WHO ARE THE BERAWAN?

ETHNIC CLASSIFICATION AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF SECONDARY TREATMENT OF THE DEAD IN CENTRAL NORTH BORNEO

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EVERY ethnographer, as he arrives in the field, is faced with a problem of classifying and mapping the different ethnic groups in the region; of working out who lives where. Sometimes the problem is easy, if good information is already in print, or if there are large homogeneous tribes such as are found in parts of Africa. On the other hand, if available information is scanty and the ethnic situation fragmented and confused, the field worker may only gradually be able to fit together the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, as he proceeds with his intensive study of one community or locality. But in either case, this information is seldom made the subject of an article. We tend to assume, perhaps incorrectly, that our colleagues would be bored by the detailed ethnology of someone else's field area.

Nevertheless, this paper attempts just such an account. Its claim to a wider than usual interest rests on two peculiarities of the Berawan case. First, in trying to find the linguistic and cultural connections of the Berawan, various anomalies appeared in currently accepted ethnic classifications of central north Borneo. The present re-examination sheds light on a range of long-standing ethnological puzzles. Second, there is sufficient historical data available to reconstruct the order of events that brought about these anomalies.

I. ARE THE BERAWAN KENYAH?

Fieldwork was conducted in the Baram District in Sarawak's Fourth Division in 1972 and 1973.1 For those not familiar with Borneo, a brief sketch of the population of the area is necessary to make comprehensible what follows.

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Crudely then, there are in Baram District: coastal people (Chinese and Malays), Iban, Penan, and orang ulu. The coastal people are not found far upriver. They are clustered around the bazaars near the coast, or in the middle reaches of major rivers. The Chinese are mostly involved in economic activities. The Malays are mainly wet rice agriculturalists, living in villages of single detached houses. The Iban are a large expansionary tribe, originating in western Kalimantan, who spread rapidly northward into Sarawak in the last two centuries (Pringle, 1970). They arrived only recently in Baram District, a vanguard having settled under the protection of Rajah Brooke in 1891. They live in longhouses and grow hill rice by slash and burn methods of agriculture. The Penan are (or were) hunters and gatherers living in small bands, mostly in the far interior. Sometimes they are included within the category orang ulu. Finally the orang ulu, literally "the people from upriver", are a congeries of tribes who live in the middle and upper stretches of the rivers.

*Sketch map of Northern Sarawak showing the distribution of peoples practising secondary treatment of the dead.*

Individual communities are labelled only for peoples of the lower Baram, and they are shown in their present location. The Tring are indicated across roughly the territory that they occupied at the middle of the last century. The main areas of Melanau settlement lie off the map to the west.

The orang ulu have come to feel, in modern times, a sense of identity in opposition to the greatly more numerous Iban, Chinese, and Malays. But they are ethnically diverse. Spread out over a vast area, each community has its
own complex stories of migration, of alliance and warfare. At the next taxonomic level, therefore, there is a classification in common use in Baram District, dividing the orang ulu into three major categories: the Kayan, the Kenyah, and the Kelabit.

The Kayan and Kelabit are culturally and linguistically homogeneous. The Kelabit, numbering about 2,000, occupy the high valleys at the headwaters of the Baram River. They have a well-developed system of irrigation, and produce abundant crops of wet rice. The Kayan are more numerous, and spread out over a much larger area. There are about 8,000 Kayan in Sarawak, most of them in the drainage of the Baram River, and a lesser number in the Balui, at the head of the Rejang River (see map). A greater number, probably around 30,000, live in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), in the Mahakam and Kajan river systems. Across that entire area, the Kayan speak the same language, with only minor dialect differences, and have a largely uniform culture. They are riverine folk, building their substantial longhouses near major watercourses. Their subsistence crop is dry rice planted in clearings newly cut in the deep forest every year or two.

The Kenyah are similar in numbers to the Kayan, and distributed over much the same territory. Areas of relatively dense Kenyah population lie interspersed among Kayan areas. (See Metcalf 1975a for details of the location of Kayan and Kenyah longhouses in the Baram District). But the Kenyah are not culturally or linguistically homogeneous. Just how wide the diversity of Kenyah language and culture is cannot be specified until more research has been done. But it is clear that the problem largely turns on whom one calls a Kenyah. In the meantime, let us note that there are a great number of Kenyah who are essentially similar, with only small variations from house to house. We could perhaps call them the “core” Kenyah, and the Lepo Tau sub-tribe, who mostly live in the upper Kayan River in Kalimantan, are often held to be the epitome of them (see Whittier, 1973).

