of a medallion or other geometric motif to be woven in a kilim rug.

point (*jerit*), are the first four resist bindings to be tied in each tendrill motif.

To establish where to begin tying Indai refers to her cloth example, to identify and count the ikat bundles (*kayu'*) which had been tie-dyed and the area from the selvedge to the mid point (*jerit*) of the first tendrill. She then turns to her tying frame and counts off the same number of bundles on the warp. She inserts a piece of plastic cord around the ninth and tenth bundles of warp to mark the start point for the first tendrill (pl.70).⁶

Turning back to the mat, Indai counts 15 ikat sections (*kayu'*) between the mid-points of the first and second tendrills. Counting over 15 warp bundles (*kayu'*), she then inserts a second plastic tie to mark the next two bundles. She skips only 14 *kayu'* between the next two tendrills. She inserts a third tie to mark the mid-point for the third tendrill. Finally, skipping over another 14 warp bundles she inserts a fourth tie. This leaves a further eight warp bundles to the point of the second selvedge - making a total of 67 *kayu'* bundles in one repeat on the small mat (i.e. 66 plus one left over for the centre fold or hinge).

However, the extra *kayu'* bundle appears to be included between the first and second tendrill, not at the centre point. Indai clarifies that there is a design error in the source material. She faces the choice of moving the tendrills over one bundle to make the space the same between each of the four tendrills. She opts to follow the pattern on the small cloth in front of her, anticipating the potential for related alignment problems if she begins altering the initial motifs. For her, subsequent adjustments are an acceptable risk, but for a novice, she suggests, it is easier to simply follow the layout on the cloth.

Indai considers that the design flaw as more acceptable for a beginner, than the frustration of attempting 'perfection' which could meet with an ill outcome. This points, again, to both the sensitivity and thoughtfulness that characterize Iban artisans' work. Further, it reflects Iban

⁶In this case the horizon (*jerit*) incorporates two warp bundles each tied with the same number of resist bindings (4).

customary belief that what might apply in one situation, will not necessarily apply in another - every event is understood and treated according to its own conditions. This view is substantiated in Chapter 9.

Having marked the starting points for each of the first four tendrils, Indai proceeds to make four small bindings on each of these (pl.70). She begins on one of the two bundles at the centre of the first tendril, applying the first binding about half a centimetre from the horizontal rows. She inserts a tie, makes one wrap to the left of the tip, then five wraps to the right, subsequently back three to make a knot about the tip. She begins the second binding about half a centimetre from the end of the first. The same space is left between the third and the fourth bindings.

Indai completes the first four bindings, even spacing them but allowing the spaces between them to be slightly longer than the bindings themselves. Taking up the next warp bundle, Indai applies four identical bindings by aligning the start and turning point of each adjacent bundle. She points out how important it is to line up each binding in order to create sharp smooth lines. Counting the number of times the tie is wrapped can help make each bundle the same length, but if ties are of a different thickness it will require making more or fewer wraps.

Indai completes the centre bindings on all four tendrils. Satisfied that the four tendrils are all evenly spaced, she then returns to the first tendril, completing it and then each of the others, one by one (pl.70). She demonstrates how the curved lines of a tendril effectively *form*, by the act of lining up the ties end to end on alternate warp bundles. She shows how they effectively *fill in*, by lining up the missing ties midway between the ties which have been secured on either side.

The artisan proceeds, again by skipping the warp bundle immediately adjacent to the horizon to pick out the next warp bundle (seventh from selvedge) on which she applies three bindings. She inserts the first of the three ties so that the first wrap (left edge) is in line with the last wrap (right edge) of the first binding on the horizon warps. Indai wraps the tie about five times, to the right so that

the last wrap is in line with the first wrap of the second binding on the horizon warps. Then she doubles back along the binding to the left and knots it.

The woman inserts the second tie so that the first wrap is in line with the last wrap of the second binding on the horizon. She binds it until its right edge is in line with the first wrap of the third binding. She aligns the third tie in the same way.

Now Indai goes back to the eighth warp and fills in by beginning and ending each tie midway between the tied bundles which now lie either side of this warp bundle. She starts the first two ties midway along the corresponding tie above, and wraps each about five times in order to reach the mid point of the tie below - before turning back to knot it.

The third tie is longer, however, as it includes part of the tip of the tendril. The artisan starts the third tie midway between the third tie above it, but she extends her wrapping beyond the mid point of the third tie below to reach the mid point of the fourth tie above.

Once again Indai skips a warp bundle to tie another bundle: the fifth from the selvedge. Two bindings are required, each beginning where the bundles above end, and ending where the next bundles begin. Indai then binds the mid points on the warp bundle which has been skipped, and which complete the tendril. This method of skipping alternate warp bundles (*kayu'*) and then backing up to fill in enables regular spacing which produces smooth even curves.

Indai notes how she uses a similar method to produce straight diagonal lines. First she draws a line across the warp threads at the desired angle. She establishes the length of the first tie by laying a lease stick alongside the line marking the slope. To keep all patterned lines the same width she alters the length of the bindings according to the slope. Lines which slope minimally from selvedge to selvedge require a number of short bindings. The steeper the slope, the longer the bindings, until the vertical position is reached which aligns with the warp threads and so requires only one continuous binding.

Indai completes several ties on a series of alternate warp bundles, each time aligning the new one with the end of

the previous tie, checking that the lengths are the same and that she is maintaining a straight line on the correct angle. Then she backs up to fill in the ties on the warp bundles which have been skipped, starting and ending midway between the bundles on either side. She is especially proud of her technique. She explains that it enables her to work more quickly and more accurately than artisans in families which do not know about this procedure. Although Indai and other artisans critique each other's work, partly with the intention of wanting to appear superior, Indai says she is not jealous of her particular methodology. Anyone can observe it; she works in the open, public space. Yet she gains personal rewards from practising the whole of her work; she is not alienated from it.

Indai refers to the diagonal lines on the small mat as *akar*, generic for jungle creepers like rattan. (One also hears the use of *randau* to mean the same). Indai notes how the spots on the diagonals, which she calls 'eyes' (*mata*), are also made by aligning bindings end for end on adjacent or alternate warps. Haddon (1936:plate XXIc) identifies a similar motif as "*batang sepepat [selemepepat] tebok igi bras*" - tree with branches outlined by the light of fireflies, and holes with rice grains.⁷

Indai notes that the specific name of the design as it appears on the small mat is *buah Beji*, explaining that the *akar* take on meaning in this context as the ladder which the Iban ancestral spirit *Beji* uses when he tries to climb to the sky (cf. Richards 1988:34). Readers will recall the aptness of the mat as an ikat tuition exercise. A cloth from Saratok with the same name (pl.66) illustrates how this legend inspires different images for other Iban weavers.

The manner in which Indai creates the figures, *gelong* (tendrils) and *akar* (creepers), that is by binding curves and straight lines, illustrates the basic components of most Iban ikat design work. Indai notes that the artisan takes care to align straight diagonals in forming the sides of

⁷Laura Start's drawing of this motif has been included in a series of brochures featuring different arts or 'handcrafts' by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Sarawak. This and other Start motifs are also reproduced and referenced in Ong (1986).

geometric shapes such as lozenges (or rhombs), the bodies of snakes, crocodiles and anthropomorphic figures - including angular arms and legs.

The 'eyes' or spots, which are sometimes analyzed as decorative filler in bodies or animals and human-like figures, also provide a visual ladder by which the artist assures she builds up shapes in a poised manner (pl.69). With regard for technical considerations and influences of other art work, these spots are also seen in similar motif work created by float weaves such as *sungkit* (pl.24), *pilih* (pl.31), *karap* (pl.36) and basketry (pl.29,33)). There is the added question of design quality and historical style concerning 'x-ray' perception (pl.45). This topic remains a potential for aesthetic research in Iban studies.

The preceding analysis of ikat procedures demonstrates both the complexity of manipulating the thread and the Iban artisan's fluidity of system in applying various groupings to different design compositions. It is emphasized that most Iban artisans do not choose to analyze the combination of threads: why they group them in a particular way. The predisposition of most individuals to act it out, rather than think about it, identifies not an Iban trait but a human one (e.g. Radin 1953).

Things are done the way they are learned through the work of parents or grandparents. Success comes through practice which teaches concentration, and consequently memorization through concrete work with sequential patterning. Uncertainties are a constant - as Iban women who monitor the results of their rigorous agronomical science cannot fail to appreciate and pass on to their daughters (e.g. Freeman 1981). The wisdom of patience and toleration is paramount in Iban knowledge.

An individual begins learning ikat by watching and helping to wind the thread: she becomes familiar with the medium. Tying a design requires as yet untrained concentration. Through handling the warp, and gradually increasing the number of threads she manipulates, a student develops concentration - apprehending concrete instances of uncertainty and generating decision-making skills.

There is no obligatory immersion in *abstract* mathematical configurations for the Iban ikat student, unlike that presented to readers by the preceding description. For the Iban student tactile qualities are primary - immediate and instructive in respect to numeracy skills and aesthetic literacy.

INTERPRETING AND CONCEIVING IBAN DESIGNS.

Iban artisans begin ikat work by imitating, in the sense of actively interpreting ikat designs (*neladan, teledan*). As an individual becomes more skilled she might choose to reproduce more complex or 'classic' designs. However, each weaver learns to value modification as a means of developing skills of personal interpretation. The exercise may only be an extra tendril or variation to an end border. As in any specialization, perfection of the most complex designs develops through trial and error, over several generations of renewal, through revising combinations of design elements (pl.39,42,44,46).

The word *teladan* is not identical with duplication. The concept has kinship with mimesis in the sense of working with appropriate source material, resources which are consistent with individual circumstances (age-grade, geo-physical environment, historical conditions, specific power relations). Imitation can be viewed as a counter-balance too, concerning the rigorous constraints of the expressive medium - an inherent abstractness in representing concepts through ikat work. The source material is a text: part of the history of the practice of specific beliefs. The artisan, through her hours of concentrated work interpreting and imitating various ancestral cloths, becomes familiar with the myriad of jungle plants and animals, and with their various associations to fertility, bravery and danger through the respect her kindred place on both the textile and how it is created.

The most experienced weavers, and otherwise those who have affinity with technical process, have no trouble responding to changes demanded of them in the modification of an existing pattern. This situation refers to the need to

alter sequences when reinterpreting a pattern to a different sized warp (pl.39). However, not all individuals experience change in the same way (e.g. Radin 1953). In the case of Iban ikat practices this principle has implications for innovative pre-disposition.

One skilled weaver told me she believed that her ability to make fine ikat design work was something she was born with. Yet, she went on to add, it was not only inside her (*ari ati*: 'from the heart'), but that she had the advantage of living in a family of master weavers who passed on their skills from generation to generation (cf. Vogelsanger 1980:118, Gavin 1989). Further, she noted that because of these circumstances, she and her family today have a comparatively rich source of designs from which to renew this advantage.

She said she learned to weave as a young woman and when she became accomplished at making *pua' kumbu'* her father, himself renown as a courageous warrior, asked her to have a tattoo engraved on her thumb - to symbolize her achievement (pl.20). The implication concerns social identity and related responsibility, the conservation of power relations between teachers and students - and senior members of the community.

In regard to comparable cultural demarcation, Iban men displayed and assumed responsibility for war-time skills by tattooing various parts of the body (e.g. Mashman 1986). A tattooed finger joint(s) honours the specific valour of a man who, like the informant's father, came through the ordeal of taking an enemy's head (pl.98).

My interest lies in contextualizing social-cultural elements such as a tattoo signification. Not all individuals who tattoo a finger joint intend to signify the same meaning. For example, the tattooed woman referred to above had many years of experience, could imitate difficult and dangerous designs and was accordingly acknowledged by her peers. Yet she observed she does not choose to create new designs.

Her sister, also a recognized textile artist, began to take up ikat work at a more advanced age. She prefers not to imitate patterns on existing cloths but to generate original

work. Her designs are very complex and represent dream inspiration. Her muses guide her in healing as well as other arts. She serves as a ritual *manang*. She explains that she is not only given spiritual guidance, she is guided to act out her inspiration (cf. Vogelsanger 1980, Gavin 1989).

In the 1990s, artisans at Rumah Ata continued to respect and feel awe for specific designs with motifs such as *jugah bedayong* (pl.57). One woman, aged about thirty, observed that her grandmother had become very ill when tying this motif in a cloth her family retain. The speaker's mother had explained to her that even an experienced weaver, ostensibly with appropriate physical and spiritual strength, deferred to the dynamic influence of cyclic change. Accordingly, she would take ritual precautions to ascertain her place in the *contextual* scheme of things. She had advised her daughter not to attempt this design on the basis it would not do her good, but cause bodily injury.

There is speculation in the literature that customarily, a woman took up the challenge, unconditionally, to demonstrate attainment of marriage eligibility (e.g. Rubenstein 1973:256). And, up until a few generations ago, weavers were required to meet clothing needs. While Iban groups, which did not have a ranked social order, encouraged all women to weave to meet such needs, it did not follow that all women devoted equal time and energy into this same activity.

Again, it is critical, in interpreting Iban patterns of Iban culture, to defer to the predominating principle of inner variation. The notion of Iban women stripped of choice, in respect to undertaking a particular design, violates ethnographic understanding. Evidence connects directly with responsibilities which Iban develop in respect to choice-making (e.g. Freeman 1981).

In the worlds which Iban construct, one lives with the consequences of one's decisions - in a very profound sense. There is a myth which tells how *Selempandai*, the creative spirit, offers each unborn child the choice of implement: a sword used in weaving or a spear for battle. The choice, which relates to one's gender, is elemental and one through which the individual lives until departure from the material realm.

When an individual creates an original ikat design she invariably gives it a 'praise name' (*ensumbar*). In association with the pattern itself, the artist receives the name in a dream. Textile names are sometimes short and sometimes more lyrical in length. Predictably, the words symbolize affective qualities of the dreamer, and imagery associated with them present events.

For example, a Saratok artist who created a significantly original work observed that his design connected with a particular long dry spell, suddenly transformed by clouds that dropped rain. On describing a cloth designed by his deceased wife, a Majau Iban man recalls the pattern as '*Ujan sayang*' (in his interpretation 'a lovely [fine] falling rain'). A weaver at Rumah Balang named a cloth which featured mostly jungle tendrils: *Bating seribu* ('One thousand twigs'). Another Iban artist's piece featuring similar tendril-like design work in an exhibition was labelled: '*Pun kayu' ambun batang bindang beraun*' with the English interpretation written as 'Casuarina and palm trees sway in the wind'. Another cloth (pl.44) from Kapit District in the Sarawak Museum collection was accompanied by the description (sic): "*kelulu gajai antu nyawa nyeriu' sa-malam malam. Kelekeh ambu belakoh minta tutoh raja nadah mansan sedan kelekit gajai langit nyawa begigit dalam bulan.*" This name and cloth portray an image of *gajai*, a frog-like god whose strong heroic voice sounds pretentious in the nights; acknowledge the king, atop [poles] and visibly clear, above the lattice-work, frog spirit in the sky whose cry in this season resounds firmly in the moon.

Interpretation, of dream experiences, and related to knowledge systems generally, is determined by historical practice of customary beliefs. Iban emphasize individual's responsibility to heed signs (e.g. bird augury, dreams).

Ceremonial poles (*tiang sandong*) and sago palms (*mulong merangau*) commonly feature in *pua' kumbu'* (pl.43,44). In healing and in festive life the poles are a key element, representing the understanding that the creator Entala made humans from the trunk of a tree (e.g. Ch.9-10). In a Freudian sense the pole is generative and dynamic, a significance heightened by the Iban perception that bodily essence or

vitality (*ayu*) is located in the boles of a stand of bamboo (Richards 1988). The dynamism refers to the perception that when the *ayu* withers and sickens it mirrors the condition of the physical body (*ibid*).

The interpretation of the various design elements or motifs which compose an overall design in Iban textiles also varies from individual to individual, and settlement to settlement. Thus, as personal experience, dream imagery in a textile usually connects with anticipation or memories of a recent event.

To clarify further the complexities of interpretation, consider a motif, such as 'frog' (*gajai*), which may be included in a design as a talisman for success, to be clever (*pandai*) in weaving. But, although frog represents a fertile spirit (e.g. the creator *Selampandai*), also, frog connects with the acts of war, and so, with acts of death. For example he is worn by *Lang*, the Iban god of war. The lyrics in *Timang Gawai Amat* refer to a ritual jacket possessed by *Lang Singalang Burong* (Masing 1981:145, 283, 316). Noted previously, *Lang's* name demonstrates a transformative essence. Accordingly a frog motif in his jacket design might well be a 'protective device' but much more it is a highly *ambiguous signification* - an assumption of polysemism which applies generally to interpretation of design motifs (e.g. Barth 1987).⁸

Crocodiles (*baya*) and mythical water serpents (*nabau*) are examples of how Iban do not see things in fixed terms. These jungle inhabitants, whose potential ferocity is acknowledged by Iban, are also viewed as potential allies. Crocodile is recognized by Iban as the manifestation of the water deity *Ribai*, who helps protect padi crops from pests; and mythical dragons or water serpents (*nabau*) which represent the lord of the serpents, father of *Ribai* and grandfather of *Keling* (Richards 1988) and believed to accompany a warrior to aid him in his dangerous task (personal communication, also see Freeman 1978). But their

⁸Contextual consideration of meaning is cautioned by Frederik Barth (1987) in considering the significance of colour for example. White as the colour of breast milk or seminal fluid is not invariably potent; since at certain times and places sperm adulterates the mother's milk (*ibid.*).

protection is not assumed. Artisans are advised by their elders to show respect by adding an offering of food when depicting such spirits as a textile motif (pl.59).

Many Baleh designs are anthropomorphous imagery, including mortal warriors as well as Gods (*petara*) and other spirits (*antu*) or more dangerous giants (*gerasi*). Previously noted is official external disapproval of such representation (e.g. Jabu 1991), an injunction which connects with nationalist Islamic objectives regarding the uniform practice of highly abstract sacred symbolism. Yet Iban conformity to this directive is relative to direct influence of or proximity to Malay communities.

Of course there is no single 'historical style' in Iban textile arts. Yet one easily distinguishes two interpretive systems which underlie *pua' kumbu'* design quality. One is the abstract patterning which is characterized by finely intricate, tendrilly beautiful form. This historical style, while not exclusive of 'Saribas' Iban, it is attributable to Iban communities in this region which have had greater historical intensive contact with Malay groupings (pl.48,49).

The second historical disposition concerns the interest in anthropomorphic symbolism, as still practised by Baleh Iban in the 1990s, but never completely extinguished in other communities. The interpretive system which underlies anthropomorphic realism reveals awe in the face of an environment 'peopled' by grotesque, devouring forms (pl.45, 53, 59). The giant representations referred to as *gerasi* depict ferocious demons which rove the jungles. *Gerasi* are also perceived as guardian or warning spirits which appear in a dream.

The predominance of grotesque realism in Iban textile arts is not a genre that is peculiar to Iban. Bakhtin identifies its significance in early unofficial European cultures (Bakhtin 1965). In an essay entitled "Beauty and ugliness" in *The origin of form in art* (1965), Herbert Read expands on this theme through the observations of African design quality in Anthony Forge's work. These theorists emphasize the elemental importance of the concept of endless renewal (an aesthetic of conception and demise) in the symbolic representations of pre-state groupings.

There are various illustrations included which demonstrate the specific expressions of grotesque realism in Iban ikat work. Iban textile artists frequently emphasize the significance of the penis (pl.45, 50). Designs depicting the dangers of war include headless torsoes of enemies (*bukang*), whose heads are often featured as trophies (*antu pala*), in the hands of warriors (pl.50, 56). When they concentrate on the upper body they symbolize agony in the presence of monstrous realities, spasmodic agony in the liminal moments of birth and death. Mouths gape hugely and teeth menace fearfully (pl.46, 53, 59).

Predictably the most potent or dangerous designs are associated with ceremonial war jackets and *pua' kumbu'* used to receive trophy heads during feasting devoted to Lang Singalang Burong. Examples of motifs in this category, are the headless bodies, and various spirits represented in animal or human-like forms such as the *gerasi*, mentioned previously. However, in contrast to this 'grotesque realism', the creation of a large bands of horizontal striping or a central unpatterned field, characteristic of the *pua' bali kelikut* (pl.55), *bali belantan* and *bali belumpong* which are important for their power as protective covers, is also considered a dangerous undertaking by all but the most accomplished artisans, according to informants in the Saribas region.

This brings the discussion to the point concerning jackets which continue to be worn by bards (*lemambang*) as 'shielding'. Part of their speciality incorporates engaging dangerous space and time, that for example surrounding an 'over-heated' longhouse environment in which individuals are suffering 'soul loss' (Ch.9).

The appropriate clothing of a bard can be viewed as shielding, activated by a cloth that transmits the concentrated creative energy of an acknowledged textile artist. Great personal danger exists for the bard as his or her spiritual soul takes leave of the physical body on a journey to invoke divine assistance.

Ceremonial women's skirts incorporate representations of processes which connect directly with the bodily cycle of fertility and decay (e.g. *bangkit* fruit and blossoms, *binka'*

lia' ginger root, *empelawa'* spiders, *lintah* leeches, *kala* scorpions). But once again, the meaning of each motif is dynamic. A fruit blossom signifies an inconstant or cyclic condition, not mere beauty.

As one might anticipate, individuals who continue to create new designs have introduced new forms into their designs. An example which appears on several cloths (pl.62) is the introduction of men in military uniform, sometimes with British medals on their necks and guns in the hands, helicopters in the background, in place of trophy heads (*antu pala*), blowpipes and headless corpses (*bukang*) (Sarawak Museum Collection, Jabu 1990, Edric Ong Collection, Leiden National Museum of Ethnography).

One such cloth was given the name *Buah bujang mali balang tukang, serang numban* (young men impossible not to [feel need to] be heroes) while another was given a longer description, *Sinau tengeregau bala chang kechanang tau nyerang tumbang ka menoa*. An interpretation reveals reluctance, ambivalence: a disturbed wandering army with a 'rough-spoken' musical gong, knowing how to attack and overthrow/protect the homeland. The designs were inspired by personal experiences of fighting during the Japanese Occupation and Malaysian 'Confrontation' with Indonesia in the 1960s.

Another example (cf. Jabu 1991:82) concerns a cloth with a new design which derives from the previously-noted story of Beji's ladder (*Tangga' Beji*) in which a warrior attempts to reach the *petara* or god. The reinterpretation shows three figures (trinity), one of which is Jesus nailed to an Iban ceremonial pole (*tiang sandong*) embellished with small crosses. Candles are included in the border design. In pre-Christian times the border area was predominated by specific motifs of omen birds (including the seven sons-in-law of Lang Singalang Burong), lizards which also represent a minor bird omen, and/or bamboo shoots, the place of ayu or bodily essence.

Contemporary innovations are consistent with an Iban ethos of toleration for the religious beliefs of others. Otherness permeates Iban belief systems. For example, the creator *Entala* draws etymological comparison with *Allah* in

the Iban literature (e.g. Howell 1909). Indian influences are also noted by Howell and Bailey (1909), and by Ave and King (1986:19).

At the same time *synthesis* is not identical with outside injunction. Contemporary innovations infrequently connect with pre-state ethos. Nor do new inventions always find official favour. The 'cultural legacy' favoured by official culture today is heavily weighted by regional factionalism. The traditional seat of political power is the Saribas for reasons which have been explained in regard to historical more intensive Malay contact.

Baleh Iban occupy fewer legitimized official positions: hence the current predominance of 'Saribas style' invented traditions in textile practises today. The personal and social implications of the outside alteration of elemental design quality are assessed in Chapters 10 and 11.

This section has brought into focus the complexities involved in a study of Iban symbolism. While Haddon's study focussed on descriptive illustrations of Iban textile motifs, detailed interpretations have yet to be undertaken in this field. As previously noted, such a focus was beyond the scope of the fieldwork objectives for this thesis.

COLOUR.

Turning to dyeing process and further examination of the use of colour, the analysis of older ikat cloths reveals the central place of *chiaroscuro* - "the technique of using light and shade in pictorial representation" (American Heritage Dictionary). As previously implied, it is a methodological element which fits snugly into an aesthetic of fertility and decay - the process of material life.

During the tying process and prior to dyeing the cloth patterning appears, in conjunction with plastic bindings or *lamba* fibres, as coloured areas on a white background. Then, once the thread has been dyed a rich earthy red and the bindings cut off, the patterns which have remained undyed give the appearance of a negative pictorial imprint, as noted in chapter 5 (pl.22, 28). This image bears reverse

kinship with photographic process in which the final print becomes the positive representation (pl.84, 86).

In Iban ikat process, the ground is earthy red dye while the predominating imagery is either outlined in fine lines of white, neutrally-coloured fields, or dark shadows. The visual effect is similar to suddenly glimpsing an image through a shaft of light which transforms familiarity of the jungle canopy. A more subdued, though equally 'super-realistic' effect, is also apparent in textiles one views in the flickery light of a fire or an oil lamp. This way of seeing the imagery, is less likely in the glary fluorescence of contemporary longhouse lighting. Neon light has the effect of backgrounding the imagery and bringing forward the reddish fields.

Red, white and black (which Iban artisans produce with dark blue or dark brown dyes) recur as dominant colours in symbolic representations across pre-state cultural groupings (e.g. Campbell 1962). The explanation I deal with in several previous references to the polysemic meaning of bodily fluids. Throughout South-East Asia one assumes influences of Indian and Arabic court cultures. The predominating colours still tend to be reddish-brown and a blue which is frequently dark indigo or bluish-black.

But textile artists in Flores, Sumba, Bali, Sumatran Lake Toba region and other Indonesian islands have learned to see indigo as their dominant colour (pl.64) - and begin their dyeing procedures with blue (e.g. Adams 1969). Iban visualize the textile ground as red, applying indigo in a secondary and relatively sparing way as an outline (pl.61). The indigo outlines produce a shadowy effect through contrast with contiguous designs in lacteal 'natural' colour, which were reserved from dye influence.

The most prized dye source for red throughout Iban settlement areas is the roots of the *engkudu* tree (*Morinda citrifolia* L.).⁹ However red is also obtained from a variety of jungle plants which include the following: *Engkerebai* (*Stylocoryne* spp.) leaves yield a light pinkish red to a

⁹*Engkudu* (Malay *mengkudu*), is also referred to as *kombu* (e.g. Sumba). This plant, which is a species of *Morinda*, belongs to the Madder family.

darker brownish brick red; the Samak tree (*Eugenia* sp.) is a mangrove tree which yields a red-brown dye; *jerenang*, or *wi*, is a large rattan (*Daemonorops* spp.) of which fruit scales yield a resin (Dragon's Blood); and *sebangki* is a small unidentified riparian tree that is possibly *Tristania* spp., *melaban* (Richards (1988:327) which yields a brownish dye similar to *engkerebai*. Iban generally obtain indigo blue colour from *tarum* (*Indigofera* sp.), which is known as *renggat* in the Baleh region.

Cotton is one of the most difficult fibres to dye. It is preferable to treat its cellulose fibres initially with a mordant which contains acids in form of insoluble minerals. The mordant reacts with the cotton to form a kind of chemical bridge between the fibre and dyes (Gasing 1991). Western chemists show that acid is harmful to textiles since it breaks the valency bonds of the fibre making it brittle. Yet Iban mordant specialists have developed a recipe containing tannin and vegetable oil that is easily hydrolysed, enabling fibres to absorb the dyes (*ibid.*). Iban, as well as other indigenous groups in South-East Asia also developed ways of obtaining a rich colour through a specific series of treatments of the cotton fibre.

Customary Iban dyeing practices require two distinct processes. The first coincides with a ritual ceremony (*ngar*) to make raw untreated cotton threads (*ubong mata'*) into specially treated threads - exposed to the dew (*ubong ambun*). The rites involve the application of a carefully prepared herbal mixture (mordant). Afterwards (or it could be prior to that procedure) individuals bind the ikat patterns (*ngebat*). As I explain, below, such ritual ceremonies are rare in the 1990s. The anecdotal evidence is that dyers may introduce threads to the mordant which are previously ikat-bound, although it is not clear whether this is a customary practice (see footnote 10 below).

The second procedure involves the actual colouring process and is carried out through a series of dye-baths (*selup*). Threads treated accordingly with both mordant and dye-stuffs produce a cloth with a deep red colour that is perceived as identical with ripeness. The cloth is *mansau*:

appropriately heated or developed thus said to be 'cooked' (*ubong mansau*).¹⁰

The individual acknowledged as holding the highest degree of textile artistry in a community is invited to mix the mordant. The chemistry depends of course on correct proportion as well as combinative quality of ingredients (*tau' nakar*, the alchemical process). The *emeritus* artist also performs the appropriate rites which take the form of a major celebration (*tau' ngar*) to help generate *ripeness*.¹¹

According to customary ways, no important undertaking commences without prior confirmation that it coincides with the desires of specific spiritual entities, either through bird augury (*beburong*) or dreaming. Women who initiated a *ngar* would "never dare to do so unless she had been invited in a dream" (Vogelsanger 1980:115)

An individual known as able to successfully mix the appropriate ingredients and so 'optimally heat' the threads to make possible a rich red colour when the threads were fed the dye-stuffs, would accrue appropriate credit. Payments would be made and 'praise name' bestowed, for example *orang tau nakar tau ngar* (Howell 1912). Howell interprets this honorific as a customary way of describing "a person who knows the secrets of measuring out the drugs in order to obtain the rich colour". A more literal translation is "a person who knows how to measure out the dye ingredients (*nakar*) and who knows how to perform the appropriate ritual ceremony (the *ngar*)".

I note earlier that analysis is not an essential element in the artistry of ordering threads in precise mathematical

¹⁰The Iban word *mansau* is used for the colour red as well as something which is ripe, cooked. In the 1990s Ibans are taught to speak Malay (the official language of Malaysia). Although some use the Malay word for red (*merah*) the nearest Iban word to this is *mera* that refers to something which is only half-cooked.

¹¹The process of mixing the mordant (*nakar*, *takar*) and the rites of the *ngar* have been referred to as a ritual 'dye' process. Howell (1912) first referred to the mordant process as a dye, was repeated by Haddon & Start (1936:21), whose notes on dyeing reappear in Ong (1986). But it is essentially a pre-dye ceremony when the thread is treated with a mordant, the actual dye is not introduced at this time (lists of ingredients without dye: Jabu 1991, Gavin 1989). Richards (1988:361) notes that in some cases the dye is applied at the same time. This is questionable as threads treated with a mordant supposedly require time for the chemical changes which subsequently enable the threads to readily accept the dye.

sequence to inform the design quality of a multiple layered warp. Similarly, *synthesis* is the predominant intellectual quality in the process of *ngar*. Chemical analysis is not necessarily the forte of the senior dye specialist.

Synthesis is referred to here in the sense that the artisan's goal, which is to ensure that the whole process comes together, is contingent on her comprehension that mixing the ingredients, no less than the various ritual acts, follows a customary sequence - but that even then she possesses no power of control over the results. The outcome is conditional on the fates, in that it might rain, or a participant might sicken or suffer mishap. Adherence to customary practice includes attention to omens which might occur as forewarning of an intervening problem.

There are further conditions of success. The ingredients must be sufficiently potent. Mordant and dye ingredients prepared from plants gathered in different seasons and from various landscapes will produce divergent shades.

Iban artists make no assumptions that a *ngar* ceremony will produce the desired results. They know, from hard experience, the transformability of chance - in respect to all areas of subsistence practices. It is a precarious event; each time *ngar* produces different results. And the best are difficult to achieve.

Howell (1912) describes the mixing of ingredients: the boiling water and the accompanying ritual offerings, the amulets and invocations to *Kumang*, *Meni* and *Segadu'*. The main ingredients include:

- * tumeric - *kunyit* or *entemut kunyit* (*Curcuma domestica*)
- *entemut* (*Curcuma sativa*)
- * oil - *minyak kepayang* (*Pangium edule*)
- * salt - *garam apong* from *apong tunu nipah* palm (*Nypa fruticans* Wurm.)
- *garam tunu*, sea salt.
- * ginger - *lia' amat* (*Zingiber officinalis*)
- *lia' kumang* (*Zingiber spp*)
- *cekur* (*Zingiberaceae*)¹²

Howell notes that the *kepayang* nuts and salt are 'burned' and finely ground with a pestle and mortar then

¹²Anthony Richards (1988) notes that *cekur* may refer to *entemu*, a type of tumeric, generally (*Curcuma spp*). In any case both tumeric and ginger are required.

mixed together.¹³ The tumeric and ginger roots are similarly processed. The artist makes offerings of eggs and betel. And, as she mixes the ingredients with boiling water in a long wooden trough, she introduces an iron bar on account of its affinal strength.

Iban customarily include an iron bar or long knife or sword (*parang*) as an essential part of most rituals. The same artefacts are often included in settlement of the credit that accrues to a bard, healer or other artist. The success of the ceremony is partly determined by this symbolic exchange of vitality. It mirrors the chemical process which produces the *ripeness* of a successful dyeing process.

The tri- or di-valent salts of the metal (blade or bar) dissolve in the solution. Hence the iron contributes to the mordant. It helps form the chemical bridge required by vegetal dye stuffs (e.g. *engkudu*) in order to combine with the cotton fibre in subsequent dye baths.

The constituent qualities of quasi-narcotic chewing material are central in the alchemy of dyeing. The combined elements comprise *Sirih* leaves (*Piper* spp., esp. *P. betle* L.), *pinang* (*Areca catechu* L.) or betel-nuts, and *kapu'* which is lime gained from grinding and cooking snail shells. In chemical terms the lime, like wood ash, contains an alkali which is essential for direct dyes such as *tarum* (indigo) and *engkerbai*.

To turn again to the process of working with a mordant: the artist immerses the thread and soaks it repeatedly over many hours; and the mixture is replenished with hot water. In the course of the soaking, women participants expect to demonstrate strength of character by facing the risks attached to running through the near-boiling water in the trough. In so doing, they tread on the bundles of soaking thread - an affinal act of potency.

The high social status accorded to this ordeal was recorded by William Howell in terms of *kayau indu* "the

¹³Similar procedures are followed by a Saratok dyer who demonstrated the procedures for a ritual *ngar* at a weaving seminar organized by members of Society Atelier and the Sarawak Museum in 1988 (see Jabu 1991 and Munan 1991). After the seminar, a similar procedure was followed by weavers in the Baleh (see Gavin 1989).

warpath of the women" (1912:64). Haddon & Start later drew on this conceptual practice (1936:22), as did Mashman (1986) among others.

When participants removed the thread for the final drying they let it drink in the dew at night and the sunlight by day for a period of about two weeks. Iban artists understood that exposure to the dew prior to the sun was essential for the thread to develop 'heat' in the sense of *mansau*. Chemists might say something to the effect that this 'ripening' process is the outcome of the mordant maturing, as it oxidizes. In so doing there occurs an increase in the positive charge or valence of its elements through removal of electrons (Gasing 1991).

Participants would wait and watch to see that the thread was exposed to the moisture of the dew but never soaked by rain. This entailed staying up all night - a vigil to invoke support from gods and develop readiness to receive this response - in the interests of increasing success.

Success was further conditioned by seasonal variability - however slight this might appear to an outsider. Dyeing would usually be carried out in July or August during the driest period. This is also the least busy agricultural period, when families wait for the fallow growth they have cut to dry, prior to burning the new garden plots. However, when men and women became busy with the planting or harvesting of their crops of rice in September/October and March/-April (even though older folks may not have to participate in farm work), many restrictions or taboos would be enforced. With regard to textile practices, a prohibition against ikat binding was strictly enforced because it was seen as akin with stifling or tying up of the rice plant (Jensen 1974:177).

In the 1990s, although weavers buy their yarn and their dyes from shop houses, they still tend to synchronize their activities with the pattern of customarily-employed others in the longhouse. In the case of Rumah Ata, many adult members attempt to grow their food requirements as well as cash crops. Their busiest times are still in the planting and harvesting seasons.

As with the decision to hold a major celebration, or *gawai*, textile artists work towards a common deadline to prepare celebratory cloths. But, although individuals do most of their dyeing during the driest months, with the introduction of commercial dye powders which do not require a mordant, they no longer choose to join together to hire a specialist to perform the ritual *ngar* ceremony.

Iban artists agree that the best dye results come with thread which is *ubong ambun* (thread exposed to dew) through being treated with the special mordant recipe and later dyed with the roots of the *engkudu* tree to become *ubong mansau* (ripened/red thread). Yet there are many reasons, they say, why they no longer do this. For example it is difficult to find enough of the roots today.

While a few individuals interested in reviving the vegetal dye resources have planted trees, the process of growth is lengthy. The difficulty is compounded by the factor that, in the case of *engkudu*, it is the roots and bark, and not merely the leaves which must be taken. Individuals observe it is difficult to find the various other ingredients. One can purchase domestic ginger root relatively easily in Kapit, but the purchase of *apong* salt from the Nipah palm may mean a trip to Sibu or even Kuching.

The time one must make available for the ceremony is also a concern at Rumah Ata. Planning, then two weeks of concentrated effort while the yarn is processed...such a ceremony not only involves the cost of the ingredients and ritualist fee, but also many other ingredients. These include eggs for offerings, and food and drink for all the participants who stay up at night to assure success through feasting.

The implications of these remarks coincide with integration with the national economy and consequent division of labour. The alienation of artisans from the whole process of textile artistry is compounded by the introduction of commercial dye powders. Artisans find they can achieve a red tone which approximates results from *engkudu* and does not require preliminary treatment. In what development theorists would view as a tentative move, most women at Rumah Ata

continue to add colour from a dye source which is locally available in the forest, usually *engkerebai* leaves (pl.90).

Women collect a large bundle of branches when they travel to their outlying farms (*umai*). They bring the plant material back to the longhouse and commonly strip the leaves from the branches in *ruai*, the open gallery of the longhouse. Often, there is help offered by grandchildren or others in the family who happen to be nearby. They temporarily store the leaves in a large tin can.

The process of working with *engkerebai* leaves, to obtain dye, means an early start in the morning. The artisan fills the can with water and sets it on an open fire. This might be on the hearth in the kitchen area at the back of the *bilik*, or outside between the scattering of smaller storage sheds. After the leaves are brought to a boil and simmered for an hour or more, the woman pours the liquid dye bath into either an ironwood trough (*dulang*) or, in the 1990s, into a plastic tub. In the trough, or tub, the woman has put fresh *sirih* leaves, a lime paste (*kapu'*) and salt (pl.87-89). She has prepared the *kapu'* by grinding and cooking snail shells in a wok with a little water.

The woman now fills the trough with the dye bath, which has been simmering in a tin nearby. She then immerses the skeins of cotton thread in the hot solution, squeezing it to help the fibres absorb the dye solution. When the dye liquor is almost colourless she discards it. She adds more water from the can of *engkerebai* leaves, which has been continuing to simmer, to more fresh *sirih* leaves, lime and salt. Then she immerses the thread for a second treatment.

The procedure is repeated six or more times until the desired colour is reached or until the simmering *engkerbai* solution, which is continually replenished with leaves and water, runs out of colour. Several women observed they seldom have sufficient leaves and so they add one or two tins of dye powder (Dylon) to produce the desired rich colour (pl.87). It appears, generally, to be a common procedure to add Dylon to colour threads which have not been treated with a mordant. Gavin (1989) notes that some women add it to a dye bath in which ritually mordanted yarns are

being dyed - on the basis of availability. She refers to insufficient *engkudu* roots/bark.

In most cases observed, during the dyeing/soaking process not a word was spoken to assure good results. Indai explained that speaking could disturb or distract spirits whose acts might otherwise help in this process. While some of the younger women did heed the warning and were careful not to talk, others did not when mixing the dye. Some offered information, others paused to scold a nearby child.

The wooden trough (*dulang*) in which the red dye is mixed is the same in which the entrails of a sacrificial pig are placed when specialists read them for size, shape and colour to interpret the portents of a related event. In the dyers' world, the examination of the shade of red dye can be seen as parallel, in respect to the blood in particular (pl.87).

In 1991, at Rumah Ata, the dyeing processes generally took only a morning's work, leaving the afternoon free to begin drying. This time frame does not account for collecting and preparing the leaves. The time for these activities vary according to chance and the number of people helping. Likewise, drying requires a second day, or more, depending on the size of the skeins and the occurrence of rain.

When the artisan has applied to the warp the completed ikat design, she replaces the lease sticks with plastic ties and removes the warp from the tying frame so that it can be immersed in its first dye bath.

At the same time she may dye extra thread for the borders as well as for the weft - in the same dye bath to assure the same colour. However, sometimes thread left over from previous dye baths may be used which may or may not be close to the same shade. When the woman attains the desired colour, she removes the tied warp and dries it thoroughly in the sun. In the moist heat of equatorial regions, it sounds easier than it transpires.

The second colour is usually blue or black or dark brown. The dyer creates it by over-dyeing sections of red warp threads which are left untied. She usually accomplishes this, in my observations, by using indigo and/or Dylon. At the same time a light blue patterning, which makes a third colour, is sometimes created by cutting the bindings off

desired sections so that the white areas under these bindings, which resisted the first red dye bath, can now be exposed to this same (i.e. second) dye bath (pl.59,83,).

To prepare the dyed warp for its second dye bath, the dyer reinserts the dried warp tube onto the two small beams for the tying frame. In this way, bindings can be tightly wrapped on all the red background area which is to remain this colour. The second colour is confined to limited areas, mostly as shadow like outlines to highlight the white designs. This means almost all of the warp will be covered during the second binding process, but this is relatively faster than the first set of bindings as it does not involve the same careful alignment (pl.93).

Although shadow areas must be identified, the process is basically one of simply filling in between the existing patterns. Although the warp bundles lie in a jumbled pile, the tied designs can be seen quite clearly in the warp when the bundles are spread flat and sorted into their consecutive order on the tying frame. Iban refer to the second binding process as *mampul* which distinguishes it from the more difficult initial binding which is referred to as *kebat*.

An individual prepares for the second dye procedure in much the same way as the first. Having gathered a large quantity leaves from indigo plants, which the women at Rumah Ata refer to as *renggat*, she soaks them in a container in order to ferment for several days. However, in some cases, women have been observed using the leaves immediately, in the way *engkerebai* leaves were used (pl.91). And, as with *engkerebai* baths, Dylon was added to make up the desired blue-black shades.

When the dyed skeins are dry, it is time to remove the ikat bindings by cutting the knots (*ngetas*). A woman frequently sits on the floor, with her feet outstretched in front, with one end of the bound skein hooked over her toe so she can hold each bound strand under tension (pl.94). The artisan can then work, from top to bottom, on each strand cutting the knots with a series of nicks.

As she cuts, other women and children who are not busy often spontaneously start unwinding the bindings alongside her. When all the knots are cut some artisans prefer to

return the warp to the tying frame to unwrap the bindings. This procedure can take several days for a large warp, even with a number of people helping.

PREPARING TO WEAVE.

When an artisan has removed all the bindings, she sets the dyed warp in the sun for further drying [and oxidation]. Then it is ready to be woven into cloth.

To reassemble the warp on the loom sticks the artisan removes the baste stitches from the woven end panels in order to unfold it. She stretches flat the end panels by inserting a flat lease stick (*lidi*) into the sleeve created by the palm fibres that are woven into the mid section of each end. Then she inserts the two end beams of the loom into the warp tube. The woman secures the beams to the ends of a large weaving frame (*tangga' ajan*) with loops of heavy cord, in a similar way to how she secured it to the tying frame (*tangga' ubong*) (pl.95). Now she inserts two wooden paddles into two of the loops at the lower end. In this way the artisan can twist the cords to increase the tension of the warp.

The woman spreads out the warp threads and works them with a porcupine quill. She loosens the first shot of weft which was woven in a plain over/under weave on one of the end panel. Her purpose is to locate the first shed (i.e. not the last weft which goes over/under groups of three). Working with the loosened weft thread, she opens three or four centimetres of warp at a time in order to insert, gradually, a flat lease stick (*lidi*). This stick, which secures the shed which the larger shed stick will occupy later, she now shifts upward away from the end. The woman loosens the next weft thread and inserts a second lease stick in this shed, and which is intended for the heddles (*karap*). The process is repeated at the other end. This time the end threads are those which have been woven over/under groups of three warps - being the basic triplet groupings which make up each ikat bundle (*kayu'*).

The weaver examines each warp thread to see if any are broken, or cut, in which case she will insert a plain red

thread. Mends are not usually noticeable when the cloth is woven if only one thread has broken. However, where an entire bundle has been inadvertently cut, she needs to replace a whole section of resist patterning with solid red, for each panel which had been bound together. However, because of the way the folding creates identical mistakes on each panel, even these flaws can appear 'balanced' or symmetrically patterned (pl.97).

Having mended the warps, the woman shifts the first two lease sticks up to the top to the second two sticks. Then she lays a new lease stick on top of the warp, about six or more centimetres from the other bottom beam. She secures this stick with a butterfly type lacing, looping a fine cord around each *kayu'* (triplet) to maintain even spacing and width (pl.95). This process helps prevent the warp from pulling in at the selvages during weaving.

Indai calls for help to hold one beam so that, together, they can simply flip the warp tube over. In this way the above procedure can be repeated for the other side of the tube. When the warps are mended, the four lease sticks are shifted to the woven end at which the previous four on the reverse (now under-) side are positioned.

When the artisan has laced, into place, the lease stick which secures the *kayu'* she rotates the warp slightly on its beams. She causes the woven end panel to shift from its position on the end, to the top surface about twenty centimetres from the beam. This movement shifts the lease sticks at this end up from under the beam. Consequently, all eight are now on the top surface.

With the warp positioned in this way, Indai and a helper now add the outside striped borders (*ara*). They begin by tying a double red thread onto the lease stick which is inside the palm sleeve in the centre of the woven panel. Winding proceeds by guiding the thread over and under each of the four lease sticks, along the top surface. It is looped around a thin bamboo rod which has been set in readiness on the warp beside the lease stick to which has

been laced to the groupings of *kayu'* bundles.¹⁴ She then winds it down around the end beam and up over the other end. There it is inserted over-under the series of lease sticks at the woven end. Winding proceeds according to the desired number, colour and size of striping a weaver chooses.

With the side borders in place Indai inserts the shed stick (*bebungan*) in the plain weave shed, marked by the first lease stick she inserted at the start of this process. She opens the shed by tipping the lease stick on edge and inserting the sword shaped beater (*belia'*). She gently turns the beater on edge, stroking the warps with the porcupine thread. When the shed stick is in place, she tips the second lease stick, removes the beater and reinserts it in this new opening.

This time the woman feeds through a heddle cord through the opening as well. This she then attaches to a heddle rod - in order to construct the string heddles (*karap*). To do this she follows the same procedure as when earlier assembling the loom to weave the end panels (described in Ch.7).

The loom is finally ready for weaving. Indai reminds me that there will be no talking while she inserts the first four weft (*pakan*). When she has them in place, Indai can see if all the warps are in order. When they are, she weaves in a few more centimetres. Then she stops to make the *semalau*, which is what she calls the line of twining found on most Iban *pua' kumbu'* (pl.90).¹⁵

Although she says this twining is not essential, it helps strengthen the ends of the cloth which are often not otherwise secured when cut from the loom. The exceptional cases are those where the fringe is twisted, as a decorative feature. While some weavers apply a simple line of twining, others apply more elaborate rows, which is the only pattern weave on the ikat cloth. Indai then weaves off the cloth in

¹⁴This rod serves a similar purpose to the lashed stick as it is intended to maintain the warp sequence and width. But it can also be shifted back when weaving reaches the lease stick which then has to be unlashd and removed to proceed, as well as enable tension adjustment for the selvedge threads.