The Berawan were selected for intensive study from among the many small ethnic groups in Baram because one of their houses preserves the traditional religion (adəd lunà). In this it is, as far as I know, unique in the entire central north Borneo culture area, although there are several houses that still follow the Bungan cult, a revivalist movement that attempted to compete with Christian missionizing.

Initially, I followed local wisdom in assuming that the Berawan were a Kenyah subgroup. This seemed sensible at first glance, given the known heterogeneity of the Kenyah. Why create a whole new category for so small a tribelet? In this way it was possible to preserve the neatly alliterative three-part classification: Kayan, Kenyah, and Kelabit.
Unfortunately, I shall have to confuse this classification somewhat, and without apologies, since the classification confused me considerably when I first began fieldwork. Since I believed that the Berawan were Kenyah, I assumed that the lack of Kenyah culture traits that I observed was a symptom of acculturation, or perhaps long standing cultural impoverishment. Several missionaries expressed just this view — that Berawan were “inferior Kenyah”. Given the emotional investment entailed in fieldwork, such a “discovery” was very unpleasant. It was some months before it became clear that the Berawan are part of a distinct and submerged culture complex, and not aberrant Kenyah.

In the first place, the Berawan language is not closely related to any Kenyah tongue. Secondly, the Berawan are not so few that they can be dismissed as freaks. They are rather more numerous than is at first apparent. Recent observers have often not realized that there are Berawan in both the Tinjar and the Tutoh rivers, an oversight made easy by the plethora of names used to describe communities, and the circumstance that most travellers are familiar with one river or the other but not both. In the four main Berawan communities there is a total of about 1,600 people. The population of “Kenyah” (using the census definition) in Sarawak is now about 9,000, so that the Berawan make up 18 percent, or nearly a fifth, of the total “Kenyah” in Sarawak.

Berawan have been labelled for convenience of classification and also because they seemed so few. But there is a third reason: Berawan themselves readily agree that they are “Kenyah”. There are two interpretations that can be placed upon this indigenous duplicity.

The first interpretation is to assume that the Berawan are trying to “pass” as Kenyah. In this view, there are certain Kenyah groups, notably the Lepo Tau, who have been militarily successful and who have developed cultural refinements that are the envy of all other “Kenyah”. Berawan ape this model of high culture, but with only middling success, being rather far removed from the fountainheads of Kenyah culture in the upper Kayan and upper Baram rivers. In fact, the Berawan are the most far downriver of any of these peoples classified as Kenyah. They are, therefore, the closest to the bazaars. This circumstance led to another prejudice against the poor Berawan. It was implied that they were inclined to be “trading post Indians”, forever hanging around in the bazaars, getting drunk. In short, they manifested the worst effects of culture contact.

A linguist who worked in the Baram shortly before my arrival, Dr. Blust, evidently also felt that the Berawan were trying to “pass” as Kenyah, although for different reasons (personal communication). He noted that there were no linguistic grounds for placing the Berawan with the Kenyah, and this led him to doubt the veracity of stories that the Berawan tell about migration from the Usan Apau plateau. All Kenyah have migration stories that begin in the
Usan Apau, which is seen as a benign ancestral home. The Berawan stories might, therefore, have been concocted in order to copy those of the Kenyah.

But there is another interpretation, one that is more charitable to the Berawan. In my experience Berawan assent to being Kenyah simply as a matter of convenience. They know that the name Berawan is hardly known at all outside their immediate neighbourhood, and so they go along with the classification that others have made for them. They do not, however, make any attempt to suppress their true autonym.

In fact, Berawan are proud of their cultural identity, sometimes to the point of chauvinism. A nice example of ethnic pride is the Berawan view of social class. Unlike the Kenyah, who describe themselves as having three classes, the Berawan have no classes. Berawan claim flatly that all Berawan, to a man, are upper class (although there are differences in rank), and they have a myth that explains how this came about. They expect to be received as nobles in Kenyah houses. Concerning the “trading post Indians” reputation, it is true that Berawan sometimes drink heavily, and this usually happens on just those occasions when there are visitors in the house, and in the name of hospitality. The Kenyah also are fond of drinking at social occasions, except for those who accepted the fundamentalist Christianity of the Borneo Evangelical Mission.

With regard to the migration stories, they state clearly that when the ancestral Berawan lived in the Usan Apau there were no Kenyah living there. Thus, the stories do not validate a claim to inclusion within the Kenyah. Rather they claim a priority over the Kenyah.

We should note that the confusion of Berawan with Kenyah is relatively recent. Charles Hose, an early Resident of the Baram and a writer on local ethnology, found it much more obvious that there was a group of downriver peoples in the Baram distinct from the Kenyah. It is this nexus of small related groups that has become submerged. In order to dredge up the lost parts, we turn now to exploring the linguistic connections of the Berawan language.

II. LINGUISTIC AND HISTORICAL AFFINITIES

Between the four main Berawan communities, there is some slight linguistic variation. Long Teru in the lower Tinjar and Batu Belah in the lower Tutoh share almost identical isolects. Long Jegan in the middle Tinjar has different vowels and many non-cognate lexical items, but its speech is easily understood by members of the former longhouses. The same is not true of the language of Long Terawan in the middle Tutoh, and the divergence of that tongue from the other Berawan isolects is commonly attributed to a mixing of their original language with the Tring language. Certainly there has been a process of
integration between the Long Terawan folk and a remnant of the shattered Tring tribe over the last century. Nevertheless, these four communities have a clear linguistic cohesion, and they all employ the same autonym, *Malawan*. I have preferred to use the Malay version of their name, Berawan, because it is most commonly used in Baram and has already appeared in print.

We deal with Berawan linguistic affiliations in order of closeness.

(a) *Long Tutoh*

The most obvious affiliation is with the people of Long Tutoh. Their migration stories are closely interwoven with those of the people of Batu Belah and Long Terawan. Today, the people of Batu Belah often marry with the Long Tutoh folk, and the links between those two houses are closer than the links between Batu Belah and Long Terawan. The Long Teru folk also have many affinal links to Long Tutoh. The historical and social links are so apparent that one wonders why they do not call themselves Berawan.

Linguistically, the Long Kiput dialect shows unmistakable similarities to the three Berawan isolecets. But it also shows a marked similarity to the languages of the communities reviewed in section (b) below.

(b) "Malay" communities in the Baram

We have already had cause to re-define the term "Kenyah". We shall now treat "Malay" in a similar fashion. In Sarawak the custom has been since the time of the Rajahs to refer to all followers of the Moslem faith as Malays. Conversion to Islam is often called masok Malau, literally, to enter Malaydom. This is appropriate because the religious change usually involves a change in lifestyle also, generally copying Malay ways. In fact, most Sarawak Malays are descendants of indigenous people who converted to Islam and adopted Malay culture. This process of cultural diffusion from the Malay peninsula and Sumatra has been going on for centuries. The ancient Sultanate of Brunei, which is adjacent to the Baram area, has been a major centre for this diffusionary process.

In the lower Baram there are several communities of people who now think of themselves as Malay, but continue to speak a language that is not Malay, and have traditions of once being longhouse dwellers like the orang ulu.

At Kampong Menawa conversion has occurred within living memory. In 1928 a segment of the Long Tutoh community decided to split off from the main house after a quarrel. They moved a short distance downriver to Long Menawa, where they owned land. Simultaneously, they converted to Islam, and they built their new village in the Malay style, with detached single-family houses dotted about under shade trees. They continued to speak the Long Kiput language with, however, a large admixture of Malay loan words.
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The other communities all converted before or just after the turn of the century, about the time that Hose was travelling in and writing about the Baram. From the records of that stormy and violent time, especially the Sarawak Gazette, which printed items of news and snippets of local ethnography from the Baram in almost every issue, we can reconstruct the order of events with reasonable certainty.