¹⁵Richards notes that *semalau* is an Iban word for magpie or Straits robin *Copsychus saularis* L.

a plain warp-faced weave, described above in the process of making the end panels.

SUMMARY.

The technical processes in this and the two preceding chapters illustrate technical complexities as well as aspects of social relations between people involved in the work. Certain things are only learned through passage from elders over time. Other things need to be learned today - such as sensitivity to the availability of other's assistance given cash-altered subsistence patterns.

Questions regarding decisions about what technical processes to continue, what designs to reproduce, and whether an individual will choose to participate in textile art, are essentially personal decisions. Yet individuals make such decisions according to commonly held beliefs and values. In pre-state communities these connect with every day concerns of agriculture, war and celebratory activities.

In the 1990s, many individuals continue to make ritual ikat cloths. But the decisions relating to artisanry are increasingly private. Today one can make a deep rich red colour with commercial dyes. Yet there is no associated customary consensus which makes it possible to assure colour-fastness. Artisans go through the extensive process of producing a cloth to find it cannot usually be washed without the red running into the creamy ikat patterning (pl.58).

This implies a temporary problem. Yet the consequences encroach on roots of textile artistry in that they affect personal rewards and social esteem - elements of motivation. The question of motivation is investigated in the next chapter. I do so by analyzing specific uses of ritual cloths in community life - practices which renewed the social relevancy of textile practices.

SECTION IV

USING CEREMONIAL CLOTHS

Ikat practices can be viewed as a primary element in Iban systems of knowledge on the basis of an intermingling with wider practices of belief. Renewal occurs in the potency of cloths through use in healing and similar critical moments in personal and group life. For textile artists, social legitimacy and vocational aspirations which made possible the powerful textiles, become transformed in subsequent practices.

Traditional codes of behaviour generate severe constraints on individual's actions and the idea of 'cultural legacy' is not wholly liberating. In part, the question of artistic motivation arises in the conflicting relationship between individual experience and the obligatory quality of group life (e.g. Fischer 1963, Dewey 1958, Read 1967).

On the other hand, in pre-state Iban communities the relationship of artistic practice and group welfare differs remarkably from western experience. For example, the idea of artists living on the periphery of the social sphere is nonsensical in an Iban context. Accordingly, in this section there is a further emphasis on clarifying ways in which artistic acts are socially purposive and prosper from positive aspects of the relationship of artist and group.

In the following pages I consider a range of celebratory events and rites observed in Kapit and Sri Aman Divisions of Sarawak during the course of study, 1990-1993. The intention is to demonstrate analogies between methodologies of tying and other ritual acts. Through various rites and larger celebratory occasions individuals come together through their active or more receptive interests in specialities such as agronomy, ikat and dye design, healing and epic poetry. A function of feasting is the sharing and renewal of knowledge and motivation surrounding the various customary practices which produce social identity in a particular grouping.

CHAPTER 9

WEAVERS AND BARDS: CELEBRATING IN THE BALEH

This chapter begins by focussing on the nature of offerings which are central to virtually every Iban ritual act. The analysis is followed by assessing a major carnival, (*Gawai Kenyalang*), and the thematic chanting which informs activities over a three day period. I present aspects of the main proceedings in each day of the feasting to demonstrate socially cohesive qualities of various ritual steps performed by each household. Other lesser, but more frequent, Baleh festive events are then evaluated in respect to the wider range of ritual uses for which artisans make ikat textiles.

IBAN RITUAL OFFERINGS: PERFORMING A MIRING.

In conjunction with plans for a major celebration many individuals increase the time spent weaving to prepare new ceremonial cloths. Closer to the celebration women also begin preparing rice wine (*tuak*). Nearer to the event, women often prepare special sticky rice, which they wrap and cook in banana or other palm leaves. Men frequently make ready, for feeding the guests, wild or domestic pig and chicken, some cooking them in bamboo tubes.

However, for even the simplest occasions, which do not depend on a major feast but pertain more to the acts of individuals within the privacy of a family's *bilik* apartment, women expect to prepare a number of basic ingredients which make up a standard offering or exchange with the immortal audience of gods and others.

Prior to the imminent start of a ritual ceremony, women work in the kitchens of their *bilik* setting out numerous tiny ceramic or plastic saucers on the floor. An older woman directs the organization of tasks carried out by younger daughters or daughters-in-law. The elder has previously prepared fried rice flour patties (*tepong*) and a pot of steamed rice - two of three elemental ingredients of the ritual offerings required for all celebratory rites.

When individuals make an offering they draw on small dishes set in three main rows. They have filled those in the first row with cooked sticky glutinous rice (*asi pulut*), the centre row with dry popped rice (*rendai*), and the third row with two or three fried rice patties (*tepong*). In ceremonies involving a number of offerings, each one requires three rows of plates with one of these three basic ingredients in each (pl.101). Women prepare the assemblage on the floor of their kitchen area.

They then set in front of these three additional small dishes, one with uncooked rice seed (*beras*), one with salt (*garam*), and the third with tobacco (*semakau*) and betel vine (*sirih*) leaves. In a recent-born baby bathing ceremony (*mandi*), described below, there are eight basic plates. The leaves include both *sirih* leaves and *sedi'*, which are the dried leaves of wild gambier (*engkelait*) (a woody climber *Uncaria gambir* Roxb.).

Significantly, gambier is also used for a brown dye for cotton. Further, all the ingredients in these last small dishes are elementary ingredients in mordant and dye procedures, as well as in medicinal healing.

For many offerings, as in the case of the baby ceremony, women also use weaving skills to fashion sets of eight miniature palm leaf bobbles (*ketupat*) filled with sticky rice. Their use is informed by the aesthetics of fertility and decay in the sense that they symbolize human heads taken in battle (e.g. Richards 1988:63, Freeman 1979).

Individuals also place ready, two or three grains of uncooked rice seed which they have wrapped in small sections of palm leaf -to form seven or eight miniature packets of rice seed (*sungki'*). Women explain that if they make seven *sungki'* they wrap the thread ties around the tiny packet seven times; and if they make eight they wrap the string eight times. Seven, or alternatively eight, hen's eggs are also set in a dish, to the right of the small dishes. The indicate how the number (e.g. 5, 7 or 8) varies according to the number of dishes set out in each of the three rows.

When it is time to perform the ritual exchange with the gods, women of the family bring out the tiny dishes they have prepared in the kitchen. They arrange them on a *pua'*

kumbu' cloth (pl.101). While some family rites may be performed in the kitchen or in the front sitting room of the *bilik* apartment, most rites are performed in the open public area of the gallery directly in front of the family's *bilik*.

For major celebrations, respective families carry out the public exchange with the gods all the way along the gallery. It is usually a mature age male who conducts the ceremony, although not always. On occasion, the blessing is performed by a guest of honour or a ritual specialist such as *manang* (male or female) if commissioned for this role.

Families perform the celebration at various times so that exchange can also occur between members of different *biliks*. In this sense a wave of offerings occurs over a period of several hours. When all concerned have gathered at a particular clothed area, a male helper in the family takes around a tray on which two dishes have been set.

For reasons of space these observations collapse variations which characterize Iban cultural patterns. Hence, one generalizes that of the dishes on this tray one has a mixture of egg yolk and *tuak*, but for events which publicly acknowledge and seek to redress serious personal illness it might contain the blood from a sacrificed fowl. The second dish is included as an empty receptacle, although not needed in situations where the rite is performed out of doors.

Each person who is present spoons a portion into the empty container as an offering to the spirits, who are also viewed as being present. A male helper then presents participants with glasses of rice wine, filled from a large aluminium kettle which is placed alongside the special rattan mat on which the cloth and food elements are set out.

Meanwhile, the guest (or family member) invited by the family to make the offering takes a pinch of ingredients from each of the dishes in the three rows, in sequence. This person arranges the selected portions in a larger empty bowl-shaped *piring* or plate (pl.98). After ingredients from the shorter fourth row are in place the guest carefully tops the offering with the eggs, and in some cases the special bobbles (*ketupat*) (pl.101).

The host hands over to the guest a live fowl. The guest waves it rhythmically over the mat, cloth, food and in some

cases the persons presiding, chanting rehearsed lines before the fowl is taken and killed (pl.99). A participant hands the guest a feather, dipped in the blood of the sacrifice, who then sets it on the top of the ritual offering.

The *piring* or offering is then taken by males in the family and placed in a designated spot, sometimes overhead, perhaps in various corners of a room, or outside. In a baby bathing ritual, the *piring* is taken to the river and tipped into the water as an offering to those spirits.

The primary communication carried out, principal feasting gets underway. Girls bring out biscuits or special leaf packets of sweet rice for the men, women and children sitting around the special rattan mat. As they serve the food, the host pours more *tuak*. The host gestures to the fried rice patties remaining on the small dishes, offering them to the men and women participants. Women may also have prepared a more substantial meal of rice, chicken, pig, fern and green beans which they then would serve to the guests.

The division of labour among participants in each family is consistent, with a pattern of mature age women in the kitchen resource area, or private sanctum, and mature age men in the public arena. Serving connections are made by younger males and girls. This 'division' is obligatory, according to Iban customary practice, in that all ritual conditions set response. The obligatory nature of such roles is illustrated in the playful role-reversals performed at the end of major celebrations (e.g. Gawai Kenyalang 1991, pl.110). At the same time, there is no prescription operating against women feasting in public.

During the 1991 *Gawai Kenyalang* at Rumah Ata women observed *mirings* inside the family *bilik* as did men outside on the *ruai*. But the implications arise in both micro- and macro-levels of analysis. The former reveals that each individual develops responsibility and gains pleasure in accordance with specific subsistence activities. Agronomical, alchemical and ikat processes each demonstrate a major preoccupation of women, as this thesis sets out to show. Moreover, macroscopic analysis uncovers interconnectivities within women's systems of knowledge and an overall corpus of beliefs and practices.

Returning to observations of patterning revealed in the details of ritual servings on the *ruai*, while the small plates are always set out in rows of three, the number in each row varies from five, to seven or eight. The reason for the variable sequence is simply 'customary' or automatic. Some women add that the larger *piring* is for a more major ceremony, but most individuals demonstrate no interest in analysis of the numerical components. Like patterns which prefigure ikat techniques (*kebat*), the mathematics of *gawai* festive offerings ground in units of three. And most individuals feel thoroughly at home with this as premise, as opposed to probing its original genius.

A further parallel to weaving is revealed in the practice of identifying offerings as constituting a single or three-fold *piring* based on three rows of five, seven or eight dishes, to the way that textile artists refer to a single or double paneled *pua'* based on a three-, five- or eight-fold *kebat*. There is an observation in the literature (Anthropos n.d.:184) that only when a child has reached her or his seventh or eighth year can a three-fold offering (*piring tiga*) be offered for her or him.¹

The inference, that this thesis emphasizes, is that numeracy skills are acted out in customary practice. There is a certain concrete quality to the learning and memorizing of mathematical sequences. Iban knowledge emphasizes crucial differences that identify specific sequential units - in terms of consequences which are never severable from the act of making distinctions.

In terms of learning *perception*, there is an instructive example in a technical distinction not readily apparent when comparing a *baju burong* and a *pua' kumbu'*. The former refers to a coat worn by ritual specialists at feasts such as that described in earlier paragraphs. The name translates as a 'bird-coat', which recalls the significance of the omen birds in Iban augury.² This jacket is often designed with

¹In 1991 a three-fold offering was performed as part of a more elaborate rite commissioned for a teenage girl who was troubled by a recurring dream at the time of the *Gawai Kenyalang* at *Rumah Ata*.

²On Iban augury see for example: Freeman (1960c), Sandin (1980), Sutlive (1978), and Jensen (1974).

simple and repetitive stripes - ostensibly easier to tie than many *pua' kumbu'* designs (pl.40). The designs of *pua'* are usually configured by only two, three or four-fold patterning which involves complex binding of larger areas of patterning. Yet an Iban artisan learns to see that the small discrete bands of motifs on the *baju burong* actually require more initial complex reordering of the warps than is true in making the *pua'*. The reason concerns creation of a five or eight fold layering in the warp tube to be tied.

More generally speaking, the winding and ordering of the threads for an ikat cloth mirror the configuration of elements which constitute the ritual exchange of food with the gods during *gawai*. And the preparation of the various ingredients of offerings, as do the procedures which prefigure ikat patterns, comprise essential parts of the larger design quality of the ritual offering plate (*piring*) and of the ikat cloth respectively.

Also learned by Iban women is that the *process* of combining elements that make up a festive offering, that is *acting out* the elaborate composition of precious substances, is the causal agent in ultimate success. In the same way, the food itself is disposable - able to be eaten by guests and family alike - once the essence has been ingested by the gods.

Previously observed is that Iban textile artists do not *harbour* their products as intellectual property so much as exchange them in an appropriate manner with the wider community, human and non-human. Needless to say 'appropriate' identifies complexities beyond simple commercial transaction since Iban economic systems are inseparable from wider systems of knowledge.

The ritualized (or social) phases of creating ikat cloth can be viewed as performance. In accordance with this notion, the product is not merely the product of one's dreams or ideas of modification, but also appreciated for its availability for social use in various ritual procedures.

In its group function the social meaning of the fabric is ritually renewed through healing and other occasions. At the same time, for the maker, the object serves as an *aide*

de memoire associated with the development of skills - both personal and social (numerary and aesthetic).

To western eyes it is striking that one can cut a cloth from the loom as the end product of intensive work, dry it and store it - without needing to consume it in some way. For example, in the context of industrial society one grows accustomed to exhibitionist objectives.

Yet the making of a cloth in an Iban community does not release the individual from responding to this work. Some of this responsibility is pleasurable but not all. And, not unexpectedly, the higher the artist's social recognition, the greater their obligations in respect to their dream guidance and innovative pleasures.

Individuals experience standardized ritual behaviour differently, in that each is constrained according to circumstances. In simple terms, this situation arises because a woman becomes a senior in her specialization at a mature age - a time when close relatives are more likely to pass on - consequently with increasing taboos on her actions. Thus, while the death of an artisan's husband will be mourned by all longhouse members, the period of restrictions is considerably longer for a widow. Likewise, the death of a senior identifies a greater network of individuals' affected by one's practice - a personal kindred incorporating great grand-children.

Some of the guidance available to Iban artists is transmitted during feasting. The wisdom of appropriate sequence has already been demonstrated in respect to making the offerings. Complexities concerning sequence are also carried through the lyrics of epic stories and chants, performed by ritual specialists at major and lesser *Gawai*.

THE TIMANG: A POETIC FORM FOR GAWAI KENYALANG.

One of the first rites in the sequence of *Gawai Kenyalang* performances at *Rumah Ata* was a *nanam*. This refers to erecting the ceremonial shrine (*ranyai*), which each family does under the ritual direction of bards (*lemambang*) commissioned to sing the *timang* chant (pl.103-105,18). Such shrines are erected at the main house post on the *ruai* in

front of each *bilik* of the families hosting particular rites, with the most elaborate ones constructed by those conducting the principal Kenyalang rites.³

The ritual pattern involved making special offerings to set inside a jar for placement within a frame of cane posts. In the case of families sponsoring rites for a *gawai kelingkang* at this time, the offering was set in a simple, but specially prepared basket for hanging above the shrine (pl.105).

Participants then wrapped two or three large *pua' kumbu'* about the poles - the number of cloths dependent on the size of the shrine. The individuals secured the textiles with string and embellished them. They used various implements including large knives (*parang*), small jars (*tajau*) as well as commercial cloth. The decorative elements would be used throughout the celebration and some would go to the bards as part of an exchange for services. Participants attached other *pua' kumbu'* to the roof of the *ruai* to provide an active shielding for participants (pl.104,110).

A total of seventeen *ranyai* shrines were constructed in the main longhouse building at Rumah Ata, four in the building opposite, and a further two in the building next to it. A fourth building had no shrines. Each family which erected a *ranyai* had planned a personal *gawai timang* which involved three singers (a *lemambang* and two assistants). The singers performed the *timang* poetic cycle simultaneously. They made their steady punctuative journey around the shrines, up and back along the *ruai*, all night.

After the first night most celebrants took down their shrines since just nine families had planned rites based on extended versions of the *timang*. The latter required a total of three nights to complete the invocatory chants.

Families with *ranyai* erected second smaller shrines inside the main sitting room of their *bilik* apartments. Some identified the smaller shrines as a woman's shrine. These varied in construction but all included ritual ikat cloths,

³*Ranyai* are similar to the *pandong*, the ritual shrines erected in the Saribas district for such major festivals as the *Gawai Burong*, discussed later.

jars and ritual offerings. A string of beads, or fabric was strung from these, extending out through a window to connect with the companion shrine in the male sphere of the *ruai* (pl.105).

Opposite the entrances of each of the seventeen *biliks* holding major rites in the main building, and similarly the six apartments in adjacent buildings, participants had erected small lean-to shelters. Underneath each lay one or more pigs waiting to be sacrificed: one for every adult male member of these households. The inside roof of each shelter featured a large *pua' kumbu'* as an auspice: the pigs were for use in a divining ceremony (pl.109). The selection of this cloth was crucial given that life-enhancing conditions surrounding the sacrificial pig impinge on human circumstance. Families identified the aesthetic quality in this cloth in terms of *pua' menyeti'*. They chose it from the family's finest ikat cloths. Metal gongs, knives (*parang*) and ironwood troughs (*dalang*) and other implements required for ritual sacrifice were set around the base of the shelter.

An official welcome (*ngalu pergabang*) gets underway. Participants prepare for a procession (*niti daun*) which, in this case, takes place after the midday meal (*makai tengga hari*). The family members of each *bilik* host, some resident and some visiting, don ceremonial clothing and parade. They show their colour and sound their metal during four journeys up and down the extended gallery of the longhouse. Leading the procession are young males in warrior's capes (*gagong*) made up of animal skins (some from tiger-cat or *remaung*) decorated with rows of tail-feathers from the Rhinoceros Hornbill (*kenyalang*). Many have special loin cloths (*sirat*) and war caps (*ketapu*) which also feature large black and red Hornbill plumes. Some carry swords (*nyabor*), spears (*sang-koh*) and shields (*terabai*), and some sound gongs (pl.102).

Warriors are followed by women carrying ritual offerings (*piring*). These females represent maturity and potency in respect to human and plant reproduction, home economics, and imagination as practised in specializations including *miring* (offerings), poetics, ikat, dyeing and healing. In this example they wear ritual ikat skirts (*kain kebat*) with a

modern silk or cotton blouse. The appearance of the women contrasts with young girls bedecked in elaborate beaded collars who made up the next part of the procession (pl.100, 101, 15).

Customarily, the potent practising ideal woman would be followed in the procession by a younger Kumang element featuring unmarried maidens. However, in this particular Baleh event only two teenaged girls joined the parade of female children aged three or four to about twelve (cf. *Gawai Antu* Ch.11, pl.125,126; Macdonald 1956; Ong 1991).

The young girls emulate the potential of Kumang, heroic Iban, their dress identifying Kumang's ideal qualities. They wear the finest *kain kebat* with a fringe of silver coins and/or bells. They also wear a ceremonial scarf (*selampai*) crossed over the breasts as a bodice topped by an intricate beaded collar (*marik empang*).

Although the idealized maiden in 1991 does not wear the customary corset (*rawai*) of metal coils, they wear similar smaller silver belts (*lampit*), bracelets and tiaras (*sugu tinggi*). Except for older antique pieces, much of the silver ornamentation is actually made from an aluminium alloy which is used as a substitute for the more expensive silver material today. Although Baleh Iban women make the elaborate beaded collars, they acquire the silver ornaments from shops or, in my observations, through exchanging with other Dayak groupings for *pua' kumbu'* (pl.118).⁴

The procession ended with one of the two principal male hosts led around a small sacrificial pig. Following the parade, pairs of young sword-carrying warriors ran up and down the *ruai*, flourishing large bundles of dried leaves (*bungai papan*) in a sacred path clearing, invocatory motion identified as *ngerandang* (pl.105).

The young females from each *bilik*, who had declined the processional role, now stood ready with rice wine: they artfully outmanoeuvred the warriors' hubris by inducing an obligatory *tuak* vigil. Fine string was stretched across the warriors' paths, entangling in the bundles of dried leaves

⁴ While the Maloh were once favoured for their silverwork, in the 1990s, much of the silver comes via traders from the Malayan peninsula.

and causing the men to halt. The ritual run was long with frequent obstacles and enervating alcoholic ordeals it was their challenge to endure. Some managed by spitting out the liquor.

The younger women who dished out the *tuak* mostly dressed in commercial cloths, many with batik patterning, but others in commercially printed Iban ikat patterns (pl.136) which could be interpreted as a decisive compromise with tradition. One often hears the opinion that it is women who carry tradition and conserve beliefs. In terms of Baleh Iban social-cultural patterns this regressive functional conclusion has no basis except in over-simplistic analysis.

In the late afternoon the mature males, for whom the major rites were being performed, climbed specially constructed ladders (*tangga'*) to the roof top (*meligai*). At an upriver position the warriors called three times to *raja remaung* the tiger god, in the direction in which he would be coming (*mangjong*).

After the evening meal, each group of one *lemambang* and two assistants began their song cycle inside the respective *biliks* before taking up their sticks (*tungkat*) and proceeding with endless steps about the shrines (*ranyai*) along the *ruai* (pl.104). As the *lemambang* each, gradually, emerged from *biliks* to take up their chanting, the indoor public gallery echoed with the *kelang kelang kelang* of sticks and deeper resonance of male singing.

In one building there were fifty-one bards, while eighteen more voices could be heard echoing within outlying buildings. The chanting and dancing continued throughout the night until dawn, with only a ten minute pause, from time to time, for tobacco or alcohol. The sound of metal rings, vibrating on the sticks as they were struck on the cement floor, intensified in the still of early morning dark.

Hostesses observed the *timang* lyrics, carefully, to renew understanding of the ways they would be expected to do *miring* (make ritual divine exchanges). As the bards recited the epic poems, invoking gods to grant the hosts' wishes by attending, active participants among the women listened for word of sequences which they would follow in their own acts.

During the first night, singers tell how the lemambang's spirit (*semengat*) journeys to call upon the spiritual deities - and how mortal guests should prepare to greet them. To achieve this objective, the lemambang wear their special ceremonial jackets (*baju timang or pengap*). Some wore *baju burong* adorned with bird motifs (*burong*), both to mobilize the aspirations of his spirit and to protect his bodily soul (pl.17). In this sense, the *shielding* essence of ikat cloths is not accurately reduced, in interpretation, to passive *protection*.

The dynamic quality is critical, as a legend clarifies. It tells a story of the daughter of Lang Singalang Burong, supreme deity. She visits earth in the form of a bird. A young man Menggin shoots her to the earth. He finds she has transformed into an ikat skirt. Transforming again, she later visits Menggin and asks him to return the skirt; this is the moment of love. They marry and she gives birth to a son, Sera Gunting. The son is accordingly half mortal and half divine. When Sera Gunting's mother returns to her father's celestial home, she weaves two jackets with bird motifs to enable both husband and son to visit her. The story goes on to establish how *Sera Gunting* has to prove his worthiness to his grandfather, to return to earth and teach mortal Iban proper and fruitful conduct, particularly in regard to the arts of war and agriculture.

Interpretation of the story uncovers fundamental aspects of Iban perception of their textile arts: The original form of Iban skirt cloth comes from Lang. He sends it in a winged form which is infinitely renewable; and it is transformed by the arts of a mortal warrior. The divine emissary in cloth and the man marry and they are fruitful in their union. But, in order for the warrior and their offspring to visit sacred domains, they require designs only Lang's daughter can make. Over space and time and human practice, both sequence and design quality in the cloths connect profoundly and inextricably with other Iban arts: ethos, war and agriculture.

The dynamic that operates within the notion of Iban cloth as a *shielding* device is not generally recognized in the literature. The intention in this thesis - in regard to functional significance of Iban textile arts - is to

demonstrate that sequences of process and design qualities ultimately interconnect with other elements of Iban cultural knowledge. This is not the same as saying that 'certain orders must be followed to cause certain results'.

There is greater affinity of Iban textile process with anarchic mathematical qualities than balanced equations. The latter merely characterize the logic of every technical system. The former qualities (variability, choice, transformation) are inseparable from culturally specific patterning which is well-documented in the literature (esp. Freeman 1981).

With regard for agriculture, in an Iban story, *Dayang Petera and the magic rice* (e.g. In Munan 1990), elders related how at one time the rice plant consistently produced, without any help from mortals, an abundance of large grains. Despite a warning that she was not to interfere with this process, a young woman took it upon herself to plant some seed and to tend to it, only to find that the plants produced only tiny seeds which now required great labour to harvest, to winnow and to replant the following season. The story instructed Iban on how it is each individual mortal's responsibility now to carry out all the laborious processes of planting, weeding, harvesting and winnowing the rice, while stressing the uncertainties and the importance of respect for customary practices.

Textile artistry is an end in itself, and Iban develop personal needs through subsistence practices which effectively overlap with symbolic expression. While the principle might be clear, *functional* elements of it enables analysis of the artist's experience of ways in which the group appropriates supervision of learning. The group specifies rites and sequence which become *the social meaning* of Iban cloths. It is this social meaning which this chapter continues to investigate through relevant details of the most momentous Iban feast - the Kenyalang.

As the *timang* cycle progresses the lemambang sings the news that *gawai* invitations are received by deities. They reiterate appropriate gift-giving decisions and other preparations for the journey to the longhouse, including expectations concerning welcome rites.

The *timang* includes not only a primary ordered set of procedures. It is a contextualized performance the bard gives. His art (on this occasion all *lemambang* are men) is informed by extraordinary feats of memory but also by improvisational skills. He sings specific references to time and place, including circumstances of the individuals who host the event. Bards make calls for guidance from guardian spirits (*yang*).

The singers set the scene for the performance: it is the legendary longhouse of Iban cultural hero Keling (consort of Kumang). The deities look down to identify their destination - the house flying the flags. Customarily the flags are handwoven textiles; in 1991 some are the Sarawak state flag, others the Malaysian flag. The gods espy the bards and begin their descent to Rumah Ata.

Their arrival is marked, the next day, by the two large poles on which the effigies of the Kenyalang are attached, and which the two Iban hosts are instructed to raise at the waters edge on the second day (pl.106). That night five adult women, who have been selected for their weaving skills, set about the task of creating a ritual belt as the singers continue their chants which tells how these proceedings are achieved in the spiritual realm of Keling and Kumang.

Clifford Sather (*in Sandin 1977:iv*) emphasizes the overall structural quality of the *timang* in data that are ostensibly Saribas Layar-specific. Yet his generalizations shed some light on the relationship between *timang* cycles and processes of ikat artistry in the context of Baleh Kenyalang.

Sather observes that despite significant variation between each performance, *Gawai* feasting is informed by the "common structure of invocational or praise chants interlocked by a sung narrative". The latter takes the form of a complex cycle of songs (*pengap*) in the Saribas Layar region.

Sather adds that the interlocking narratives are divided into three parts when sung, the first stanza performed by the *lemambang* and the second stanza by a second bard who serves as his assistant. The third constitutes a repeat of the first two and is sung as a chorus by all three singers

(or, in some cases in the Layar region, groups of six singers under the direction of a chorus leader).

The observations strengthen the significance already attributed, in earlier sections of this thesis, to the *three-fold* process of ordering bundles of thread for a ritual ikat cloth and dishes of ingredients for a ritual offering.

An implication concerning *timang* design quality is that the three-fold alteration of "solo and choral elements considerably heightens the total effect". And the "internal rhyme and repetition are used to enhance the vocal power of the songs" (*ibid.*:iv).

More important to my primary objectives is a further observation by Sather concerning the significance of innovation and imaginative force in the artist's performance:

Individual bards, however, through their ingenuity, personal inspiration and command of the esoteric, bardic language are expected to enrich the basic form with allusion, varied imagery, rhyme, repetition and stress. Each master bard is known for a distinctive style of presentation, and through his apprentices, his distinctive personal influence, techniques and interpretation are transmitted and in the course of time tend to transmute the basic form into clearly discernible local and regional styles of gawai performance (*ibid.*:v).

In the same way I argue that the fluid and untrammelled imaginative skills of an accomplished Iban textile artist centre in feats of visual imagery. The latter identifies careful manipulation of threads in learned sequences known to generate *chiaroscuro* effects, which connects back to fluid, transformative design intentionality.

In the case of ritual performance, the tension which builds up through the long hours and concentrated efforts to follow the details of the Kenyalang is finally released, after the farewell and the departure of the spiritual guests, through a transformation of mood into comic relief as women and men act out role reversals in a mock performance of the *lemambang* and associated feasting activities (pl.110).

Attention turns to various other celebratory occasions which occur at Rumah Ata during 1991-92, to illustrate something of the range as well as the historical signifi-

cance of uses of Iban textiles. The respective feasts concern critical moments in personal as well as social development - cyclic events such as birth, puberty, marriage and death as well as intervening situations of illness and accident.

COMMEMORATING THE DEAD.

In the heightened affective atmosphere surrounding the death of an Iban kindred member one observes, more easily, certain social constraints that textile artists experience in relation to customary *adat* law. When an individual in the longhouse passes away, all textile activities cease. The kindred flies a white banner as a signal that numerous restrictions (*penti*) are in force which affect the longhouse - inhabitants and guests.

During the initial period of mourning (*ulit*) no one is to enter or leave the house, there is no music, merriment, elaborate dressing, body decoration, nor any cutting and combing of hair. On at least three occasions, in 1991, women at Rumah Ata all put away their *ikat* and all other work - for fourteen days until a formal ceremony had been held to lift the mourning taboos.

The family dress the deceased's body in fine clothing and invite mourners to gather throughout the first night. Men construct a wooden coffin and the body is buried in the morning. Although some of the person's possessions may be buried with the body, gifts which are offered to the deceased person to help the spirit (*semengat*) journey to the netherworld (*sebyan*) are not all interred with the body.⁵

At Rumah Ata, a ceremony was held to mark the end of the initial period of mourning about two weeks after the death of an elderly woman. The initial 'severing rites' were identified as *ngatas ulit*, which at least one member from every household in the longhouse expected to attend.

A woman commissioned to sing the mourning chant (*sabak*) sat inside the deceased's *bilik*, preparing her mood, with

⁵By contrast, custom of groups in Sumba, characterized by social stratification, was to bury great numbers of *ikat* cloths and other valuables (e.g. Adams 1969). See Uchibori (1978, 1984a) on customary Iban mortuary practices.

her arm inside a suspended a white cloth sling. The senior man and woman of the house sat on the floor in the centre of the room, alongside a large bush knife (*parang*), a ceremonial ikat skirt (*kain*) and ornamental silver pieces. Others in the family, followed by representatives from every other *bilik* filed to exchange commiserations.

First female visitors approached in a ritual exchange. They gave up a string, which they had tied to their waist and which the *bilik* host now cut away, and were recipients in the sense of getting light brushes over the body with ikat cloth and silver waist coils (*seminting*). Then the men came up and each had a tuft of hair cut from their head, or in a few cases a string cut from their wrist. And they received, in respect to passing their hand through a silver bracelet - one of the ritual metal pieces.

A man who entered the room uttered a war cry. He took the clippings down to the river to be discarded. An existing white banner (*tambai*) fluttered in warning of mourning taboos in effect. It was taken down in a second ceremony *tambai ulit*.

Once the formal rites are performed to release the general community from an initial state of mourning (*ulit*), only the *bilik* family continues to observe various restrictions, until a final release of bonds is held during *Gawai Ngelumbong*. The latter is an annual feast in the Baleh. In the following chapter there is discussion of *Gawai Antu* which serves a similar function in Saribas and Saratok districts, but held merely once per generation.

At Rumah Ata the final release/separation rites celebrate the journey of the deceased's bodily spirit. When the body is sick the spirit (*semengat*) leaves and begins the journey to *sebayan*. In the final severance rites the journey is complete, and is memorialized. Up until this occurs the widow, or widower, remains subject to adultery constraints. Accordingly, bereaved persons cannot dress in bright clothes. A woman's skirts, customarily *engkudu* red, must be over-dyed with indigo to transform them as *kain chelum* (blackened cloth), the Iban customary mourning shades.

Baleh longhouse communities hold their memorial feast at the end of harvest - a fitting time when the future is assured through storage of harvest fruits.

At the Rumah Ata *Ngelumbong*, in 1991, the principal feasting involved two of its four buildings - those in which an individual passed away during the last year. Two families had commissioned respective singers. Each singer (both were women) sat in the public gallery area of the bereaved family, her arm slung in a suspended cloth. Above her was an ikat cloth, a *parang* blade and other personal ornaments of the deceased, together with ritual food exchanges (*piring*).

Over the course of the evening individual families made special offerings from ingredients set out on a *pua' kumbu'*. Gifts of food and other objects offered as grave goods (*baya'*) were placed in a cardboard container, to be taken to the cemetery the following day. Participants observed that once the exchange was essentially made, some of the material goods could be returned to the *bilik* and foods eaten.

The thematic movement of the feasting was not unilinear, but purposive insofar as achieving catharsis through alternating periods of solemnity and chaos. No one was spared the profanity of being smeared in decayed earth-bound matter. Ultimately, tension was gathered about the early hours of the morning when participants severed contact with the essential vitality of deceased ones, and the deceased bodily spirits made a final departure from the sphere of the living.

Gawai Ngelumbong is a periodic performance with cathartic purpose. The meaning arises in the termination of a period of mourning - and consequently new beginnings. However, the death of a newborn baby brings about different needs, ritually attended to in accordance with the circumstances of death. In one situation observed in 1991, there was no customary period of mourning (*ulit*). Similarly, there was little reason to farewell a vitality that might otherwise be viewed as expended within the natural course of events. Instead, the concern of the community, in this case, was focussed on the possibility that the castaway spirit of the baby would be so frustrated by the turn of events, that it would take out its anger on the group.

With the bodily remains about to be buried, men and women in the longhouse all ceased activities that were in progress. Any action likely to draw unwelcome attention was curtailed. Over a three day period ikat frames and looms were put away, jewellery removed, and laughter and music ceased. On the night of the third day a healer (*manang*) was called to perform a special healing rite (*pelian, belian*) in contrast to a regular separation rite (*be-serara'*). The baby's death occurred under exceptional circumstances impinging on fundamental and various taboos - details which remain implicit out of respect to the individuals concerned.

Consequently social concern focussed on the mother's vitality or *ayu*.¹ The concept of *ayu* is symbolic, represented by the growth of bamboo shoots, which has generic associations within the story of Entala creating Iban from a pole or bole (e.g. Richards 1988). While celestial *manang* watch over the vital nature of all individuals, families substantiate the monitoring of lives in their care by planting respective clumps of bamboo (Richards 1988). When the body sickens this condition is mirrored in the growth of the bamboo. Textile artists extend identification of this affinity by tying *ayu* into their compositions.

Attending to the baby's mother, the *manang* set out a bush knife (*parang*), an ikat skirt (*kain kebat*), and charms including small stones (*batu*). She examined the young woman, stroking her stomach, limbs and head with the stones and *parang* as she set about removing causes of distress. The healer cut a string from the young girl's waist and hung it on the outer (group) side of the front door of the family's *bilik*.

The *manang* instructed the girl's mother to fetch pieces of clothing belonging to each member of the *bilik* family and a small kerosene lamp. The door to the *bilik* was locked,

¹*Ayu* refers to life vitality/bodily soul. *Ayu* reflects the general state of body (*tuboh*) & spirit (*semangat*); it has no independent existence in contrast to spirit. *Ayu* are seen as bamboo shoots (*tubu'*) growing in clumps at Bangkit where they are tended by Menyayan, chief of celestial *manang*, especially in rites for the sick (*saut*). When a mortal dies their *ayu* is severed from the clump. An adopted child's *ayu* must also be cut from their natal clump & transplanted into that of their adopted family.

windows secured and curtains drawn. The healer set down a prepared offering of rice topped with an egg, next to the plate of charms, ikat cloth and family's personal effects.

The *manang* covered herself with a piece of yellow cloth so that the personal effects and the ritual offering were with her beneath this canopy. She began singing to the baby's spirit, requesting it not to harm the family. As she chanted she progressively trembled. And then, removing her cover, she peered into the small quartz crystal (*batu keras*), vision assisted by the flickering light of the lamp. The family crowded close in order to see.

Her diagnosis determined, the healer told the family to get two ikat cloths, a large *pua' kumbu'* and a smaller *kain kebat*. These were required for *bedinding*, shielding rites which would provide a protective wall and essentially make the young woman invisible to malevolent spirits (e.g. Richards 1988:73). The implication is that Iban textiles, in conjunction with other talismans (*engkerabun*), activate a transformative and ultimately renewing effect on the afflicted woman. Recurring bad dreams cease if the healing succeeds.

The concerned father nailed the *pua' kumbu'* over the inside front entrance of the *bilik* and did the same with the smaller skirt over the back outside entrance in the kitchen area. The *manang* rubbed the patient with a talisman. The cloths were to remain up for the night to prevent the angered spirit, or incubus (*antu buyu'*), from entering the *bilik*.

In this respect Iban textiles develop a physical as well as a metaphoric significance. The incubus did not enter the room as it happened and so did not have to be killed as occurred differently in the event witnessed by Freeman (1967). In that case, the young father was overcome by hysteria and threatened to commit suicide after the death of his six month old child (Freeman 1967).

On another occasion during 1991, a Baleh woman had an ominous dream in which her grandson had died. She called on the *manang* to perform a healing rite (*pelian*). When the dream recurred, the *manang* was commissioned again, this time to perform a more major ceremony referred to as *tuboh ayu mansau*.

The concept of making *mansau* was previously observed in relation to colour dyeing procedures and in particular generating optimal degrees of heat - but never overflowing energy. In the event of *tuboh ayu mansau* the purpose, similarly, is to strengthen or transform a former condition of devitalized *ayu*. In this performance the woman and her grandson were named afresh, with the intention of throwing off attention from troubling spirits.

The implication of renaming is transformative at a *root level*, as it is in the ikat dyeing process. To explain: naming occurs not so much by chance in Iban communities as by securing the appropriate name through divining. The practice of a chicken picking specific grains is detailed below. In other words, achievement of one's personal development (or optimal heating in Iban terms) is pre-figured through one's name. The achievement of *mansau* cloth in dyeing procedures is not simply *root-level* in a metaphorical sense - since *engkudu* root is a primary resource. The interconnectivity concerns, then, a transformation of an original (lacking) potential by applying generative heat.

A banana bole is set up in the *ruai* in front of the troubled dreamer's bilik (pl.112). As a sign-post, it represents the place of the bodily soul (*tiang ayu*). The scene readily contrasts with the *ranyai* shrines erected during Kenyalang and *pagar api* in Saribas healing feasts. The latter is discussed in the following chapter. But again, the constructed shrine is the place around which *lemambang* and *manang* perform their incantations, a focal point and guide-post for the errant spirit (*semengat*) and attending celestial spirits.

A *pua' kumbu'* was spread on the floor onto which participants placed small dishes of ingredients as an offering. The *manang* performed the rites (*miring*). Then she offered each participant a tray on which two dishes were set comprising a mixture of egg yolk and *tuak*. Each person spooned a portion into the empty container as an offering to attending spirits. Next an offering plate (*piring*) was prepared with the various selections of rice salt, tobacco and *sirih*. The *manang* sang a blessing (*sampi*) while waving (*biau*) a cock over the offering and then over those present.

The principal offering plate was set beside the banana bole. Other items were in place. One was a tray containing eight small dishes of uncooked rice. They joined a folded *pua' kumbu'*, ceremonial skirt (*kain kebat*) and other personal clothing belonging to the woman and her grandson. To these were added a dish of the *manang's* personal charms. In this dish lay the end of a long string of antique beads. The healer suspended the beads from the ceiling, along with a cloth sling. A participant observed that the beads represented the life span, hence the potency of this aid was variable in respect to years/beads.

The woman and boy were asked to sit together on a metal gong next to the palm bole (pl.112,113). A large *pua' kumbu'* was draped about their shoulders and the *piring* was placed in the woman's lap. The *manang* lifted a fowl into the sling and proceeded with her singing. When she came to the cycle in which she would pronounce the new names, she held up the tray of eight small dishes so that the cock could peck at the grains in each dish (pl.114). She then took some of her own special *pun* rice seed, which she had wrapped in a small *kain*, and sprinkled it on their heads and on the ground. Each was served rice wine (*tuak*) to complete the naming rite.

The woman stood up from the gong and carefully tipped the contents of the offering she had been holding into a plastic bag, as part of the ritual payment, which she then handed to the *manang*. She also handed the *manang* M\$12.

WELCOMING NEWBORN AND MOTHER INTO THE COMMUNITY.

The title of this section identifies the transformation that takes place with the event of a birth. I refer to alterations in the personal identity of a young woman, as well as effective social renewal, and subsequent realignment of relationships brought about by the new birth.

At such moments in the life cycle of the body the potential for conflict or new tensions take on special significance in Iban textile arts, given their basis in dream process. This observation emphasizes changes in the

motivation of the young mother as artist, a circumstance which connects through her work with others in the group.

But it also emphasizes constraints on the mother, as artist, in relation to prohibitions on deeds which ordinarily generate personal worth and social identity. The significance is that the young new mother inhabits a liminal place, in Victor Turner's (e.g.1969) terms. The bodily cycle is both punctuated by sudden shifts - and coheres on the basis of long periods of gestation as it were. For example, a virgin immediately enters womanhood by way of a sexual act, except that she develops consciousness and sensibility in relation to transformed sexuality over space and time. Consequently, an initial naming ceremony for a newborn baby can best be understood in its wider implications of vital welfare. Predictably, the initial naming ceremony resembles the re-naming rites referred to above.

In the Baleh region, a celebration during 1991 began with ritual first bathing (*mandi'*). Although usually performed when a baby is one month old,⁷ in this instance an elder was very near death, a potential which brought forward three different ceremonies at short notice. One of the babies was only three weeks old but, rather than risk going without the ceremony throughout the long period of mourning when the man's spirit would not have been put to rest, the naming was held early. The mother had gone to Kapit hospital to give birth and then returned to the longhouse about one week later. Therefore, the newborn baby (and others by way of contiguous relations) had already been exposed to the dangers of the river and beyond.

Nonetheless, once back in the longhouse, neither infant nor mother stepped outside the confines of the family's *bilik* apartment. For one month the mother expected to rest. She was handed her baby for breast feedings but otherwise did virtually no other deeds. She was not permitted to cook or wash clothes. Neither was she to wash her hair nor body with water. She was required to wear a small cloth on her head, in this case a hand towel, to keep away all draughts.

⁷By contrast, in Saratok a ritual bath ceremony was not performed until the baby was three months of age.

The new mother at Rumah Ata was not required to sit over a smoky fire (to induce appropriate after-bleeding and prevent haemorrhage) which was a custom in the past.

Care was taken to ensure the infant was not exposed to draughts. The child's head, feet and hands were kept covered, and the belly wrapped in an extra cloth assuring prevention of malign influences through the navel. The mother's diet was carefully developed giving monotone emphasis to 'ginger chicken'.

In the same phase of performance, though immediately before commencing specific rites of first baby bathing, an elder woman formally brought to a close the mother's period of receptivity, waiting and seclusion. The ritual specialist observed that this liminal period was associated with emotional disorientation - *gila*.

This concept is identical with ethnological understanding of the outcome through a process of personal vigil: deprivation of the senses bringing about altered states of conscious behaviour and ultimately, transformation, in terms of personal changes that are legitimized by the group.

The Iban elder added complexity to this understanding with her comment that young recent mothers become less rational and demonstrate a kind of "monkey-like" logic. An Iban bystander saw this as enthusiastic behaviour - a state of undeveloped motivation which carries danger for the individual and the group. The rite known as *betata*, which the elder was preparing to perform, was to protect the young woman from undue consequences of the altered state. (The stem *tat* identifies 'bearing up' as in developing the wisdom of patience.)

The female elder, also an experienced midwife, placed a number of small charms in a saucer of water. They included a small pitted stone which she referred to as *batu udok*. She said she had found it when a dog passed it in its faeces (*batu*=stone; *udok*=dog). She said that it helped a baby to come out of the mother during birthing. She also had two small black round stones, *ubat menawa* (lit. medicine to offset natural deficit). Use of these stones assured the physical formation of the baby. She used a fourth stone, white and soft, *batu sabon* (lit. soap stone), and a fifth

which was spotted and shaped like a tooth, also referred to as *batu udok*.

The woman then brought out some stems which she said came from the *bangkit* flower, previously noted in regard to common depiction in ikat designs. She placed them in a cloth, immersed and squeezed them in the saucer of water. She explained that this was medicine to overcome feverish (enthusiastic) behaviour (*obat nyilu*).

The notion of over-heatedness is fundamental in Iban interpretive systems (Freeman 1955, 1981), a point that I comment on in various places. The use of *bangkit* flowers in recent mother's rites illuminates its symbolic use in textile artistry - the notion of 'letting a cooler head prevail' in the context of creative zeal.

The ritualist proceeded to grate some herbs into the water. She explained that these were varieties of wild ginger (an essential ingredient in the ritual mordant ceremony, *ngar*). She explained that the one which was orange in colour was needed to develop heat in the body (*chelap*), since over-chilling was a possible, though unwanted, consequence of the healing. Another which was more yellow in colour was regulatory too, in the sense of menstrual flow.

She swished the stone charms (*pengaroh*) about in the mixture and then cut the water with a small knife (*parang*), in a cross, again reminiscent of the ritual stirring of the mordant. She then instructed the young patient to drink a little of the mixture. Next she wiped the charms, dripping with the liquid, on the girl's head, breasts, inside wrists, down her legs and soles of feet, down the inside of her arms and palms of her hands, and on her forehead. Ultimately, the elder woman took a mouthful of the liquid and sprayed it out on the patient's head, three times.

The specialist tipped a container of fresh water over the mother's head and body two times and sang a prayer (*sampi*) forecasting well-being - and no further need to avoid washing and wear a head-wrap for fear of heat loss. The young woman was given a sip of the herbal mixture and received it again rubbed into her stomach. The healer ran a strengthening *parang* blade down the girl's back and front as she concluded her song. Finally, she waved the container of

medicines and charms over the girl's head, did the same with an ikat skirt and a small earthenware jar (*tajau*). The latter object then passed over into the possession of the ritualist, as part of the credit accruing to her in the ritual exchange.

A few dollars also changed hands. The mother of the young patient explained that the woman who had been called on, was once an active midwife (*bidan*) but was now very old and only assisted in birthing. Yet her value as a ritual specialist was unquestionable on account of powers of visualisation legitimized through a dream. But, she added, her powers were specific to the above rites and hence unequal to the task of *healing* in a comprehensive sense.

The significance of this latter observation is qualifiable, on the grounds that the life cycle of the very old woman registers identity with liminal process through which the patient is going. Which means that the older woman is past child-bearing age and secondly, due to her advanced age, she is a patient in her own sphere of lived experience.

Parallel to this situation is the belief that only artists who have progressed beyond menopause can choose to tie certain designs. This raises the question of how, historically, such situations maintain status quo and conserve ranks of senior practitioners, warranting inquiry in its own right. This issue bears critically on artists' experience of the cultural code through which they construct their experience.

That evening of the mother's first bath, the women in the household were busy in the kitchen cooking and setting out the ritual ingredients for the principal meal of the feast. Later, in the evening, children helped the women cut palm leaves into strips and weave them into two sets of eight miniature baubles (*ketupat*) each filled with rice. They also made minuscule packets (*sungki'*) by wrapping just two or three seeds together in a folded leaf, secured by a short piece of cotton string. These would be added to each of the offerings (*piring*) for ritual exchange the following morning.

By early next day, the kitchen floor was half covered with a series of small saucers set out by the patient's

mother-in-law who organized the ingredients for numerous ritual offerings. The mother-in-law, an accomplished farmer, original textile artist and *manang*, was locating a variety of special bracelets and beads. Various men in the family sought out two large and two smaller gongs and spread extensive rattan matting for laying on the *ruai*.

The baby's bathing ceremony was signalled at about nine a.m. when the baby's great grandfather struck a large gong (*tawak*) several times (pl.111). The *manang* arrived from his *bilik* about fifteen doors along and proceeded to perform a ritual offering (*miring*) from the ingredients which had been set out on a *pua' kumbu'*. One of the baby's aunt's arrived to carry the baby in a *pua' kumbu'*, together with an offering plate, as part of the procession to the river.

Two other female participants took up small gongs to sound along the way, warding off any malevolent spirits or ominous sign of them.⁸ The great-grandfather carried the sacrificial cock and a *parang* blade while the baby's grandfather remained in front of the longhouse, overlooking the river, to fire a warning and protective shot when the cock's blood was spilt into the river.

On reaching the river, the baby was unwrapped and taken into the water. Bathing took place downstream from the great grandfather who simultaneously slaughtered the cock to let its blood wash by the baby. The plate of rice and eggs was also tipped into the water, as an exchange with the spirits of the water who were asked to act benevolently towards the child (pl.115).

Once the offering was in the water, however, the essential process was complete, and children washing clothes with their mothers further downstream dived after the eggs, and came up over-joyed if they managed to retrieve one.

The procession filed back to the longhouse to the reverberating sound of the metal gongs (117). The baby's mother awaited in the *ruai*. She dried and dressed her small son.

⁸Compared to dreams, few young people referred to the need today to consult omen birds at Rumah Ata which were of central importance in the past (cf. Freeman 1960c) Bird omens continued to be observed by many older Ibans in 1991 (e.g. on one occasion the appearance on a house post, of a lizard, a minor 'bird' omen, was acknowledged and ritual ceremony performed).

She was then instructed to bring forth items of the baby's clothing, which the *manang* added to a plate of beads and a folded *pua' kumbu'*. He set the clothing on a tray next to a *pua' kumbu'*, which had been spread out with a second set of small dishes. The latter were intended for an offering which was to be placed under the large gong on which the mother and baby would be seated.

A long ritual presentation process began during which the baby's mother gave the child into the arms of each of his elderly kindred. In sequence, each sat with the baby on top of the metal gong with a 'shield' of *pua' kumbu'* over the shoulders. The new mother began this phase by handing him first to his paternal grandmother with whom he and his parents resided.

As each elder, in turn, took their seat on the gong, they carefully touched an iron bar on the floor in front of them, with a foot. As each held the baby, the child's great grandmother, also a *manang*, uttered a prayer (*sampi*) and waved a *parang* blade over their heads. Finally, the mother was recalled to her place with the baby on the gong for the naming.

The principal *manang* took his place alongside a live cock which he had lifted into a cloth sling. The sling was suspended from the roof with a long string of antique beads. The 'cord' serves as a conduit for spiritual guests. After about 30 minutes progression through his song cycle the *manang* came to the part detailing how the baby's name would be selected.

In this case the *bilik* family had pre-selected the names, adding predictable variability to the established ritual order. Nonetheless the cock was offered the tray of eight dishes from which it pecked a bit of rice seed from each to confirm the name.

The *manang* took up a small saucer of charms sitting in water -and in which sat the end of the beaded cord of the sling. He stroked these charms on the foreheads of the infant and his mother. He then took his special *pun* rice seed, which he had wrapped in a special *ikat* skirt, and placed several panicles on the heads of the baby and the mother. Finally, the mother received a drink of the *manang's*

own rice wine (*tuak*) which he produced from a small container.

The ceremony was sealed with a ritual exchange, a practice which transpires in similar events, previously described in this chapter. Again, the *process* accrues credit which is payable on completion of services by those who commission the performance. In this case the baby's great grandmother handed the performing artist a small cash payment which she followed by exchanging, with him, a drink of *tuak*. The ritual fee included a small jar and the contents of the offering plate used in the naming rites.

Feasting is intimately connected with the rites of exchange in Iban communities. Food and drink is distributed to all the guests throughout the rituals - giving substantive form to acts which speak on a more symbolical level. Taking in food and drink constitutes an emphatic partaking of the outside world and hence dramatizes belonging to the material domain (Bakhtin 1965). To take food and drink is to renew bodily life and connectivity with Nature. Predictably, in the recent birth rites, eating the sacrificial cock is, ultimately, the overarching moment in the event seen as a whole. Above all, in Iban societies the cock is homologous with an aesthetic of endless renewal.

rites concerning good fortune.

In addition to ceremonies for rites of passage such as birth and death, many Iban celebrate many other critical moments, as significant in the on-going development of individuals and the group. Most nights at Rumah Ata, a *manang* was called upon to give treatments (*belian*) for relatively minor ailments. Needless to say, a *manang's* services were in most demand immediately following a major *Gawai* and the consequences of extended and intense celebration.

Although an offering (*miring*) would not necessarily be made for a minor treatment, in almost all cases, a handwoven ikat cloth (*kain kebat*) and a small knife (*parang*) would be used in the healing in conjunction with massage, herbal medicines and sung prayers (*sampi*). Ritual settling of accounts occurred in the form of a dollar note, which has

become a basic part of many rites, together with cocks, eggs, rice and sometimes a jar, piece of metal, beads and/or ceramic plate. Because of the high value that attaches to ikat cloths, only in a very serious healing would a textile be exchanged.

Although many Iban weddings now take place in a church and are officially registered, families continue to celebrate this rite of passage with a customary feast or *Gawai*. Wedding celebrations are held at the longhouse where the couple intend to reside. Where the spouse is from another longhouse, in the Baleh region, one can often see the wedding party travelling together in boats over which several large *pua' kumbu'* have been stretched as a shielding canopy (pl.116). Gongs and noise echo from the wedding boats, chasing birds and other spirits, assuring that no ominous intervening signs interfere with planned events.

For the wedding of her son, Indai said the family hung many *pua' kumbu'* in the *ruai* where the couple were seated. She added that when a woman leaves her natal *bilik*, she may be given some of her family's *pua' kumbu'*, especially if any are her own work. But generally the pieces are seen as belonging to the place and family in which they were inspired.

This phenomenon, curious to western eyes, is clarified in another example which it mirrors functionally. The Iban story of the *Liar's Heap* tells of word acts commemorated by the place which gave rise to them (e.g. *In Munan* 1990). As persons pass by a particular place they toss a stone onto an existing heap of stones. In so doing, they build up group memory of an infamous lie which gives the kindred cause never to forget.

But the question of whether a textile must remain in the house in which it was made is not a fixed one. Several Baleh artisans observed that they often gave *pua' kumbu'* to family and friends according to choices of their own making. However they were referring to cloths they had made themselves, not inherited valuables (*pesaka*).

Further, the notion of group memorials, or cultural heritage, is currently contextualized by the advent of industrial society through which individuals take up work elsewhere and experiences diverge profoundly. Any work being

done in the 1990s has impoverished social significance compared to textiles created in pre-state communities.

Yet continuities occur, as this thesis attempts to explicate along with complexities. Hence, when a bride takes up new residence, she can expect to weave the patterns of her new *bilik* family of which she is now a member. The aesthetics of creative performance predict this situation in that artists are uncommonly receptive to contexts in which they work. Yet the *obligatory* element of having choices ostensibly stripped away, being required to start again by learning particular design procedures, is also a significant component of the freedom of choice inherent in living where one decides.

Many weavers, in such situations, confirmed that elder women not only encouraged their daughters-in-law to weave but expected them to reproduce family cloths. In return the praise received, in the case of one young woman, showed development of social status in relation to her textile arts. And this process of 'the making of social standing' through ikat work was reinforced, from time to time, by the observations of Others, which legitimized her *pua' kumbu'* skills.

However, this chapter has had broader objectives in respect to these ways in which an individual gains motivation as a textile artist. It investigated the question of historical uses of cloths to uncover *Iban* significance of technical procedures - how methods learned by artisans complete a kind of circuitry in respect to group festive life. One learns particular schema or sequential powers as a young girl, which apply not only to making cloths but to the wider celebration of critical moments in the life cycle of individuals and the kindred group. In this sense, an *Iban's* relationship with her artwork is intimate, essentially experiential. The chapter has also sought to uncover culturally specific constraints, or tensions, that are inherent in creative process. The foregrounding of these discontinuities takes place in a subsequent chapter in relation to how *Iban* artisans experience industrialization.

In ikat process, as in other ritual exchanges such as *miring*, the individual learns that the *significance* of

sequence, in respect to warp strings and offering plates, lies in its consequences for individual vitality and group welfare.

Through attending to process individuals learn to develop powers of concentration and care with creative detail. Understanding what is to be done is directly related to developing patience through taking small steps, with confidence guided from within. While spiritual beliefs, no doubt, exert profound pressures on artists to reproduce the complexities of subconscious process, at the same time the technical aspects concerning numeracy skills are not isolates of Iban experience, as they are in the west. Numeracy is a concrete practice learned through shifting strings and dyeing elements and setting out ingredients for offering plates. And powers of visualization are never severable from seeing the impact of one's work through patterns of well-being in the community.

Although agricultural practices in the 1990s have not been focussed on here, conceiving an ikat design and weaving it into a cloth form resemble the planting of a seed, caring for it as it grows, harvesting and processing the grains for feeding others. Similarly the process is analogous with giving birth to a human child and caring for that child as it increasingly takes care of its own wider pleasures and responsibilities.

The unexpected and unaccountable is anticipated in Iban communities. In this respect, the practice of customary beliefs contributes to continuities in Iban ikat work, in conjunction with other arts such as healing and *beburong* or omen reading. Unlike stratified social groupings in which artisans, healers, poets or other specialists make these their full-time work, Iban develop their skills in conjunction with cropping, gathering, hunting and domestic tasks.

Currently, in the 1990s, individuals also engage in wage labour and cash cropping, a variable with critical ramifications for the various arts as Iban customarily practised them. Yet, as this thesis attempts to clarify, motivation in the lives of Baleh artisans is not, at the time of this study, de-limited by considerations of financial gain. Healers and bards receive cash as part of ritual exchange for

their services. Yet each has periods when there are relatively few major celebrations. Alternatively, an influx of demand requires great flexibility in regard to the demands of subsistence work, since the *lemambang* or *manang* may have to spend as many as three days and nights away from home.

Similarly, dyers, healers, and other specialists, regardless of how hard they may have worked during the day, are obliged, through their special work, to stay up late and perhaps travel into the night. Decision-making skills, again, are honed along patterns learned in long hours of tying *kebat* or offering exchanges with a divine audience. Knowing what sequence to perform comes automatically, but only after long hours of attending, and continuing to receive guidance from song cycles and ancestral *pua'*. In this context, the notion of Iban as 'lacking' in some way through not having developed writing skills is seen to be a nonsense (cf. Walter Ong 1967).

Iban textile arts are given meaning by both weavers and non-weavers, young and old, through an over-arching practice of beliefs. This practice plays a diminishing, though significant role in the lives of rural individuals living in Baleh longhouse communities in the 1990s. The next chapter widens this observation by exploring various ways in which Iban in other districts and in urban situations make and use textiles.

CHAPTER TEN

IBAN TEXTILE ART AND RITUAL IN SRI AMAN

In this chapter the subject turns to ritual uses of ikat cloths in longhouse communities within Sri Aman Division. In particular, my interest concerns variations in the design quality of textiles used, and influences of external values and practices (e.g. Malay) on ritual traditions. To this end there is an antithetical component developed in this chapter, which juxtaposes with the affirmative approach of chapters which accentuate customary practices in the Baleh region.

The chapter begins with an orientation to social-historical variables which inform ways in which Iban in the region live and work. In this regard, the contrast with Baleh lives is fundamentally different..

The issue in this chapter is informed by internal and outside efforts (i.e. Iban and official) to revive Iban textile arts, together with the implications of these actions as socializing forces. Questions arise such as: when a commercial cloth substitute is introduced into ritual performance, precisely what are the implications in relation to preceding alterations in artisan's lives? Similarly, with the loss of the traditional form, what is the quality of the corresponding demise in creative activities and what is the impact of this loss on the wider body of knowledge - in respect to individuals's experience and group life? And further, where ikat cloths continue to be made but no longer for ritual use, what are the consequences concerning Iban valuation of these objects and subsequently on the motivation of makers?

These questions arise in the context of the impact of industrial capitalism on customary patterns of livelihood. This impact concerns not only the lives of those who live in rural longhouses in the 1990s, but also those who promote the making and use of Iban textiles in urban situations. However, the urban situation is more thoroughly investigated

in Chapter 11 where the question is developed in conceptual terms of the economic broker.

SRI AMAN SETTLEMENT DISTRICTS.

The Division of Sri Aman is only one third the size of Kapit Division, but Sri Aman has twice the population. Like Kapit, much of the region is populated predominantly by Iban, many of whom involve themselves in textile related practices today. There are many similarities in the ways Iban in both regions make and use ritual ikat textiles, as this chapter will demonstrate. But, as will become clear, it is also useful here to evaluate observations of a wider range of weaving techniques promoted in Sri Aman districts today, noticeably supplementary weaving techniques which resemble the gold and silver brocade work of Malay songkets.

The name *Sri Aman* occurs as recent political signifier in the wake of a put-down of a recent communist rebellion. The military action and associated loyalties over-flowed nationalist boundaries. An earlier historical chapter emphasises that Iban maintain linkages of kith and kin in Indonesian Kalimantan. Thus the renaming, *Sri Aman*, has ramifications in regard to interrupting historic associations, both legendary and physical. A tightly restricted road access into Kalimantan has recently re-opened in 1990. While Iban migration routes were riverine, the majority of individuals travel by public or private road transport today.

The main areas of field work in Sri Aman which are focussed on for this thesis include work in two communities along the Layar River, one on the Skrang (Sekerang) River and two communities on tributaries of the Krian (Kerian) River. These areas are generally referred to by the names of their respective Districts of Betong, Sri Aman, and Saratok. To reiterate a fundamental social-historical variable, these areas represent Iban communities which have longest been settled amongst Malay villages.

The Malay population in this region is concentrated in the flatter areas of Betong and Saratok in contrast to the hilly region of Lubok Antu where Batang Ai Iban predominate. (Below see Table VIII.)

Table VIII. Population distribution by ethnic groups (1980) for Districts of Sri Aman Division

<u>Districts</u>	<u>D I S T R I B U T I O N</u>				<u>P E R C E N T A G E S</u>			<u>Total</u>
	<u>Iban</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>Malay</u>	<u>Melanau</u>	<u>Bidayu</u>	<u>Indiq.</u>	<u>Others</u>	
Sri Aman	62.7	14.2	21.8	0.4	0.6	0.1	0.3	100%
Lubok Antu	84.0	11.4	3.7	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.3	100%
Betong	44.2	7.7	47.7	0.2	0.1	0.05	0.05	100%
Saratok	57.7	9.1	32.6	0.2	0.2	0.05	0.05	100%

(Compiled from 1991 Annual Statistical Bulletin - Sarawak:16).

As in the Baleh, Iban communities in the hilly region of Lubok Antu have remained relatively isolated until recently when, in the 1980s, the government opened the region to hydro-electric development. The resulting direct impact on Iban concerns relocation of a large number of Iban communities to make way for the large Batang Ai dam. Although there are still some older established longhouse communities in remote areas beyond the dam, a number of relatively new longhouses are set on concrete slabs along the road to the district town of Lubok Antu.

Their elders have brought with them knowledge of customary ways. But individuals within new communities are forced by this development program to turn outwards from inner spheres of river life to roadway connections with the metropole - from relatively independent subsistence practices to reliance on the cash economy.

Prior to this relocation, many other communities in the same region had been disrupted in the course of the Administrations's reaction to the border conflict with Kalimantan. Many Batang Ai Iban were relocated in land schemes such as one near the Skrang - where families were housed in single dwelling structures, again with no concern for existing patterns of loyalties and responsibilities regarding ritual exchange process.

A first impression of Iban communities in the Saribas-Layar is that, in contrast to Batang Ai Iban, individuals generally have maintained relatively more autonomy over their lives. As Clifford Sather points out:

Following their defeat by the first Rajah Brooke in 1849 at the battle of Beting Marau, the Saribas Iban embarked on a conscious programme of self-modernization, embracing mission schooling and the cultivation of rubber, coffee and other commercial crops, and produced in the process a disproportionate

number of the present generation of educated Iban government and business leaders in Sarawak... (in Sandin 1977:i-ii).

Individuals in Saribas and other Iban longhouses within the relatively flat coastal plain area of Sri Aman continue to be favoured in commercial farming programs. There is an existing level of infrastructure that sweetens the prospect of bringing in equipment related to plantation development.

Linked to such questions, there occur a large number of Iban communities now strategically placed along the main state highway. Historically, access has been not been easy. In the 1990s the integration of Saribas Iban into development projects takes on a new urgency. Rural lands are coming under intense commercial scrutiny. And as a large population group, Iban have become an important economic force in regard to labour and more general 'national productivity'.

Customary Iban livelihood takes root within the autonomous *bilik* family as a cultural and economic unit that is loosely integrated into a community of kith and kin within the overarching guidance of customary law. In the 1990s the predominant socializing force is externally instituted and informed by development economics and monotheistic cultural programs.

The idea of cash cropping is an indisputable plank in the development program, but it still needs selling to Iban in the region. One government agency which focusses on agricultural development projects is the Sarawak Agricultural Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (SALCRA). It was founded in 1976 to develop land that is already 'in place'. SALCRA currently focusses on the establishment of palm oil plantations in accessible coastal regions such as Saratok along the main state highway. SALCRA has also set up land programs for cocoa in the Layar region.

One resulting pattern is that Iban in the region continue to focus on agricultural livelihood by way of cash cropping. By comparison there are those in the Baleh who now rely heavily on non-agricultural work such as logging. Yet those in the Sri Aman district who work on consolidated agricultural holdings are no less alienated from customary agricultural practices.

For example, 'farmers' involved in consolidated land programs maintain ownership rights to their land. And the plan is for control of the agricultural project to eventually revert back to the longhouse community. But in the meantime the project is directed by outside 'professionals' who make the decisions regarding how to plant, what fertilizers to use, through to how the crop is to be harvested, bagged and distributed.

There is another primary aspect of consolidated projects which distances farmers from lived experience of their work. It concerns the variable that individuals of households with shares in a SALCRA project are paid on the basis of their contribution as day-labourers. Although households ultimately gain a share of the season's harvest revenue in proportion to the land they allocate to the project, they are required to adhere to an 'eight to five' routine. Like wage labourers, participants are denied a day's earnings if they are sick or otherwise miss work. The economic impact on any one participant depends on the number and age of a family's members; some families of course have more labourers than others on whom they can rely.

My attention turns to demonstrating variations in the experience of Iban across settlement areas, in connection with the influence of official culture. In the following sections I investigate the significance of three relatively major celebrations in the Sri Aman region in order to contrast these with Baleh feasting observed there during this same time period, 1990-1993.

GAWAI BURONG.

A principal Gawai held in the Saribas-Layar district of Sri Aman is *Gawai Burong*, the Bird Festival. Like the Baleh *Gawai Kenyalang*, in previous generations this celebration would customarily be held to honour adult men who qualified, on the basis of taking a head in recent battle, to host the event.

In the 1990s, hosting a Saribas *Gawai Burong* both acknowledges externally-motivated political and/or capitalistic achievements -and honours continuity in Iban customary

practice through those acts by deferring to Lang as god of war (e.g. Richards 1988:178).

While this observation of the linkage of capitalism to the warpath is interesting, too much can be made of it on the basis of this particular evidence. In the 1990s it is probable that the act of hosting itself takes precedence over the idea it celebrates. Yet the act of hosting conserves existing social relationships, in the context of communities in which egalitarian relationships have been eroded by outside socializing forces and subsequent stratification through attainment of legitimized positions of political power. There is strong evidence, some presented in this thesis, that hosting was customarily a dynamic which grounded in more or less equitable sharing of highly uncertain subsistence conditions. In the 1990s, the premises of hosting serve purposes which are externally-generated in an urban Malaysian context (e.g. Sather *In Sandin* 1977:iii).

Customarily the *Gawai Burong* served a purpose somewhat similar to the Baleh Kenyalang:

In the course of such a celebration the status of warriors and warleaders is publicly validated and the armed strength of the sponsoring community asserted and spiritually reinforced through the blessings of the festival, the invocation of past warleaders and pioneers, and by the presence of its spiritual guests (*ibid.*:iv).

As implied above the significance of Lang Singalang Burong as principal spiritual guest concerns his identity as god of war.

In the above passage Sather notes that Lang is called on to "strengthen the martial prowess of the celebrants with charms and other sources of spiritual power" (*ibid.*). As is the case in the Baleh, individuals hosting *gawai* in honour of Lang do so customarily in a series of ascending stages. Hosts are required to hold the particular *gawai* deemed appropriate by virtue of recent past acts.

One such *Gawai Burong* was held during the early 1980s by a family on the Layar in which the eldest son as host had recently gained a post in the state administration. About nine longhouses were invited, a range of networks which represented the extent of their son's social role.

During August 1991, a contrasting Gawai Burong was held in a neighbouring longhouse on the Layar by the family of a young woman who was seriously ill. In the previously-referenced Gawai Burong the host sought to procure strength for a new experiential phase. The difference in the 1991 event attests to the perception of Lang as a *transformative* essence. It might be recalled that the name Singalang signifies a dynamic quality. He is *neither one nor the other, a bit of both* (e.g. Richards 1988:349).

Consequently the young woman sought to transform a mentally crippling moment in her life. The feast was healing-oriented accordingly, and meshed closely with other *gawai* which aimed at renewing relationships at the level of the group. The Gawai Burong was much less elaborate than the one noted above which more accurately is termed *Gawai Burong Bender* (cf. *Gawai Burong* recorded by Sandin 1977).

Three non-resident *lemambang* attended the 1991 Gawai Burong. They were commissioned to sing over the course of one night, following unsuccessful treatment of the woman in state hospitals. Families had each constructed a shrine at their respective houseposts along the indoor gallery (*ruai*). They identified the shrines as *pandong*. These constructions were very similar to the *ranyai* in the Baleh, consisting of a ritual offering laid inside a 'shielding' of ritual ikat cloths held by three poles. Contained within were *pua' kumbu'* and a number of other ritual objects, including knives, jars and in the case of the host shrine, the wooden trough in which a pig would be sacrificed to Lang.

The patient was assisted onto the public gallery and laid down upon a mattress placed near the outer wall of the longhouse and adjacent to the main shrine. The *lemambang* began their song cycle in a procession composed of 'warriors'. In the 1990s a 'head-taker' was identical with killing in the line of duty as a policeman or government soldier, but more generally conserved ranks of 'virility-aged' males. Each carried an old (smoked) enemy head, *antu pala*, which was secured inside looped fibres. Costumes were modern items of western clothing.

The song cycle proceeded throughout the night. Although only the members of the longhouse participated, in addition

to a few closely related kindred from the neighbouring longhouse, their presence generated a strong sense of concern for the young women.

When dawn eventually broke others from the neighbouring community arrived to participate in a drawn-out cathartic ceremony, the form and purposiveness pre-figured by the results of reading the entrails of a sacrificial pig. This diagnosis was negative which essentially stripped rational logic from subsequent proceedings. At the same time, sincere concern for the woman continued unabated. And this situation is equally important in analyzing significance in terms of the community accepting responsibility for the woman's condition.

Moreover, the ceremony proceeded. The final offering to the God of War was staged outside on an open verandah. A special shrine had been erected in a fenced-off area within which only 'warriors' were assumed safe to enter. The exceptions included two elderly women who, on the basis of their combined knowledge and status as accomplished textile artists, had been commissioned to prepare the special baskets (*kelingkang*) in which final offerings would be made.

The ultimate phase of the feasting rites culminated when the young woman was carried prostrate into the area. She was shielded in a *pua' kumbu'*. Kinsmen carried her around the shrine three times as *lemambang* sang, then they returned to place at the *pagar api* inside.

A warrior carried the *kelingkang* offerings to the roof with the customary war cry of three *ohas*. The cock, which had been waved over the patient and warriors during the blessing and then sacrificed, was now cut up. Each of the men on the verandah, who totalled about twenty, expected to consume a share of the uncooked flesh.

The preceding constitutes a brief description of proceedings. The intention is to convey an adherence to customary Iban rites in a community that, compared to those in the Baleh, lies much closer to the metropole and clearly within its direct sphere of influence. What needs to be accented is that, in this case, other cultural forces were tried in conjunction with Iban practices. Previously mentioned was a period of treatment in the hospital.

But textile arts continue to play an important role in this situation. One elderly kinswoman who had been commissioned to participate was aged well over eighty and so there were clear personal restraints on her attendance. She had travelled by bus for about a half hour, then on foot for a similar length of time. The basket she wove was not complex in structure, but the perception was that only a woman of her skills and post child-bearing age was qualified to carry out this specific role - relating to the condition of a patient in a state of limbo.

Ordained by the outcome of the entrails reading, a second healing was arranged for the succeeding night. It would be performed by an Iban *manang* who had travelled from his home near the town of Sri Aman. The ritual progression went from a community-focussed ritual (*Gawai Burong*) to a healing rite (*pelian*) which customarily focusses on individual response. In the former *lemambang* officiate, and in the latter the skills of a *manang* are commissioned.

In the healing situation described the *manang* was renowned as an Iban ritual healer (*manang*) although his specialization was marked by other beliefs, in that his training was received from a Malay healer (*bomoh*). He had recently treated a patient at the neighbouring longhouse in a celebration, a summary of which follows.

SYNCRETIZING MALAY AND IBAN HEALING RITES.

In the *pelian* or healing situation discussed here, the host family observed that their household was *over-heated* (*angat*) which contrasts with the more calm or cool state of (*celum*). While the healing ceremony focussed on the senior male in the household and not his wife, main roles in the performance were played by his son and two other young women whose relationship I could not ascertain but took to be his nieces.

In preparations, under the supervision of the *manang* and the assistance of the *manang's* wife, the women of the household began to cook and make palm leaf decorations which informed a particularly ornate shrine, *tiang ayu* or *pagar api*, which would represent the place of the *ayu* (pl.120).

At the same time the men of the household were supervised in the construction of a small cardboard house and a miniature *perau'* or longboat. The men were also asked to construct a large wooden swing. At dusk, after an evening meal, the *manang* took his place on a chair set against the outer wall of the public gallery.

His patient sat on the ground before him. The residents of the longhouse also gathered around, the men along the outer side of the gallery, the women and children along the inner side. Musical instruments composed of a row of gongs, a single larger gong and a set of drums had been set up and a group of three men began to play Iban music.

Throughout the evening the *manang* performed a series of healing rituals which included a number of dances, both solo and with members of the community. At various points, the *manang* punctuated proceedings by evidently entering a trance state - then return to the domain of the audience.

At a certain phase in the performance, he asked the three young people to lie face down on the floor, two on the far side of the shrine and one on the side nearest the swing. He covered each with a large *pua' kumbu'* and his own head with his red cloth and began swinging into a probable trance state (pl.119,121).

At a point of tension in the performance, the *manang* covered himself as he danced as though seeking his prey, then crawled reptile-like about the foot of the shrine, before entering a trance-like state - in which he was carried back to his seat.

In another act to attain an abrupt gathering of tension, he instructed a member of the audience to reach into a small jar which had been placed, empty, at the foot of the shrine. Now a small turtle was produced from the jar. The small turtle was interpreted as a good omen and its healing powers were drawn upon as it was stroked over the body of the patient, in a way that other Iban healers do with small stone charms.

In a change of mood midway through the night the scene switched by way of transforming Iban into Malay props. The *manang* changed his head cover from a piece of red cloth to a black cap identical with Islamic faith. He instructed

members of the patient's family to dress in Malay clothing, the boy in white shirt and black cap, the girls in long tunics and towelling as headcovering (pl.122).

As they sat on the floor before the performing artist, he set up a record machine to play a recording of an Islamic Imam's invocation. He altered the mood again by tuning in melodious popular Malay music. And then he instructed two young girls, in Malay garments, to sit together on the swing with an offering (*piring*).

At a late hour, with the audience level of awareness abnormally focussed, the *manang* instructed his patient to go into the family *bilik* where he performed a private healing rite involving a ritual cutting and bodily removal of that which caused the patient distress. In this rite the *manang* produced a small wooden effigy which represented a Malay person who, he said, he had discovered had been causing the family's distress. The object was passed around for the audience who examined it with care.

The upshot was a sequence of offerings. These resembled the Baleh setting out of a pattern of rice dishes. But the cock was substituted by carved portions of roasted chicken, bringing to mind the Christian tradition (pl.120). Then, just before dawn, after offerings had been taken to the riverside, the wooden effigy was placed on the earlier-crafted small boat and sent down the river. The small (Guinness stout carton) house remained in its position on a post, as a welcome place for the summoned spirits.

The syncretization of Iban, Chinese (the turtle) and Malay cultural elements in the performance demonstrates close inter-connectivity between Iban lives and outside influences. In particular, this intermingling occurs at the level of subsistence practices. Not surprisingly then, the diagnosis in the healing above concerns the patient's work as a policeman and his relations with a Malay superior. Yet his situation is not exceptional in his community, many members being employed under the supervision of a Chinese man in a neighbouring consolidated agricultural project. The implication that I draw attention to is that contextual elements of subsistence practices inform the quality of such cultural patterns as healing performance.

GAWAI ANTU.

The Iban celebration which most Sri Aman area Iban live to perform or participate in is the *Gawai Antu*, or feast for the spirits of the dead. As previously noted, in Lubok Antu district, as in the Baleh regions and Kapit district generally, Iban communities hold an annual wake (*Gawai Ngelumbong*). However, Krian Iban in Saratok districts, Saribas-Layar Iban of Betong and Sekerang Iban in Sri Aman districts hold respective *Gawai Antu* just once in a generation - about once every thirty years.

It is fruitful to consider the frequency and intensity of *gawai* that occur in a community and surrounding districts in recent decades, to establish parameters of the celebratory use of textiles. But also in this chapter, I accentuate contextual considerations linked with alienation from the process of making textiles - an implication of the industrial division of labour.

A particular longhouse community which had hosted a major *Gawai Burong* in 1980 planned to sponsor a conjoining *Gawai Antu* in 1993 (see Richards 1988:96). Their previous *Gawai Antu* had been held in 1956, thirty-seven years earlier. The *Gawai Antu* was the principal event they hold and involved all *bilik* families in high financial outlay. The community expected to host about eighteen longhouses which represented an increase of 200 per cent over the number invited to the *Gawai Burong*.

Prior to the *Gawai Antu* the same community was planning to hold in November 1991 a *Gawai Selamat*, a post-election feast 'to extend good wishes', to which they would invite about nine longhouses. A prominent family in this longhouse also held several small family *gawai* that year such as *Gawai Tuah* (celebration for good fortune) on such occasions as when a son experienced light injury in an automobile accident and when another son returned for a visit from Kuching where he studied at a technical college.

In a given year, the number of *Gawai Antu* that are held in the region is also a variable situation. In 1991 there were at least three in Saratok district, two or more in

Betong (i.e. Saribas/Layar district) and at least one in Sri Aman.

There are differences in costume and ritual performances between these three districts. The brief description of one feast performance in Saratok is productive in demonstrating more salient or generalized elements in the relationship of textile art and regional customary practices - with implications for comparison with the Baleh region.

To emphasize an earlier point, *Gawai Antu* occurs just once in a generation, in each particular longhouse. As one might expect, the planning begins well in advance, as does the supply, purchase and appropriate budgeting for import brand liquor, acquisitions of rice and pigs. Communities, too, increasingly deal with the logistics of securing guests' attendance. Family members live and work throughout Sarawak in situations that regulate personal time-off in different ways.

In the case of one 1991 *Gawai Antu* in Saratok, major renovations were also made to extend the indoor gallery - to make the place large enough and sufficiently modern to conserve contemporary self-imagery. Television Malaysia would be there to film the event, as would private video film professionals.

Unlike Baleh communities which hold their annual feast *Gawai Ngelumbong* in the autumn and coinciding with the cycle of seasonal harvest, most communities preparing to hold *Gawai Antu* in Sri Aman Division in 1991 planned to hold them during the spring in November. In this regard there is identity with the Baleh *Gawai Kenyalang*. The events are social-political by definition. But in recent decades this requires consideration of external variables such as school vacation periods, and official patron availability.

The Saratok longhouse community was composed of about twenty-five *bilik* families and each was expected to invite and host at least one, and in a few cases, two neighbouring longhouse communities. Kith and kin from other longhouses, officials and other outsider guests would arrive at staggered hours during the event, picking and choosing their degree of participation accordingly. Yet by evening, the longhouse would be packed to near standing room.

Gawai Antu celebrations feature two discrete though interdependent activities held on consecutive weekends in the 1990s. The first event is *Gawai Nganyam*, which identifies weaving miniature bamboo objects for the use of deceased spirits. These items symbolize everyday needs of an aesthetic-economic nature, basketry balls for play as well as tiny woven containers of fish. Important and complex variations are woven into bamboo constructions of ritual wine cups (*garong*). However, equally important as the objects is the bringing together of accomplished weavers, who celebrate an advanced phase in their life journey by engaging in activities that renew both skills and status through honouring ancestral figures.

On the day of the *Gawai Nganyam*, the host laid out sitting mats in the inside gallery. Invited weavers, from among kith and kin in about 30 longhouses, sat in groups of intimates. They proceeded, over the next fifteen or more hours before the dawn, to strip and weave painted (red, white, black and yellow) bamboo poles into miniature basketry for the deceased of each sponsor family.

One artist was well-known as *tau' nengkebang* for his original work in *pua' kumbu'* designs in addition to being *tau' nakar* for his knowledge as a dyer in mixing mordant ingredients and achieving success in *ngar* ceremonies. He generally worked by day as a public service officer. The significance of his inclusion among weavers at a *Gawai Nganyam* relates initially to his artistic skills and specifically not to his gender. But of similar importance in qualifying for this work, in his life cycle the man had passed beyond the dangerous years of immature biological growth and hence achieved closer affinal relations with the object of the *nganyam* work.

In contrast to restrictions against wearing jewellery at the time of a person's death, during the pre-*nganyam* period when artisans collected and processed the bamboo poles, they expected to adorn as much metallic substance as they possessed, symbolic of the strength required for the coming vigil.

In addition to responsibility for the collection and the preparation of fibres during the weeks prior to the actual

basketry event, an artisan made textiles for self and family to wear at the subsequent *Gawai Antu*. In the case of the Iban individual noted earlier, his weaving activities for the event focussed, not on ikat, but rather on *karap*. More specifically, he wove a ceremonial vest and long bands of coloured cloth threaded with glittering gold or silver design yarns which he fabricated into caps for himself and his sons. He adorned them with tall clusters of bright plastic flowers and long tail feathers according to local Saratok fashion (pl.124,126).

During *nganyam* each group of weavers worked for its respective host family, side by side in long circular sequences of bodies, occupying the *bilik* side of the entire public gallery. Younger women set out ingredients for ritual offerings to invited deities and served light food and drinks to the artisan guests. Male members of respective households performed ritual offerings (*miring*), and sat drinking and talking along the outer half of the gallery, sometimes engaging their prize cocks in play fighting outside.

Tension mounts over the hours of weaving as the dawn deadline hovers in the distance and work develops increasing complexities in regard to formal ritual requirement. Opportunities to do this particular work do not always arise in equal amounts for skilled artisans. Success varies, and experimentation and innovation are every bit as significant in the overall pattern of work as the knowledge (and the constraints) arising in ritual order.

In this case, *Gawai Nyadi*, the main event of *Gawai Antu* began the following weekend, when host families would farewell and finally sever connections with the spirits of those who had passed away since the previous generation had held the Feast. Many guests travelled by private car and even more by public road transport. Many guests, especially those who were to play a central role in the various rites, arrived a day early. But the majority of the guests began arriving at the longhouse early in the morning and throughout the day of the main event.

Members of each guest longhouse tended to arrive together, sometimes as a result of chartering a mini-bus.

Each approached the longhouse in single file and was invited in at one end of the gallery and formally greeted. The guests then moved as in a procession up and down the length of the public gallery. Each was stopped at *bilik* entrances where they were asked to offer respects to the gods followed by a toast to the health of host families. Hosts were dressed in ceremonial clothing while guests usually had on western style travelling clothes prior to making a change. Accordingly, guests carried large packs comprising special ceremonial clothing for a ritual procession (*niti daun*) to be held later that evening.

Each family set up a small shrine on the gallery and one inside the *bilik*. However, unlike the large *ranyai* or *pagar api* around which the bards focussed their performance these were off to one side. Some were adorned with *pua' kumbu'* while others featured velvet-like prayer rugs. They also featured a small tree or branch, about which gifts to the dead were placed. The public gallery was alight with multi-coloured 'Christmas' lights which some families had strung up and the windows were adorned with pastel shades of chiffon.

Outside on the uncovered verandah, each household had strung up the red and yellow bamboo baskets constructed during *Gawai Nganyam* alongside the ornately carved and painted miniature houses for the dead (*sungkup*). Inside these were located personal belongings, including photographs, of the deceased being honoured by that family. Their final earthly destination would be the graveyard, where families would proceed the following day.

Two groups of seven bards had been commissioned to lead the night-long chant, and they took up position in the centre of the gallery. These *lemambang* were dressed in formal attire of western modern black trousers, white shirts and neck ties (red for one group and yellow for the other), topped with local ceremonial caps and handwoven vests (pl.124). They began their song and dance cycle inviting divine guests, slowly moving up and down the length of the public gallery, along a cleared pathway amidst the guests.

The neon lights of the gallery were rendered dim by the all-revealing light of the national film crew who lit up the

lemambang' path and entered into process of the lyrics via a hand-held microphone.

At two moments in the cycle of events, once in the early hours of the evening, and again in the early hours of the morning, men and women from each household were directed, by way of the bards' poetic flow, to don special costumes and participate in the procession. The parade comprised over three hundred individuals, focussing on the young men and women as representatives of culture heroes Keling and Kumang.

Although there were young children in this group of females, unlike the Rumah Ata Kenyalang described earlier, teenage women predominated here. Unmarried women lined in fashionable silver and gold threads, and brightly coloured plastic flowers (pl.125.127).

Interesting to this thesis is the social-cultural variable of supplementary weft design work that characterizes *Gawai Antu* celebrations in the 1990s. Of more than 200 handwoven *kain*, only about twelve were patterned with *ikat* designs, two were in *sungkit* while the vast majority glittered with silver and gold supplementary designs. The previous note of a connection with Malay *songket* is re-emphasized here.

Amongst the male 'warriors' handwoven brocade vests also featured. A few dressed in the more robust or earthy war capes of the Baleh. These were worn by relatives of Rumah Ata families who had attended the *Gawai Kenyalang* there the week before and now joined the Saratok feast where they also had kindred relations. In contrast to the general pattern of young men proud to exhibit ceremonial costume in the Baleh, in the *Gawai Antu* it was *de rigueur* for males to criticize customary roles through introducing western elements into their dress.

An important difference that applies when contrasting the reluctance of young women to participate in the Baleh is the *obligatory* essence of the males' actions in Saratok. The freedom of choice which is operative in mockery of tradition needs to be contextualized in this case by increasingly profound ties with televised repetition invoking conformity

- with its specific impact on choice-making among Sri Aman area Iban.

The *lemambang*'s chanting and dance progressed throughout the night and the audience was both constant in mass and periodic in attention. Guests assembled on the basis of kinship or political ties but commonly shared little in the way of customary subsistence experiences. Some were teachers from as far away as Bintulu, others were employed in local government jobs in Sri Aman, Saratok, Betong and Kuching. Many of these individuals had taken up residence in town in government housing. Many others, from longhouses such as those on the upper Lupar tributaries of Skrang (Sekerang), Lemanak and upper Batang Ai beyond the dam, were more isolated from urban and agricultural development schemes but presently targeted in tourism programming.

Of those communities in Sri Aman area - particularly along the Skrang and Lemanak - which are geographically isolated and less development-targeted, families continue to farm as discrete units. Not surprisingly, there one finds customary practice of agricultural rites such as *Gawai Batu*, festival of the whetstone, a post-harvest celebration in respect to selection of fields for the next agricultural cycle.

Yet, in the 1990s, development programs encroach with increasingly direct impact on more individuals within more communities in Sri Aman than is the current experience of Iban in the Baleh. The example of tourism is referred to above. The issue is significant in this thesis since 'Iban cultural legacy' informs a basic part of national tourism strategy as developed in peninsula Malaysia.

Local cultural brokers operate concurrently that planning to transform Ibans' interest in the textile arts by way of training programs and competitions. Sri Aman area Iban occupy the traditional and predominant seat of Iban political party power. Hence most (though not all) development-oriented efforts to 'revive cultural heritage' occur in this region - with concomitant advantages and constraints on skills related to transmission of customary knowledge.

IBAN LONGHOUSE CEREMONIES FOR TOURISTS.

While it is true that many more longhouse communities can be reached by road than in Kapit district, many Sri Aman district longhouses still retain their old appearance. In the Kapit areas logging operators require access to grounds to which Iban hold native title. Part of the dealing that takes place results in new concrete slabs and low-set longhousing development. Otherwise there are thousands of dollars currently being earned some weeks by some young males in their employ. And through such means certain other Rejang longhouse structures are being transformed.

The more rustic longhouse communities of the Sri Aman area are a promoted attraction to 'adventure tourists'. Many have the added attraction of accessibility. A tourist can board a mini bus in Kuching for a three hour drive on good road surfaces, followed by perhaps just a one hour boat (*perau*) journey in relative comfort along the Skrang or Lemanak Rivers. By way of contrast a currently favoured 'adventure' destination in the Baleh entails travelling for several hours up dangerously fast flowing tributaries. And at low water the trip often requires passengers to get out and walk or help pull the boat over exposed boulders.

Mainly non-Iban tourist operators have been taking visitors to the Skrang, for more than ten years, and several longhouse communities there have developed skills and infrastructure for hosting international travellers. This includes the important goal of making available for sale *pua*, other weavings and artefacts.

Guests are encouraged to wander through the *ruai* of the longhouse proper, to observe Iban men and women who have been advised at short notice of the tourists' arrival. In the case of Skrang families, many individuals labour in consolidated agricultural programs. Consequently tourists come across older males and women working at basket and mat weaving for the evening sale, as well as others tying or weaving an *ikat* cloth for community use, mending fishing nets, and so on.

In the case of one such Skrang community in the 1990s, tour groups, are formally invited back into the longhouse

after a meal in their newly constructed tourist accommodations. In the evening the longhouse is an active place with most residents home from labouring or farm work, bustling to prepare for cultural activities which pay a little extra cash through dancing, craft sales or *perau'* transportation.

With early evening focus on craft marketing, many women set out *bemban* mats lined with tourist items, some they made themselves and others which they had purchased for resale. Wares included ikat cloths, Malay songket, indigenous as well as modern forms of basketry, wood carvings, pottery, beads and bangles (pl.129).

When the tourists had had an opportunity to make purchases, objects were cleared away and the dance performance began. A handful of families provided sounds and dancers. Two or three male elders, dressed in *sirat* and hornbill feather head-dress, performed adroitly and several children imitated these fluid movements in their turn. Camera flashes mixed with neon fluorescent and bright yellow spot lighting. Finally young women danced in ceremonial costumes including one heavily adorned in silver coins which gainfully reflected the bright lights (pl.128).

On one occasion, Iban residents were celebrating a coincidental *gawai* and invited tourists to taste the rice wine and encouraged them to dance. Later, tea and biscuits were served before tourists retrieved their shoes from the doorway and filed out to the privacy of their accommodation. This particular group returned to Kuching the next morning.

The cultural performance was a refined, less than spontaneous event. But being a relatively early moment in the tourism program there remains a certain vitality in the dancing. Craft items were significant more for their conformity to international standards of tourist arts than any specific innovation (e.g. Graburn 1976).

It could be said that the Skrang community focussed energy on practising music, dance and handcrafts and in return renewed a sense of customary skills and identity gained through exhibiting those practices. Yet the process of transmission short-circuits wherever the audience is constituted by spectators.

Regardless of how enthused and sincere the 'adventurers' are, their attendance is *passive* in a crucial respect. Customary Iban performing artistry through which 'cultural heritage' was renewed, was ultimately dependent on an *active receptivity*. And this capacity to respond grounds in one's day to day experience - shared practices which cluster around the fertility cult of growing rice. As with any practice which is reduced to an economically motivated activity, the crafts and dance performance produced for tourists are fundamentally discontinuous with customary Iban practices.

Basic social-cultural contradictions which relate to commercializing longhouse community life are a specific problem in the context of already fragile cohesive elements. Disagreements occur between tour companies and host communities regarding fees and conditions of work. Other inter-group dissension concerns tour operators and competitive neighbouring communities concerning market share.

Similarly, when an enterprise began construction of a craftshop in 1990 at the jetty where tour groups wait for longboats to take them up the Skrang, residential interest groups prevailed in their fight to conserve market share of tourist arts. Less easily resolved issues arose where one longhouse currently had three guest houses for three different companies, none of which wanted competitors' clients to be present at 'their' performances.

A rudimentary fact which also creates tension involves residents wanting to invest the cash earnings from tourism in improvement of longhouse structures - tin roofing and electricity in particular. No sooner have they done this than tourists seek out more 'interesting experiences' which refers to neighbouring competitors' *original* facilities.

WEAVING CEREMONIAL TEXTILES IN SRI AMAN.

When viewed alongside observations in the Baleh of the social meaning of textiles, a major difference concerns the focus in the Sri Aman area on decorative elements in costumes. Specifically, I refer to the predominant use of *karap*, a weaving technique which features supplementary threads of gold and silver. In addition, in the latter

region there is wide usage of merely decorative non-Iban forms, the most banal being plastic flowers and velvet prayer rugs.

It needs to be re-stated that the Sri Aman area is the seat of Iban tradition. And in this vein women in many long-houses were observed tying *kebat*. Some used natural *lemba'* fibres while others used the coloured plastic ties. Their frames and looms were customary models and they continued to transmit procedural understanding in terms of *kayu'* or optimal number of folds implicit in a particular design (*buah pua'*).

Yet comparatively few women create their own designs in Sri Aman settlement districts in the early part of the 1990s. The observation will come as no surprise wherever it is viewed against a backdrop of interrupted and commercialized subsistence patterns. Since, the creative process in customary Iban textile arts is inseparable from subsistence practices - a symbiosis of economic and aesthetic variables underpinned by the life cycle of the rice plant.