In the second half of the last century, the Baram was extremely unsettled with large war parties of interior folk often coming downriver to harry the coastal folk. In 1857 a Kayan war party even kept the capital city of Brunei in a state of panic for months, despite the fabulous wealth and ancient military prestige of the waning empire (St. John 1862:54). The Kenyah were also actively raiding, while keeping one wary eye on the Kayan, and even the Berawan made raids on the coasts of Brunei in the 1870's. The Berawan themselves evidently succeeded in avoiding the attentions of these large Kayan and Kenyah war parties by concentrating in large villages, by cultivating alliances with their neighbours, and by having an evil reputation for ferocity if provoked — a kind of Borneo berserk.

Near the end of the century the chronic violence of the Baram area persuaded the Sultan of Brunei to cede it to the expanding state of Sarawak which gradually imposed an orderly administration in the Baram for the first time. Just before the cession the ancestors of the Batu Belah, Long Terawan, and Long Tutoh communities were all clustered together in one very large longhouse near modern day Batu Belah. This was made necessary by their location on a principal highway for large Kayan war parties, which came down the Baram, went up the Tutoh, and crossed into the Limbang river where they made such depredations among the Tring and the Murut people there that the area became a depopulated no-man's land. The Berawan also had firm alliances with the large Kayan community that now lives at Long Panai. The Berawan of Long Jegan were luckier, being removed from the major routes of war parties. Even so, they found it advisable to build massive fortress-longhouses, virtually impregnable without firearms, and to ally themselves with the first wave of Sebop settlers in the Tinjar, the Long Taballau Sebop. Near the end of the century they shared a very large longhouse with these Sebop at Long Batan in the upper Tinjar, and this was the headquarters of the famous rebel chief Aban Jau.

In this chaotic situation, the smaller communities in the lower Baram did two things. They removed themselves to less exposed positions, and they sought military protection. Several moved into the Bankong River, a small and unattractive tributary of the lower Baram, where extensive swamps make it easy to conceal oneself. Others moved towards the coast, where marauders from the interior would be unlikely to follow, since there is no access by river
and the interior folk are unfamiliar with sea travel. The move towards the coast brought these smaller groups into areas controlled by Brunei. They looked to the Malay world of the coast for protection, and they converted to Islam and adopted Malay culture as consequences.

The map shows the present location of these communities, some of which have prospered and multiplied in the interim. The Dali’ live in the lower Sibuti river, near the spot where the old Sibuti bazaar was located. The Miri people live in several small kampong near the modern-day town of the same name: at Kuala Miri, at Pujut, and at Luak Bay. Heading north along the coast we find the Belait people (autonym: Belit) near Kuala Belait, and the Tutong near the modern-day town of the same name. Moving inland a little, we find the large Bakong community located near the bazaar at Beluru, far up the Bakong River. Finally, the Narom people now occupy a kampong of that name adjacent to the Marudi bazaar. The Narom converted to Islam a little later than the other groups (excluding the Menawa folk), and in Hose’s day still maintained an orang-ulul lifestyle. They had a longhouse inside the Bakong River, and sent a war canoe to the 1899 regatta at Marudi (Haddon 1901:409). Evidently they maintained a military cohesion during the troubled period of the last century, and established themselves in a defensible place in the Bakong. When peace was established they moved so as to be near the newly established centre of trade at Marudi.

Linguistically, all six of these communities show a close affinity. Moreover, the original settlers at Long Teru, the Lelak people, spoke a language belonging in this group. In the 1920’s Berawan immigrants from Batu Belah gradually moved into the Lelak longhouse, and the Berawan tongue has now almost completely displaced Lelak. But old people still remember a little, and they say that it is mutually intelligible with the Bakong language.

Luckily, systematic linguistic field work has recently been carried out in the Baram by Dr. Blust. He concluded that all the non-Kayan languages of the Baram and all the coastal languages from Bintulu in the south to Tutong in the north are members of a separate group of Austronesian languages (1972). He calls this group the “North Sarawak” languages, and divides them into four major sub-groups: (1) Kelabit—Lun Bawang—Saban, (2) Kenyah, (3) Lower Baram, and (4) Bintulu. He notes that there is no linguistic evidence to support the view that Berawan are a kind of Kenyah. On the contrary, he shows that there is a distinct Lower Baram subgroup, the members of which vary as much from the Kenyah languages as does Kelabit. The Lower Baram subgroup comprises the Berawan dialects, Long Kiput, Narom, Lelak, Dali’, Miri, Belait, and Tutong.  