And the issue of *active receptivity* of an audience is not delimited by the case of tourists. Creative moments in Iban textile work and meaningful audience response constitutes a principle which is negated wherever individuals (especially those living as urban professionals) are alienated from work processes implicit in the textiles.

Elders, in a Saribas-Layar longhouse considered to be exemplary in its textile arts, bring out their grandparents' *pua' kumbu'* and reminisce on the complex design work their ancestors have accomplished. In the 1990s the women concentrate on reproducing and modifying these designs. The *pua' kumbu'* are exceptionally fine in execution and clearly *classical* in design (pl.48,49).

Yet one can observe in such pieces a lack of vitality, coinciding with the long-term discontinuity in social-cultural practice through which groups customarily encourage creativity (e.g. Freeman 1981). Textile designs cluster along a thematic line usually identified cross-culturally as 'tree of life'. This contrasts with a continuing substantive interest in the Baleh in relation to grotesque realism. However the classical beauty reproduced by weavers and

lobbied by traditional interest groups in the Sri Aman district gives it a mythological place in 'Iban cultural legacy' - seen as the 'finest' Iban ikat textiles. But in terms of fine work, it is recalled here that the floral patterning in Baleh kain kebat is certainly as fine (pl.28).

The significance of grotesque representation has less to do with admiration and beauty and more elemental connection with pre-state practice of beliefs (e.g. Bakhtin *op.cit.*, Read *op.cit.*). In contrast to the dynamic element of fertility at work in grotesque realism the tree of life is an idealized abstraction which lacks an original vitality inherent in immediate experience of birth and death.

Creatures are seldom represented in classical examples reproduced as Saribas or 'regal' Iban textiles. Sometimes minuscule abstract spirit figures appear, but they are not explicit (pl.49). It is important to acknowledge that, in 1991 at least, there exists no total ban on depicting creaturely forms in Iban art. For example artisans in this region quite commonly depict the face of *Nising*, albeit in miniature form. Others, in mat weaving, frequently depict the forms of large figures known as 'reaching giants' (pl.33).

Empiang Jabu (1991:82) indicates that there are formal restrictions at work in regard to weaving human forms. The implication is that the restrictions are self-imposed though contextualized by external socializing forces. Clearly, Islamic beliefs proclaim abstract representation of sacred and profane subjects alike.

As genre, textiles in the Sri Aman area were further distinguished by the formal quality of bold wide stripes which made up borders which ran the length of the outside selvages. Weaver's in the Layar observed that specific colours were customarily de-limited for the use of artists who had passed through certain phases in the life cycle. Accordingly, an outside white border was identified as an auspice; only the most accomplished and appropriately mature artisans could enclose their work in white borders (pl.97). Similarly, an outside yellow border was also a sign of an accomplished weaver (pl.65).

Again the ideological and conservative dimensions of this maxim were significant. Yet the practice also affirmed bio-physical realities, as previously expressed. The social responsibilities, too, were significant, in the event of those who dreamed they were able to do that work.

While specific ikat motifs were not 'owned' in the sense that any one individual had exclusive rights to them, particular design qualities have been guarded and passed down within specific families. But while the most valued heirloom cloths may be retained by members of a *bilik* family as impartible *bilik property*, some cloths and considerable ikat-related knowledge would transfer into adjacent *bilik* families as experienced siblings married out. This can be seen in much the same way as how, in Iban agronomical practice, some of the household's rice seed is transferred, to become the original rice seed (*padi pun*) of the new *bilik* (e.g. Freeman 1955/1970).

Further, unlike the situation in stratified societies where colours or whole textiles were permitted only for the making and/or use of court members, all Iban were permitted, on the basis of universal potential, to attempt to develop the skills and knowledge to accomplish design work of the highest esteem and which had affinity with a white border.

At the same time, women living within increasingly more prosperous households, in the context of contact with external civilizations, have had the most opportunity to devote time to their skills (e.g. Jabu 1991, Ong 1986). The fineness and perceptible 'prayer rug' effect of classic examples of *pua' kumbu'* suggests that such women were influenced, moreover, by the social esteem accorded to Malay noblewomen.

In this sense Iban women in selective cases strove to afford silver and gold threads (e.g. Jabu in Ong 1986:28). In turn these elements were a source of higher status within neighbouring elites. Making and owning the most precious textiles had concrete social rewards which were being renewed in the early 1990s on the basis of continuing predominance by the Malay elites.

While several women in the Baleh were able to exhibit ceremonial skirts with patterning featured in supplementary

float weaves such as *pilih* and *karap*, most affirmed that they no longer made *pilih*. Several said that they *liked* to make *karap* but relatively few were doing this compared to women involved in ikat design work. By way of contrast, women in Sri Aman districts also rarely do *pilih* work, but it is a common occurrence in the early 1990s to see an Iban woman making *karap*.

At this time a number of women in the latter region had begun learning to weave through formal classes. As mentioned earlier, Iban communities in the Saribas-Layer district were the first to be introduced to European values and Christian beliefs through schools which Anglican missions set up as early as 1850. The district has continued to be a main beneficiary of government-driven schooling. Unlike Kapit, where there are no tertiary education facilities, Betong is not only closer to education facilities in the administrative capital, but has its own post-secondary technical institution.

In 1991 the Betong vocational school employed forty-five teachers responsible for 357 students. Although Betong and Sri Aman had a similar number of primary schools (45 and 49 respectively), Betong had twice the number of secondary schools - six compared to only three in Sri Aman (ASB 1991: 213-226).

State high school enrolment figures for males and females indicated that there were more females enrolled in Betong in 1991 (ASB 1991:222), but enrolment figures for the technical college at Betong showed merely 107 female students compared to 250 male students (*ibid.*:219). While intervening factors such as marriage and childbirth would account for a reduction in female enrolments, the curricula catered to males and so helped to pre-determine the statistics (ASB 1991:219). The implication was that the predictable though viable course of teaching that remained open to young women could only be pursued in other more populated metropolitan areas.

I asked young women students at predominantly Iban schools in the Sri Aman area to complete a questionnaire that was identical to the one referenced earlier (Ch.6.).

Compared to Kapit Division, where more than 50 per cent of students responded they had a mother who makes ikat textiles, of 40 Iban students in a Sri Aman urban school, just over 25 per cent affirmed this same pattern. Just one individual indicated she had woven a cloth herself. A majority of respondents wrote that no one in their longhouses made either *karap* or *kebat*, although some did make mats (*tikai*).

For a number of reasons, including the prevalence of interest groups, in addition to the demise of Iban artistry, Betong not only had a Technical college but also a new craft school which offered training in ikat (*kebat*). This craft training institution, *Kraftangan*, consisted of two buildings, one for each class of about twenty students and two instructors.

Interviews with students enrolled in the Iban weaving course at the *Kraftangan* school in Betong confirmed that fewer women in local Iban longhouse communities were making ikat textiles than in the Baleh. Most respondents indicated that their peer group was more interested in learning skills which gained them public service jobs or other wage work.

Responding to a question which assessed the kinds of technical skills among their Iban peers, who were involved in textile weaving, respondents affirmed that a large number have skills in *karap*. The relationship of this field of specialization with Malay cultural practices is reiterated.

The increase in *karap* weaving by Iban on back strap looms is, in my observation, a relatively recent phenomenon (e.g. Haddon & Start 1936). In further support of this notion, Jabu (*in* Ong 1986:28) records that her grandmother was the only woman in her longhouse district (i.e. Betong) to weave with silver thread.

The students in the *Kraftangan* Iban textile course ranged in age from about eighteen to thirty, although one Iban woman was aged forty-seven. The latter was already an expert *karap* weaver, having completed several skirts and jackets using this supplementary weft technique. She explained that she had learned *karap* from a woman resident of an Iban longhouse on the Layar. Although her sister-in-

law also made ikat (*kebat*), the student had not done so prior to coming to the school.

Another student observed that she had been taught to make *karap* by an 'auntie'. She decided to learn *kebat* because she would like to start her own business making and selling textiles. She had, by about her tenth month in the program, completed five projects. Such projects the class contributed to the school's merchandizing workshop in Kuching to be made into bags or other commodities for sale (pl.134,138).

A recurring response among craft school interviewees was that the motivation for enrolling in the ikat program concerned the promise of 'an eighteen month project' for which they received R\$150 a month as well as the training - when the option was longhouse life without wage earning possibilities. The corollary was that most observed they were unlikely to continue ikat work after they completed the course.

One student noted that once she was finished she would still not have access to her own equipment. She observed that sticks were available through the Kraftangan program at a discount of ten or twenty dollars, but thread was not subsidized at the school.

The majority of students pinned their future hopes on post-graduation selection among the 50 per cent who could continue in a 'workshop experience' program. The one year workshop program paid a student piece rates plus a monthly retainer to fill consignment orders while gaining further experience as a professional craftsperson.

On visiting a longhouse on the Layar, which was consistently promoted by student weavers and others in the district as having the most accomplished weavers in the district, it was evident that there existed a desire to revive ancestral skills. To accomplish this generalized need, artisans were not usually making *pua' kumbu'* to sell but were active in government sponsored competitions - for which they had renewed existing recognition. While Baleh Iban women in the same period were more involved in weaving for sales, there were moves to motivate individuals on the basis of competing in similar state and national events.

Investigation of the implications of this issue continues in the following chapter in respect to various external influences which underpin continuities in Iban textile arts. This study focusses on strategic objectives of urban institutions and other bodies which provide training, competitions and sales outlets, with an eye for evaluating the impact on the lived experience of artisans.

SECTION V

ADDRESSING SOCIAL CHANGE

In this final section of the thesis, focus returns to a more macro-level perspective of Iban textile art and the impact that urban industrial society is having on the ways in which Iban are encouraged to continue this activity in the 1990s. The central issue concerns the loss of agency of Iban women in their roles of artisan and makers of Iban culture in the context of Malaysian society and industrial interests.

Cultural groupings in Sarawak celebrate a diversity of official annual feast days. For two weeks in February Chinese families close their shophouses all, or part, of most days while they celebrate their calendrical new year. Following agreement by Imam about the appearance of the new moon in March, Malaysian followers of Mohammed commence a month of fasting (*Ramadan*). The period is followed by *Hari Raya*, a week of feasting. Later in the year, Indian communities celebrate annual Hindu and Buddhist events, while Christians join together in their various feast days.

The official calendar of cultural events now boasts a *Hari Gawai* day in recognition of 'Dayak and other' indigenous groupings. The notion of ethnic integration on the basis of officially defined diversity is profoundly at odds with nationalist acknowledgement of ethnohistorical pagan values, needless to say. On the other hand, the current drive at tribal cohesiveness by Iban and other indigenous peoples rallies around such invented traditions as *Hari Gawai*.

However, my interest here concerns the conflict that exists in the implicit incompatibility between nationalist objectives ('unity through diversity') and objective realities of much more profound cultural differences. It is these *differences* which need to be submerged and forgotten in order for programs of 'national unity' to succeed. And it is the same *differences* which generate textile arts among other Iban skills related to pre-state systems of knowledge.

The objective in these pages is to evaluate, from the view-point of Iban textile artists, those possibilities and constraints which arise in projects of official and private enterprise concerning 'Iban cultural legacy'. I have previously identified this concept of *textile artist* in respect to individuals who produce autonomous work that is inseparable from daily subsistence practices and legitimized from within the artist's community.

Deeply entrenched as political will in the 1990s is the proposition that Iban cultural heritage is a highly desirable element in achieving ideological (nationalist) unity and economic advances in the tourism services sector. This twin-edged premise underlies most of the rhetoric that surrounds the advancement of Iban textile arts in the 1990s. In this context my intention is to investigate the experiences of Iban artists in respect to continuities and conflict that they perceive and work with as options.

June 1, as a Sarawak public holiday celebrating Dayaks 'in our midst' commemorates selected aspects of its peoples ethnohistories, as does every other official feast day. Differences are collapsed, pagan associations are glossed over - the event is a triumph of syncretism. The interest here concerns *Hari Gawai* as the tip of an iceberg which extends into the depths of the textile arts in Iban communities.

At the tip is the *pua' kumbu'* - in the 1990s standing above all other single legitimized symbols of 'being Dayak'. Not that essential meaning of *pua'* is extricable from other processes which animate Iban social-cultural patterns; but rather, *pua'* are an idealized and prized object of nationalist projects. And as such, their abstract use meshes with interests which include plans for a national dress, and driving ethnic arts fashion and tourist industries.

The establishment of an appropriate form for *Hari Gawai* day is still in progress. However, an early winning idea revolves around fashion shows in which young girls compete for beauty prizes decorated in 'traditional' costume. The legendary Kumang, as ideal Iban, is transformed by the competition into a one dimensional woman wearing nationally approved designs.

Chapter 11 addresses the impact that external interests have on Iban textile artists through a discussion of urban based organizations which have been formally legitimized by government bodies and which are currently active in directing the development of handcraft projects in Sarawak. Implications of the study, as a whole, are then reviewed in the context of a final, concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 11

BEYOND THE LONGHOUSE: AGENTS FOR CHANGE

This chapter examines government organizations which currently play a central role in the development of the Malaysian handcraft industry and the impact these urban based programs have on rural Iban artisans, their work and their lives generally. The discussion begins with an investigation of the background to the Kraftangan education program addressed in the previous chapter in order to underline some of the assumptions and objectives of this government institution.

I then go on to discuss other government projects related to the production and promotion of local handcraft items. Marketing strategies are of particular interest, as are the roles of both public and private entrepreneurs in Sarawak who are actively involved in this Malaysian arts and crafts sector. The final section turns attention to women's organizations, and the roles they play in promoting Iban ikat artistry.

GOVERNMENT 'CRAFT EDUCATION' PROGRAMS.

At the end of the previous chapter reference was made to a Kraftangan training program in the Division of Sri Aman. This Betong campus opened in 1990-91 in an Iban settlement area with a direct local objective in regard to Iban ikat design work. Betong was the third school within a project which aimed to train young people in a variety of local handcrafts. The original campus opened in 1979 in the metropole Kuching. A second opened in Miri about the same time as in Betong.

Kraftangan schools inform the Sarawak human resource section of the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (PKKM) which was incorporated in October 1979 as a statutory body under the Prime Minister's department in Kuala Lumpur. The federal body is responsible for the industrial develop-

ment of the local handcraft industry (see *Perbadanan Kraftangan* publication).

Given industrial objectives, the program accents developing manual dexterity in relation to serial reproduction for merchandising sales. As such, the project is driven by market forces, as proponents can justly acclaim.

PKKM was not the first statutory body to focus on handicrafts. Heather Strange (1981) investigated the world of pandanus mat weavers in Rusila, a Malay kampong near Trengganu on the east coast of peninsular Malaysia. In that study she noted that, as early as 1957, a small Weaving Centre (*Medan Anyaman*) was organized under the umbrella of a federal government agency RIDA. Local women, together with their children, were encouraged to gather to learn and practise their craft.

In 1966 this project was subsumed under the political objectives of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and specifically the aim of promoting Malay ownership of entrepreneurial schemes. The craft project was renamed *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA), a 'Council of Trust for the Indigenous peoples'.

Twenty unmarried girls were selected each year, with the help of the local *penghulu* 'chieftain', to enrol as full-time students. In the early days of the program students received fifty cents a day as well as all money realized from sales of their mats, which they priced themselves (*ibid.*:70). Heather Strange observed that students were also brought to the northeast coast Craft Centre from other parts of Malaysia to learn pandanus weaving.

The social-political climate in the north-east coast is markedly different from mainstream Malaysia in the 1990s. Fundamental Islamic practices rule. Accordingly, the *dalang* as performing artist in shadow puppet theatre is, himself, increasingly manipulated in this work. In 1991 resolute official actions were taken to fundamentally alter the *dalangs'* epic repertoire from Hindu poetic sources to Islamic forms. In the same time frame young women were officially removed from any public performances such as dance.

The implication of bringing other Malaysian citizens to a craft training program in the heartland of nationalist ideology is that 'handicraft' is part of a much wider process of external socialization. The north-east coast is an extreme example, and allowing for differences in the level of enthusiasm between 1960 and 1990, the point stands that national craft programs are both industry- and nationalist-oriented.

In 1965 individuals skilled in rattan weaving were selected from Sarawak to attend the (re?)training in north-east Malaya. Sarawak had become confederated with peninsular Malaya two years earlier. Heather Strange added that several Dayak mat weavers were invited to exhibit their work in Kuala Lumpur. Consequently, both weavers and their husbands acknowledged the official recognition which reflected back on their village craftswomen.

Strange emphasized that the focus of the Rusila Craft Centre had altered vividly by 1978. A new building featured a formal and elegant sales room filled with crafts from throughout the country. The local mat section was comparatively small and merchandise was marked up as much as forty per cent. Local item sales figures were down and a competitive feeling among the culturally diverse grouping had overtaken the cooperative quality nurtured through former composition of local craftspeople (*ibid.*:72). Several local entrepreneurs along the main highway had also opened retail outlets, as an off-shoot of national interest in north-east fibrous crafts.

By 1978 prospective students had to apply to a Crafts Board (*Lembaga Kraftangan*) in the state capital Kuala Terengganu. Although successful applicants were paid forty Malay dollars a month during the six month course plus money from sales of their products, only eleven mat weavers were selected. These women were given a comparatively small workspace as the room was now shared by students learning Malay cloth weaving *songket* - and they required more space for their large floorlooms.

In 1978 the Crafts Board (*Lembaga Kraftangan*) was brought under the "direct control" of the Ministry of Public Enterprises and raised to the status of a corporation by an

Act of Parliament. It has since become known as the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, or *Perbadanan Kraftangan*, which currently directs the *Kraftangan* schools in Sarawak.

At the time of the inception of PKKMM, Heather Strange raised the question of impact of social-political changes on the forms of encouragement provided to craft producers.

In the following year (1979) PKKMM opened the first Sarawak *Kraftangan* school in Kuching. In a personal observation made to me, a student of that first program recalled how she had been one of fifteen young women invited to attend the first class. In her case this tuition comprised a six month course in basketry. She learned about the course, indirectly, through a prominent politician's wife - a patron of Iban arts. In other words, the information was privileged.

Several of the other foundation students were also selected from the same district - previously underlined as the seat of Iban tradition and party political power. Students were given accommodations in Kuching and received pay of sixty dollars a month for food and pocket money. At that time a certificate in basketry led to no defined industrial vocation. In the case of the young woman she followed up the *Kraftangan* course with one in Home Economics at a technical school. On graduation she found government contract work involving rural house visits in which she passed on training in handicraft manufacture and merchandizing as well as home economics.

Although she did not stay in this teaching role, in doing it this alumna can be seen as a successful product of the PKKMM program - which is essentially re-formulating or reinventing *ikat* traditions in line with 'free-market economics'.

Kraftangan schools socialize indigenous and other craft practitioners. There is an age criterion as there is a minimum level of existing craft expertise. It is not a vocation program in the sense that welding might teach previously unlearned skills. This is demonstrated by previous data coming out of a survey conducted at the Betong campus. *Kraftangan* retrain persons versed in culture-

specific practices to create a skilled labour force in the image of industrial strategists.

Tuition applies to students who work as full-time employees who are paid a monthly retainer of M\$168 per month (1991) together with accommodation at a government hostel. As paid full-time workers, individuals are required to complete a number of projects but are not given any rights to the products of their labour. In the case of ikat classes, students use school equipment, thread and commercial dye stuffs. They are told what objects to make and guided on the designs to tie, although trainees continue to have input into which designs they copy as well as interpretive aspects. But overarching principles of merchandizing de-limit these choices severely in regard to behavioral patterns of consumers.

Strategic planning for the PKKMM program is set down in the head office in Kuala Lumpur. The corporation's publication *Perbadanan Kraftangan* is distributed to mainstream and other (ATO) trading operations. The expensive, glossy, full colour pages promote competitive, quality controlled Malaysian handcraft products to an international audience.

Applying elementary tenets of economic analysis: the PKKMM operation achieves any advantages it offers to the international market-place on account of its cheap labour. Its producers are paid trainee wages and it competes with not just its counterparts in other countries but also with independent small producer groups (albeit backed by religious and humanitarian organizations), cooperatives and individual artisans.

PKKMM's operating objectives beg analysis in terms of state capitalism which is both its right and its critical flaw. The disfiguring quality stems from its implicit promise to generate continuities with the intellectual property through which it works. It promises, says a PKKMM brochure, to "seek to look into the interests of the traditional craftspersons."

Its profitability derives from an existing pool of cultural knowledge and numeracy skills of individuals whose labour is re-directed to capitalist aims at apprentice levels of pay. Negating its promise of integrity regarding

the intellectual property of indigenous artisans, PKKMM resolutely sets out to "encourage and give priority to crafts which reflect the identity and creativity of the national culture" (*ibid.*)

Trainees who enrol to learn 'traditional' craft skills are now required to work in a plain blue uniform complete with scarf covering the head in the Malayan requirement (pl.130,132). The significance to this thesis is that commercialization objectives and strategies relating to craft production effectively flow back into the pool of knowledge of those communities from which trainees are selected. Moreover, these strategic objectives ultimately cause economic and emotional dependency in graduates. And further, disinheriting of access to the means of production is transmitted as a de-motivating force within trainees' communities.

The PKKMM corporate slogan originates in Mohammed's understanding that "The most blessed means to earn thy living is by the work of thine own hands". Yet an alienating force prevails in the mode of work that trainees undertake. One recalls the context of customary Iban subsistence practices - and in particular emphasis on free access to the means of reproducing one's family, in the context of social encouragement of innovation (e.g. Freeman 1981).

Critical response in rural communities to the fruits of a trainee's labour, in respect to customary Iban knowledge, and consequently local legitimation of traditions that terminate in serial reproduction of pastel pink and green *pua'*, cannot be anything but superficial and meaningless (pl.131,133). In my observation Iban elders nod their heads in customary toleration of the idea in itself. They also acknowledge that pastel pink and green connect with external interests and accordingly have no truck with customary Iban cultural patterns. But the point I make is that the new colours are never intended to represent customary ways. And any craft industry promise to the contrary is counterfeit.

The PKKMM trade pamphlet depicts local producers hard at work and juxtaposes urban consumers admiring pastel furnishings, sumptuous silk batiks, expensive gold and silver jewellery, decorative lamps, wall hangings, writing folders,

and cosmetic bags. A brochure clarifies that PKKMM will "increase the number of craftspersons who understand the objectives and aspirations of the corporation". And this identifies plans "to produce handicrafts that are functional and with wide market appeal".

STATE HANDICRAFT PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE MARKET APPEAL

Although the craft training schools in Sarawak each have a small exhibition area, the main sales outlets are housed in separate locations under the retail name *Karyaneka*. In 1991, the Kuching shop was located behind the Sunday Dayak marketplace. It merchandized a wide range of expensive craft items, including silk batiks and other higher fashion commodities made by peninsular Malayan artisans. As Heather Strange found in Rusilia, external commodities were over-represented.

'External' handicrafts refers to contemporary Malaysian ikat bits added as a decorative accessory to modern handbags and as a print on wrapping paper and business cards to promote the range of fashions. The outside craft component also includes miniature daggers to use as letter openers. And local items accent small painted shields and carvings of warriors for book ends.

The PKKMM executives have established their role as managers trained in public service. Further, many keenly focus on the prospect of modifying traditions, as dictated by market trends, and appropriate technology which adds the advantage of productivity and quality control. But key players are not chosen on their experience in design quality at the root level of connectivity with subsistence practices. Accordingly, the pre-state mix of aesthetic and economic variables is devoid of meaning in their market research data. Yet PKKMM have launched a 'quality label' program through which it verifies, registers, and certifies authenticity of crafts.

Perhaps there is a case for quality control in the face of chemical dye stuffs and the marketing decision to indicate recipes not in customary measures of *kati* or *pikul*, centigrams and millilitres. Dyers can easily identify with

the difficulty of developing colour fast cloth with widely-distributed commercial dye-stuffs which mal-align with the purposes of ikat artisans. But Quality Control is essentially a customer guarantee, not a producer's aid. *Quality Control* insists that only goods are produced which conform to a consistent range of size and colour. Personal variations, 'accidents' and innovative possibilities are but unmarketable anathemas.

The state economic development of handicrafts taps a domain of high growth, given its linkage with tourism services. At the provincial level there operate, predictably enough, several other arms of state capitalism with interests in industrializing craftwork. One of these is the *Bumiputera Development Corporation*.

Specifically, the *Bumiputera Development Corporation* was established in the wake of the 1971 'New Economic Policy' (NEP). The NEP was a vehicle through which a number of public enterprises were proposed as a means of reforming access to the economic pie. The policy set about achieving at least thirty per cent corporate equity by *Bumiputeras* by the end of 1990. As widely reported at the time, Chinese groupings occupied the predominant places in the business domain.

Bumiputera is an economic-linguistic device which demarcates non-Chinese Malaysian citizens (see Ch.1). Neither do Europeans qualify as 'sons of the soil' but this situation carries minimal political significance at the time 'Bumiputera' policies are set in place.

One such Bumiputera-led state capitalist enterprise was the 'State Economic Development Corporations' (SEDC) program which operated with specific tactical aims within the respective Malaysian States. The ethnic mission of SEDCs was supervised by a high majority of Malay executives. As James Jesudason's economic study (1989:98) observed: "Even when experienced Malay managers were not available, SEDCs preferred to hire recent Malay graduates rather than non-Malays."

In the mid-1970s SEDCs were generally un-productive and by 1981 only the odd operation operated at a profit. "It was common for SEDC officers to award sub-contracts to companies

that they or their relatives had started on the side" (*New Straits Times*, 13 September 1981, in Jesudason 1989:99).

By 1984 SEDCs were privatized. By that point the high accumulation of Malay assets was concentrated within specific interests - the predominant political party UMNO (*ibid.*). Following privatization the picture was favourably altered in terms of individual gains by leaders within that elite (e.g. Jesudason *op.cit.*, Lim Mah Hui 1983).

In the 1990s SEDC is a high-profile player in Sarawak tourism. The corporation is involved in most areas of the sector including management of resort and shopping centre construction. But of particular interest here is the star role played by SEDC in the cognitive and industrial transformation of ethnic arts.

An early project of SEDC's craft industrialization arm, Bumiputera Development Corporation, was the establishment of retail and wholesale craft outlets under the name *Sarakraf*. An operating objective was to transform the economic situation of "many who are unable to promote themselves effectively due to constraints such as being remote from markets and facing costs which would be prohibitive for an independent small business" ("*Sarakraf products of distinction*" pamphlet, 1991).

Despite an ancestral pattern, via SEDC, of uncertain success in spheres of policy and specifically in the use of non-specialist managers, the Bumiputera Development Corporation set about establishing a consultancy for the craft industry in Sarawak. As is the case with federal counterparts, PKKM and Karyaneka, the SEDC subsidiaries' focus on advisory services concerns the intention of aligning design and production methods with consumption patterns in international craft markets.

Differences are apparent; since in contrast to Karyaneka operations, *Sarakraf* establishments feature local products. Sarawak crafts are not a side-line. Although, as exemplified by the use of Iban-style ikat textiles, the work of local producers is perceived as yardage for cutting up, into bits, for handbags or business convention give-aways (pl.138).

Shops also displayed new *pua' kumbu'*, both large and small. In the case of the latter, despite the promise of

consultancy expertise, stocks in 1991-93 comprised both finely tied designs in crisp sharp colours and larger basic designs in which white resist areas were smudged with black. Nonetheless all *pua'* were singularly priced at M\$35.

This pricing situation indicates operating constraints in the area of fixed labour and material costs. What arises, with particular concern to this thesis, is the issue of an object-oriented approach. Such an approach to exchange demonstrates no change from the pattern of traders paying Navaho weavers a fixed sum per pound weight of product. In the case of Iban ikat cloths, the pricing on new pieces relates to size. 'Antique' pieces are priced higher as dictated by patterns which long precede SEDC operations - the buying patterns of private and public collectors.

SEDC consultancy concerning serial reproduction of crafts in Sarawak constituted two focal points in the early 1990s. The first was a prototype realization scheme and the second a rural production program. The prototype sector employed marketing research staff, artist/designers and craftspersons who produced examples of proposed craft forms. The artisans included male wood-workers, approximately three women weaving basketry forms, and five others stitching handbags. In the area of textiles, one Iban man made Iban ikat cloths (*kebat*), three women wove Malay *songket* and two more embroidered Malay cloths with gold motifs. One workshop employee estimated that, in a 12 month period, these workers made around one hundred prototypes, many of which had been suggested by a design consultant from Japan.

The items headed for market-testing at Sarakraf retail outlets, including the Living Museum-Cultural Village and city shops. Objects which were chosen for production were farmed out to an artisan labour pool at selected rural villages. The villages included Iban communities and Malay, and while Iban made Iban items so did Malay. In the early 1990s, artisans who made proto-types in the Bumiputera Workshop also trained rural artisans, as producers, in about twenty communities throughout Sarawak. Thus, the Village purchasing scheme was not merely providing urban outlets for 'traditional' crafts but directing rural artisans in specific new forms for which they were paid piece rates.

I reiterate a previous implication concerning the severely restricted importance of the maker. This significance occurs as market advantage, shared as profit-taking by those with equity in SEDC, and currently reliant on securing a source of cheap labour. A related previous point is recalled, that market competition for SEDC and its craft industrializing counterparts consists of small production units of indigenous artisans, and other cooperative groupings. In Sarawak a considerable market advantage which is enjoyed by SEDC and PKKM augurs a trend of monopoly and homogeneity in the merchandizing of ethnic arts.

The same general situation holds for cross-cultural analysis (e.g. Chalmers 1985). In its early stages craft industrialization utilizes indentured forms of labour, a condition however it cannot rely on indefinitely. Predictably there are increasing moves towards mechanization in Sarawak. For example, basket-makers are encouraged to employ electric bamboo stripping devices. And chemical dyeing methods are heavily weighted in government projects.

Consistent with industrialization perhaps, but negating customary economic practices, each of the SEDC selected villages was specializing in a particular craft. In the early 1990s members of one selected Iban community in the Spaoh region of Sri Aman were concentrating on bamboo basketry while those in a community near the town of Kapit produced ikat cloths.

This situation is highly pertinent in that it demonstrates the establishment of craft specialization by external socializing forces. It is a nonsense to say that Kayan or Maloh or Aztec or Mayan artisans were *specialists* wherewith one assumes a pre-disposition on the part of those individuals. Clearly, the question of *craft specialization* begs social-historical analysis, a project to which this chapter contributes in an introductory way.

Reference has been made to the 'Living Museum' as an SEDC operation in Sarawak. It has the name *Kampung Budaya Sarawak* and was located about twenty kilometres out of the metropole at an exclusive hotel and golf course beach resort. The 'living museum' was opened in 1990 coinciding with the major tourism promotion 'Visit Malaysia Year'.

This 'cultural village' features seven different houses 'representative' of seven ethnic groups of Sarawak. The Iban longhouse complex is a composite of an old style *bilik* joined onto a new style one. The latter serves as a private living area for individuals employed to sit weaving and cooking in the older area.

The adjacent longhouse labelled 'Orang Ulu' represents an amalgam of cultures, *Kayan*, *Kenyah* and a number of other smaller and less well known groups of the more isolated agricultural peoples. The rationale usually cited in this collapse of ethnic demarcations, which resulted in the 'Orang Ulu' living museum piece, is a sore point with *Kayan*, *Kenyah*, *Kedayan* and other affected persons. It is not surprising since the underlying principle unites with deeper-seated objectives in regard to Cultural Unity Through Diversity. Social engineering connected with the slogan is transparent in its disregard for *inner* variation as this chapter demonstrates.

Promotional writers for the Cultural Village express an objective need "not just to portray Sarawak cultures but to bring it (*sic*) to life, simulating the authentic ways of life of the various major ethnic groups." To this end, full-time dancers "provide eclectic performances blending the very best elements of each ethnic group's traditional dances" (*Kampung Budaya Sarawak* pamphlet). The craft prototype Workshop provides less of a tourist draw card than a convenient site for the work, since it is located away from heavy visitor traffic.

In the early 1990s the fee for entering the Village was set at M\$35, a clear signal to local residents that it was a tourist venue - an SEDC perception that has been consistently applied in craft production spheres. The point is that craft industrialization is a consumer driven enterprise. This condition does not overlook the importance of local elites, who desire items of national dress in addition to older collectibles. But in the overall mix of marketing objectives, international consumption patterns prevail. And clearly, this has more to do with *simulation* than *authenticity* in regard to the promise, in the above pamphlet, concerning Sarawak Cultural Legacy.

The *simulation* or reinvention of Sarawak Cultural Legacy is continuous with external systems of social thought, whether this be of Brookean design or State Economic Development Corporation implementation in the 1990s. The SEDC program of nationalizing or unifying craft production is mostly significant for its illumination of current cultural anxieties. At a textile symposium held at the Sarawak Museum in September 1991, an SEDC officer delivered a paper entitled "To encourage and promote the use and production of traditional Iban costume".

The paper suggests that "the longhouse community should, wherever possible, be encouraged and assisted to organise beauty pageants and cultural shows on their own at least once a year during the Gawai Festival... Wherever possible a separate contest should be organised for the younger generation. In this way, we [cultural brokers] are not only training them how to use the costume but also inculcating in them a sense of pride and respect for their traditional costume."

He went on to add that they [as brokers] must ensure that the young people be educated on the "proper dress code" and verify that only the 'original' version of the costume is used. In order to carry out these concerns he declared, "it is necessary to have one single authority which can decide and determine the various types of costumes, its original or authentic form and undertake necessary steps such as organising weaving classes" (1991:4)

The SEDC spokesperson stressed the need for centralized agencies in order to impose quality control, standardized pricing, and improved productivity and marketing. He added how such an institution should also be the central agent in dealing with the production and sale of the complete set of costume as well as organise promotional activities such as traditional fashion shows, cultural performances, public forums, seminars and workshops."

He envisioned such an institution would be similar to Kraftangan's information division Infokraf in Kuala Lumpur and that it would need appropriate quarters and sufficient operating funds. A current example of venue selected for traditional fashion shows is the Kuching Hilton. In addi-

tion, it should have a capable and dynamic leader who has the trust and support not only of the public but also the government. He suggested that no other existing institution fits his criteria other than *Sarakup Indu*.

The historic implications of the women's organization *Sarakup Indu Dayak* are important to this discussion, but the reference to it in the SEDC paper occurs as a *denouement*. The whole movement of the rhetoric is towards centralization of cognitive qualities associated with Cultural Legacy. And, clearly, the reference he makes to this particular women's program is irrelevant to the point he hammers home. At the same time, I intend to discuss the specific historic significance of *Sarakup Indu Dayak* and other women's organizations following the next section.

OFFICIAL RECOGNITION: ETHNIC ART COMPETITIONS.

Competitions with the most potential to stir interest in Sarawak are those which bring public exposure through opportunity to exhibit work in Kuala Lumpur. For example, *Perbadanan Kraftangan* sponsors the *Wicitra* Biennial Craft Exhibition and Competition as one such avenue. Since *Wicitra '84* the competition has been open to all Malaysians. It features two categories, Best Design Award and Best Craftsmanship Award.

The notion of *craft designers* is something of a 'new word' in craft merchandizing circles which identifies an obsession with the 'marketability' of objects. It is a current form of idealizing craft objects and setting them on a pedestal of contemporary fashion. In this sense, *Wicitra* makes commodity-orientation their aim in the statement that they "provide an avenue for craftspersons and craft-designers to demonstrate their capabilities...in terms of workmanship and design."

However, to give historical significance to this observation: in the 1992 *Wicitra* competition a group of Baleh Iban weavers won second prize, in this national event, for their ikat textiles. Curiously, they won their award for items in silk.

As an earlier chapter sought to clarify, the customary thread of choice in Iban communities is cotton. Certain questions arise surrounding the introduction of silk into remote rural Iban communities. And the issue has profound implications for relationships - between suppliers and users, as well as intra-group users and non-users. To answer these questions I firstly broaden the historical backdrop to the national prize for 'traditional crafts' that goes to a textile entry in silk.

As might be expected, given technical procedures of tying ikat cloth, the lead up to this prize-giving was quite lengthy. In 1988 *Wicitra* made textile weaving a focus of its competition. Coinciding with this opportunity, a textile arts workshop was held that year in Kuching. Its objective, reportedly, was two-fold: "partly to introduce silk-weaving to Sarawak weavers, particularly pua-weavers as the State was launching the silk industry and also to revive the tradition of natural dye" (*Borneo Post*, 26 August 1991).

The Workshop was organised by the principal patrons of ethnic arts in Sarawak, through a cultural society. The sponsors were Sarawak Eastern Empress Silk Company and Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (PKKM). A further connection concerned an influential interest in the local fashion industry. Seventy Iban weavers were invited of whom about half were from Kapit Division, including several from Rumah Ata. Commercially spun silk yarn was distributed for workshop experimental purposes.

Subsequently, the fashion manufacturing company coordinated the establishment of a silk ikat project in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Community Development (*ibid.*). In 1990, the director of the project selected certain artisans in a Baleh longhouse to source the pilot project - which would ultimately result in the *Wicitra* award.

The company supplied the women with silk thread to construct a number of small *pua' kumbu'* and longer scarves or *selendang*. The latter was a significant choice of merchandise, both from a cognitive point of view and forces of market research. Richards' dictionary (1988:332) glossed

selendang as a "shoulder scarf worn out of doors by Muslim women and used as veil".

In return for the silk resources, as well as the opportunity to participate, each selected woman was to produce two *ikat* cloths which could be tied simultaneously. One item was to be handed over to the project coordinator and on the other they would retain an option to keep or sell.

The fruits of the project were exhibited at an exhibition held at the Sarawak Museum in 1991. This event served, too, as an accumulation of momentum towards claiming acknowledgement in the subsequent national craft arts competition. Three of the longhouse women given supervisory powers in the project were brought to Kuching to demonstrate the work in the state opening.

To back-track a little: the *selendang* and *pua'* project in the Baleh longhouse was run in conjunction with a second (public sector) development project. The parallel program involved the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture. Women aged under thirty-five were invited to participate in making cloth which featured gold and silver threads (distributed by the culture ministry) with the aim of teaching and producing brocaded *selendang* in *karap* technique.

Karap was not commonly done in the Baleh, as my earlier chapter explains. There was a need to re-train skilled people. The daughter of the head-man (*tuai rumah*), who was chosen as one of the artisans who attended the Kuching workshop, had the role of co-ordinating the Baleh women. She helped the other women learn how to pick out the series of warps to be strung onto pattern lease sticks (i.e. the *karap*) by making up examples of various design 'repeats' in magnified bamboo samplers.

Prior to presentation in Kuching, the products from the twin projects were to be formally shown to sponsors in the longhouse of origin, and certificates of achievement would be given out. The visit of government officials, together with the achievements of the women, was met with preparation for appropriate feasting in the longhouse.

Sponsors and officials journeyed from Kuching. The travel could be done in one day, but it was a long day. For example, a latter part of the travel involved a one hour

trip upriver to the Baleh tributary by government speed boat. Then, there was a further three hours of pushing and pulling three long boats over a final course which featured boulders and rapids. But the officials' efforts were well rewarded.

The longhouse community honoured their guests with a colourful traditional welcome. And, sponsors were treated to first chance to look over the silk and other cotton pieces. The visitors' boats were greeted with gun fire, gongs were played and young women in ceremonial dress offered *tuak* at the top of the steps which led onto an open platform overlooking the river. Residents and guests then joined in a processional march, up and down the indoor gallery.

The walls of the public area of the longhouse were completely covered with old and new *pua' kumbu'*. Above the hangings, at most doorways, were displayed two or more framed textile certificates, including several from *Wicitra '88*. In the area facing the entrance to the head-man's *bilik* was an elaborately decorated palm laden with food and small *pua' kumbu'*.

Seating mats were laid down and ingredients intended for a ritual offering (*piring*) were set on a large *pua' kumbu'*. The Malay representative from the Ministry was invited to make the blessing, welcome speeches were made and feasting begun.

After the initial eating and drinking, various community members joined guests admiring the display of heirloom and new cloths. Another more substantial feast began later in the evening. The two Malay men from the Administration and Radio Malaysia were invited to perform offerings, set out on *pua' kumbu'* along the galley, for each of the twenty or so households in the longhouse. While they were doing so, the competition artisans gathered inside the head-man's *bilik* where each presented their related products to the two respective project sponsors. Each piece was carefully examined, its qualities and its name discussed. The best of the duplicate pieces, in addition to an older large *pua' kumbu'*, were purchased by the private sponsor.

The official presentation of competition entry work was then opened on the *ruai* with speeches by government offi-

cialists from Kapit and Kuching. The young artisans were then called, one by one, to come up and receive their certificate for completion of the Ministry project. The ensuing festivities continued throughout the night to daybreak. Various combinations of three players took their place at a set of gongs and others shared in the performing of various Iban dances (*ngajat*). Honoured guests quietly excused themselves around two in the morning while the host community continued feasting through the night, in their customary manner.

After coffee and crackers, a farewell ceremony began about 9 a.m. with a dance around the banana bole shrine. 'Warriors' with *parang* blades cut down the small *pua kumbu* and other gifts for presentation to their guests for their journey home. In five days the *tuai rumah*'s daughter and two other women would follow the officials to Kuching for the Opening of the exhibition at the Sarawak Museum.

Clearly the community had prepared well in advance for the celebration, successfully integrating new 'certificate' rituals with older traditional events. Their actions acknowledged the opportunities that had gone the way of prominent householders and associate families in their grouping, and implicitly the advantages gained over neighbouring communities - since they had been chosen over all other Iban groups.

On the other hand, the delegate from Kuching shook his head at the expense to his Ministry. He was evidently having second thoughts about future repeats of this particular event, in the wake of realities of longhouse hardships and the prospect of another difficult trip.

The outcome of official forays into rural communities is ambiguous too from the point of view of Iban. Yet political connections and bald economic realities predominate in the 1990s.

A follow-up event was planned in the Baleh to further develop the relationship of artisans and sponsors. A special ritual dye ceremony or *ngar* was held at the longhouse in 1992. During that year the artisans completed another silk ikat project for the private sponsor. And ultimately, representatives of the small group from the longhouse were

flown to Kuala Lumpur to receive their prize in the *Wicitra* '92 competition.

The up-shot of this episode, in terms of my thesis, concerns the nature of the relationship between artisans and sponsors, and artisans and others - *others* referring to both kindred groupings and inter-connecting communities in the district. Analysis of costs and benefits, in the context of rural Iban lives in the 1990s, terminates in specific dependency on cash income for staple food supplies (e.g. *Annual Statistical Bulletin 1991*).

From the point of view of Iban artisans, competitions are becoming a commonplace means of achieving advantage. Yet the meaning of such competitions is inseparable from western connections and, specifically, from the alienation of western artists and their products that is associated with industrial society. I draw on John Dewey (1953:9) at some length to emphasize the degree of isolation and idealization which attaches to formerly vital symbolic representations, upon immersion in the semiotic web of industrial society:

The factors that have glorified fine art by setting it upon a far-off pedestal did not arise within the realm of art nor is their influence confined to the arts. ...The forces at work are those that have removed religion as well as fine art from the scope of the common or community life. The forces have historically produced so many of the dislocations and divisions of modern life and thought that art could not escape their influence.

Dewey describes the historical forces in terms of *modern industry and commerce* and their *international scope*. He accents the independent factor of modern *mobility of trade*, which is ultimately and specifically *due to the economic system (ibid.)*. The web of associations encroaches on sincere Maecenas-like relationships between patrons and the artists they nurture. This relationship too acquires a new status:

Now even that much of intimate social connection is lost in the impersonality of a world market. Objects that were in the past valid and significant because of their place in the life of a community now function in isolation from the conditions of their origin. By that fact they are also set apart from common experience, and serve as insignia of taste and certificates of special culture (*ibid.*).

While there is no doubting private gains in social esteem, sponsorship relations, entrepreneurial and nationalist objectives - all these and more - Dewey's observations generate substantive negation of a linkage between products produced for similar competitions and *customary Iban art*.

In respect to individual artisans who view competition and industrial experimentation as a model of future opportunity, questions arise regarding the notion of her *private gain*. No reasons exist for viewing the artist as actual competitor against a background of international trade. She has only mediated access to information concerning fashion design trends. It is her proxy who effectively enters the competition, for rewards of considerable magnitude when measured by potential scale of operations.

A 'Development Study' made on behalf of the Australian Development Assistance Bureau for the Malaysian Ministry of Agriculture (March 1985:70) pointed out parameters of a related growth area. The batik craft industry in Penang prospered during the early seventies, it noted: "in association with a European who had extensive experience in and knowledge of European high fashion and who possessed the necessary personal contacts to gain access to the high fashion market...However, with her departure and the loss of these talents and contacts most of these markets were also lost" (*ibid.*).

The Iban artisan is, by similar standards of economic measure, the skilled labour who in this case binds the market effective designs. One recalls the behind-the-scenes influence of the silk industry and underlines its role in driving the establishment of a new industry, together with its jobs. While much of the honour falls to the Iban women involved, they do not direct their silk project nor do they have access to the means of reproducing this work.

Further the women are considerably alienated from this work. The 1993 commercial exhibition of silk ikat items occurred as a precious display in the lobby of the Kuching Hilton. Iban silk ikat was juxtaposed with a range of expensive jewellery and toiletry implements - evoking associations with exotic table covers and head scarves respectively. A male mannequin was adorned in a chic silk

ikat vest and the female counterpart in an exquisite gold songket *selendang* or head covering.

At about the same time, a spin-off from the silk ikat enterprise was the sponsor's production of knotted silk carpets. Iban artisans did not have an existing tradition of carpet knotting, neither was it feasible to reinvent this particular tradition in Sarawak. Instead, labour for the Iban design project was provided by Himalayan groupings outside of Malaysia.

Such a project invokes the issue of intellectual property rights since the designs and colours are drawn from explicitly heirloom *pua' kumbu* (e.g. *Sarawak Tribune*, 21 December 1991). Further, the addition of a new collectible form of 'Iban cultural legacy' into an international marketplace, in which rug prices mirror those of antique *pua' kumbu* (M\$2000), raises questions of corrosive, direct competition in an art market which carries long-term bearish marks.

SOCIAL ROLE OF TEXTILE ART: WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS.

Finally, the discussion turns to an issue already raised, concerning women's organizations. The interest this thesis has in the topic is the individual-orientation of women's groups - a human-focus which contrasts with the object-fascination of other cultural/economic brokers previously discussed.

In the early 1990s a women's group in Sri Aman met for two hours, twice a week, to learn to make ikat textiles. Their group was one of the arms of The National Federation of Women's Institute, an example of a Malaysian organization specifically aimed at women living in small rural towns. The Sri Aman group had just completed a three month course but had applied to the government for a three month extension on funding they needed to pay the instructor. If successful it would be the second such grant awarded to the group. Their first project had been a three month session in *karap*. They planned to attempt mat weaving following completion of their current ikat projects.

Iban members of the group explained that although they may hold a small exhibition, most of them were doing the course as a hobby, a social activity and a way to meet people. Significantly, they gathered in a community hall at a prescribed time, away from home and children - in contrast to longhouse situations where Iban women could choose spontaneously to get together with family and friends throughout the course of daily routines. It is not a surprising observation that the motivation level of participants was low and that the group comprised a select number of about twenty women - in the comparatively large population of a district capital.

As early as 1963, coinciding with confederation of Malaysian states, a National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) was established as a centralized force behind such volunteer women's organizations. Karim (1984:220) noted that NCWO was set up to act on behalf of forty-one organizations.

In subsequent developments, during the period of the Third Malaysian Plan (1976-80) when the national handicraft program (PKKM) was formed, the Women's Organization took on a higher profile within the nationalist program. A body called the National Advisory Council for the Integrating of Women in Development (NACIWID) was established, reporting to the Office of the Prime Minister. The National Council of Women's Organizations was effectively subsumed under NACIWID (Karim 1984:225). By 1981, of 25 individuals who officiated within NACIWID, 15 persons represented Ministries or other government agencies and only 12 of the total number were women (Strange 1981).

NACIWID was ascribed the dual role of co-ordinating and advising Administration efforts to integrate women involved in Development, in conjunction with arousing nationalist consciousness and awareness among women's organizations (Karim 1984:225). NACIWID tactical plans included organizing courses aimed at encouraging women to enter the economic sector; organizing talks such as "The Development of Sarawak" and "Family in Islam"; publishing a Quarterly magazine, *Wantanita*; and representing Malaysia at International meetings (*ibid.*). A survey of forty women's

organizations demonstrated that *education* was the primary emphasis in 77.5 per cent of cases, focussed on kindergarten facilities, libraries, adult education classes and scholarships (*ibid.*).

Formalized women's groups tend to be urban-based, serving women who are profoundly alienated through relocation from the subsistence roots of renewing those skills. Many come from distant communities on a temporary basis on account of a husband's current work project.

Government services is an exceptionally large employment sector in Malaysia. It is a sector which recruits predominantly from Malay populations, notwithstanding the impact of the 1971 New Economic Policy. Yet the latter *Bumiputera*-orientation means that Iban increasingly enter into government service. The remuneration package is heavily weighted by accommodation provisions, but on the other hand, there is a pattern of families being required to up-root on a regular basis.

The Dayak women's organization (*Sarakup Indu Dayak*) is a prominent example of a Sarawak body which, like the National Federation of Women, aims at social cohesion through uniting women's practice in urban centres. It provides activities which encourage women out of individualized homes into the wider community. Socializing events include a program of speakers and regular classes on matters of health, child-care, nutrition, family development and craft skills. Such urban programs extend their concern to rural social economic conditions. *Sarakup Indu Dayak* has also played a major role as cultural broker, by attempting to bridge the gap between rural and urban Iban through helping to organize and sponsor rural participation in urban based craft seminars and exhibitions.

As a final note, there has been no attempt in this chapter to negate the role of women's organizations in the state - merely to explicate the premises under which they operate.

This chapter concerns 'agents for change'. The intention has been to evaluate the impact on artisan's lives of public policy and private enterprise which seeks for various purposes to transform or reinvent Iban Culture. A number of

key programs have been omitted in the interests of brevity. For example I have not discussed the impact of classes offered by the British Council and various church and youth clubs. But the data that were presented demonstrate key objectives concerning the national development of indigenous textile arts in the early 1990s.

What the chapter *does* argue strongly is that the state's role in craft development/industrialization *is discontinuous with pre-state artisanry*. Since this observation directly opposes the rhetoric which surrounds various programs which attempt to transform indigenous craftwork, it has also been my intention to investigate underlying assumptions.

Accordingly, the chapter does not oppose the idea of state craft training programs in post-secondary vocational education in a business society. The purpose in this regard also has been to clarify assumptions of such projects in order to identify their social role: in training persons who elect to make a living, not as artists, but as those who serially reproduce the designs of others within the craft industry.

As 'industry', handicraft is but an invented cultural tradition, but one that has direct linkage - not with Iban customary ways - but with court cultures and ideological structures which are ultimately dependent on division of labour. And as this thesis attempts to make very clear, Iban inherit a very different kind of social-cultural pattern predicated on an inseparable mix of aesthetic and economic variables.

CHAPTER 12

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this final chapter I re-state the objectives of the thesis, discuss the means by which I have achieved specific findings, and evaluate the results, with reference to the principle implications of the study.

I set out to examine the problematic relationship of Iban women and the technical and aesthetic skills that underlie their ikat artwork, against a backdrop of industrial society. To this end, it was my initial purpose to identify the key concept that women engaged artwork as a crucial social practice. To meet this objective I identified ways in which ikat practices meshed with Iban pre-state culture. Accordingly, I investigated the quality of participation in pre-state celebratory life - the agency of women in constructing ways of knowing the world.

The destination of subsequent lengthy excursions into the technical domain of ikat work, was the point at which I could say that ikat process flows over boundaries which art theorists traditionally construct around fine art. The theoretical thrust of the descriptive technical sections came out of the juxtaposition of textile arts as performance, and social knowledge that informs ritual exchanges (as the art of making offerings). By attending closely to the ikat process I was able to draw out specific sequences of ikat that form a connecting passage with the wider sphere of symbolic behaviour.

The significance of this descriptive work lies in the picture it produced of ways in which Iban actors transmit social thinking. It pointed to pathways which women take in this artwork, via various social roles they customarily engaged: as farmers, healers, wives, mothers, singers, dyers, weavers, and others.

Having sketched in the details of the significance of ikat artwork in pre-state lives, I went on to investigate contemporary conditions under which women practice. I

presented evidence that Iban ikat artists increasingly reproduce the ideas of outsiders as cultural brokers. As I had done in the earlier technical sections, I focussed on qualitative aspects of access to materials. In conjunction with this approach, I accented the realm of ideas which underlie the creative development and social use of material resources and technologies.

The principal findings in this section on contemporary practice, as expected, relate to my thesis statement concerning fundamental changes in the relationship of women to their artwork. I refer to a transformation in the primary value of ikat work - in respect to its customary connection with various systems of social knowledge. And, as my thesis statement has indicated, the quality of the change amounts to a loss of agency of women in the making of Iban culture in the 1990s.

I turn to an evaluation of these findings. The question of decision-making emerges as a dominant theme in the thesis - both in relation to pre-state lives and 1990s social practice. Throughout the thesis I have underscored the indications that women customarily worked in varying ways, within and across Iban communities. The evidence is that pre-state artisans operated in a dynamic as opposed to a prescriptive social environment.

Derek Freeman (1981) made this point concerning the social encouragement of creativity; and my findings are wholly consistent with this understanding. Specifically, I have shown that the sequences involved in ikat artwork are both mathematically rigorous, and anarchic in respect to engendering the development of social responsibility in artisans. Discounting the predictable social constraints implicit in any group membership, I have found that the choice-making demands made on pre-state Iban women occurred in the context of individual autonomy.

For example, it can be said that under pre-state social conditions Iban women tended to favour one of two basic approaches to ikat work. The first was essentially a technical approach in which individuals focussed on the careful imitation or renewal of an existing design - a practice which was tantamount to skilful craftwork. The second approach

concerned fewer individuals, those who worked with original images. These were communicated to them through dreams, and acted out with considerably more intuitive skill than pre-meditation on fixed lyrical themes.

Decision-making in respect to creative process and social use, in the final instance, is shaped by economic and political pressures which predominate from time to time. The question of *autonomy* and *agency*, which I attribute to the practice of pre-state Iban women, is directly related to the isolation from group life of household subsistence activities. Again, when considering the impact of social obligations, wherever individuals lived in closer proximity with the community of kin, the issue is contextualized by Freeman's findings regarding the social encouragement of innovation.

This raises the question of *egalitarianism* in pre-state Iban communities, in relation to my study. I emphasize that mine is not a close investigation of relationships within Iban family units - findings which ultimately test the hypothesis of *egalitarianism*. In the absence of these data in the literature, and in the light of the juxtaposition commonly made concerning *equality* and *liberty*, my findings come down on the side of the latter, that is, *choice*. At the same time, I uncover no data (at the macro-level of group life) that question the proposition of equal political and economic rights in pre-state Iban communities.

On the other hand, I do produce historical evidence that neither equality nor choice-making are operative components of Iban group life in the 1990s. I show that with the encroachment of coastal States (courtly regimes), which imposed their authority over local labour, decision-making and motivation in regard to textile work were increasingly affected by outside socializing groups. The advent of the Brooke Raj altered that situation of small group autonomy even more significantly - by reining-in the activities of mobile agriculturalists in Sarawak.

The State Land Code was (and is) an act of law which effectively extinguishes the rights of Iban to practice historic forms of agronomy. It had the critical consequence of squelching the circuitry of economic systems and celebra-

tory patterns. The introduced patterns of land tenure put to ground the historic possibilities which Iban groupings had established as self-sufficient household producers. And, in terms of my thesis, the instrumentality of women in the making of that pre-state culture was critically undermined by capitalist controls over access to land - and by implication, its cultural resources in the shape of rice fertility cult.

The consequences, or impact on the social practice of Iban women in the 1990s, is that individuals depend on the national economy. They do so for formal education, wage labour and commercial practices aligned with new requirements to buy staple foods, clothing and energy resources (ASB 1991:158-169). Related to these historical conditions, is the splintering of personal relationships and cultural patterns in small groupings, through individuals leaving to seek outside work, or staying to raise cash crops. Commercialization of agriculture is marked by private as opposed to individual practice, and as such, Durkheim taught, is directly related to low levels of social-cohesiveness (e.g. Durkheim & Mauss 1963).

To sum up this point, Iban women's ikat practices, which in significant ways informed pre-state cultural behaviour, had its roots in the autonomous agricultural practices of the small group. The erosion of small-group autonomy has had a crucial negative impact on the development of coherence in Iban cultural performance.

In the 1990s, the shared day-to-day experience of long-house audiences is scanty. And, as I have demonstrated, the vacuum that occurs in the transmission of ikat skills and products is currently being exploited by public and private cultural brokers. I refer to evidence that women are alienated from the means of their art practice. They are separated, too, from the products themselves - objects now idealized as an adjunct of tourism policies, and marginalized by their place in the national economic system.

The question of *alienation* was investigated with reference to ways in which handcraft development agencies subsume the artisan, through superintending the ideas contained in objects produced by trainees and competitors.

This raised the problem of the effects of urban agencies on rural lives, and specifically how cultural brokerage circuits back into longhouse life, dictating historical art styles. For example, the form of 'traditional' costumes is directly shaped by outside ideological interests - which I showed also prescribe current uses of Iban textiles.

By way of underscoring the significance of the 1990s production situation, I reiterate that every woman had access to her own hand-made stick loom equipment in pre-state communities. Each member of a grouping was able to grow and/or collect the various plants required to weave and dye cloth. Significantly, only a few items, such as sea salt, *had* to be acquired through trade (notwithstanding individual choices to trade cloths for other items).

To further develop the context in which women produce ikat work in the 1990s, the study showed how the making of ritual cloths involved all females in pre-state households. As children, females developed dexterity and numeracy skills through simple tasks. And, in regard to the dominant theme in my thesis, individuals ultimately acquired varying degrees of social knowledge, pertaining to sequences which constitute ikat design and dye process. It was seen how knowledge passed through the family into which a woman was born and/or married, in the social practice of successive generations.

The fundamental point of this theme of decision-making, is that among those most inspired by textile work, women could attain the highest status accorded to Iban individuals - identical with social responsibility related to spiritual guidance through dreams. Importantly, all women (and frequently men through association), had multiple opportunities to develop choices in regard to ikat work. Through everyday performance involving cloths individuals learned the social significance of ikat. Ritual cloths were never common pieces, but they were omnipresent in day-to-day settings, whether performance was staged in the rice padi or the longhouse.

On the surface, Iban women enjoy a similar relationship to their textile work in the 1990s. They own their personal equipment, purchase their own materials, and choose their

own designs, imitating or sometimes transforming design quality. At first glance, it would also appear that individuals receive knowledge from older family members in accordance with customary cultural patterns of behaviour. I refer to the habit of using or exchanging the products of their labour, for which women claimed a right to (cash) payment, in addition to the social status connected with their achievements.

Yet, the situation is very different in the 1990s to what it was in pre-state Iban communities. Closer examination in the thesis uncovered the political-economic reality that many women in the 1990s are unable to afford the yarns and dye-stuffs. Iban women, generally, are further disadvantaged by the situation that a mere handful of individuals are granted access to silk fibres in the 1990s. Further, those women who do manage to purchase their own yarns and then sell their cloths, are increasingly constrained by the influences of traders and international market trends, in terms of designs, forms and colours.

These findings are consistent with the view that Iban women who are assisted through private and government projects enjoy merely an apparent advantage, through being supplied with higher quality or lower priced materials. Specifically, these individuals commit more directly to external pressures to make commodity items. They work within time frames constructed by others without regard for contingencies such as farm and domestic tasks, and without adequate concern for personal illness, or ritual mourning and related taboos on artwork. I argued that this group of individuals are effectively subsumed as wage labour, within an entrepreneurial scheme grounded in high capital investment.

The up-shot of this argument concerns the recent situation that social status accruing from textile skills is increasingly related to outside public policies. My premise is that these policies are dressed in forms that distance individuals from the process of the work and the means of reproducing that work. In this regard I have focussed on training programs and related achievements within a new variety of craft education - instituted from outside. Much of this schooling aims at economic concerns, and indicates,

I put it, a kind of socialization that is at odds with personal and social conditions which contextualize customary ikat practice.

This implies, very clearly, that attempts to conserve ikat artwork as a form of national cultural heritage are on very shaky grounds. Since, Iban ikat practices arise and are renewed in activities that are not replicable under capitalist relations of production.

A common thread links many studies of craftwork in the context of industrial society, namely, the insistence that hand work cannot compete with factory production. My observation is that craft development agencies have digested this lesson, and as a result they focus on selected high profit niche-markets, comprising consumers who seek 'one-of-a-kind' designs. One frequently hears the argument that serial reproduction provides a means to participate in the cash economy. Yet, choice-making is denied by this 'opportunity'. Further, the impact of fashion merchandizing strategy on rural artisans is such that makers are fundamentally distanced from their work.

For example, I have shown that rural artisans are critically dependent on the creative direction of urban specialists, as well as the consumption patterns of foreign tourists and local elites. Yet, it is precisely the innovative sphere which Iban customarily valued, as the means of developing the highest social standing.

While the serial reproduction of crafts offers a cash income, on the cost side, rural artisans rely on external financial resources to meet the expenses of marketing boutique-style commodities. Furthermore, the weaver's cash rewards compare unfavourably with the hourly wages and more reliable salaried jobs of women in urban situations. In sum, where rural women participate in the mainstream economy via their ikat work, the artisan's social economic position remains marginal. I uncover no evidence of up-ward mobility.

However, I have demonstrated that there is much more at stake in Iban women's lives in the 1990s than the survival of particular forms of cloth - and even specific art practices. This, I feel, is a principal contribution of this thesis to studies of textile art and studies of gender. My

approach to the issue of *cultural survival*, clearly enough, is not an art object-oriented manner, but one grounded in social practice. It is an approach, which in the case of Iban artwork, enables the view that Iban women can survive without their textile arts - but they cannot adapt effectively without active agency in the development of their culture.

It follows that my findings indicate severe conflict in the practice of re-training Iban artisans and transforming elements of customary symbolic significance, in the interests of nationalism and industrial development. Iban ikat arts are being altered in accord with composite cultural patterns. To explain the ramifications, with recourse to metaphor, these contemporary cultural patterns float aimlessly, attaching only sometimes to the experiences of rural Iban women, and then with non-productive sequence when it comes to everyday practice.

To categorize these principal implications in terms of academic specializations, they fit quite comfortably, I suggest, with the objectives of the anthropology of art. Here I use the term to identify my sense of the social necessity of art (e.g. Fischer 1963). But more specifically, I refer to the anthropology of art as the investigation of ways in which the practice of art theory connects with the development of individuals and social groupings (e.g. Read 1967, Graburn 1976).

Since my subject concerns Iban women and social practice in pre-state societies, this calls for further specificity in regard to the relationship of art and sex and gender. I especially refer to the ill-founded reluctance within mainstream Western art theory to acknowledge the connection of artwork practised by indigenous individuals and the aesthetic transmission of social knowledge.

Many would accept the view that the same refusal to take women's art seriously, connects with the question of the cultural disenfranchisement of women in classical societies. I have no problem with this notion, indeed my findings lend weight to the proposition. Yet, I want to make very clear that my findings concerning the loss of agency of Iban women in the 1990s, oppose the notion of inherent powerlessness in

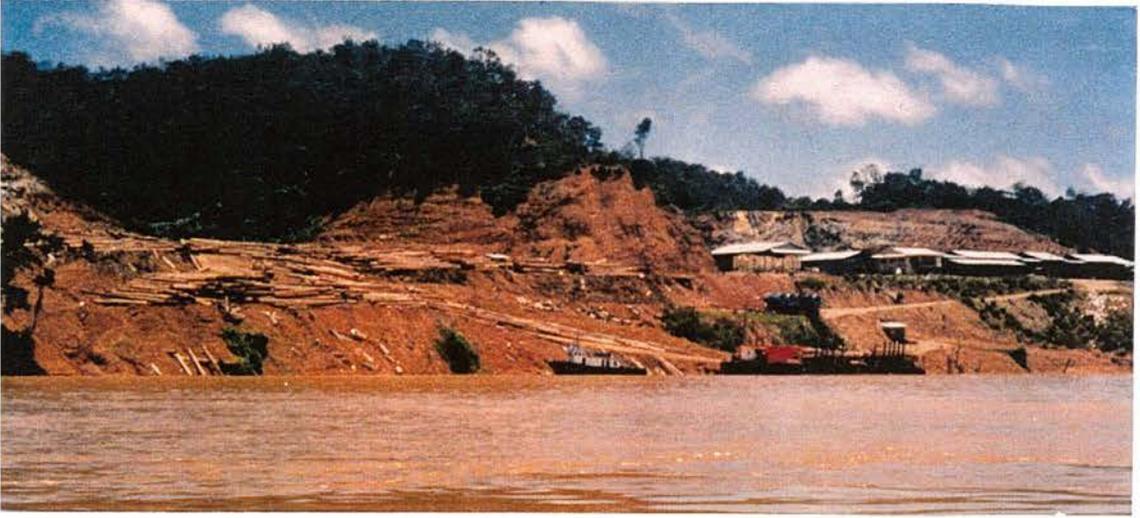
Iban women. Any assumption of victimization would amount to a very narrow interpretation of my findings - indeed, would violate the ethnographic data.

It is worth repeating that I approached the issue of women's agency in pre-state Iban culture by evaluating connections between the lives of Iban women in the 1990s, and capitalist relations of production. And I reiterate, in my use of the term *disenfranchisement*, I refer to historical consequences. The concept identifies specific loss of access to the means by which Iban women customarily reproduced their artwork, and, by direct association, symbolic systems in pre-state communities.

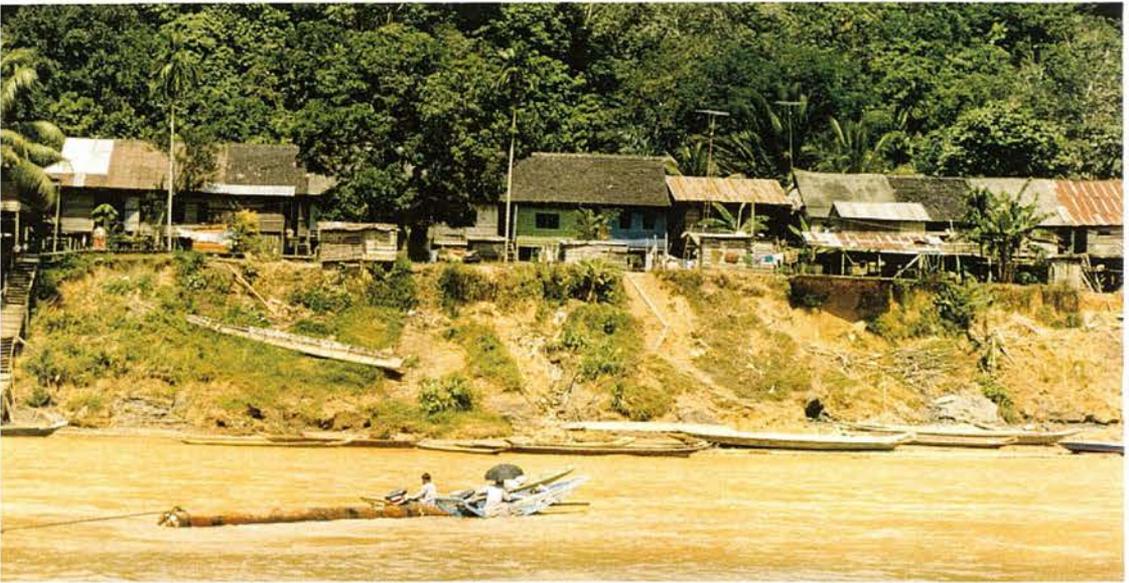
I end with the observation that the affirmative quality of my thesis connects with its anthropological approach, and the perspective of art as social practice. Importantly, this study provides new field data which are replicable as a conceptual and empirical tool for evaluating cross-cultural experiences of artisans. In this way it contributes a critical approach to assessing current literature on textile arts in S.E. Asia which tends to be overwhelmingly product focussed, as well as providing a field approach for future work in this area. Such studies generate the basis of a strong case concerning the social necessity of art. They do so by building the empirical basis by which cultural analysts can re-evaluate assumptions concerning indigenous artwork. With particular respect to indigenous women, similar studies serve to highlight the significance of intellectual and aesthetic systems which are both implicit in, and renewed through, the practice of art.

APPENDIX

COLOUR PLATES



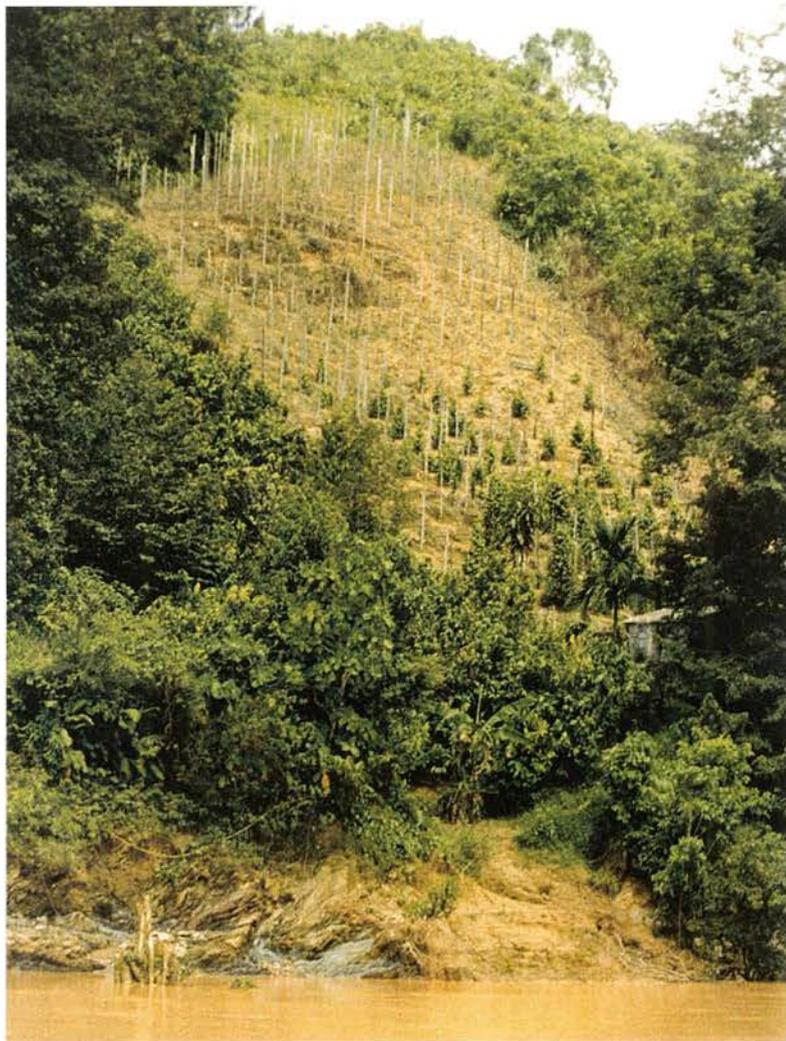
1. Logging camp, Baleh River, 1991.



2. Iban in perau' moving logs near longhouse, Baleh River.



3. Cargo boat passes Iban speed boat moving a log boom on Baleh, shores of which reveal expanse of secondary growth in this region.



4. Iban farm house (umai) and terraced pepper garden
Baleh River.



5. Above. Iban longhouse, Baleh River.

6. Below. Hillside swidden fields, Baleh River.





7.Above. Kapit town, Rejang River, 1991.

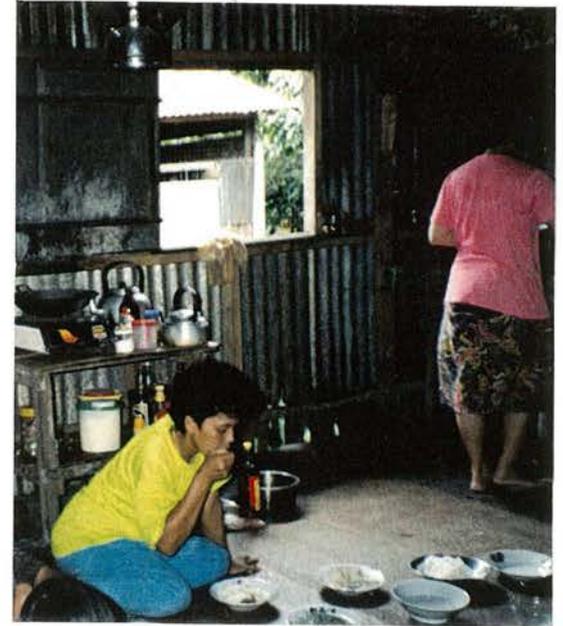
9.Below. Shophouses on the main plaza, Kapit.



8.Above. Passenger express and cargo boats at one of Kapit's three jetties built to cope with the Rejang River at low water in August.

10.Below. Morning market, Kapit.





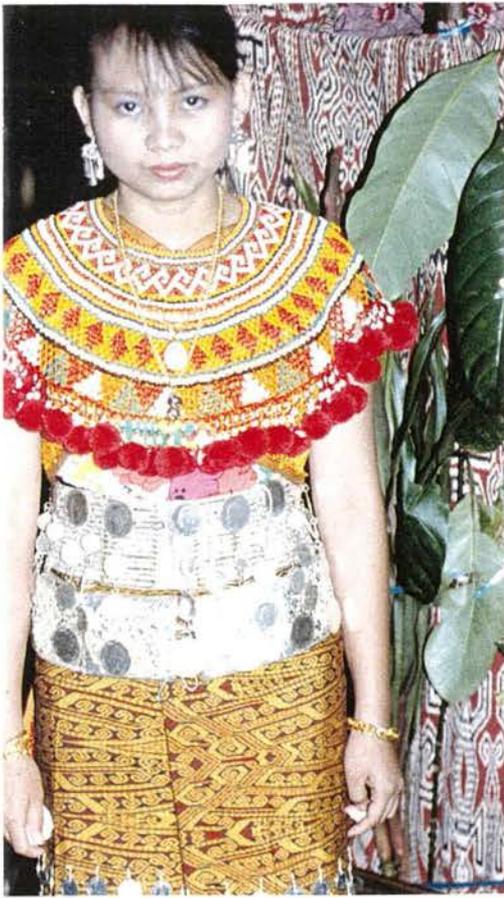
11.Top left. Lowset Iban longhouse, built in 1980s, Baleh River.

12.Top right. Artisan weaving on back-strap loom (*tumpoh*) in the public gallery (*ruai*) of her longhouse, Baleh R.

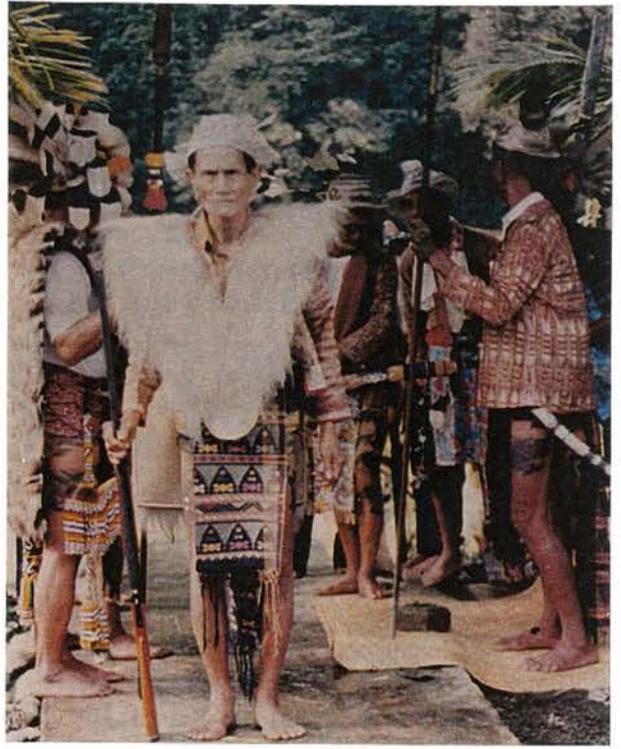
13.Left. A longhouse kitchen, 1991, with neon light, electric fridge, gas cooking plate and aluminum sink with pumped tap water in back area.

14.Right. Dining in an Iban kitchen. Note oil lantern, gas plate and woman cooking at a fire hearth beyond view.

Photo credit: Shane Chalmers



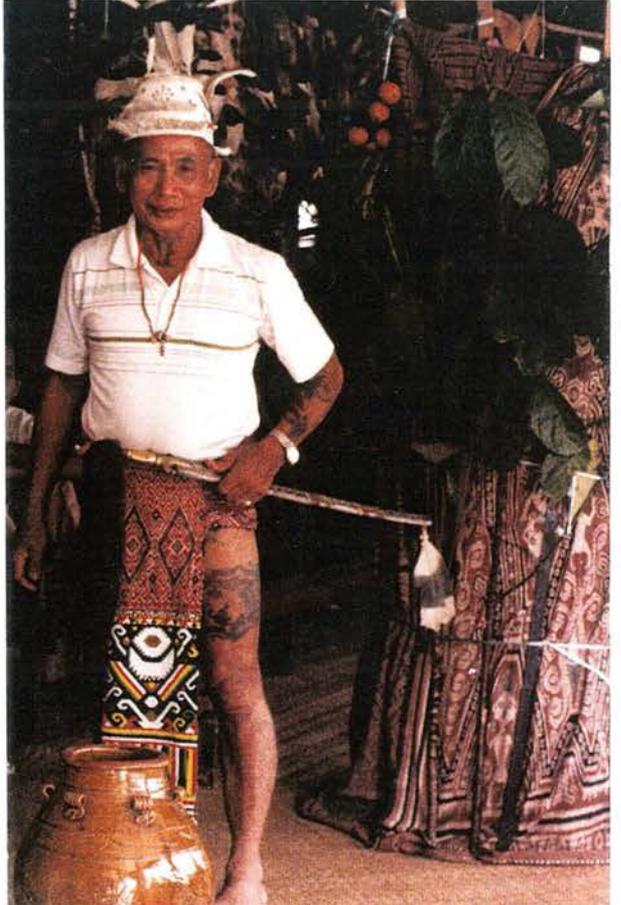
15.Above. Teenaged girl in ceremonial costume beside shrine (*ranyai*) wrapped with ikat cloths (*pua' kumbu'*).

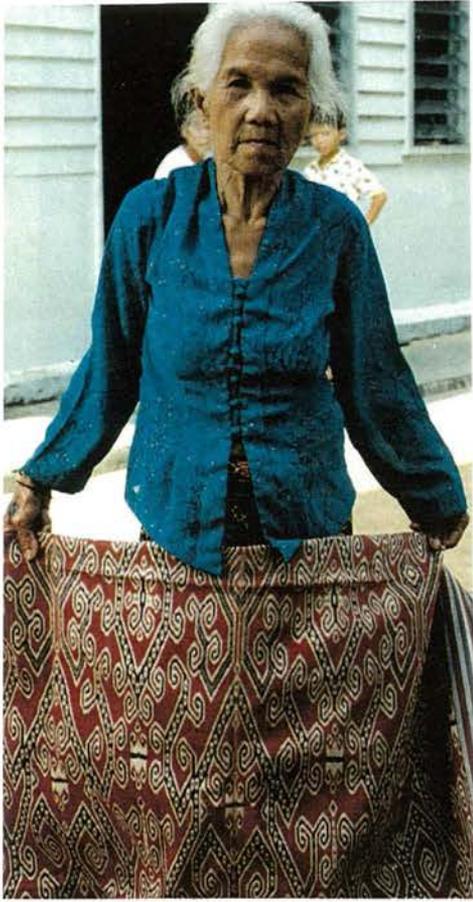


16.Above. Iban bards (*lemambang*) in ceremonial attire for Gawai Kenyalang festival in 1991, Baleh R.

17.Below. Iban bard (*lemambang*) in ikat jacket (*baju burong*) and loin cloth (*sirat*) with *sungkit* patterning.

18.Below. Iban in fine ceremonial loin cloth (*sirat*) with beaded end (*kela-pong*); Note shrine (*ranyai*) with *pua' kumbu'* and metal bar.





19. Left. An Iban elder displays her most recently completed ikat textile.

20. Below. The woman's hands reveal tattoo markings, a customary Iban sign of an accomplished textile artist.



21. Left. Old & new pua' kumbu' air after use at Baleh festival (*gawai*).

22. Right. Binding warps on an ikat frame (*tangga'ubong*) & ikat skirt example (*teladan*).





23. Above. *Lebur api*, an heirloom example of a *sungkit* cloth from Baleh used to ritually receive enemy trophy heads (*antu pala*).

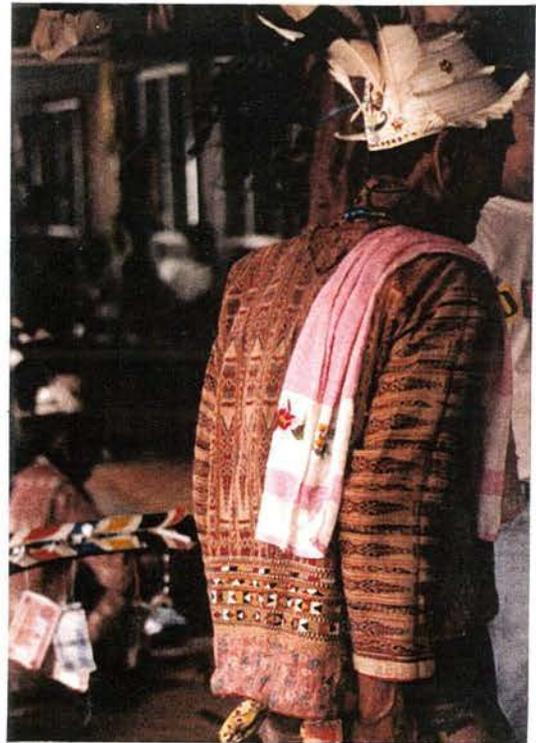
LaiLai, private collection, Kapit.

25. Below. Macro of 23 above. Python (*sawa'leku*) & sleeping cat below (*mayau tindok*) in supplementary brocade technique of warp wrapping (*sungkit*).



24. Above. Spirit figures (*antu*) in main design (*buah pua'*) of pl.23 in *sungkit* brocade, supplementary to warp faced weave of ground cloth.

26. Below. Ceremonial jacket with ikat bands of bird motifs (*baju burong*) features back panel in *sungkit*.

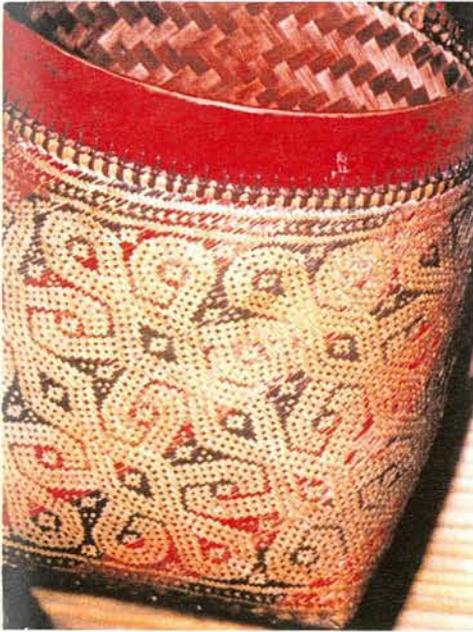


27. Below. Macro of panel in 26 above shows slit tapestry form of *sungkit* technique (cf. brocade in 24, 25).

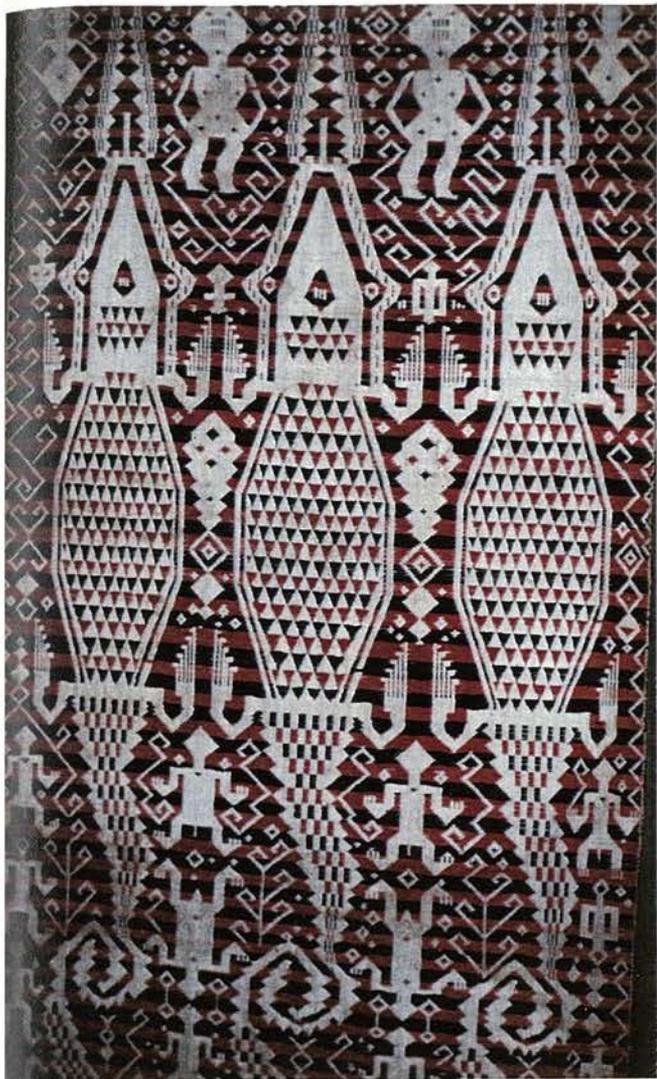


28.Top Right. Fine lace-like ikat designwork on this skirt (*kain kebat*) illustrates the white highlight effect of tendrils within a shadowy red/black ground.

29.Below. Iban basket with neutral patterning on red/black ground of float weave, features tendril-like curves and dots - cf. similar effects in ikat (28) & *pilih* (30) designwork.



30.Bottom
Kain pilih. Note use of banding of red/black float threads forms shadowy ground for white (non- float) pattern areas.



31. Above. *Kain pilih* with crocodile motif (*baya*).

33. Below. 'Reaching giants', float weave motifwork on a Saribas Iban mat, cf. ikat & *pilih* motif work (pl. 32, 34).



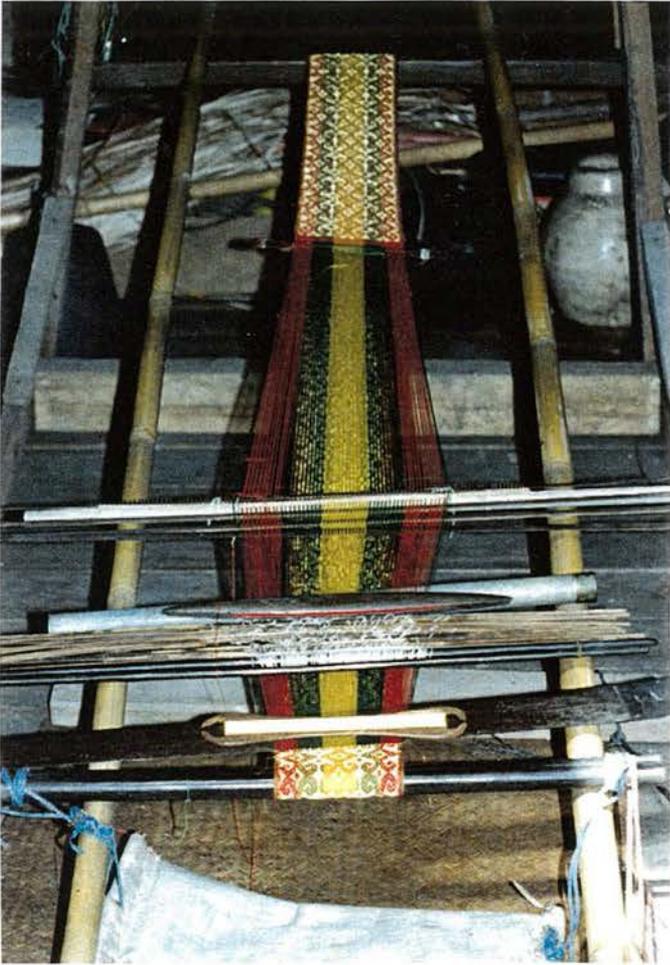
Above.
(b) reverse

and right:
(a) side Iban
feature.

32. (a & b) Above. Macro view of *pilih*, shows positive/negative effect

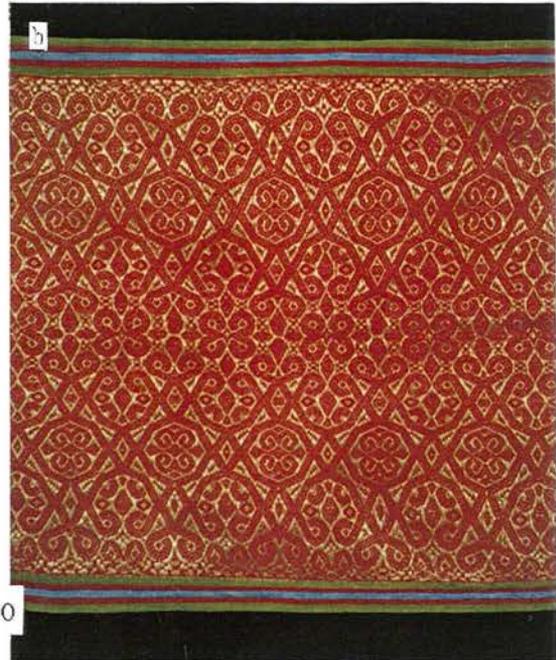
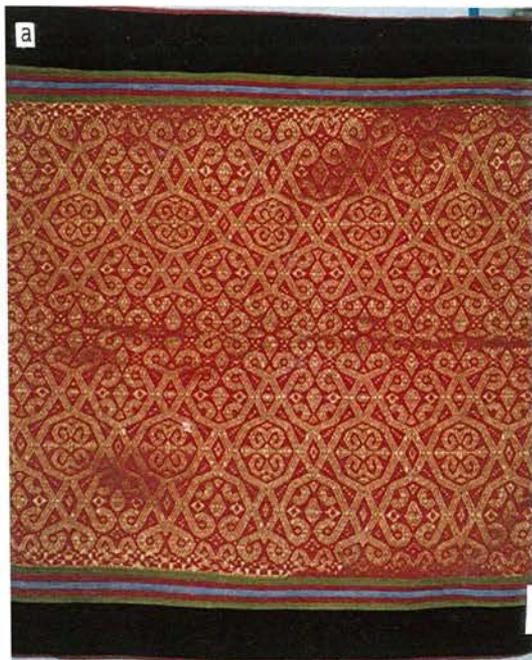
34. Below. Ikat warp on loom to be woven into a small single panel *pua'* features mirror image of 2 warriors.



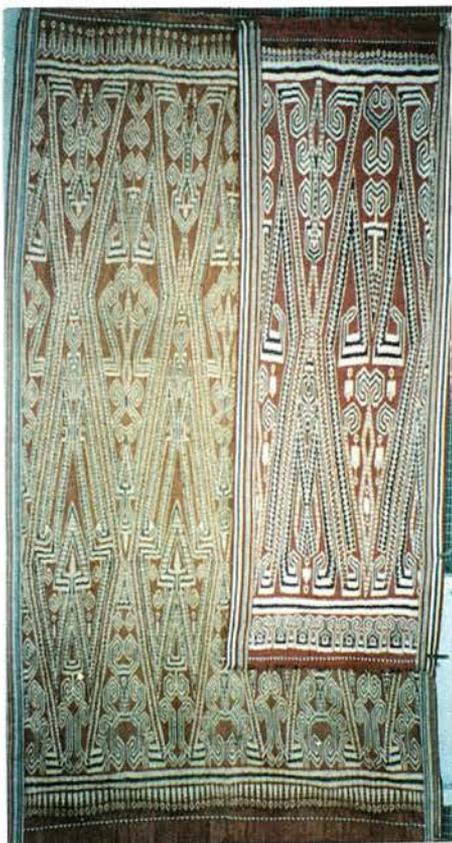


35. Above. Karap weaving on an Iban backstrap loom, Saratok, shows set of lease sticks threaded to facilitate lifting of different warp combinations for supplementary designwork.

37-38 Below. Iban ceremonial skirt (*Kain karap*) shows positive/negative pattern: a. favoured side, b. reverse side.



36. Graph paper shows minimum threading sequence for karap and effect of reversing the order for repetitive blocks of pattern. Iban create similar guides in bamboo float weave.



39.Above. Small 1-panel pua' with older 2-panel cloth which served as example (teladan) for ikat interpretation.

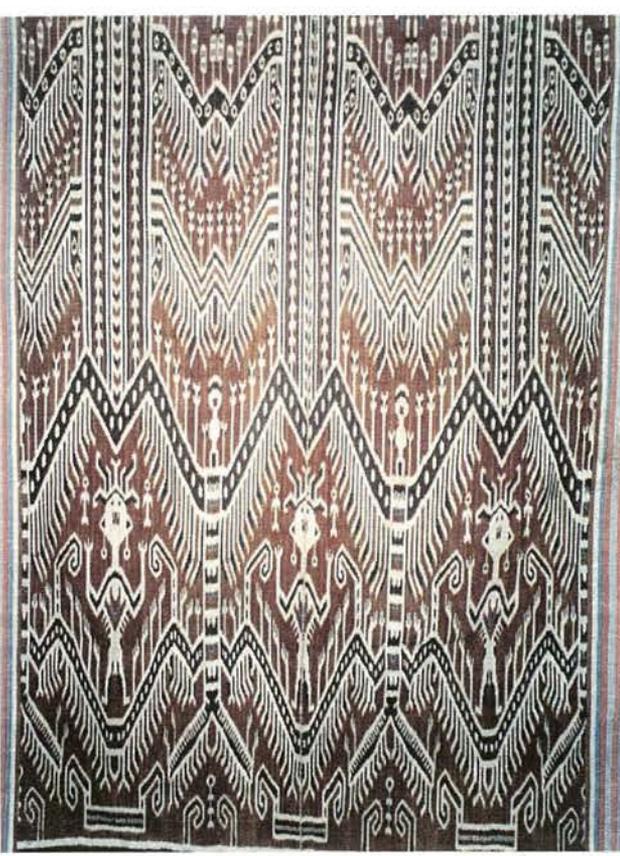
41.Below. One of two panels of a Baleh pua' kumbu', tied as a vertical 3-fold repeat (note 3 half-figures).