*Another small group, the Lemiting, are mentioned in several early accounts. Today no trace of them remains.*
Let us review our conclusions so far. On purely linguistic grounds, we can separate a nexus of downriver peoples that are clearly related, and that are quite distinct from the Kenyah. There is now no cover term in general use to describe this group, but there is a name constructed in the Kenyah style that was used in the past. This name is the *Lepo Pu'un*. *Lepo* means nation or tribe and is a term for a large inclusive group. *Pu'un* (Berawan Long Teru: *puwong*) means "to own". The name can be glossed as something like "the owners of the land", reflecting their occupation of the lower Beram before other immigrants. This term was still in use when Needham worked in the Baram in 1951-2 and he gives a partial list of its component groups as follows: Long Kiput, Berawan, Narom, and Balait (1971:226). Some of the Moslem villages have been left out of this list, and the term was already passing out of use. The Lepo Pu'un disappeared from view because they were split up and subsumed under the two labels: Malay and Kenyah. Hose and other observers at the beginning of the century found it much easier to see the original situation because the change to Malay had occurred only recently, or was still in progress.

As a second step in the search for linguistic and cultural affinities of the Berawan, let us widen our view to include societies outside the Baram area, and languages beyond the limited sample considered by Dr. Blust. Luckily, I am able to draw on the work of another linguist, Dr. Hudson, whose classification embraces the entire island of Borneo.

(c) *Peoples to the south*

Figure 1 is a schematic representation of some of the classification contained in Hudson (1974). Only those parts of the classification that concern us here have been included in detail, and diagrammatic display does not appear in the original.

The first thing to note is that all of the languages that Blust classified as the "Lower Baram group" appear together under the heading "Baram-Tinjar" in Hudson, so that the unity of this group of isolects is not in question. If we now turn to the next level of the taxonomy, we see that there are three other groups of languages that are classified in the Rejang-Baram subdivision. All these languages are found to the south of the Berawan, in the Third Division.

Of these groups, the Punan Bah are geographically the closest to the Berawan. Until shortly before the Second World War, the Berawan community now located at Long Jegan had its longhouse further upriver at Long Tisam. From there it is a matter of a few hours walk only to arrive at Punan Bah farmhouses in the Jelalong branch of the upper Kemena River. These houses were in contact with their relatives in the Tubau branch of the Upper Kemena, who in turn utilized a walking path into the Belaga to maintain contact with
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Punan Bah settled in that river. Thus, a well-defined route linked the Tinjar and the Belaga through the intermediary of the Punan Bah. Dr. Clayre walked over part of this route some years ago, and remarked upon its relative ease (Clayre, 1972).

The route into the Belaga made possible contacts between the Berawan and the important communities in the middle Balui to the south of the modern

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1—Diagrammatic summary of relevant parts of a classification of Borneo languages by Hudson (1974).

N.B. The names in italics are arbitrary, and serve to designate categories. The names not in italics are those of actual languages. Exo-Bornean languages are ones that have close affinities to languages indigenous to regions outside Borneo. Endo-Bornean isolects are those autochthonous to Borneo.

bazaar at Belaga. Here are located the two large longhouses of the Kejaman, two of the Sekapan, and three of the Punan Bah in addition to the four houses of that ethnic group located in the upper Kemen River (Rousseau, 1972). There is also a large house of the Lahanan folk in the upper Balui, above Belaga. These twelve communities are the people that Leach labelled the Kajang. Like the Berawan in the Baram, they were earlier occupants of the Balui River than the Kayan and Kenyah immigrants who now dominate those
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areas. Like the Berawan, they have been subsumed under a label of convenience in the national census, where they are counted as Melanau.

Evidence of Berawan contact with the Kajang is not hard to find. The noble families of both Long Jegan and Batu Be'ah claim links of kinship to the Kejaman and Sekapan aristocracy. There are several Punan Bah men married into the Berawan community at Long Jegan, and Berawan men have gone to the Balui to marry in recent times. Some Long Jegan folk can speak Punan Bah, and even sing Punan Bah death songs. A Punan Bah prophet converted the Batu Belah Berawan to a new revivalist cult in the early 1950's. It may seem odd that the Berawan should be prepared to travel so far to marry, and that cultural influences have been felt at such a range. But it must be remembered that when these patterns were evolving, the Baram and the Balui were empty apart from the Berawan (and cousins) and the Kajang respectively. They were each others' nearest neighbours in a vast, empty land of forests and rivers.