40.Above. Ceremonial jacket (baju burong), with bands of ikat & pin stripes. Saribas District.

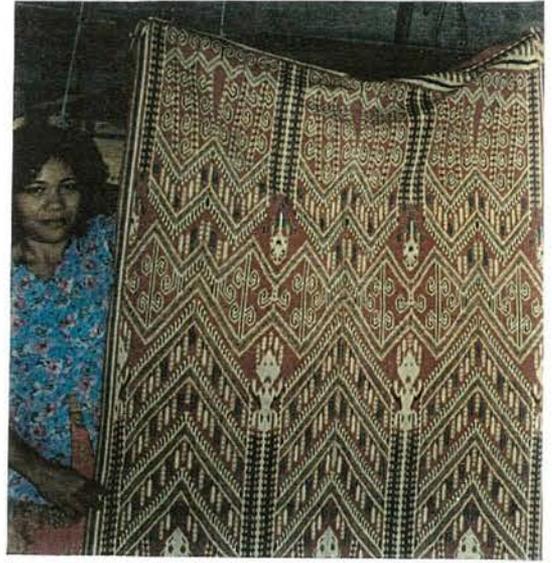
42(a & b). Below right. New & old cloths from Majau River, show ikat subtle interpretation.





43. Above. *Pua' kumbu'*, Majau River. This 2-panel cloth illustrates a pattern bound as a 3-fold repeat. 1 panel has 1 1/2 Iban figures which become 3 when joined at centre.

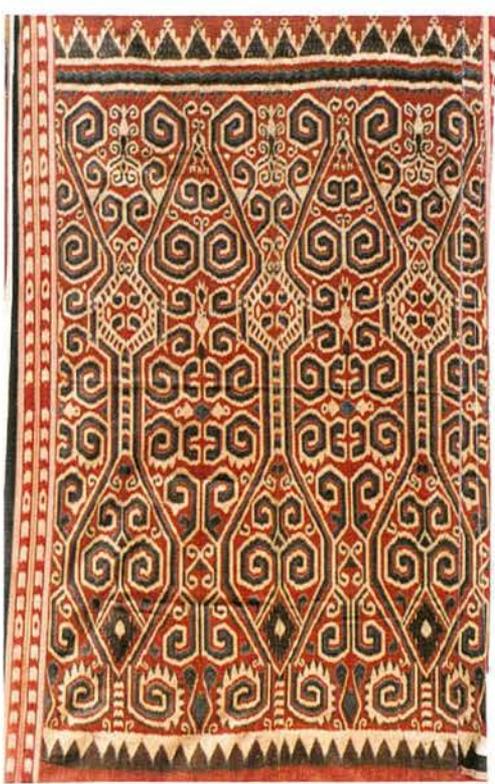
45. Below. Baleh example of 'grotesque realism' and vertical mirror imagery.



44. Above. *Pua' kumbu'*, Kapit District. Note friendly faces compared to older version of 'grotesque realism' below.

46. Below. *Pua' kumbu'*, Kapit District in Sarawak Museum. Note the subtle asymmetrical composition (top/bottom).





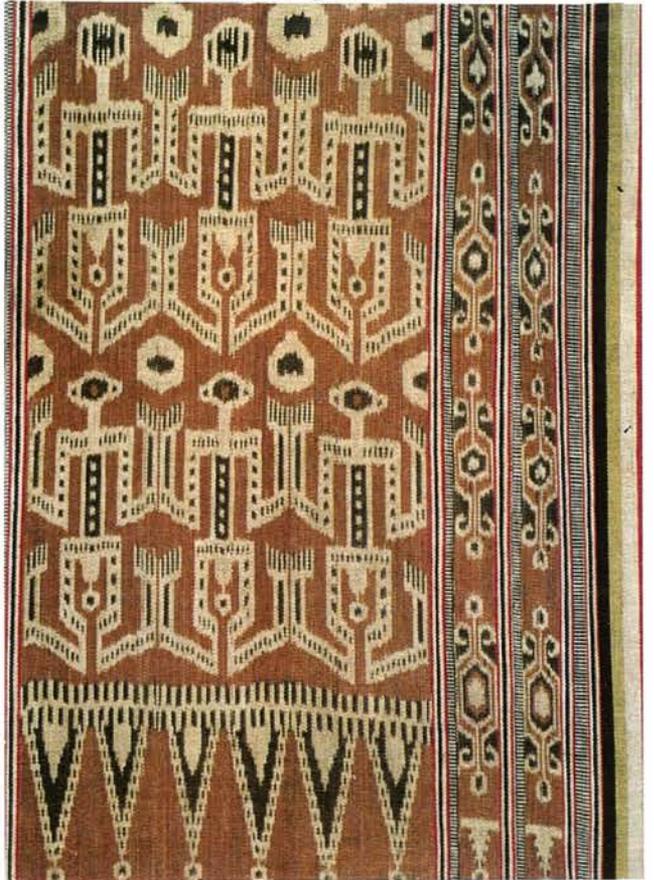
47. Above. Pua' kumbu', Saratok region. Sarawak Museum. Note the undulating or gestalt like effect in design as eye moves from 3 lozenge shapes (bottom half) up to 2 shield-like shapes between these.

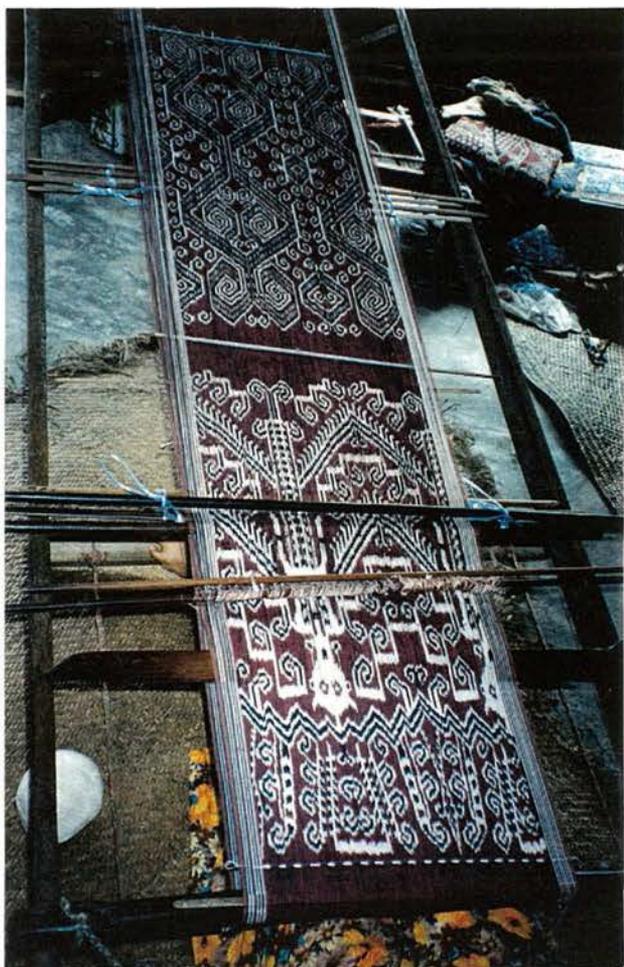
49. Below (a & b). Saribas Pua' kumbu' example of the 'classical' design work in which deities appear as small abstract figures in contrast to bold depiction in Baleh cloths.



48. Above. 'Classical' ikat designwork on pua' kumbu', Saribas District.

50. Below. Iban man's ceremonial shawl, dandong. M. Tan collection. Main design (buah pua') shows 2 of 5 rows of Iban warriors with enemy trophy heads; ikat borders (2 anak) - shields (terebai); and horizontal kayu' counters or millipedes (kembai) fencing off end border of bamboo shoots, pemuchok tubu'.





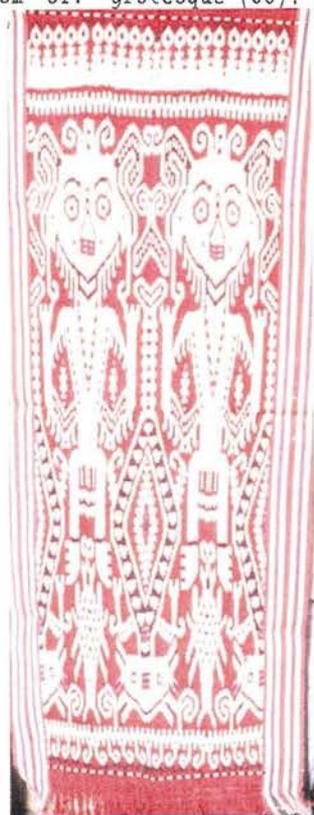
51.Above. Ikat warp tube tied with 2 different designs to produce total of 4 small pua'. Note 3-fold configuration of design. Baleh.

53.Below. 'Grotesque realism'. Warp ikat design tied in 4-fold configuration. Baleh.



52.Above. Dyed warp with 2 ikat borders (anak) prior to assembling loom and to adding pin stripes (ara).

54.Below. Small commercial pua', Kapit, with consumer friendly faces ('heroic realism' cf. 'grotesque' (53).

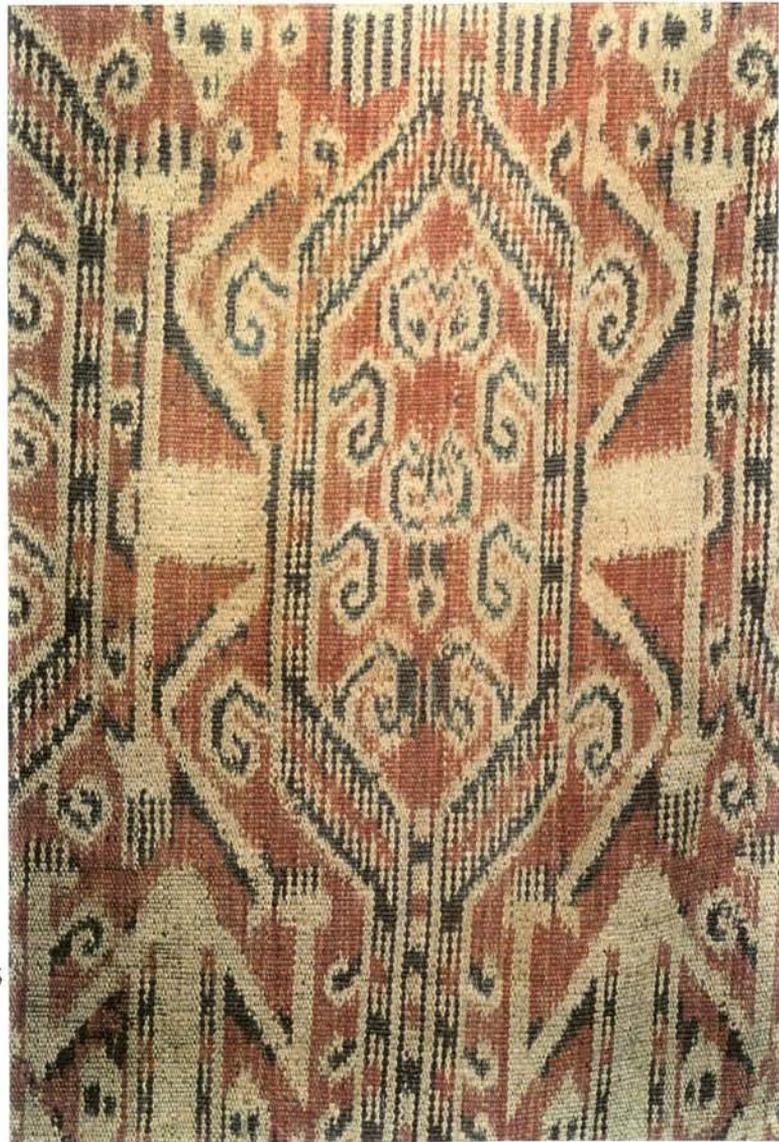
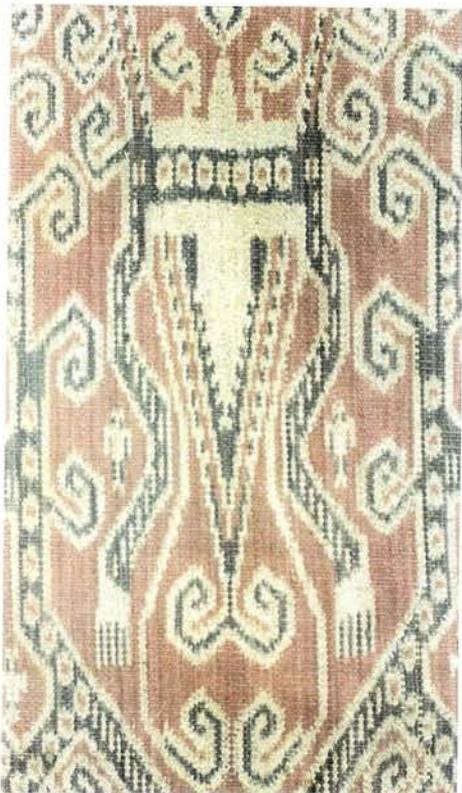


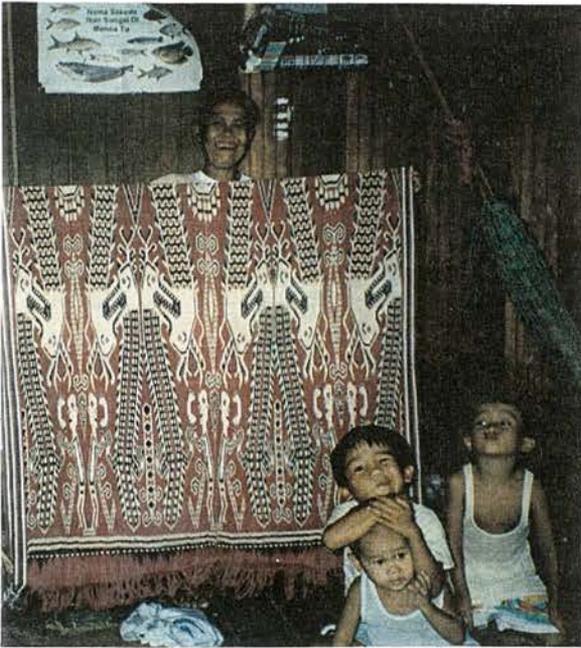


55.Top left. *Pua' bali kelikut* from 2nd Div. M. Tan collection. Design said to be attempted only by an accomplished textile artisan.

56.Below. Headless torso (*bukang*), is an example of a motif which is forbidden (*mali*) for all but most accomplished ikat artisans.

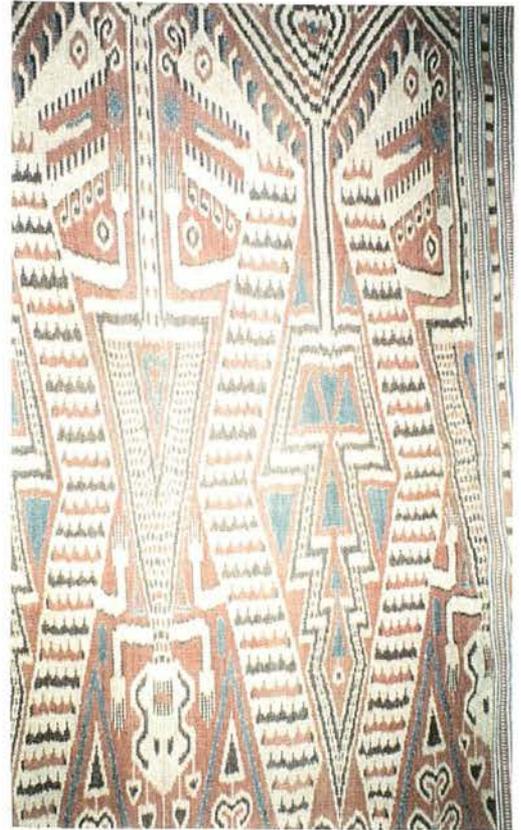
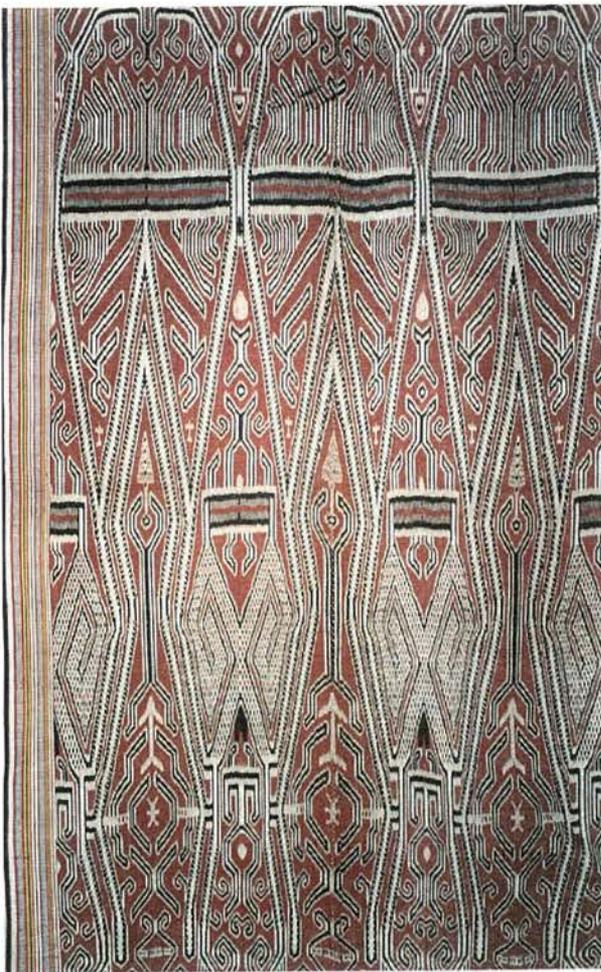
57.Below. *Jugah Bedayong*. *Baleh* motif said to be dangerous to tie for fear of sickness.





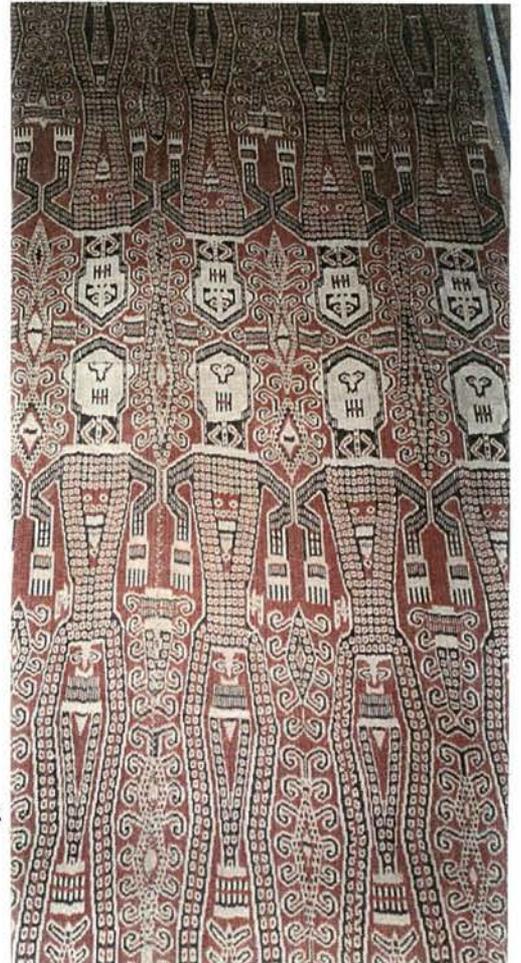
58. Above. Pua' with serpents (*nabau*),
Baleh

60. Below. Pua' with 3-fold configura-
tion giving undulating effect, Majau.



59. Above. Serpent deity (*nabau*)
with offering of food. Note 3-
fold effect (zigzag/lozenge).
Kain River.

61. Below. Pua', Sut River. Note
how top & bottom halves differ.

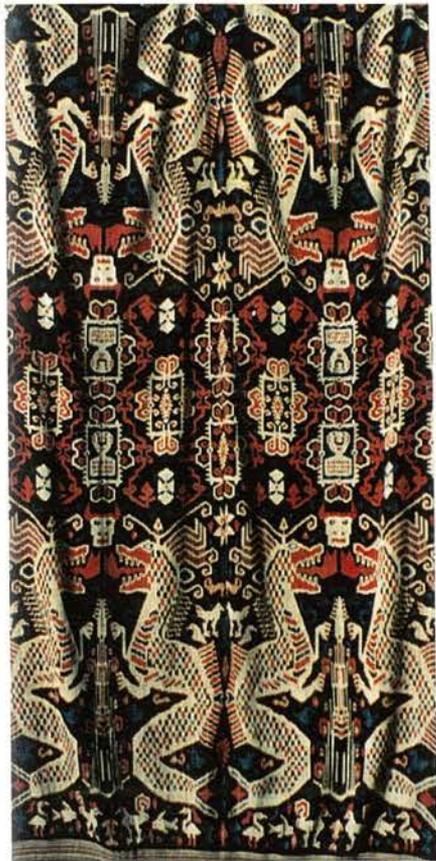




62.Above. Pua', Kanowit. Sarawak Museum. Helicopters, post World War II inspiration.



63.Above. Pua' kumbu', Sarawak Museum. Blur at centre - sign that warp was folded vertically and horizontally in this case.



64.Above. Sumba - warp ikat textile features indigo ground. Private collection, M. Wronska-Friend

65.Below. Pua' kumbu', 2nd Div. M.Tan collection. Note outer yellow border, said to be sign of accomplished artisan. Also, 'paper-doll' fold configuration.



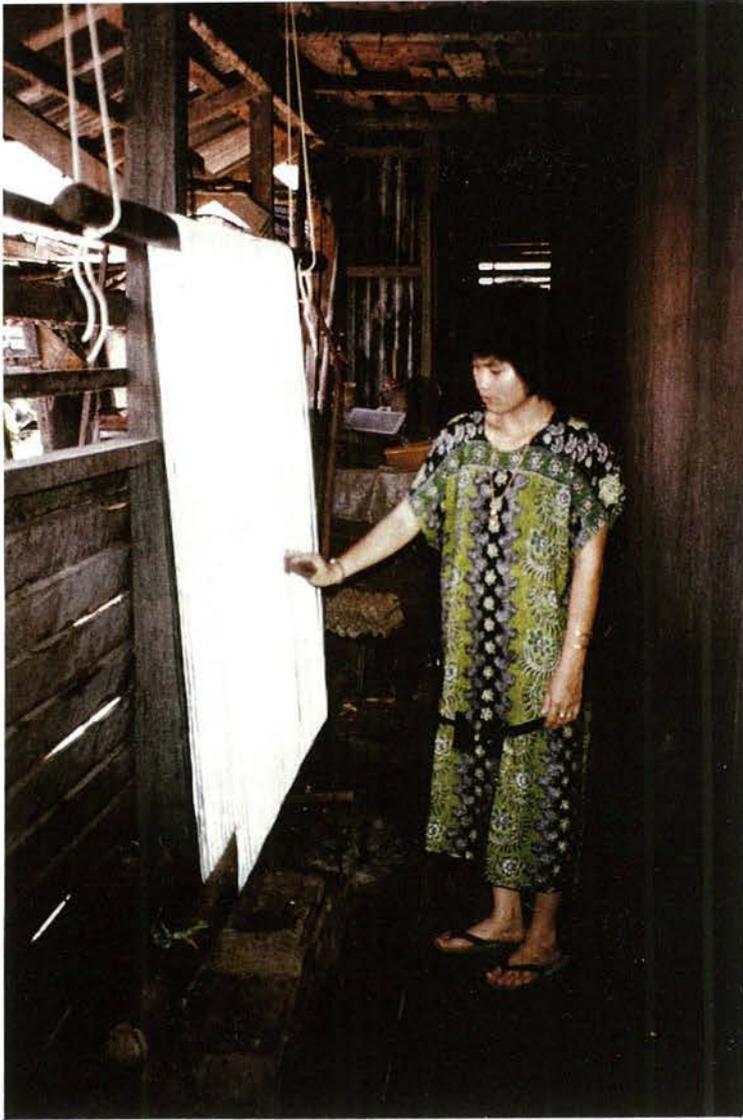


66.Above. A Saratok rendition of buah tangga' Beji
67.Below. Iban working at her ikat frame in the public
gallery (ruai) at a Baleh longhouse.

68.Top Rt. Small pua',
tangga' Beji Baleh exam-
ple (60 kayu') in tech-
nical discussion.

69.Centre. Cloth above
folded vertically twice
reveals min.panel tied.
70.Bottom. Cloth folded
to reveal only focal
motifs. Note bindings
that mark tendrils'
horizon line (jerit 4).





71. Left. Baleh, brushing starched cotton warp.

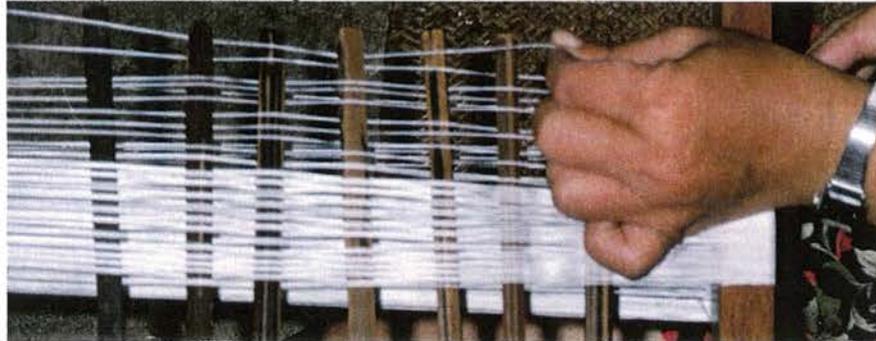


72. Top right. Winding a warp onto loom sticks supported on a wooden frame. Man winds cotton into balls from skein winder. Baleh R.

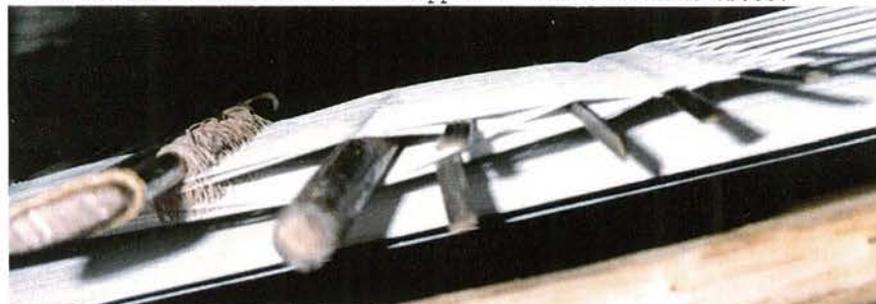


73. Bottom right. Iban elder demonstrates spinning, Kain River.

74. Warping sequence for ikat textile, Baleh. Note, 1st 2 *lidi* secure plain weave, top 5 secure triplet (*kayu'*) sequence.



76. Weaving end, to draw top 5 sticks forward 2 *lidi* inserted between shed stick & 1st stick tipped to form 4-section cross.



77. The 2 *lidi* drawn forward between tipped sword & shed stick recreates tiny empty shed for 1st *lidi* with triplet sequence.



75. Making heddles (*karap*) in order to weave end panel.



78. To change from B shed held open by shed stick, to A shed, weaver pulls bottom threads to top with heddle stick.





79. As artisan begins to reorder warps on second side of tube, she picks off outside and central triplets, dropping them onto plastic tie held by toes.

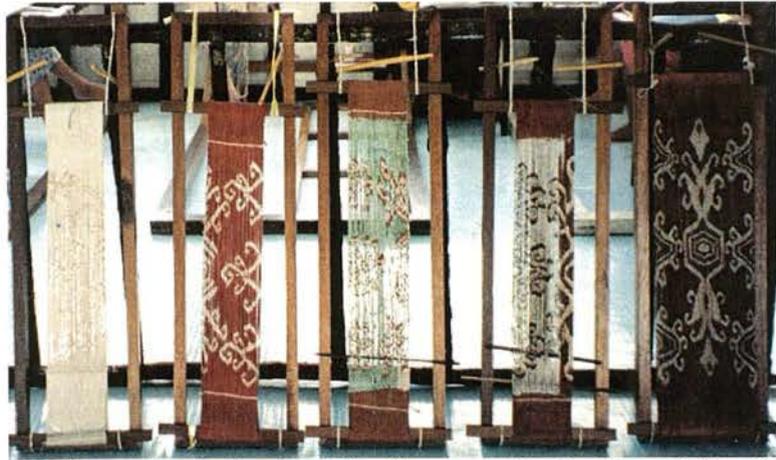


80. Reordering the last few warps prior to folding end panels.

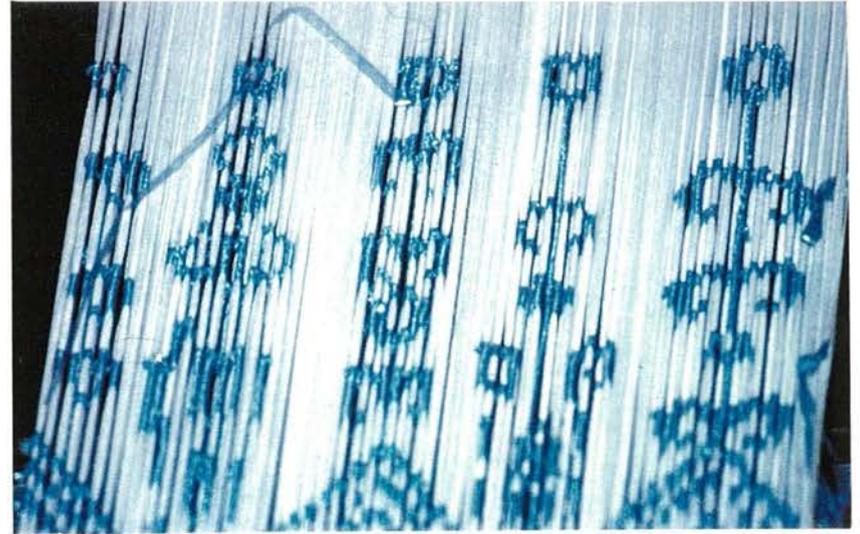
81. Below. Folded warp tube on tying frame. (*tangga' ubong*).



82. Rigid *lidi* replace plastic ties securing reordered warp (i.e. *kayu'* or ikat bundles) on ikat frame.



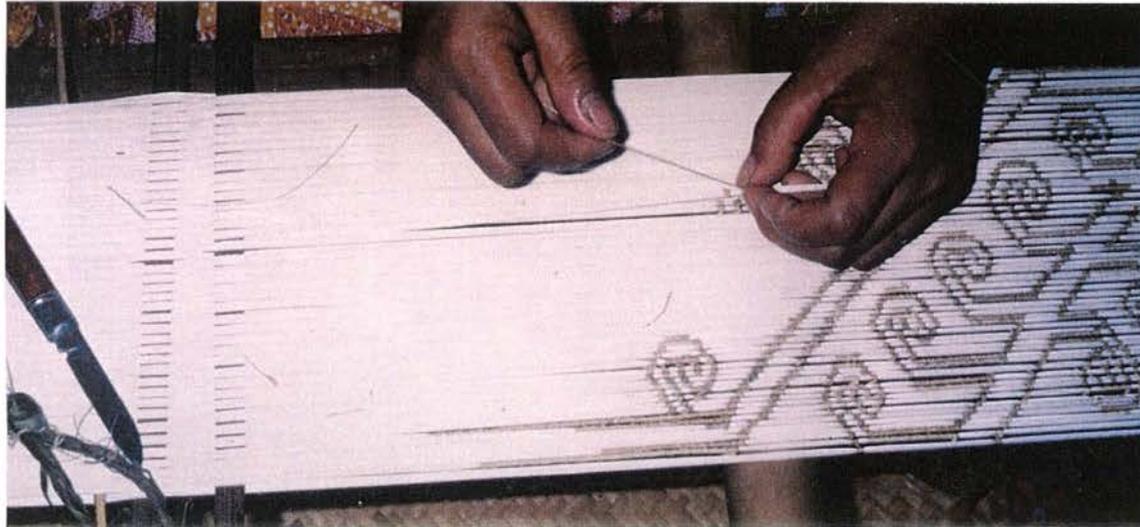
83.Above. Ikat display, Kraftangan school. From left: 1st bindings (*kebat*); result of 1st dye bath; 2nd binding (*mampul*) protects red, also removed some bindings to expose white for 2 shades of 2nd dye; with & without bindings after 2nd dye bath; finally, ikat warp unfolded, ready to weave.



84.Above. Ikat pattern as seen in blue plastic bindings.
86.Below. Ikat pattern above (84) transforms as opposite or 'negative' print in final cloth form.



85.Below. Binding ikat design with *lemba'* fibre.





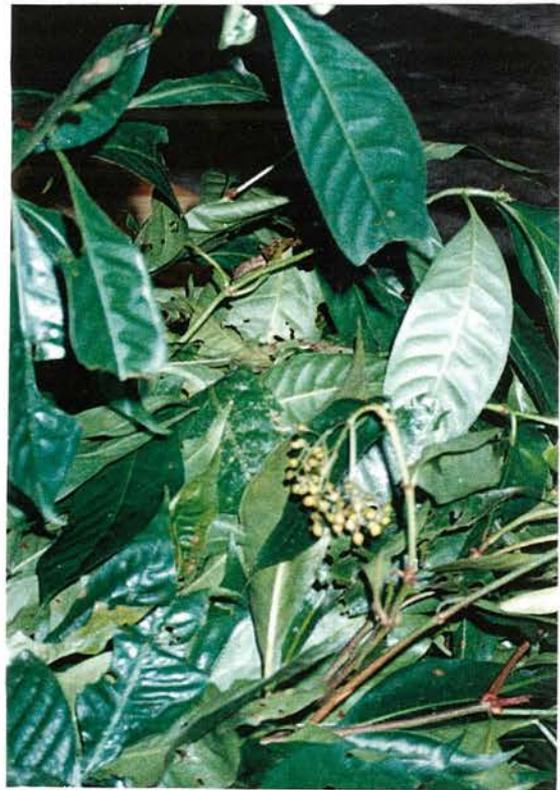
87. Above Weft threads in *enkerebai* dye bath.

88. Right. Dyeing with *enkerebai* and Dylon - Baleh region.

89. Below. Dye ingredients (from top): sirih leaves, lime paste from snail shells (*kapu'*), sea salt, tin of dye powder (red), dried gambier leaves (*enkelait*) and *enkerebai* leaves.



90. Below. *Engkerebai* leaves.





91.Above. Ikat warp in indigo dye.

92.Below. Dyed warp for pua' kumbu' and shorter one bound in half for ikat borders (anak).



93.Above. Close up of knots and mampul bindings on and off red ground after 2nd dye bath.

94.Below. Cutting knots (ngetas) to remove bindings from ikat warp.





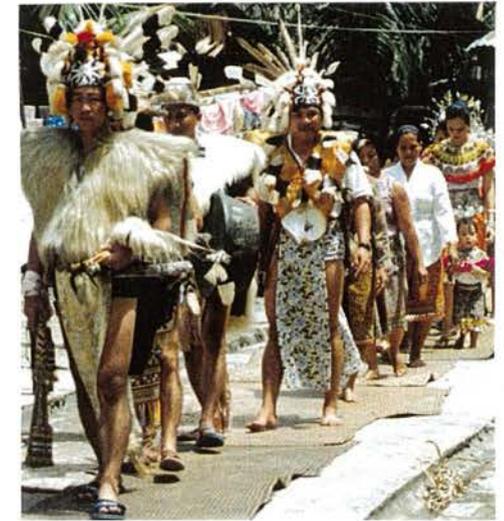
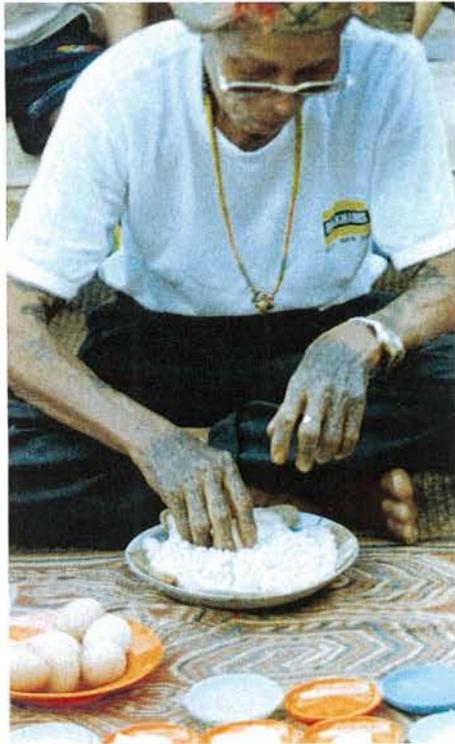
95.Above. I help to attach *lidi* with butterfly stitch to secure warp threads at appropriate width, prior to weaving.



96.Left. Applying final row of twining or herring bone stitch (*sema-lau*) to ikat cloth.

97. *Pua'*, 2nd Div. M. Tan collection. Moon's cloth (*buah bulan*) with white outside border - sign of accomplished artisan. But note: repetitive strands of solid red where an ikat bundle was cut when bindings removed. Slippage (*rang*) evident in horizontal bands .





98. Above. Tattooed 'warrior' makes offering (*piring*).
 99. Top centre. Waving cock (*biau*) & saying blessing.
 100. Top right. Women who prepare ingredients for offerings in opening procession for gawai, Baleh.
 101. Below. Small plates set out on ritual ikat cloths ready to make 3-fold offerings (*miring*) at Gawai Kenyalang, Baleh 1991.
 102. Opening procession (*niti daun*), Baleh G. Kenyalang

103.Right. Constructing a ritual shrine (*ranyai*) at Gawai Kenyalang, Baleh, 1991.



104.Left. Trio of bards (*lemambang*) sing the *timang* as they encircle shrines (*ranyai*) under the protective canopy of ritual ikat cloths.



105.Right. Iban maidens offer *tuak* to warriors during *ngerandang*. Note cotton print leading from inner *bilik* to shrine in public gallery (*ruai*).





106.Above. Kenyalang pole,



107.Above. Host G.Kenyalang

108. Carved Kenyalang with offering plate (*piring*), gifts of cigarettes and small *pua'* prior to *Gawai Kenyalang*.



109.Right. Pig awaits sacrifice under canopy (*pua' kumbu'*).



110.Below. Women mocking *lemambang* provide comic relief, offsets tension following days of serious ritual exchange at *Gawai Kenyalang*, Baleh 1991. At this same time an artisan is weaving a ritual belt at the wooden frame in background.





111.Above. Elder sounds gong (tawak) to announce start of ritual ceremony.

113.Below. Woman and grandson await the announcement of their new names under the protective cover of a pua' kumbu'



112.Above. Woman & grandson take seat on gong next to banana bole shrine as manang performs healing rites.

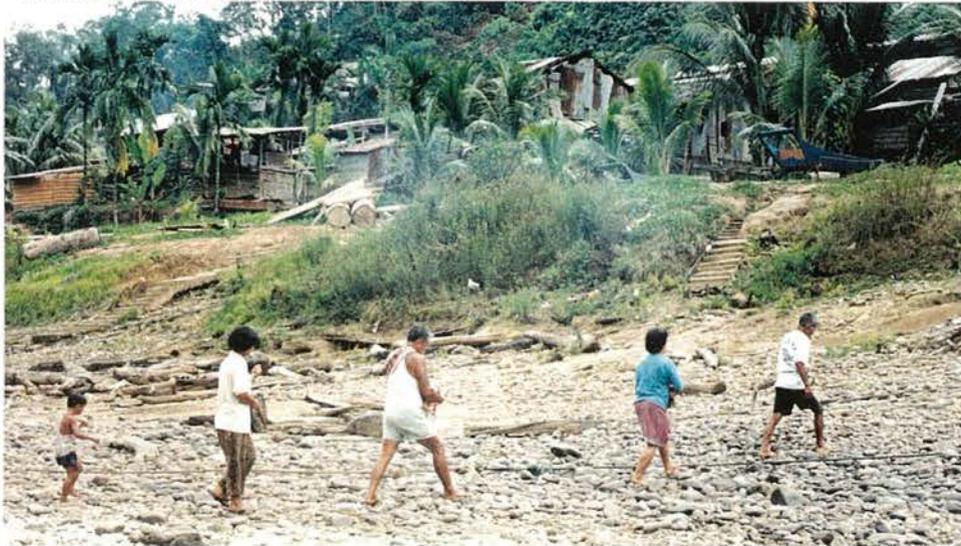
114.Below. Cock pecks rice seeds to confirm the choice of new names chosen to offset ill effects of a dream.





115.Above. Elder sacrifices cock as babies given ritual bath, Baleh River.

117.Below. Procession: participants in baby's ritual bath ceremony return from river to the sound of gongs.



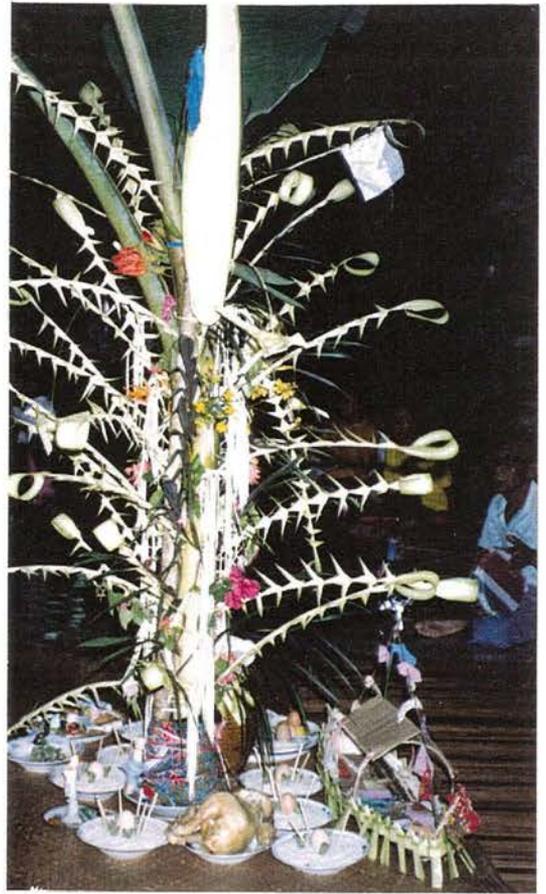
116.Above. Iban wedding party travels up the Rejang by longboat under a protective canopy of pua' kumbu', flying banners (now commonly a Malaysian flag) and sounding gongs to offset the occurrence of any ill omens.

118.Below. Iban trader from Rejang river offers ceremonial belts in exchange for pua' kumbu' in a Baleh longhouse.

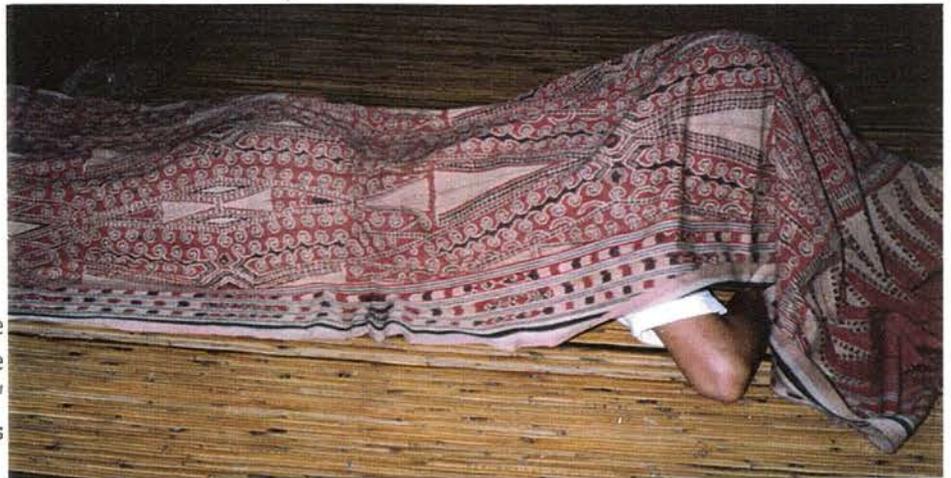




119.Above. Iban *manang* in trance on swing during healing ceremony. Layar River.



120.Top right. Elaborately decorated banana bole shrine with miniature boat and ritual offerings for healing ceremony, Layar.



121.Right. One of three individuals told to lie prostrate under *pua' kumbu'* as *manang* swings into trance (above).

122.Right bottom. Iban props are replaced with Malay (e.g. clothing, music and prayers), in proceedings of this Iban healing ceremony. Saribas-Layar district.



Photo credits
Petr Chalmers

23. Top right. Iban
longhouse, Sri Aman
division.



24. Right. Iban bards
in formal 'ceremonial'
dress - white collar &
tie, grey flannel pants
and more elaborate hat,
Gawai Antu, Saratok,
1991.



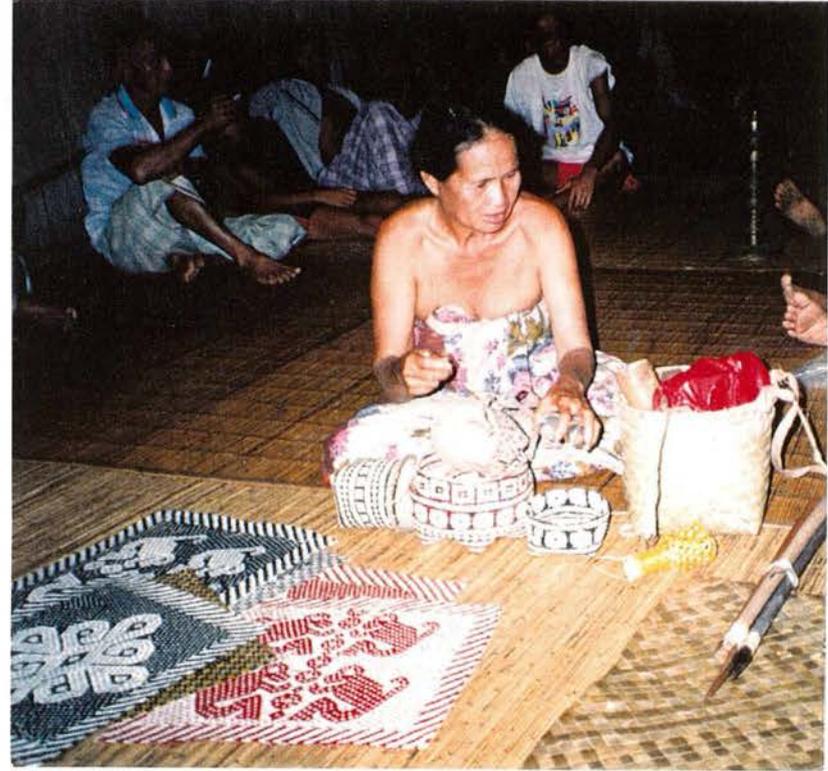
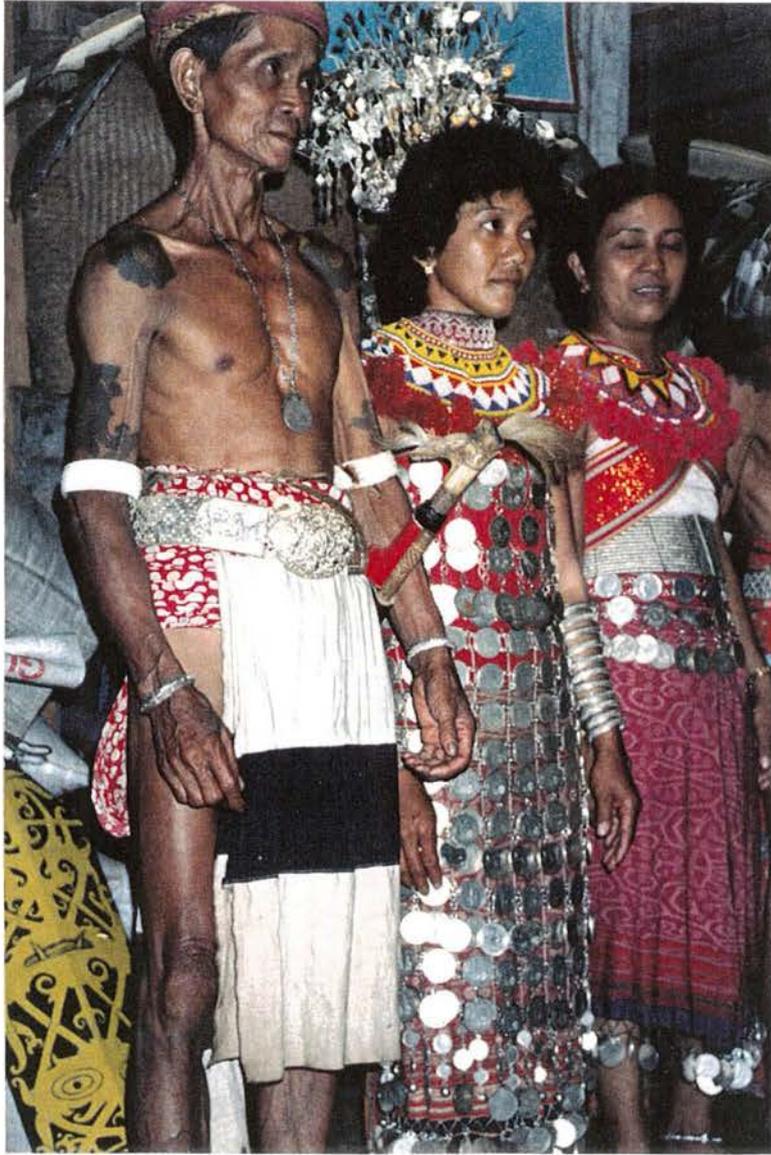
125. Left. Iban maidens
- as ideal of Kumang,
display a glitter of
gold and silver in
ceremonial procession
during Gawai Antu.
There was only 1 skirt
in sungkit amongst over
200 kain karap. and Right



126. Iban leading ceremonial procession at Gawai Antu.



127. The glitter of metallic threads in kain karap dominate the subtle shadowy colouring of an ikat skirt. Also, note kain karap in non-customary blue. Saratok.



128.Above. Iban woman sets out handcrafted souvenirs to sell to tourists (e.g. white shirt behind) prior to dance performance at tourist venue, Skrang River.

129.Left. Iban dance performers pose for tourist cameras - Longhouse, Skrang River.

130. Right. Kraftangan students in Malay-style uniform learning to make Iban ikat cloth.



131. Below. Kraftangan students experiment with pastel shades for ikat textiles tied with customary Iban designs.



132. Right. Kraftangan student cuts bindings from ikat warp.



133. Bottom right. Student warp with customary Iban designwork but altered Iban aesthetics - colouring it with a dark green ground and red tendrils.



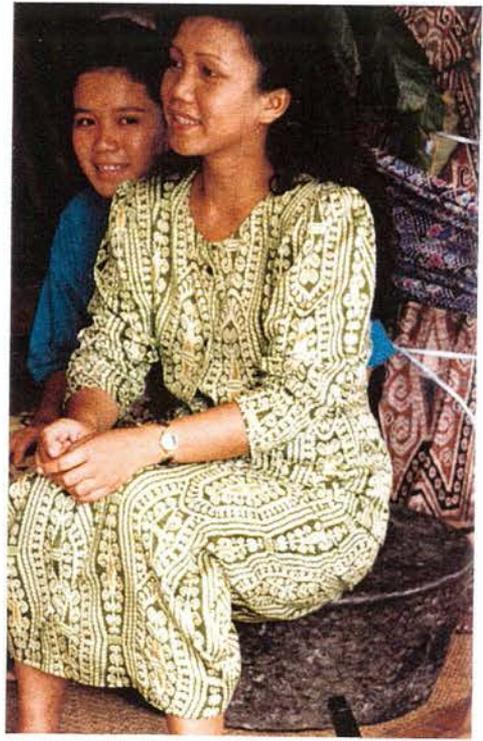
134. Bottom left. Kraftangan display room.





135.Above. Pua' kumbu' displayed in hotel lobby shop with souvenir pillows made from commercially printed Iban designs labelled 'Sarawak' and 'Colourful Borneo'.

138.Below. Briefcase displayed at Kraftangan. An example of marketing strategy in 1991, it is made from vinyl with small pieces of Iban ikat cloth (i.e. customarily made into pua' kumbu') attached to bark cloth panel to give a decorative 'ethnic' touch.



136.Above. Young Baleh woman at Gawai dressed in commercial print which features Iban design in non-customary colour.

137.Below. Iban elder at Gawai dressed in ceremonial costume, but with souvenir t-shirt.



GLOSSARY OF IBAN TERMS RELATING TO TEXTILE ART

This glossary is intended to provide an Iban-English orientation for students pursuing studies of Iban textile art. Included are terms for technical processes, names for designs, motifs and colours as well as words relating to discussions of their uses and social-cultural significance. Not all Iban words which appear in the dissertation have been included here.

The most important published source for this glossary is *An Iban-English Dictionary* compiled by Anthony Richards, Oxford University Press, 1988, referenced [AR] at the beginning of entries which are drawn for the most part from this source. Another significant source, particularly with regard for motif work, is *Iban or sea dayak fabrics and their patterns* by Alfred C. Haddon & Laura E. Start (1982/1936), referenced [H&S].

Glottal stops are included as they identify some words with the same spellings but different meanings (e.g. mali, mali'). While many words in Iban are not recognizable to non-Iban speakers, many others are clearly intelligible to Malay and Indonesian speakers (e.g. child=anak in both; cooked rice=asi, nasi; rain=ujan, hujan and food= makai, makan).

ADAT: Customary law, basic values, code of conduct, manners, conventions of Iban way of life. Adat safe guards state of affairs in healthy balance or state of chelap: cool, fresh, calm, free of quarrels or sickness which, by contrast represent heated states of angat.

AJI: [AR, H&S] Shrew, especially *AJI BULAN*, white shrew, moon rat, a nocturnal, burrowing insectivore living near water. Weaving motif. A title for deity *Keling*. To go beyond the moon, son of royal lineage - cf. *Haji* - a Muslim who made the pilgrimage to Mecca. *AJI PELIMPAH*, in Skrang, leader of the dead. *KENDI AJI*, signs at branching of paths on way to land of dead (*Sebayan*).

AKAR: [AR, H&S] A creeper, anything that can be used for binding or generally as a substitute for rattan (*wi* or Malay *rotan*), except in mat making. Motif in weaving, creepers often depicted with white dots or eyes (*mata*), usually with tendrils coming off them (cf. jungle canopy). Also referred to as *randau*.

ALONG: Soot, pot black.

AMBUN: Dew, fog, mist. Iban stress the importance of exposing freshly mordanted or dyed yarns to dew (which oxidises the solution).

ANAK: Child. Also a parent/child metaphor to refer to small vertical bands of ikat (the *anak*) within striped borders (the *ara*) on ceremonial blankets as the children of the main ikat section (the *buah pua'*), which makes up the body of these cloths.

ANDA MARA: [AR] God of wealth, called upon to celebrate acquisition of valuables and seek their increase.

ANGAT: Heated, feverish, infected, state of disharmony - cf. opposite state *CHELAP*.

ANTOH: Upright frame on the wooden base of a spinning wheel, on which the spindle is held.

ANTU: [AR] Spirits, good or evil, that communicate with and/or can enter into humans. *ANTU NULONG*, familiar spirit, especially of ancestor, is a spirit that helps. 'Ia be-antu.' (He has a familiar.) 'Ia ber-antubendar.' (He must have supernatural powers). Customarily, for an Iban artisan to attempt certain difficult aspects of making ceremonial cloths (e.g. create original designs or prepare special mordant recipes), she must first be guided by spirit helpers through dreams or other communication. Spirit helpers may be celestial deities such as *Kumang*, a patroness of weaving, or spirit of a deceased relative. *ANTU SEBAYAN*, the spirits of dead, believed to be friendly and/or dangerous. *ANTU KEPAPAS*, spirit of envy; *ANTU RUA'*, spirit of waste, greed, extravagance; *ANTU TISIL*, spirit of misfortune. *ANTU PENYAKIT (SAKIT)*, spirit of illness. Special cloths and basketry are used for most rites and festivals, (e.g. for the spirits of the dead (*GAWAI ANTU*)). *Pansa' antu*, include all first beings existing at creation (i.e. gods, *petara*), the first men (*mensia*), first race of giants, demons, monsters (*gerasi*) of whom some inhabit the land of the dead (*sebayan*) and of snakes (*Panggau* - residence of heroes *Keling* and *Kumang*, who are represented as snakes (*ular*), most appear as motifs in Iban textiles.

ANTU PALA: [AR] Dried trophy heads of Iban enemies and which house enemy spirits were received in special ritual ikat blankets and later hung in baskets from a ring-frame over the hearth in the longhouse gallery. *Antu pala* often appear as motifs in textile designs.

ANYAM: [AR] Basketry term, to weave, to interlace, plait (of baskets/mats). '*Indu' nyau ber-anyam.*' (The women have started weaving baskets. i.e. festival for the dead is near.) '*Ia nganyam ka aku tikai sa-lambar.*' (She is making a mat for me.)

ANYAM BELEBUS: Striped woven cloth for which a needle is used to create warp float patterns, and which resemble mat patterns.

ARA: Narrow stripes of different colours which make up the outside vertical borders (at selvages) of ikat cloths (*pua'* or *pua' kumbu'*). **ARA BULOH:** narrow black/white striped edge on ritual cloths. **ARA SURIK:** striped borders, sometimes said to represent snake, see *ULAR KENDAWANG*.

ARI TELADAN: [AR] From a pattern (*teladan*). Refers to producing a textile pattern by copying/imitating an existing example. '*Ia neladan ukir aku.*' (She/he follows or copies my design.) '*Ia nginjau tikai bemban aku kena'-ka teladan.*' (She/he borrowed my bemban mat to copy the pattern.)

ASI: (Malay, *nasi*) Cooked rice. When rice seed appears in a textile design it is more commonly representative of the uncooked seed (either *beras* or *padi*).

AYU: [AR] Skrang - life vitality, bodily soul, reflects general states of body and soul, but with no independent existence as the spirit (*semangat*) has, and distinct from life span (*sukat*) and from the dead (*sebayan*). If evil spirits attack the *ayu*, the human body sickens. Likewise when the spirit leaves the body in dreams or sickness, the *ayu* also sickens and wilts. The *ayu* are like bamboo (*tubu'*) or banana and grow in clumps at *Bangkit* where they are tended by *Menyayan*, chief of the celestial shaman (*manang*), especially in rites for the sick (*saut*). *Menyayan* transplants the *ayu* from the family clump as necessary, clearing away those that are dead. For healing rites a banana palm may be erected in the longhouse gallery (*ruai*), in front of a family's apartment (*bilik*) to represent *ayu*, as place to attract spirits - cf. textiles, symbolic meaning for bamboo shoot motif (*pemuchok tubu'*), often in end borders of ceremonial blankets (*pua'*). May also be referred to in meaning of a dream.

BAIYA: Burial goods. See *baya'*.

BAJU: [AR] Coat, jacket, tunic, shirt. **BAJU ANYAM**, jacket with woven patterns, sometimes specifically refers to supplementary warp patterned jacket. **BAJU ARA**, striped jacket. **BAJU BINDU'**, jacket with patterned panel on back.

BAJU BURONG: Ceremonial jacket with ikat patterns in vertical stripes with bird motifs, used by ritual specialists. An Iban legend [Jenson 1974:84, AR 1988:214] records how the daughter of *Sengalang burong* (*Lang*), the god of war, was visiting earth in the form of a bird when a young Iban man named *Menggin* shot her. He finds her in form of an ikat skirt. When she later goes to his longhouse to ask for the return of her skirt, they fall in love, marry and she gives birth to a son, *Sera Gunting* (half mortal/half deity). When the mother returns to her father's celestial home, she weaves two jackets with bird motifs to enable her husband and son to visit. The story goes on to establish how *Sera Gunting* has to prove his worthiness to his grandfather, and to return to earth to teach mortal Iban the proper conduct, especially regarding war and agriculture. The story not only links mortals with spiritual ancestry but endorses the spiritual power/significance of weaving. See also *baju pengap*.

BAJU KELAMBI': Woman's coat having embroidered patch on the back, fashion adopted by the Balau about 1900 (cf. *baju bindu'* above). **BAJU MATA'**, 'unripe' (i.e. other than in a red dye which involves ritual mordant preparation). **BAJU PELANIN**, shirt with attached collar. **BAJU SUNGKIT**, jacket with brocaded patterns made by wrapping groups of warp. **BAJU TAYA'**, sleeveless cotton jacket customarily worn (in the past) under a leather breastplate in war.

BAJU PENGAP: Also *baju timang*. Long coat worn by bards (*lemambang*) and healers (*manang*) when conducting rites. See *baju burong* above.

BALI': [AR, H&S] Change, transform, alter, fade. Also *mali'*, *bebali'*. '*Bungai kain nya' mali'*.' (The pattern of the cloth fades.) **MANANG BALI'**, transvestite shaman, said to have been of the highest order.

BALI BELANTAN: Important ritual cloth (*pua' belantan* or *lantan*) which is often very long and narrow to be used as a ceremonial shoulder cloth (*dangdong*) and characterized by a plain red centre field and brocaded (*sungkit*) ends.

BALI BELUMPONG: Important ritual cloth (*pua'*) characterized by its large plain red centre field with ikat patterning at either end and sides bordered with customary striping.

BALI KELIKUT: Important ritual cloth (*pua'*), ikat zigzag repeating in horizontal rows, end design (*punggang*) has fire tong motif (*sepit api*), metaphor of strength, endurance & supernatural, power to withstand fire, virtue of creator god *Selam-pandai* believed to have created man with fire tongs of blacksmiths forge (e.g. Jabu 1991).

BALUI: [AR] **KAIN BALUI**, cloth woven first, then dyed giving a plain coloured cloth. **TIKAI BALUI**, plain mat.

BANGKIT: Fruit represented as diamond motif in textiles and basketry (e.g. Haddon & Start 1982/1936).

BANTANG: Upright posts of a frame to which the back beam of a backstrap loom are lashed, especially when winding on a new warp.

BATIK: Resist-dye method of patterning woven cloth, wax or resin is applied to intended pattern areas which will thereby resist the dye. For more than one colour, sequences of waxing and dyeing are used.

BATU: Stone. Small stones serve as talisman (see *pengaroh*, *engkerabun*). e.g. *batu keras*, a small quartz crystal used as a seeing stone by *manang* during healing rites (*belian*).

BAYA: Crocodile. Also *baia*. Common weaving motif. represents the manifestation of the water deity, Ribai, which helps to destroy padi pests.

BAYA': [AR] Grave goods. Also *baiya*. *Baya'* are for use by the deceased in after-life whereas a special cloth (*pua' pandang*) and other things used at a funeral may be recovered.

BAYAK: Monitor lizard. Weaving motif.

BEBUNGAN: Large wooden shed stick on loom which secures crossed ordering in warp threads for plain weave. See also *BUNGAN*, *BELUNGAN*, *LEBUNGAN*.

BEDINGING: Shielding rites for which a ritual cloth (*pua' kumbu'*) is used as a protective wall. Its transformative quality essentially makes a person invisible to malevolent spirits.

BEJALAI: To go on an extended journey to seek work, acquire material goods and in so doing, see the world beyond an individual's immediate community.

BEJI: Ancestor spirit, said to have made a ladder (*tangga'*) to the sky. Commonly pictured in ikat designs on *pua'*.

BEKENGKANG: To be striped.

BEKIKIANG: Crooked.

BELEBAS: In weaving, process of ordering the thread for a warp. *LEBAS:* distinct, clear - cf. *PAKAN BE-LEBAS*, method of patterning cloth that refers to weaving in weft threads in an order that gives distinct weft patterning (e.g. by varying the number of warps over or under which each weft is inserted or floated). See *ANYAM BELEBAS*.

BELIA': Weaving tool, wooden sword used to make opening (shed) in warp threads on the loom and to beat in the weft threads to make a firm cloth web during weaving process. See *belian*, preferred 'ironwood' from which they are fashioned.

BELIAN: Trees yielding strong heavy wood, 'ironwood' (*Eusideroxylon* spp.) is the preferred material for weaving sword or beater (*belia'*). The wood is yellowish-red when first cut but quickly turns black in air or water and when oiled and worn from use gives a glassy finish. *BELIAN* also the verb for *pelian*, a series of rites performed by Iban healers (*manang*).

BELINGKIAN: Argus pheasant, textile motif. Tail feathers also used in 1990s on ceremonial hats (e.g. *Gawai Antu*, Saratok, pl.126).

BELUNGAN: Large round shed stick securing the crossed ordering of warp threads on the loom (*tumpoh*), used in conjunction with heddle stick to change shed during weaving. *LEBUNGAN* (small shed stick).

BENIH: Seed. Motif which appears in ikat design work.

BEPENTI: To observe numerous strict taboos (e.g. in weaving, do not talk during insertion of first picks of weft).

BERAS: Uncooked, husked rice - cf. *brau*, *asi*.

BERASOK: Fit together, overlapping, to put on. *PUA' BERASOK*, ritual cloth used to 'put over' for protective cover - cf. *kumbu'*.

BIDANG: A knee length skirt, fashioned in a tube, held at waist by a cord/belt. Haddon & Start define as a petticoat. Today handwoven skirts are commonly called *kain* (cloth) in contrast to skirts fashioned from a commercial cotton cloth, usually a *batik sarong*. Handwoven skirts may be decorated by *ikat* (*KAIN KEBAT*), or supplementary weft (*KAIN PILIH*, *KARAP* or *SONGKET*). Worn for various rites during ceremonial occasions (*Gawai*).

BILIK: Room, or in case of Iban longhouses, name of the private apartments which when counting are often referred to as 'doors' (*pintu*). *BILIK FAMILY* used in the dissertation to refer to members of an Iban household unit (e.g. Freeman 1955).

BINKA' LIA': Root of ginger plant.

BINTANG: Star. Common motif in textiles and basketry.

BIRU: Blue, usually a dark shade.

BIRIS: Thin strip. In weaving the end panels of an *ikat* cloth, two long strips of palm fibre are woven into the web to serve as a sleeve into which a rigid stick (*lidi*) can be inserted on which to stretch the warp panel and alternatively removed to facilitate folding of the warp tube for binding multiple layers.

BRAU: Husked rice.

BUAH: Fruit. Regarding textile art, *buah pua'* refers to the main design area on the body of the cloth, i.e. the central pattern. This main design for which the most powerful ones originally created through inspiration communicated by spirits through dreams. *Buah bangkit* (lattice design), *Buah bunga* (flower) *Buah berasok* (patterned cloth used to 'put over' for protective cover), *Buah menyeti'* for a finely patterns ritual cloth and other longer poetic praise names (*ensumbar*) often begin *Buah...*

BUBUL: collection, crowd in, to fill up spaces. *BUBUL LAPANG* or *BUBUL AJA:* pattern which fills up space on a cloth.

BUKANG: Headless corpse, textile motif (pl.56).

BULAN: Month, Moon. Common weaving motif. *BULAN KEMBONG*, *BULAN PERENAMA*, full moon. *AKI' UNGKOK*, grandfather bent-back, man in the moon. *BULAN ANAK*, new moon.

BULOH: Bamboo. As symbol on textiles, sometimes said to be the narrow black and white striped edge on ritual cloths - cf. bamboo shoots (*TUBU'*) which most often appear in top and bottom borders of ritual cloth designs. *BULOH GALAH*, *BULOH CEGALAH*, pair of bamboo poles about 160 cm. long on which to stretch skeins of thread which have been soaked in mixture of rice starch and water.

BULU LANDAK: Porcupine quill, used in weaving to pick at, and scrape across, warp threads to separate any that may cling together, to ensure the desired shed opening. Also worn in hair by accomplished weavers during special rituals.

BUNGA: Flower. Also *bungai*. Motif in weaving. *BUNGA TERUNG*, type of body tattoo, brinjal flower.

BUNGAI: Flower. On textiles, refers generally to pattern, design, e.g. *BUAH BULAN* or *BUNGAI BULAN* both referring to moon pattern.

BUNGAN: Large shed stick on a loom. Also *BEBUNGAN*, *BELUNGAN*, *LEBUNGAN*.

BUNGKAN TURAK: Bamboo cylinder serving as spool container for shuttle in weaving. Also *PELEBUNGAN*.

BUNSA: Insect, a minor omen 'bird'. Motif on textiles.

BUNSU RIBUT: [AR] God of wind. *ANAK BUNSU*, youngest child in a family. *BUNSU PETARA*, youngest child of the deity. Also refers to joint (in wood work), final tuck of knot or lashing, last knot in finishing a mat, point or climax of a story.

BURAK: White.

BURI: Cowrie shells which are sewn onto jackets etc as ornaments.

BURONG: Bird. Motif in textiles, especially predominant in *ikat* stripes in ceremonial jackets (*baju burong*) and in small *ikat* stripes (*anak*) in ritual *ikat* cloths.

CELUM: Black. *NYELUM*, to blacken. *NYELUMBONG*, annual wake in Baleh region.

CICAK: Small lizard common in houses. Appears on textiles.

DANGDONG: (Also *dandong*). Shawl or shoulder cloth worn by a man, particularly when performing special rites - cf. *SELANDANG*, shawl worn by women.

DAUN WI': Leaf of the rottan, common textile motif.

DIRI: See *peniri*.

DUJUL: To put the end against something. In weaving, support sticks used when measuring out/winding new warp onto loom sticks during warping process, to put the end of one stick against others to ensure that equal lengths of warp will be wound across the width of a proposed cloth. Two *dujual* are wedged between the two end beams of a loom to hold the beams at the required distance when winding a new warp.

DULANG: Wooden dish/trough, used in dyeing thread, also used for reading entrails of sacrificed pigs. Range in size, large troughs resemble miniature dug out longboats.

DULANG SIMPANDAI: A design meaning tray belonging to the Iban God *Simpandai* (*Sel-empandai*), creator.

EMPELAWA': Spider. Motif.

ENGKARAMBA': [AR] Carved wooden figures in human form set at entrance to longhouse to ward off evil. Haddon & Start classification for textile motifs in the form of human-like figures, but as such does not differentiate representation of various Gods (*petera*), less benevolent spirits (*antu*) such as giants (*gerasi*), and mortals (*mensia*).

ENGKARONG: Skink, lizard (*Lygostoma* spp.). Motif.

ENGKATAK: Frog. Motif.

ENGKELAIT: [AR] Wild gambier. (*Uncaria gambir* Roxb. & other spp.) Woody climbing shrub, yields a brown dye for cotton, as well as medicinal astringent for dysentery, sore throat. White-veined leaf, dried, used in betel-chewing.

ENGKERABUN: [AR] Talisman or charm (*batu, pengaroh*) that blinds an opponent (e.g. an enemy or the spirits among whom a *manang's* spirit (*semengat*) travels).

ENGKEREBAI: Leaves of this tree (*Stylocoryne* spp.) are boiled to obtain a dark red dye used to colour ikatted yarn. Yarn added to water in which *engkerebai* leaves mixed with betel (*sirih*) leaves and lime from snail shells (*kapu'*). Seedlings are used in augury.

ENGKUDU: (Malay *MENGGUDU*) Small tree (*Morinda citrifolia* L.) which grows about 2 metres tall, the skin of the roots yielding a red dye used for cloth, prized by Iban as the best dye for rich colour-fast results, especially when yarn has been ritually treated with special mordant to become *mansau* - 'ripe' red (cf. *ubong mata'*, thread which has not been treated and so considered unripe).

ENSERA: Prosaic legends and stories recited by anyone for entertainment, but essential as an informal means to pass on Iban histories, beliefs, values - cf. *PENGAP*, *TIMANG* as examples of more formal oral literature performed by ritual specialists or bards (*lemambang*).

ENSUMBAR: Praisename, for warriors, also given to ritual cloths (*pua' kumbu'*).

ENTADU: Caterpillar. Also a textile motif.

ENTIBAP: Palm (*Arenga saccharifera*), the leaf stem yields black fibres used for rope; the trunk is a source of sago.

GAAR: See *NGAR* below.

GADONG: [AR] Light green or light blue, sky blue, seldom differentiated. But deep green (*ijau*) and dark blue (*biru*) are distinguished.

GAJAH: [AR] Elephant, appears as motif on textiles and also, sometimes as a wooden figure set on ceremonial pole. Elephants not native to Borneo although some were imported for logging work.

GARAM: Salt. Salt (*Garam apong*) from *apong tunu nipah* palm (*Nypa fruticans* Wurmb.) and sea salt (*garam tunu*) are two basic ingredients of the mordant, besides oil, ginger and tumeric.

GASING: [AR] Spin, revolve, spinning-top, spinning wheel (*PELING GASING, GASING INGGAR*) '*Ia ngasing taya'*. (She spins cotton (into thread).) The wheel (*layang*) of a spinning-wheel has two sets of spokes set a few centimetres apart on the same axis, with a stout cord joining the spoke ends zigzag for the driving cord (*kelindan*) to run on, and a handle (*tayok*) by which to turn it. The spindle (*mata gasing, batang gasing, engkeluli'*) is a pencil-sized rod of hardwood running freely against a second pair of uprights (*antoh*). It is built on a thick board of heavy wood (*papan*).

GAWAI: Festival or celebration which Iban customarily accompany with religious rites and for which a range of ikat cloths are made.

GELONG: Coil, curl, a coil of rattan. In ikat design work, the *gelong* are the curled tendril motifs often making up a large part of design work on ceremonial cloths or as fillers in background. *Gelong paku' resam* - curled top of the edible *resam* fern (*Gleichenia* spp.) One of the first motifs a person learns to tie as it is also used as a basic building block for other motifs (e.g. animal tails).

GERASI: [AR] Giants. *ANTU GERASI* - ugly ferocious beings, who rove with hounds and eat humans. *Antu gerasi* may represent the former inhabitants of areas invaded by Iban. May also appear in a person's dream as a helping spirit (*antu nulong or tua'*). Textile motif.

IGI BERAS: Rice grains. A name given in some designs for white resist spots on creeper (*akar, randau*) motifs in ikat patterned textiles. *Igi*, numeral classifier for grains, seeds, teeth etc.

IJAU: Deep green.

IKAN: Fish. As a textile motif, often included to represent offering of food for crocodile or other potentially dangerous spirit/being.

IMBAI: Horizontal, next to, side by side.

JAIT: Sew with a needle. *Jait tulang ikan*, blanket stitch. Panels of *pua' kumbu'* are joined vertically at the centre by sewing.

JANGGAU: Large tree (*Aporosa frutescens*) bark mixed with skin of the roots of *engkudu* tree to produce deep red dye.

JENGGUAN: Shuttle-Spool carrying weft for weaving or a netting shuttle/needle especially for cast-nets (*jala*). Also called *LIDI PENYINTANG*.

JENTANG: Stretch thread, process of winding/stretching and securing the warp threads under an even tension, around the two end beams of loom fastened onto a warping frame.

JERENANG: [AR] (Malay) Large rattan, *rotan (Daemonorops* spp.). The unripe fruit scales yield a resin, Dragon's Blood, which can be used as a red/scarlet dye.

JERIT: Horizon, in case of weaving, the line or point at which one begins to tie a tendril motif (*gelong*). This is the central point on warps where the coil of the tendril passes over the maximum number of times. The size of various tendrils is noted in naming them *jerit tiga* (3), *empat* (4), *delapan* (8) etc. where the numbers refer to the maximum number of ikat bindings which are applied/counted along the central or horizon line (*jerit*) of that tendril.

JUGAH BEDAYONG: Name of a motif in the Baleh which is believed to be dangerous to tie (pl.57).

KAIN: Cloth, often used to refer to skirt. *KAIN KEBAT*, ikat patterned skirt. *KAIN KARAP*, skirt with supplementary weft patterns made using pattern sticks. *KAIN PILIH*, skirt with supplementary weft patterns picked out by hand/quill pick. *KAIN SUNGKIT*, cloth/skirt with tapestry-like patterning. *KAIN BALUI*, plain cloth dyed after weaving. *KAIN PAMPUL*, cloth dyed in more than two colours. *KAIN PANTAK RIDUN*, cloth sewn with beads or cowries. *KAIN PUA'*, ritual Iban cloth usually two panels with selvages joined vertically up length of centre although today often smaller one panel pieces and in the past sometimes larger being composed of 4 panels (two central panels and two separately woven side borders). *KAIN SETERA*, silk cloth. *KAIN TATING*, has small bells or coins at hem.

KALA: Scorpion. Motif. Also called *KELABONG*.

KALAMBI': Ceremonial jacket. Also *KELAMBI'*.

KALAI: Skein winder, small H-shaped wooden hand-held winder on which to wind cotton thread into skeins.

KANJI: (or *KANYI*). Starch. Iban cook sticky glutinous type of rice (*padi pulut*) to make a mushy paste with which to treat cotton threads to strengthen the yarn, as well as to stiffen the threads to make them more manageable.

KARAP: Heddle stick and/or leashes (and lower heddle rod where used) on Iban loom (*tumpoh*). String heddles are formed by feeding a string over or under selected warp strings and about a thin rod so that the weaver can pull up the rod to open its particular shed. A minimum of one set of heddles (*karap*) is used in conjunction with the shed stick, extras may be threaded up as pattern sticks where blocks of repetitive design work are created using supplementary weft threads - the heddles, the rods, this form of supplementary weft technique and the resulting patterned cloth (*kain karap*) are all referred to as *karap*. The rod may also be referred to as a stick for lifting (*penanggong karap*).

KAPU': Lime. Iban tend to use shells from small snails which they heat in a wok, crush and mix with water to make a paste which can then be used in dye process. This substance enables the dye to become water soluble.

KAYAU INDU': 'The warpath of the women.' Phrase used to refer to the ordeal of treading on the cotton thread which is soaking in the hot mordant bath in the wooden trough (*dulang*) during the ritual *ngar* ceremony.

KAYU': Wood, trees. But also a numeral classifier for things like wood, bars of iron, bars of soap, bolts of cloth. In the case of Iban textile art, it refers to the bundles of warp threads which are bound/ikatted together to create each particular section of a pattern, i.e. the basic method of interpreting a tied design is by counting the number of *kayu'* which make up one vertical panel or 'repeat' in an overall design in an ikat cloth.

KEBAT, verb **NGEBAT** (Malay **MENGIKAT**, from stem **IKAT**): to bind, tie or wind around. **IKAT** is a weaving term adopted into English to describe a technique of patterning cloth: a resist dye method involving the selection and binding of bundles of yarn that have been measured off ready for weaving, in order to prevent penetration of colours during dyeing which is done prior to weaving. When the resist ties are cut away the undyed areas are revealed in patterns on the yarn which is then assembled on the loom (in the case of Iban ikatted warp) or, in other regions, used as weft, ready for weaving.

KELABONG: Scorpion. Motif. Also called **KALA**.

KELALIN LAMBAL: Translates as interlaced bamboo, name given to single or double rows of twining (cf. *soumak*), usually relatively thick groups of black and white weft inserted at beginning and end of woven cloths. Both decorative lines as well as a reinforcement for cut ends of fabric.

KELAMBI: Ceremonial jacket. See *baju kelambi* above.

KELAPONG: Appendage. On a cloth, especially a loin cloth, this is the decorative end section which is different from the rest, often woven separately and added as a border or fringe.

KELINDAN: Driving cord on a spinning wheel.

KELING: [AR] Referred to both as a celestial deity and as a mythological culture hero or prince, husband of *Kumang*, goddess of weaving, princess of great beauty. *Keling* manifests as snake, but representing deity with all attributes most admired: he is handsome, strong and bold, a type of 'Adonis' as *Kumang* is 'Venus'.

KELINGKANG: [AR] Small square basket or mat, roughly made of slips of bamboo for holding an offering, hung by the four corners or set into a bamboo pole that has the top splayed into a cone (*teresang*). **GAWAI KELINGKANG**, ritual feast honouring men's achievements, traditionally for war, and for which such offerings are a major feature. An accomplished textile artist is invited to make *kelingkang*.

KEMERAI: Millipede. In textiles, a name for the horizontal 'fences' or '*kayu'* counters which separate the main body design from the top and/or bottom borders, which are often rows of bamboo shoots (*tubu'*) or other more elaborate motif work. On a basket, refers to plaited band.

KENDAWANG: Type of snake (*Cylindrophis rufus*). Has a red head and tail, body striped black white and red and is said to be represented on some ritual cloths in the outside vertical striped borders (*ara surik*).

KENGGANG: Striped or knotted.

KENYALANG: [AR] Rhinoceros hornbill (*Buceros Rhinoceros* L.) Iban will not touch their nesting holes but shoot the birds, using the tail feathers to decorate war caps, capes, shields and scabbards. The red and yellow horn, which is hollow is also used in Iban costume, particularly the casque of the Helmeted hornbill (*Tajai*) which yields ivory. *Kenyalang* is a helping spirit of a shaman (*manang*). **GAWAI KENYALANG**, 'war' feast held in honour of *Lang*, God of war and Iban warriors for personal achievements in war (or today a mature male and his professional achievements) which will benefit the holder in the next world, rites end with the erection of a tall pole (*sandong*) with a Rhinoceros hornbill, the *Kenyalang*, carved of *pelai'* wood, painted and fixed atop, with small ritual ikat cloth (*pua'*) (pl.106, 108). Note, however, that *Lang*, who is being honoured, is represented not as the Hornbill but as a Brahminy Kite. When rites are completed the *Kenyalang* flies to attack ancient enemies, usually down river. *Kenya* and *Kenyalang* are also names for *Lang's* sister, *Segadu'*, a patroness of the art of dyeing thread. See **LANG**.

KEPAYANG: Tree with a fruit (*Pangium edule* Reinw.) which yields an oil. Iban smoke the fruit over a fire. Then, when it is broken and rubbed into weaving implements, the wooden tools are given a rich dark oil which, with use (especially the sword shaped beaters) appear to have a black glass-like finish.

KERA RAKANG: Woven design originating from animal shape.

KETAM: Crab. Motif.

KETAS: [AR] To cut, (*ngetas*) as in the case of *ikat*, the knots on *ikat* bindings or other things held taut. *Ketas ulit* which refers to ritual act of cutting red dyed strings which members of longhouse community tie about their waist or wrist during mourning, and which signifies the end the period of mourning (symbolizing the severing or releasing of the dead persons spirit (*ayu*) from those of the community) - cf. cutting of the unwoven warps on a completed textile is also a reverend act which customarily (i.e. more commonly in the past) would be done only after a ritual offering had been made.

KETUPAT: Miniature bobbles plaited from strips of palm leaf, filled with sticky rice used as an ingredient in ritual exchanges (*miring*) and which symbolize human heads taken in battle.

KIJANG: Barking deer. Textile motif.

KOALI: Skein winder. See also **KALAI**.

KUMBU': Wrap or cover as with a blanket. **PUA' KUMBU'**, ritual cloths believed to have protective power and so used to cover persons (e.g. *pua' berasok*), doors, alters etc. during rites and during particular periods of danger.

KUMANG: [AR] Ideal woman, Goddess of Beauty, patroness of weaving, wife and cousin of *Keling*. *Kumang* appears on earth as *Ular Tedong Bulan* (Krait snake). Many Iban folk stories (*ensera*) begin with *Kumang* going to collect water weeds (*lemba'*), the fibre of which is used for binding the warps, but in more lengthy invocations (*pengap*) chanted by ritual specialist bards (*lemambang*) it is *Meni'* who always comes to weave the sling for the sword made by *Lang*. *Kumang* is also associated with porcupine (*landak*) and often visits his house because the quills are protective amulets against madness and are always worn by women when they perform the ritual of dyeing the warps - cf. *Segadu'* who may be called for dyeing rites.

KUNING: Yellow.

KUNYIT: Turmeric. (*Cucurma longa*) Malay **ENTEMU KUNYIT** (*Cucurma domestica*). Yields a yellow dye, powder also used to smear on forehead.

LABANG: White (of birds). '*Manok ia labang.*' (His cock is pure white.)

LABONG: Kerchief, cloth cap/scarf, richly decorated.

LADU: Mud from down river streams, used as black dye.

LALAT: Fly. Motif.

LANDAK: Porcupine. See *bulu landak*.

LANG: [AR] Brahminy Kite (*haliastur indus* Boddaert & *Spilornis* spp.) Bird of prey. *Lang Singalang Burong*, father-in-law of principal Iban omen birds and teacher of law and custom to *Menggin*. Usually referred to as *Lang*. Regarded as god of war and headhunting but in some districts he is also called upon with *Pulang Gana* for padi rituals, because (a) he is king of omen birds (vital in farming as in war), (b) he brings a head trophy as symbol of fertility and success, and (c) he brings skill as a smith to make weapons. cf. **KENYALANG**.

LANGIT: Sky.

LAPIS: Piece of raw cotton fibre which has been cleaned and beaten open ready for spinning into thread. Also numeral classifier for broad flat things like sheets of paper. Also means fold, line, lining, doubling of cloth.

LAYANG: Wheel on a spinning wheel (*gasing*) used to twist cotton fibres into thread.

LEBAS: Distinct, clear. See **BELEBAS**.

LEBUNGAN: Small shed stick used in weaving. Also **BELUNGAN**.

LEBUR API: [AR] (**LEBOR API**) Name of prized ritual cloth (*pua'*) patterned in tapestry technique (*sungkit*) and prized as highest grade of cloth, which, like the best ikatted *pua'*, was used to receive heads (pl.23). Part of a series of bird-omens sought before going on a foray (*kayau*). Although not ikatted, the mordant dye process was important to achieve rich red for the body of the cloth. *Lebur api* were woven for ceremony '*encaboh arong'*, 1st stage of *Gawai Burong*. End design (*pung-gang*) is often a moving python snake (*leku sawa*) representing *Keling*, power (e.g. Jabu 1990), cf. *lebur*, to heat, smelt in forge. Rare to find anyone making this cloth in 1990s.

LELAMBAK: Flower pattern plaited into fibrous mats.

LELINGKOK: Curved, zigzag, crooked.

LEMAMBANG: [AR] Ritual specialist, poet, bard, master of oral literature and words of power. Expert in ritual chants, especially commissioned to lead public invocations (*pengap*) of celestial guests and conduct the ritual at major ceremonial occasions (*gawai*). The first *lemambang*, called *Simpang Gading*, and *Kayu' Arang* were taught by *Lang*. Once called in a vision of their tutelary spirit (*yang*), *lemambang* learn from senior *lemambang* but there is no formal training. Customary fees (*upah*) include iron (as *Kering sememgat*) because the spiritual journeys they make are arduous and of some danger, although less dangerous than some of those of a shaman (*manang*). *Lemambang* are distinct from those who can utter prayers (*sampi*) or tell stories and sagas (*jerita*, *ensera*). Male *lemambang* recite the *pengap* and *timbang* for head trophies but women recite the *sabak* for the dead. *Lemambang* wear specially woven ceremonial jackets and cloths for particular moments in a ritual, their recitations guiding the festival hosts as to when such special ritual objects are to be brought out.

LEMBA': [AR] (*Curculigo latifolia*) Broad leaved stemless plant commonly growing on waste land. About one metre in height, yellow flowers at base. The leaves are scraped with sharp piece of bamboo to expose the stringy raffia like fibres which are used to bind warp threads when ikatting designs. Stories of *Kumang*, Iban cultural heroine (and by some an Iban goddess, spirit or princess of beauty and patroness of weaving), often begin with her setting out to find *lemba'*.

LELETAN: Shed stick. Also *BELUNGAN*, *LEBUNGAN*.

LIA': Ginger. *Lia' amat* (*Zingiber officinalis*), *lia' kumang* (*Zingiber* spp.) and *cekur* (*Zingiberaceae*) are important mordant ingredient to make cotton thread ready to accept dye solutions and also an important medicinal ingredient.

LIDI: [AR] Lease sticks or laze rods used in setting up a loom and in weaving. Long thin flat splits of a very strong flexible material such as the ribs of the *Aping*, a wild palm (*Arenga pinnata* Merr.). Split about 2 cm. wide but various lengths to suit width of warp wound onto loom. **LIDI PENYINTANG:** long, thin, weaver's spool. Eight *lidi* are customarily bound with thread form part of the offering at a marriage (*belah pinang*). **ULAR LIDI:** painted bronze-back snake (*Ahaetulla* sp.). **BUKIT UNJAM LIDI:** hill on way to Mandai which is passed by souls of the dead (in *sabak* for a young woman). *Kumang je-lidi:* snake deity, wife to *Keling*.

LIDI PENYINTANG: Weaver's spool/shuttle, long and thin.

LIKAU: Zigzag decoration, striped like a python or tiger.

LILIT: A form of embroidery using gold and silver threads, especially as a border or braided binding.

LILIN: Wax. In ikat work, Iban rub either bees wax or candle wax on ikat bindings to hold their twist and make them more water resistant.

LINTAH: Textile motif that represents the leech, especially two interlocking or as if swallowing (*lintah betagam*).

LUBANG BELEBUS: Extra shed stick used for supplementary weft pattern work such as small areas of brocade, or for tapestry technique of wrapping groups of warp threads (*sungkit*).

LUMBAL: The back strap which is attached to the breast beam of a stick loom and fits about the weaver's waist so that the warp threads on the loom can be brought under tension during the weaving process. Also called *LUMBING*, *TEMPAUT*.

MALI: Forbidden/taboo.

MALI': To change or alter. See *bali'*.

MALU: Shy. Also ashamed, hurt someone's feelings.

MALU': To hit or beat. See *palu'*.

MAMPUL: Binding warps a second time to cover and so protect areas dyed red before exposing warp to second dye bath, customarily indigo (*tarum* or *rengat*), which is used to add shadowy outlines to the first set of patterning. Cf. *kebat*, the term used for binding (for the first time) patterns on the warp which are to be reserved white when exposed to the first dye bath which colours the ground area red.

MANANG: [AR] Shaman, healer of the sick in spirit and restorer of souls; one able to enter a trance to free his/her own soul to seek out and bring back a soul that has left the body and started the journey to the land of the dead. *Be-manang* to employ a *manang*. **MANANG BALI**, male *manang* changed and become a woman (highest grade of shaman, rare). **MANANG MANSAU**, 'ripe' or fully qualified (but not *manang bali*) Cf. thread that has undergone ritual mordant bath also considered ripe (*ubong mansau*). **MANANG MATA'**, novice who practises, but in complex rites as an assistant to others, cf. *ubong mata'*. **MANANG MENERIS**, novice not yet initiated as *Manang Mata'*.

MANSAU: Ripe, cooked. Also red. In weaving, thread which has been 'cooked', that is, treated with a mordant in a ritual ceremony and then dyed red, especially with *engkudu* root to produce a rich brick red is said to be *mansau* or *ubong mansau*, cf. *mata'*.

MARIK: A bead. *MARIK EMPANG* or *MARIK AMPAN*, beaded necklace.

MATA: [AR] Eye. Common textile motif. *MATA PUNA'*: dove's eye pattern in cloths, baskets & mats. *MATA HARI:* sun, also appears as motif. *AI' MATA:* tears. *MATA MANANG:* beads (*tesai*) presented to a *manang* to give him keenness of sight. *NGE-MATA:* eyesight. Watch over, look after, keep an eye on. '*Di-ke-mata-ka.*' (Watched over by). *MATA GASING:* eye or spindle on a spinning wheel.

MATA': Raw, uncooked, unripe, green. In textile art contrast made between thread which has been through the ritual mordant bath to produce a deep red from *engkudu* root (*ubong mansau*) and thread which has not been so treated, i.e. left raw, uncooked (*ubong mata'*).

MAYAU: Cat, domestic. *MAYAU BATU*, wild cat. As textile motif is often represented as a sleeping cat (*mayau tindok*).

MELANTI: Back/top beam of Iban loom secured to wall or posts for weaving. Also called *TENDAI*.

MENI': [AR] Goddess of the waters and patroness of dyeing (*takar*) and weaving (*tenun*), known also as *beriak*, a tailor-bird. In *pengap* sung for a *Gawai Kenyalang* to which *Lang*, God of War, is honoured, when a special belt for a sword is to be woven, it is *Meni* who appears to take over the work from *Kumang* (also a patroness of weaving) and completes it quickly and superbly.

MENSIA: Mankind, realm of the living, that is, humans as opposed to animals, or to spirits (*antu*) and gods (*petara*).

MENYETI': Best kind of ritual cloth (*pua'*) with finest, excellent patterning (e.g. *Pua' menyeti' bali belumpong*).

MIMPI: Dream, vision. Important mode of omens or spiritual communication. In the case of various weaving, *ikat* and dye processes, an Iban individual may only proceed if she/he has been advised to do so in a dream.

MINYAK: Oil. *Minyak kepayang* (*Pangium edule*) is rubbed into hardwood weaving swords (*belia'*). *Minyak kepayang* is also one of the main ingredients in the mordant treatment for cotton threads prior to dyeing.

MIRING: To make an offering, ritual blessing. See *PIRING* below.

MUAI UBONG: Process of sorting warp threads and folding into ordered bundles so that the amount of tying is reduced and one or more vertical panels with a true repeat are secured.

MULAI: To twist back. *PULAI*, return, give back.

MULAS: Twist, wring, whirl.

MULONG MERANGAU: Sago palm, features in ritual *ikat* cloths, particularly in the Saribas Layar district, said to symbolize tree of life, often with skulls hung in branches representing ritual ceremony (e.g. *Jabu 1991*).

MUNGGGA': Cut into lengths. Also *PUNGGGA'*. In weaving this refers to the warping process. This is the process of measuring out lengths of warp threads, in this case by winding the threads onto the two end beam sticks of the backstrap loom. The beam sticks are secured on a wooden frame at a required distance apart to ascertain the quantity of threads of a certain length. Threads are then measured out by winding on enough 'lengths' of thread until, when the wrapped threads are set close together on the end beams, the desired width is attained.

NABAU: Mythical serpent or water dragon, sometimes referred to as king of crocodiles. Deity of *Panggau*, grandfather of *Keling*.