Except for a few tiny groups that need not concern us, we have noted Berawan connections with the speakers of the Rejang-Bintulu and Rejang-Sajau isolects. One subdivision of the Rejang-Baram languages remains to be discussed, the Lower Rejang group. The Kanowit and Tanjong are once again small groups, but the Melanau are a large segment of the population of Sarawak, and number many thousands. Most of them live near the coast in the Third Division and the southern part of Fourth Division. The Melanau tongue has many dialects, varying slightly from one river to the next. Sago is a major part of their diet, and previously they built substantial longhouses like the orang ulu (interior folk). Most of them are now either Moslem or Christian, and the longhouse lifestyle has disappeared. The Kajang have sometimes been labelled the "inland Melanau". There is no evidence of direct contact between the Berawan and the Melanau; the link is an indirect one via the Kajang.

(d) Peoples to the north

To the north of the Berawan, in the Limbang and Trusan rivers, there live speakers of the languages that Hudson refers to as the Apo Duat group. These include the Lun Dayeh, Lun Bawang, Kelabit, and Tring.

The Tring have already been mentioned in connection with the community at Long Terawan, where a remnant of the Tring tribe has intermarried. The Tring were once a large and powerful tribe that occupied the entire Tutoh River valley and a large part of the Limbang in Fifth Division. According to Berawan stories, their first encounters with the Tring were friendly, but then Tring aggression against the Narom caused the Berawan to come to the protection of the latter. From then on warfare was continuous. At first the Tring had the best of it, but Berawan strength gradually grew with the consolidation
of an alliance of downriver peoples against the Tring. Newly arrived Kenyah immigrants, elements of the Lepo Umbo’, were drawn into the alliance at an early date.

The Berawan accounts tell of sneak attacks, of raid and counter-raid, and of heroic confrontations between the famous champions of each side. Over a long period of time, the Tring were gradually driven back into the Limbang River, and the Tutoh was cautiously colonized by the Berawan. The great Kayan war parties of the latter half of the nineteenth century completed what the Berawan had begun, and the Tring were all but annihilated. Well into this century, the Tring lands in the Limbang remained almost empty, until occupied by the ever land-hungry Iban. The Tring were not defeated because of lack of bravery. On the contrary, Bok (1881) describes the fear engendered among the coastal people of Brunei by their dread name. But for a couple of centuries they were a major target of raids by all the Baram tribes. Their plight is symbolized by a cave high up on the path from the Tutoh into the Limbang that is still called “the place of skulls”. Into this cave were thrown the corpses of a party of Tring refugees that were ambushed nearby. No Berawan cares to sleep near this spot.

But the Tring not only had many enemies and an exposed location, they also lacked organization. They failed to group themselves into large villages for defence, or to cultivate alliances with their neighbours, and they paid the price for their factiousness.

The remnant at Long Terawan belongs to the Tabun branch of the Tring. So completely have the other branches disappeared that no one now remembers their names. Some Berawan insist that the Tring language is close to Berawan, but this may be an artifact of the mixing of the tongues at Long Terawan. Tring is closely related to Lun Bawang and Lun Dayeh (“Murut”) spoken in the Trusan and to Kelabit spoken in the highlands at the headwaters of the Trusan, so that one cohesive group of languages is distributed from the upper Tutoh through the Limbang and Trusan into the Kelabit highlands.

Before going on to examine the cultural affinities of the Berawan, let us review the linguistic data. First, a number of isolects are spoken in the lower Baram that are closely related to Berawan. Second, several languages spoken to the south are more closely related to the lower Baram languages than to any others. Together with the latter, they comprise Hudson’s Rejang-Baram group. Third, to the north another group of languages is more distantly related to the languages of the Rejang-Baram group. These are the Apo Duat languages which are taxonomically about as distinct from Berawan as Kayan and Kenyah are. The Rejang-Baram and Apo Duat languages lie in a curve across northern Sarawak.
But is there any cultural distinctiveness that coincides with this linguistic differentiation and gives it significance for the cultural anthropologist? There is; it lies in mortuary ritual.