NABU': Rolled up in a ball. Also *NGABOL*, to roll into a ball.

NAGA: Deadly snake. Motif often on textiles and basketry. Represents serpent spirits, usually those associated with ill intentions and feared by Iban in contrast to non-deadly snakes (*ular*) which represent earth form of deities (e.g. *Keling*, *Kumang* etc.), cf. *NABAU*, *ULAR*, *SAWA*.

NAKAR: (Also *TAKAR*) Term to define the technical aspect of dyeing ritual, literally meaning to measure (by volume) and to mix the ingredients of a mordant, cf. *NGAR*, *GAAR*, the ritual mordant ceremony.

NASI: Malay for cooked rice. See *asi*.

NELADAN: In ikat work, to copy, follow or imitate an existing pattern (*teladan*).

NENGKEBANG: Invent, make up, in making an ikat cloth, refers to a person who creates an original design, not copying an existing cloth pattern but by reproducing from memory a design presented to that artisan in a dream. A weaver who has reached a stage in Iban textile art who produces her own designs is referred to as *tau' nengkebang*, that is, has knowledge explained as spirit communication through 'dreaming'.

NGAJAR: To teach, from stem AJAR.

NGAJAT: Iban dance. In the 1990's Malaysian government interest in cultural tourism and ethnic celebrations promotes the production and use of ceremonial textiles for dance performances.

NGANJI: To starch. When preparing cotton thread for weaving, Iban would dip it in a starchy mixture of sticky rice to strengthen the spun threads.

NGANYAM: To weave (*anyam*) or interlace with regard for basketry and mat making in contrast to cloth weaving (*tenun*).

NGASING: To spin. In the past Iban would spin cotton fibres into thread using a spinning wheel (*gasing*).

NGAR: [AR] Entire mordant dyeing procedure, including not only the technical part of mixing ingredients but also the performance (*ngemban*) of proper rites and use of powerful charms necessary for success in dyeing and weaving.

NGEBAT: Verb form of *kebat*), to ikat, process of binding or lashing together. **NGEBAT PENURU:** bind warp threads ready for dyeing. See *kebat* regarding resist dye method of binding warp threads before weaving.

NGEBOL: To wind thread into a ball. See also *NABU'*, *TABU'*.

NGELESIT: Process of husking cotton fibres.

NGEMBAN: [AR] Perform the rite and utter the prayer for success in dyeing and weaving (the responsibility of women of recognized skill). See *NGAR*, *NAKAR*, *TAKAR*.

NGETAS: To cut. Also *KETAS*. In the ikat process *ngetas tampok lemba'* refers to cutting the knots of the grassy *lemba'* bindings from areas on the warp threads to be exposed to the second dye bath and when dyeing is complete and thread to be put onto the loom sticks for weaving.

NGIKAT: Iban use this term to refer to the process of drying and combing the starched warp stretched on bamboo rods prior to the ikat tying process (*ngebat*). In Malay, however, *ngikat* is the verb form of Malay term *ikat*, which refers to process of tying or binding threads for ikat patterns which are made by resist dyeing of the thread prior to weaving into a fabric - cf. *NGEBAT*, the Iban term more commonly used by Iban for ikat (*kebat*).

NGIRIT UBONG: 'Pulling the threads' - the process of winding thread around two end beams of loom, pulling on each to ensure a firm and even tension is kept as each successive thread is wrapped on.

NIBONG: Tall palms (*Oncosperma* spp.) wood used as poles, resists termites, leaf as thatach, spines for blowpipe darts, fruit chewed as betel (*pinang*). **NIBONG RANYAI**, magical palm in the land of the dead (*Sebayan*) which bears amulets on its branches and which only the souls of the brave can cut down. Iban erect ceremonial poles as shrines to represent the *Nibong Ranyai*, as well as depicting it in textile art.

NISING: A spirit (*antu*), enemy of *Lang* (God of War). As a textile motif, *Nising* is often depicted in the Baleh as a giant spirit (*antu gerasi*).

NITI DAUN: Name for processions as at *Gawai Kenyalang* for which participants wear ceremonial costume and walk in single file up and down the outer and inner gallery areas of the longhouse at the start of a celebration.

NYUNGKIT: Verb for *sungkit*, to make this brocade or tapestry technique (by wrapping weft around groups of warp threads using a needle).

ORANG: Person. *Orang ulu*, name currently used in Malaysia to refer to Kayan, Kenyah and other indigenous groups in up-river (*ulu*) regions of Sarawak.

PADI: Rice (*Oryza* spp.), as uncooked grain in the husk, usually to refer to the crop growing in the field. Cf. *beras*, uncooked, husked rice. Iban customarily grew *padi bukit* - hill or dry rice whereas Chinese and other groups living in plains areas grow *padi tanjong* - swamp or wet rice. *Padi pulut*, name for sticky glutinous rice (*Oryza glutinosa*) from which weaver's produce starch for cotton yarn. Also for making sweets and one of three basic ingredients of ritual offerings. *Padi pun* - name Iban give to their household's sacred seed. See Richards 1988:242.

PAKAN: Weft, or woof, the horizontal threads inserted in weaving cloth.

PAKAN BELEBAS: Method of patterning cloth with weft, e.g. supplementary weft inserted during weaving ground cloth, using a needle or series of pattern sticks (*karap*) to pick up various warps for desired float areas. *LEBAS:* to make clear. See also *BELEBAS*, *ANYAM BELEBAS*.

PAKU': Type of edible resam fern, appears as tendril motifs on many ritual cloths.

PANDAI: To be clever - cf. *tau'*, *tau' ngar*, *tau' nakar*.

PANDONG: Ritual shrine constructed from bamboo poles about which ikat cloths (*pua' kumbu'*) are wrapped, as central place for Iban ritual ceremonies - cf. *ranyai*.

PANGGAU: Wooden platform. Sometimes used in Iban ritual ceremonies to avert evil foretold in a dream (*mimpi*). *Panggau Libau* is home of Iban deity *Keling*.

PANTAK: Small dark-coloured wasp. On textiles appears as a small star-like motif.

PAPAN: Flat board, the base on a spinning wheel.

PASU: [AR] Dry measure, equated to 8 *gantang*. Standard sacks of rice (*padi*) are about 3 *pasu* or 24 *gantang*. 8 *gantang* of rice fits into a 4 gallon kerosene tin.

PEDALAI: Jack tree, (*Artocarpus* spp.), wood gives yellow dye, heated with alum it gives blue.

PEDANG: [AR] Malay sword (*duku'*), curved and thin with brass or silver cross hilt and scabbard bands. In weaving the beater is a sword shaped piece of wood, long thin curved piece with point and one slightly sharpened blade so it can be inserted into the warp shed which may often be an obscure opening. See *BELIA'*, the common Iban name for this weaving sword/beater.

PELANGGONG: Heddle-rod on Iban loom. Also called *PENANGGONG*, or *KARAP*.

PELEBUNGAN: Shuttle container for the spool that carries the weft in weaving. Usually a section of bamboo. Also called *PELEBUNGAN JENKUAN* or *BUNGKAN TURAK*.

PELIAN: The series of rites performed by Iban healers (*manang*). See *belian*.

PEMALI: Ritual prohibition or taboo.

PEMALU': [AR] Also *PALU'*. Instrument for beating. *PEMALU' TAYA'*, plaited rotan beater for raw cotton. *PEMALU' TEKALONG*, club for beating out bark into barkcloth;

PEMIGI: Cotton gin, used for cleaning raw cotton bolls - cf. *igi*.

PEMISIT: Claw like instrument used for cramming woven strips in mat making.

PEMUCHOK: Refers to the row of motifs, often bamboo shoots (*tubu'*) or shoots of plants tied at top and bottom borders of ceremonial cloths (*pua'*). May be seen as the foundation, or that which comes first (cf. Richards *PEMUN*). *PEMUCHOK REBONG*, pattern features cone shape or chevrons to represent bamboo shoots; *PEMUCHOK TUBU' BEKENGKANG*, pattern features striped bamboo shoots, *LANCHAM PEMUCHOK*, emphasizes the pointed aspect of shoots. Also *PENUCHOK*, or simply *PUCHOK*, numeral classifier for long pointed things.

PEMPANG LELINGKOK: Horizontal zigzag lines which divide the central design area of a ritual cloth (*pua'*) from the end borders (*punggang*) - cf. *SELAKU*, straight horizontal lines.

PENANGGONG: Heddle rod on Iban loom. Also *PELANGGONG*. *PENANGGONG KARAP*, upper heddle-rod (from *TANGGONG*, to lift).

PENGAROH: [AR] Charms, talisman, amulet, any small object (or collection of them) possessed of power that can be worn to protect or benefit the owner. Accomplished artisans are likely to possess such charms as spiritual signs which qualify them for more difficult/dangerous textile work. Most *pengaroh* are referred to separately as stones (*batu*), especially by *manang*, whatever their material. Three ways of obtaining charms: as gifts from the deities invited by *pengap* to a ceremonial occasion (*gawai*); as gifts left by the dead when they take away the soul of one who has died (related in *sabak*); by finding them in fulfilment of promises made or instructions given by guardian spirits (*tua'*, *yang*) in dreams (*mimpi*, *nampok*). Their number, nature, and precise effect are customarily kept secret, but in the 1990s many Iban were proud to show and discuss such charms. See *batu*, *engkerabun*.

PENGAP: Long poetic incantations chanted at major ceremonial occasions by ritual specialists (*lemambang*), generally known as *TIMANG* (verb *nimang*, to sing praise). Compositions follow a set theme and customary patterns of extensive repetition and alliteration, but feature personal embellishments which vary from bard to bard and from performance to performance, with regard to the need to acknowledge particular

guests of honour as well as the situation of the host community as it exists at that moment in time.

PENGAROH: Charm, talisman. Often small stones (see *batu*) found under auspicious circumstances believed to possess power that will benefit the owner. Such stones were believed necessary to assure that an artisan could meet the challenge of difficult ikat motif work, also used by women performing various rites associated with textile art, such as *ngar*, the mordant ceremony.

PENGHULU: Malay word for headman, in case of Iban communities, a political position introduced by British where selected Iban acted as spokesperson/supervisor for a defined number of longhouse communities.

PENIRI: (Malay *diri*) warp threads.

PENTIK: [AR] A carved wooden image set to ward off evil, in farms to keep off padi bugs, representing a cat against rats or a kite (*Lang*) against locusts - cf. image carved on the upright part of spinning wheel which holds the spindle through which raw cotton is twisted into thread (pl.73). In healing rites, *manang* use *pentik* to attract and carry off (or absorb) the patient's illness.

PENUCHOK: Shoot of a plant. See *PEMUCHOK*.

PENUMPU: [AR] *TUMPU* (firm footing, push against with feet). Beam used as weaver's foot brace under Iban back tension loom.

PENYINTANG: Weaver's spool on which weft is carried, the spool being inserted into bamboo shuttle. Also referred to as *LIDI PENYINTANG* as the spool is usually a thin stick similar to a laze rods (*lidi*).

PERENGKA TENUN: Equipment for weaving, general description for the sticks which make up an Iban back strap loom, or *tumpoh*.

PESAKA: Heirloom. *Pua' pesaka* used to describe valuable old family ikat cloths (*pua' kumbu'*).

PETARA: Iban God(s), deities. Term possibly from Hindu *batar* meaning lord (e.g. Jenson 1974:100). [AR] *PETARA KEBONG LANGIT*, gods of heaven. *PETARA TENGAH TANAH*, gods from the earth.

PETIK: Spotted.

PILIH: A supplementary weft technique, inserted by use of pick or fingers, to create patterns. Patterns often asymmetrical, and often using alternate banding of red and yellow threads for supplementary weft as ground cover - cf. Iban *karap* and Malay *songket* which involve use of sets of pattern sticks to facilitate creation of repetitive blocks of patterns. *Pilih*, like *karap* creates a two sided cloth with positive/negative patterning. *Pilih* is unusual in that the 'negative' side is featured as the primary or front face of the cloth, with supplementary design threads appearing as long floats across the width of the fabric to form the background so that motifs appear in white as the warp and weft of the groundcloth - consequently comparable to the negative or resist patterning of ikat patterning. *Pilih*, *karap* and *songket* all involve continuous supplementary weft threads. *Pilih* and *songket* rarely made today, compared to *karap* which is a popular weave for Iban women's ceremonial skirts in the Division of Sri Aman in the 1990s.

PINANG: Betel nut palm (*Areca catechu*), the leaves of which are combined with lime (*kapu'*), both for chewing and as an ingredient for dye baths for which it contributes a brown shade, usually in combination with other dye plants such as *engkerebai* or *engkudu*. The leaves are also an important ritual ingredient in offerings to the gods.

PIRAK: Silver.

PIRING: [AR] Shallow plate, usually metal, or china dish such as a saucer or plate, smaller than a tray (*talam*). Verb: *MIRING*, making/offering of food, tobacco, betel etc. served as *piring* (plate) to deities (also often includes rice, eggs, salt and rice wine i.e. *tuak*), set out on a ritual ikat cloth (*pua' KUMBU*) and accompanied by a prayer (*sampi*), waving (*biau*) usually passing a cock over those present, and sacrifice (*sengkelan*) usually the same or another cock.

PLANDOK: Mousedeer. Appears as motif in textiles.

PERENGKA TENUN: Term used in Betong district for set of weaving equipment, other areas loom equipment referred to as *TUMPOH* [Jabu 1991].

PUA': PUA KUMBU'. [AR] Iban ritual cloths, most in ikat (*kebat*) technique of tie dyeing cotton threads to create dye resist designs prior to weaving. *MENYETI*, best kind of ikatted *pua'*. Other finest examples: *BALI BELANTAN* and *BALI BELUMPONG* (noted for their plain red centre field) - cf. *Lebur api*, one of the most valued ritual cloths (*pua'*) but with *sungkit* patterning, not ikat). *KUMBU'* - to cover, these ritual cloths (*pua'* or *pua' kumbu'*) often used to cover person or ritual

shrine due to its transformative, protective qualities - cf. *baju burong* and story of Menggin and the special transformative powers of the skirt (*kain*).

PUNGGGA: [AR] *MUNGGGA*. Cut into lengths - cf. *LUMPONG*, measure out warp threads for tying ikat patterns and subsequent weaving.

PUNGGANG: End patterned border of ritual cloth (*pua'*). Also *BELANGGAH PUNGGANG*: the edge design on woven fibrous mat.

RAJA: (Malay *Rajah*) for ruler, king, royal. Richards notes the term *raja* used by Iban in Skrang River district for ruler, likely due to proximity to Malay settlement there. Iban throughout Sarawak also aware of the position through the power wielded by the *Rajah Brooke*. But according to Derek Freeman's study (1955) Iban communities were essentially egalitarian and not class based. While leadership due to personal achievements was acknowledged for particular expeditions, no customary institutionalized positions of authority in the form of privileged rulers or hereditary chiefs upheld in contrast to neighbouring groups like the Malays, Kayans and Kenyah. In 1990s in Baleh, used for deities such as *raja remaung* (tiger).

RAKUP: [AR] Front or breast beam of loom. As verb, to fit together, match.

RAMBUT: Hair. In textiles, fringe or tassled end.

RANDAU: Creeping plant, creeper of any kind, predominant on many ritual ikat cloths/skirts - cf. *akar*.

RANG: Jaw bone, 'don't make jawbones' in weaving ikat cloths refers to the need to maintain even and tight tension on warp so there are no slippages which would result in less than sharp lines in the ikat patterning. Iban admire and value sharp lines in contrast to Japanese ikat work which does not place emphasis on need for clear cut patterning.

RANYAI: Ritual shrine erected for Iban ritual ceremonies in the Baleh area which have offerings inside poles wrapped with ritual ikat cloths (*pua' kumbu'*). In other regions may be referred to as *pandong* or *pagar api*.

RAWAI: Iban woman's corset customarily made of rings of rattan wrapped with brass.

REBONG: Bamboo shoots - cf. *TUBU'*, motif often used across end border (*punggang*) on ritual ikat cloths.

REMANG: Light fleecy clouds.

REMAUNG: Wild cat, leopard or tiger. *Antu remaung* honoured in rites (e.g. at *Gawai Kenyalang*, in Baleh 1991). Appears as motif in textiles.

RENGGAT: Term used in the Baleh region for leaves from indigo plant (see *tarum*) which were used for the darker blue dye on ikat cloths. Richards notes only that *renggat* refers to the process of steeping cloth in dye.

RENONG: Grave goods of person dead and buried far from home. See *baya'*, *baiya*.

ROTAN: Malay word for rattan, (*wi'*), Lawyer cane.

RUAI: Long indoor public gallery of an Iban longhouse onto which a series of private apartments (*bilik*) open.

RUMAH: House. *Rumah tanjong* - longhouse.

RUSA: Deer. Common motif on textiles.

SADAU: Upstairs loft in an Iban longhouse, in the past primarily a storage area. Today, as a second story, it often composes one or more sleeping rooms.

SAKELAT: Woollen cloth usually red flannel, especially scarlet, used to trim jackets in the past, cotton prints also used for this purpose. In Americas this woollen cloth was known as *bayeta*.

SAMAK: Plants yielding tannin, preservative for cordage, also in case of *Bakau*, a Mangrove tree (*Rhizophora* spp.), used for red-brown dye in ikat textiles.

SAMPI: Prayer, poetic invocation, begins with 'oha' repeated three times. Usually performed in conjunction with the waving of a fowl over a ritual offering (*miring*) and all present.

SAWA: Python. Textile motif, for example, important symbol said to represent Keling which appears in brocade technique (*sungkit*) on end sections of highly prized ceremonial cloth named *Lebur api*, required in the past to ritually receive enemy heads.

SEBANKI: [AR] Small riparian tree (*Tristania* spp.) from which a brownish dye similar to *engkerebai* can be produced.

SEGADU': Female sky deity, as sister of *Lang* (God of War), she is also sometimes referred to as *Kenyalang* or *Lang*. *Segadu'* is said to have made a home for *Kumang* and her sister *Lulong* when they were children, and to have been a lover of *Keling* before he became *Kumang's* consort. In the Baleh area she is also a helper in dyeing. She is also mentioned in prayers (*sabak*) as one who gives gifts to the dead.

SELAKU: Rattan cane (*wi*) or creeper (*akar*) used as rope. In textiles, refers to solid horizontal lines, usually one white or white/black/white which serve as dividers or fence between central design (*buah pua'*) and end border patterns (*punggang*) - cf. alternative fences appearing as broken lines which are often referred to and serve as basic ikat bundle counters (*kayu'*) for interpreting/reproducing patterns. These *kayu'* counters also referred to as leaves of *resam* fern (*Gleichenia* sp): '*penuri daun resam*' or as millipedes. Another variation is zigzag horizontal fences: '*pempang lelingkok*.'

SELAMPAI: Woman's woven scarf worn for ritual ceremonies. Also Malay *selendang*.

SELANDANG: See *SELENDANG*, shawl.

SELANGAN BATU: Hardwood (*Shorea* spp.) used for beams on loom, may be used in reference to front beam.

SELEMPANDAI: [AR] Cricket, locust, sounding at night, like a hammer on anvil. Deity (*petara*) who is creator of humans and of matter including iron, tempering humans on an anvil. Symbol of strength. *Manang* invoke *Selempandai* in healing rites (*pellian*).

SELEMEPAT: Fireflies. See *SEMPEPAT* below.

SELENDANG: Malay name for shoulder cloth, shawl or scarf. Malay women may also use as a veil. See *selampai*, Iban woman's handwoven ceremonial scarf.

SELUP: [AR] Dye, especially of cloth. Threads customarily steeped (*sepoh*) in vegetable dyes such as *engkudu*, *engkerebai*, and *tarum*. *SELUP PASAR*: commercial dye. Also used as a verb, e.g. to set on fire, '*Ia nyelup meriam*.'

SEMALAU: Magpie. Refers to row of twining on ends of *pua' kumbu*. See *kelalin lambai*.

SEMENGAT: (Malay *SEMANGAT*). Bodily spirit (as opposed to body, *tuboh* and inseparable bodily soul, *ayu*); has identity of its own, likened to a shadow, and enters and leaves the body by the fontanelle. It feels no wounds inflicted on the body; travels at great speed, finally on death it begins the journey to the after world (*sebayan*). *Semengat* of *manang* and *lemambang* leave their bodies during rites to seek spirits invoked on various ceremonial occasions. Ritual textiles (e.g. *kain*, *baju*, *pua' kumbu'*, *dangdong*) provide transformative, protective power for both spirit (*semengat*) and mortal (*mensia*) bodies temporarily without spirit.

SEMPEPAT: Fireflies, appear on ritual ikat cloths, which Haddon and Start described as white (light of fireflies) outlining on dark rattan creepers. Also appears *SEPEPAT*, *SELEMEPAT*.

SENGALANG (SINGALANG) BURONG: [AR 1988 Sutlive:1978] God of War. Also known as *Lang* (See *Lang*, *Kenyalang*). Bird deity possessing highest power of authority. Appears as the Brahminy kite. His 7 daughters married the 7 major augury birds, *Lang's* sons-in-law, who live in a prototypical longhouse: 1. *Ketupong* (Rufous piculet) 2. *Kikih Embuas* (Banded Kingfisher) 3. *Beragai* (Scarlet-rumped Trogon) 4. *Papau/-Senabong* (Diard's Trogon) 5. *Bejampong* (Crested Jay) 6. *Pangkas/Kutok* (Maroon Woodpecker) 7. *Nendak* (White rumped Shama).

SENGKABIT: Waist or back strap that is attached to the breast beam of the loom, fitting around the weavers waist during weaving.

SEPEPAT: Fireflies. See *SEMPEPAT*.

SEPI API: Fire tongs, motif on textiles.

SERAGUNTING (SURONG GUNTING): [Jenson:1974:90-2] Son of daughter of god of war, *Sengalang Burong*, but of mortal father. Represents mortal Ibans' physical link to spirit ancestry. Legend notes how a bird (really daughter of *Lang*) changed into a skirt when shot by *Menggin*. Later she appears in human form and asks *Menggin* for her skirt. They marry and *Seragunting* is born. The essence of this myth lies in *Seragunting* having to earn/prove his claims to spiritual ancestry to his grandfather *Lang*. *Lang's* insight enables *Seragunting* to advise and direct Iban about the stars as indicators of rice planting, the bird omens used in farming and on various rituals and prohibitions, as he can foresee the consequences of men's behaviour because he knows the correct order of things. See *BAJU BURONG* above re: significance of this legend regarding weaving.

SIKAT: Comb. In weaving, to stretch and brush dry thread after it has been soaked in rice starch, to separate strands which have stuck together and to rid the thread of any bits of husk.

SILUP: [AR] Insert, weave into, mend; **SILUP TIKAI:** plaited edge or binding (*ungki*) of mat (esp. *lampit*). **NYILUP** (verb) 'Taja' pen enda' tau' nganyam, nyilup tau' ga' kami.' (Although we can't weave we can mend). 'Ia nyilup-ka bulu landak ba bok ia.' (She put a porcupine quill in her hair (as amulet).) 'Jarum ia silup ngagai kain.' (Her needle slipped into the cloth.) **SILUP LANGIT:** triangular figure in weaving.

SINGALANG BURONG: See **SENGALANG BURONG**.

SINGGAR: [AR] Female snake deity of Gelong, princess of weaving thread. Other patronesses of textile art see: Kumang, Meni, and Segadu'.

SIRAT: Loin cloth, long narrow sash-like textile, main cloth usually plain colour, (white, red or blue cotton but sometimes ikatted or woven in supplementary weft) with end sections especially embellished by supplementary weft patterns or tapestry (*sungkit*). Today, some sirat simply a only strip of batik or commercially printed cloth purchased from traders. **SIRAT PAYA,** special loin cloth. In the past part of Iban men's clothing, in the 1990s usually worn only as part of ceremonial costume.

SONGKET: Malay supplementary weft technique using continuous design threads (usually silver or gold) that pass from selvedge to selvedge, using a Malay loom, a large frame equipped with two harnesses/shafts and foot treadles. Cf. brocade. The designs are formed by shooting across series of warps, either on the top surface or underside of the cloth, resulting in a two sided cloth with positive-negative sides. The predominant technique of Malay weavers whose *songket* material is especially valued as design threads are of gold and silver on fine silk foundation in the best pieces - cf. **SUNGKIT,** a dissimilar Iban weaving technique.

SUGU: Comb.

SULAM: Embroidery, needle work on pre-woven cloth so that design threads can be applied at any spot/angle in contrast to brocade and other supplementary weft techniques where design threads applied during process of weaving generally follow the more restricted order of horizontal wefts which build up thread by thread to form the foundation cloth.

SULAT: Bone needle or bodkin used for tapestry work (*sungkit*) and mat making.

SUNGKI': Miniature packets of rice seed which may be included as an ingredient for ritual offerings (*miring*). Two or three grains of uncooked rice seed wrapped in small sections of palm leaf. If women make 7 *sugki* they wrap a thread tie around each packet 7 times.

SUNGKIT: Tapestry-like weave, needle (*sulat*) used to insert and wrap weft threads around groups of warps to create weft-faced pattern. Involves many discontinuous pattern threads which pass back and forth around small groups of warp threads several times within a design area using a slit technique, often to build up triangular or wavy line designs. Motifs produced by this method appear exactly the same on both sides of the cloth, unless in some cases the weaver does not trim and conceal the many thread ends where each new weft starts and ends, but leaves them untrimmed on one side. Note spelling: *sungkit* is frequently confused with *songket* which is a supplementary weft (overshot or float) technique typical of Malay weaving. *Sungkit* is a technique used more widely in the past for ritual cloths (*pua'*) such as the '*lubor api*', a special cloth woven to receive trophy heads, which although not ikat, still noted for quality of mordant/dye process. *Sungkit* is also featured in small elaborate panels on the bottom back section of ceremonial jackets and end panels of loin cloths. In the 1990s, fewer weavers make *sungkit*, compared to the revived interest in *kebat*, although some Iban now specialize in new one-sided form in bright colours (e.g. Batang Ai Iban).

SUNGKUP: Miniature house erected over the grave erected during Festival for the dead (*Gawai Antu*).

SURIK: Stripe. **SURIK RINIK:** refers to fine, closely detailed lines in cloth. Also refer to **SURIK ULAR KENDAWANG:** stripes of *kendawang* snake represented as black, white and red stripes along vertical edges of ritual cloths; also **KENGGANG KELIKUT** which are fine stripes with checkered/lattice like pattern using weaving technique of pick and pick, alternating sheds with groupings of all black warps, then all white ones appearing on top surface of web.

TABU': To roll or wind (thread) into a ball. See **NABU', NGEBOL**.

TACHU: Half of a coconut shell, used as a measuring cup, the customary way Iban measure out ingredients for dyeing process and for rice for cooking.

TAJAU: Large pottery jar, usually Chinese made, valued by Iban as an heirloom, investment. Customarily used as a place to store valuable cloths away from threats of light and insect damage. Jars also used to hold water or for making rice wine.

TAKAR: Dyeing process of measuring out by volume, the various ingredients. See **NAKAR, NGAR GAAR.** 'Ia nakar beras.' (She/he measures out the rice.) '*Baka' penakar beras'* (basket for measuring rice). In past the common measuring tool was a half

coconut shell. Cf. *NGAR*, refers to ceremonial performance required to prepare special mordant ingredients which involves special technical as well as ritual knowledge and acts.

TALI: String, rope.

TAMPOK LEMBA': The knots in grassy fibre (*lemba'*) which secure each wrapped section of warp strings in areas protected from penetration of liquid during submersion into the dye bath.

TAMPONG: [AR] To lengthen, join, splice, sew on, patch. *TAMPONG TIKAI* or *PUA'* (mat or cloth made in two parts), *SIRAT TAMPONG* (loincloth with added end panel in elaborate design work) - cf. *TANGKAN*, to follow on, succeed, as in tradition.

TANDA SIRAT: Embellished end of a loin cloth, often woven as a separate piece and joined on (*tampong*) to long body of *sirat*.

TANGGA': Ladder. Customarily, a notched pole was used as an entry ladder to Iban longhouse which were highset. Also used to climb from longboats up steep muddy river banks.

TANGGA' AJAN: Wooden frame to support loom beams during warping, the process of measuring out a new set of warp threads.

TANGGA' UBONG: Wooden frame (*tukal*) on which cotton warp threads are stretched (*jentang*) for tying (*kebat*, *ngebat*) before dyeing and weaving.

TANJU': Open wooden verandah which stretches the length of an Iban longhouse where crops are usually spread to dry. In the past such a verandah was highset, today on lowset buildings which have no wooden verandah, *tanju'* may be used to refer to the concrete area onto which the indoor gallery area (*ruai*) opens.

TAPANG: [AR] Hardwood tree *Koompassia excelsa* (Becc.), tall, lowest branches may be over 25 metres, grows near streams often surrounded by sago palms. Wood polishes well and is used for weaver's sword shaped beater, also for blowpipes. Also referred to as Bee tree, climbed for honey, and as 'king of trees.'

TARUM: [AR] Indigo plant (probably the creeper *Marsdenia tinctoria* R. Br., and not Indian *Indigofera tinctoria* L.). Leaves are fermented and used to produce blue dye to colour cotton threads. In the Baleh region, referred to as *renggat*.

TAU': To be able, know how. Also *temu*. *Penau*, knowledge.

TAU' NAKAR, TAU' NGAR: Name given to a person who has achieved the highest status of ikat art (e.g. Jabu 1991), having attained the knowledge of how to mix the special mordant recipe (*nakar*), that is to measure out the ingredients, and to perform customary rites (*ngar*) in which cotton threads are prepared for subsequent dyeing with *engkudu* roots to achieve a rich brick red.

TAYA': Cotton (*Gossypium* sp., *G. arboreum* L.). Iban cultivated cotton in the past but rarely in the 1990s. Most weavers purchase commercially spun cotton thread from traders who imported it, much coming from India.

TAYOK GASING: Hooked piece of wood onto which spun thread is wound from the spindle of the spinning wheel; also the hooked piece of wood on wheel of spinning wheel by which it is hand turned. *Tayok* can also refer to the curves a top makes when spinning.

TEDONG: Cobra.

TEGI: To ram weft threads tight with beater.

TEKALONG: Species of bread fruit tree (*Artocarpus* sp.), also called *temeran*. The bark (*kulit tekalong*) used for making bark cloth, in the past an important material for clothing such as loin cloths and jackets; rough walling (cf. *ipoh*), warp strips for large heavy mats (*bidai*), basketry straps (*ribis*) and cordage (cf. *pempan*). In the 1990s still used for basketry straps, particularly for heavy packs. When stripped, the inner bark is used, if necessary softened and widened by wetting and beating with wood mauls (*pemalu'*).

TEKU': Curves, bends (concerning design shapes) - cf. *gelong*, tendril.

TELADAN: A pattern or example to follow, in ikat, often another textile from which an artisan can learn, imitating or copying (*neladan*), either by generally following the overall layout of a pattern or, in the case of a novice or first attempt at a particular design, by actually counting the number of warps and length of areas tied for different sections of the pattern.

TEMENGGONG: Malay title conferred on Iban leaders in the Second Division and more recently instituted by British as a political position (i.e. paramount chiefs) over that of regional *penghulu* throughout Sarawak.

TEMERAN: See TEKALONG above.

TEMPAUT, PAUT: [AR] Backstrap band on Iban loom which in the past was usually made from bark cloth (*tekalong*) or deerskin (*kuli rusa'*). It is attached by cords to breast beam of loom for weaver to lean back in to hold warp taut. Today such belts often made from a piece of strong plastic or other canvas like material. Also *LUMBALAI, LUMBING*. '*Lumbai; tempaut enggau rakup*.'- loom with unfinished cloth on it (not to be used in new house until after *MANDDI RUMAH* rites).

TEMU: Know, understand, to be able, skilled. Also *tau*.

TENDAI: End beam of loom which is fixed to wall or brace for weaving. Also called *MELANTI*.

TENGANG: Long, straight creeper, the bark makes durable cords.

TENJAK: [AR] Malay loom, literally 'limp on toe.' It is a large floor loom that has a rigid free standing framework and treddle or foot operated peddles to change the warp shed in contrast to the Iban backstrap or stick loom on which the shed is opened by hand operated heddle sticks.

TENUN: Weave. Used to refer to textile weaving on a loom, not mat or basket weaving (which are referenced as *anyam* or *nganyam*).

TIANG: [AR] Post, pillar. *TIANG RUMAH:* house post; *TIANG JEGADA,* post on porch to receive offering at ceremony; *GAWAI MANGKIONG TIANG,* rite after moving to new longhouse. *TIANG LANJI'*, cane ribs of padi basket. *BUAH TIANG RANYAI* and *BUAH TIANG SANDONG:* designs on ritual ikat cloths (*pua'*) which feature ceremonial poles and which can only be tied by experienced weavers.

TIKAI: [AR] Mat. *TIKAI BURIT:* seat-mat, worn by men, hung from back from a waist cord and so as part of costume, handy for sitting on in boats and fields. *TIKAI UBONG:* cotton carpet. *TIKAI BEMBAN:* mat made from split reed fibres (*bemban*). *TIKAI WI:* heavy split rattan mat. *SILUP TIKAI (UNGKI TIKAI):* plaited edge, finish a mat, especially heavy mats.

TIKAL: Fold up, tie, turn back.

TIMANG: Long poetic incantation sung by ritual specialists on major ceremonial occasions. See Ch.10. Also: *PENGAP*.

TUA: Familiar or warning spirit, appears in a dream (*mimpi*) or vision. Artisans who create original ikat designs do so through the inspiration and guidance drawn from visions communicated to them by such spirits. See *yang*, also see *gerasi* above.

TUAH: [AR] (Malay) Good fortune, sign of luck, godsend. Also *rasi* (Skrang *raksi*).

TUAK: Fermented rice wine, customary Iban drink made especially for ritual occasions.

TUBOH: Body, distinct from spirit (*semengat*) and bodily soul (*ayu*).

TUBU': Young edible shoots of bamboo (*buloh*). In textiles, a motif commonly ikatted in a row as end borders on ritual cloths, e.g. *pemuchok tubu'*. Iban also refer to by Malay *rebong*, or *muchok rebong*, cone shaped bamboo shoots. See *ayu* regarding bodily soul and parallel to clumps of bamboo.

TUGANG: A decoration of various colours or coloured stripes.

TUKAL: Wooden frame about one metre long upon which cotton thread is wound off as a warp for ikat tyeing prior to weaving. More commonly specified as *tangga' ubong* (literally, a ladder for thread). Malay use *tukal* as a measure of thread, i.e. hank of 16 skeins.

TULANG: A bone.

TUMPOH: Iban back tension loom. Constructed with a continuous warp which is wound about the two main end beams. The loom sticks have no permanent frame, working parts are kept rolled in cloth, with or without warp threads wound onto the loom sticks. In use, the artisans lash the top end beam to a pair of uprights posts or to the wall of the longhouse. A weaver sits on a mat on the floor with feet against a heavy beam which is positioned on the floor as a foot brace. The warp strings are held under tension by leaning back in a waistband or backstrap (*tempaut*) attached by cord to ends of breast beam.

TUMPU: [AR] Push against (with feet), firm footing. *PENUMPUPU,* foot beam under loom.

TURAK: (Malay) Spool, shuttle. Also *JENKUAN, LIDI PENYINTANG*.

UBAT: Medicine. Howell (1900) refers to the ingredients for the mordant bath as medicines. Mordant and dye ingredients such as ginger (*lia'*), betel leaves (*sirih*)

and lime (*kapu'*) and iron knives (*parang*) are equally important in dyeing as in healing rites.

UBI, UBIARA: Wild sweet potato (*Dioscorea* and *Pachyrhizus* spp.) used as a dye.

UBONG: Thread, usually refers to cotton thread.

UDAH: Finished, ended, already (Malay *SUDAH*).

UJAN: Rain. A threat to thread treated with mordant as it would dilute/wash out the solution in contrast to process which does require exposure to lighter moisture of dew (*ambun*), which enhances reactive process.

ULAR: Snake. Represents earth form of deities (e.g. *Keling, Kumang*) who reside in celestial longhouse at *Panggau Libau*, the mountain from which the *Gelong* (i.e. coiling) River rises. The *Gelong* River is said to be represented on earth by the *Kapuas*, the longest and extremely windy river in Borneo, today within the Indonesian Kalimantan region but ancestral homeland of all Bornean Iban. **ULAR KENDAWANG:** type of snake (*Cylindrophis rufus*) with redhead/tail and body striped black, white and red, said to be represented in striped patterns along vertical edges of ritual cloths (*ara surik*) - cf. *naga*, term for deadly snakes.

ULU: River or headwaters, hinterland. Also refers to hilt of sword or paddle. See *orang ulu*.

ULU': Interpretation or meaning when used in reference to dreams (*mimpi*).

WI: Climbing palm *Calamus* and other spp.. Rattan (Malay *rotan*) is the cane (e.g. Lawyer cane).

YANG: Tutelary spirit appears in a dream (*mimpi*) or vision to bards (*lemambang*) and healers (*manang*) - cf. *tua'*.

GLOSSARY OF ENGLISH WEAVING TERMS

BACKSTRAP LOOM: BACK TENSION, or STICK LOOM. Iban stick loom called *tumpoh*, strap called *tempuat*. A set of sticks on which warp threads are wound and held under tension for weaving into cloth by securing the top or warp beam to a wall or posts and the breast beam to a belt which fits about the weavers waist. The Iban loom being strung with a continuous warp so that it forms a tube around the two end beams and can be rotated as weaving progresses.

BALANCED WEAVE: Warp set so that when weft interwoven the resulting web has equal numbers of vertical warp threads and horizontal weft threads per centimetre (square set so that neither the warp nor the weft dominate).

BEAM: The front and back wooden bars of a stickloom on which the warp threads are wound and held under tension for weaving. Iban, breast beam *rakup*, top end beam *tendai*.

BEATER: Batten. Iban, *belia'*. For a stickloom, the beater is usually a long flat pointed sword shaped piece of hardwood used to prise open the shed, or opening within the warp, and is turned on edge to allow a weft thread to be accurately inserted. It can then be used to beat, or pack firmly into the woven cloth, each new weft thread. On some sticklooms (not Iban) and on large floorlooms, the warps threads are fed through a comb-like reed which is used to comb or beat the weft into the cloth as it is woven.

BOBBIN: A spool or stick on which weft threads are wound so that they can be inserted between warp threads during weaving. Iban *lidi penyintang*.

BROCADE: Fabric decoration applied during the weaving process. Patterns are created through the use of additional threads that float across one or more warp end(s) to make a design (textured and/or multi-coloured) that may be visible on only one or both side(s) of the textile. Iban e.g. *karap*, *sungkit*, Malay *songket*. Often confused with embroidery which differs in that embroidery involves application of design threads to a textile after weaving process is completed. Embroidery threads can be applied at any point in the woven structure of the cloth whereas brocade threads are inserted pick by pick as the weft of the foundation cloth is built up, i.e. aligned to the consecutive warp and weft. BROCADE may involve continuous float threads which are inserted from selvedge to selvedge, or a number of discontinuous threads. Designs produced on both top and underside of a fabric give either a positive/negative or feature only on the top side leaving either a lot of loose unfinished threads on the underside or alternatively concealed within the warps to produce a plain underside.

DYE: To colour thread or cloth. Iban, *selup*. See also *ngar*.

EMBROIDERY: Application of design threads to a piece of woven fabric using a needle. Malay *sulam*. Often confused with BROCADE.

ENDS: Weaving term to refer to each individual warp or weft thread which itself may be composed of multiple threads.

FLOAT WEAVE: Weaving technique of skipping across multiple warp or weft threads to create surface texture/coloured pattern. Also called OVERSHOT. The threads which are floated may be either the basic warp or weft making up the foundation cloth, or they may be extra supplementary weft design threads which are inserted between alternate picks or shots of weft.

HEDDLES: The string(s) on a loom which loop over/under alternate warp threads and a slender rod (heddle stick, Iban *karap*) so that a series of warp threads may be raised or lowered during the weaving process creating the shed/opening where a horizontal weft thread is to be inserted.

IKAT: An Indonesian/Malaysian word (*mengikat*) meaning to knot, to bind, to tie around. Refers to the method of resist dye patterning involving tie-dyeing warp and/or weft threads prior to weaving the yarn into fabric. When threaded on the loom or woven into warp, a distinctive pattern is created, characterized by blurred linear effect where slight shifting of threads occurs during warping or weaving process. Iban terms *kebat*, *ngebat*, refer to specialization in warp ikat.

INDIGO: A blue dye obtained from indigo plant (genus: *indigofera*). Iban: *tarum*, *renggat*.

LAZE RODS: Also lease sticks. Thin sticks used to maintain order of threads when warping or weaving. Iban *lidi*.

LEASE STICK: See LAZE RODS.

LOOM: Iban *tumpoh*. A set of sticks or frame used to support a set of vertical warp threads (i.e. non-rigid elements) under tension to enable horizontal weft threads to be interwoven into fabric.

MORDANT: Any substance such as metallic salts of alum, chrome, iron and tin, various acids or ammonia, used before or during the dyeing process to fix the colour in the yarns, making the dyes permanent and colour-enriched. Iban, see *ngar*, *gaar*.

PATTERN WEAVE: A single- or double-faced fabric with design created by floating various series of basic weft or warp threads which make up the ground weave. Iban, *pakan bebas*. Contrasts to supplementary weft patterning such as brocade (Iban *sungkit*, *karap* or Malay *songket*), no extra decorative threads are introduced.

PICK: A single shot of weft thread inserted through the shed opening of stretched warp threads that is then packed or beaten into the web of the cloth being woven.

PLAIN WEAVE: (TABBY) Weave where weft threads inserted over one-, under one- over one- under one warp.

PLY: To twist two or more threads together to form one thicker stronger multi-stranded thread in contrast to simply using two or more threads together without twisting into a new single but multi-stranded element as Iban weavers work.

SELVEDGE: The finished edge of a fabric. Cloth selvages are formed at vertical sides of cloth during weaving as the horizontal wefts threads are turned around the outside warps as they are continuously passed back and forth the warps and beaten into a web.

SET: Refers to the number of weft threads and/or warp threads in a width of one centimeter of a woven textile.

SHED STICK: Iban, *bebungan*. Round stick or length of bamboo placed behind the heddles on a stickloom to maintain the ordering of the warp so that alternative warps pass over or under it. Thus the shed stick is used to secure one shed, while the heddle string is used to pull up the bottom warp strings which pass under the shed stick, and so reverse the order to opposite shed needed for weaving a plain weave.

SHUTTLE: Instrument, usually a wooden boat-shaped piece on which weft threads are wound and which facilitates passing, sliding or 'throwing' the weft through the shed opening from one to the other side of the warp threads which are held under tension on the loom. Iban, *jengkuan*.

SKEIN: Yarn wound in a loose elongated coil.

SLIT TECHNIQUE: Tapestry technique where discontinuous weft threads meet and are repeatedly wrapped about adjacent warps so that a slit results at that point as the web is built up - cf. Iban *sungkit* (pl.27). To prevent a slit, weft threads may be interlocked when they meet or may be wrapped about the same warp thread which produces a saw-tooth effect at that point.

SPINDLE: A smooth slender stick on a spinning wheel, (or as a separate hand held tool, with a weight WHORL near the lower end), onto which fibres are wound during the spinning process. Iban *mata gasing*.

SPINNING WHEEL: A hand or foot operated wheel which turns a spindle onto which raw fibres such as cotton can be drawn out and twisted into thread. Iban, *gasing*. Also *pelang gasing*, *gasing inggar*.

SQUARE SET: See balanced weave above.

SUPPLEMENTARY WEFT: A second set of decorative threads, inserted between alternate shots of ground weave, and often floated across multiple warp threads to provide textured patterning. Iban, *sungkit*, *pilih*, *karap*. Malay *songket*.

TABBY WEAVE: See plain weave.

TAPESTRY: A weft-faced weave produced by beating weft together so closely that they conceal the warp. Designs are created using many discontinuous bundles of weft of different colours, to build up different areas of the pattern. Fingers, a needle, fork or comb may be used to pack or beat in the weft, as the web is built up unevenly. Iban, *sungkit*, for which a needle is used to wrap groups of weft threads about bundles of three or four warp to create a weft faced tapestry, using a slit technique - adjacent wefts do not interlock but are simply turned so that where they build up repeatedly on the same warp to form a vertical line, a slit results in the fabric. Patterning is identical on both sides of the cloth. Two finished surfaces are created, except when the many ends (start/finish) of weft are not secured and trimmed from the worked side of the tapestry.

TREADLES: Foot pedals on footlooms such as the Malay loom, used to raise/lower heddles instead of, or as well as, using hand-drawn heddle sticks (*karap*).

TWILL: Weave characterized by texture featuring diagonal lines formed by sequence of interlacing warp and weft. Iban basketry and mat weave (*anyam*) widely used to create textured float patterning. An example of the weaving sequence for the most common basic twill weave involves repetition of groups of four warp where the weft is inserted over two warps/under two warps in the first shed, but each subsequent shot of weft begins that same sequence by moving just one warp to the right (or left), to produce a diagonal rib effect. Besides a balanced 2/2 twill, there are almost limitless possibilities in twill weave combinations: including unbalanced 2/1 twill (over two/under one), 3/1, 4/2, or more elaborate combinations as 4/2/3/2 with bands then reversing that order. Without ordered repeats, the basic twill technique extends to enable asymmetrical float patterns such as found in mats, basketry and float weave textile design work.

WARP: Series of threads set lengthwise on a loom into which horizontal weft threads are interwoven to form a web, or woven cloth. Iban, *peniri*.

WARP BEAM: One of two beams (the top one) around which the warp is wound on a stick loom, and which is fastened to a post or wall during weaving process. Iban *tendai*. The other, the breast beam (*rakup*) is attached to a belt (*tempuan*) fitted about the weaver's waist.

WARP FACED: A woven fabric produced so that only the warp shows on the surface of the cloth. Warp faced cloths are produced by using more and/or thicker warp threads than weft. The warp is set together so closely on the loom that the weft, when inserted, is completely concealed. Warp which has been tied with ikat patterns is usually woven as a warp faced cloth to maximize the exposure of the warp designs, although may be woven in a balanced weave so that the pattern is more obscured or speckled where the weft passes over the warp, giving a shadowy effect.

WARPING. Process of winding out the appropriate number and length of thread onto a frame or beams of a stick loom, which serve as the foundation warp for subsequent weaving process. Iban *ngikat*.

WEAVE. Insert horizontal threads over under a set of vertical warp threads to make a cloth. Iban, *tenun*.

WEB: The woven fabric or cloth (*kain*) made by interlacing of two sets of threads, vertical (warp - *peniri*) and horizontal (weft - *pakan*), in such a way that the interlacing is permanent.

WEFT: Also called WOOF. Iban, *pakan*. Weaving threads which are fed over and under a set of warp threads in varying sequences, to create a web, or woven cloth (*kain*).

WEFT-FACED: A woven fabric produced so that only the weft threads show on the surface of the cloth because the weft threads are packed together closely so as to conceal the warp. This may be facilitated by setting warps with space between them, and by using a weft that is thicker/heavier than the warp strands. Tapestry is an example of a weft-faced weave.

WOOF: See weft (*pakan*).

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