III. CULTURAL AFFINITIES: THE NULANG ARC

Many cultural features serve to distinguish the Berawan from the Kenyah. The Berawan name children at or near birth; they have no equivalent of the elaborate Kenyah naming ceremonies (pusau). The Berawan do not have social classes, and social rank among the Berawan is less rigidly fixed by birth than among the Kenyah. Berawan have a firm rule of uxorilocality after marriage, unless, as happens occasionally, bridewealth is paid. This contrasts with Kenyah practice of ambilocality, although modern usages have been influenced so much by Christianity that it is hard to be sure what the traditional Kenyah practice was. Berawan longhouses tend to be shorter than Kenyah ones of similar population, and they accommodate the extra persons by extending the individual family rooms to the rear of the house, so that the backs of Berawan houses are often a maze of passageways and platforms. Berawan religion differs in many respects from traditional Kenyah religion. In every phase of their society and culture, there are differences of detail between Kenyah and Berawan.

One feature, however, stands out above all others. Berawan practise an elaborate ritual of secondary treatment of the dead. For the Berawan, this is the most important rite of their traditional religion, and a large part of the definition of their cultural identity. The stories that recount the origins of the Berawan people begin with such a ceremony. The Kenyah do not practise secondary treatment of the dead, insist they never have, and express disgust when told about it.

Before proceeding I should comment on the use of the term, secondary burial, which is applied to these extended mortuary rituals. But Berawan do not typically bury corpses at all. I prefer the terms “secondary treatment of the dead” or “secondary disposal”, or for brevity the Berawan word nulang. The word is cognate with tulang, a bone or bones. Since the substitution of /n/ or /ng/ for an initial consonant regularly converts a noun into a verb in Berawan, nulang could be glossed as “to bone”. When Berawan translate nulang into Malay, they say ambil tulang, “to take the bones”.

But if the Kenyah do not have nulang, who else in northern Sarawak shares this custom with the Berawan? Briefly the answer is: just those peoples that were discussed above, the speakers of Hudson’s Rejang-Baram and Apo Duat languages.

Unfortunately, our knowledge of the mortuary rituals of these peoples is woefully incomplete. We have only a few scattered references, mostly in
volumes dating from early in the century, and the chance even of salvage research is rapidly slipping away. However, these old references are sufficient to establish that in historical times *nulang* was regularly practised by all of the peoples speaking Apo Duat or Rejang-Baram languages, and by no-one else in northern Sarawak.

I stress that so tidy a correspondence between linguistic groups and the distribution of a given culture trait is not at all what one would expect to find in central north Borneo. On the contrary, the area is characterized by variation and borrowing of bewildering complexity. A complete inventory of culture traits for any one community, if one could be prepared, would show some items shared with this neighbour, others with that, in a complex network reflecting the closeness of ethnic and historical ties.

To support my generalization concerning the distribution of *nulang*, I review briefly the data on death rituals in northern Sarawak.

The Kelabit and their lowland cousins evidently had a wide range of elaborate death rituals. Harrisson (1962:10) gives a schematic account of the practices of the Kelabit themselves. Primary storage of the corpse was usually in a wooden coffin; less frequently in a large jar. Both were equipped with bamboo drainage tubes to carry off the products of decomposition. Secondary storage was in a smaller jar, or in the unopened coffin. Associated with the ritual of secondary disposal was the practice of erecting a variety of megaliths (Harrisson 1958). Some were in the form of menhirs, others resembled tables or urns, and yet others were underground chambers made of slabs of stone. Harrisson suggests that the insertion of bones into "urns" or crevices in stones may have preceded jar burial, and given rise to it.

Information on "Murut" (Lun Bawang and Lun Dayeh) practices is equally sketchy. Ricketts, writing in the *Sarawak Gazette* of 1894, describes how:

The corpse is first tied up in such a manner that the elbows and knees rest against the chest and it is then placed in the jar which has previously been prepared by being cut at its widest circumference the top forming a cover; a hole about four inches is cut out of the bottom into which a bamboo pipe is fitted. The cover being put on, the mouth of the jar is closed with a china bowl and the whole is sealed with a gutta like substance . . . (215).

This description corresponds clearly with modern practices of the Berawan of Long Teru. Ricketts goes on to explain that the jar containing the corpse was stored sometimes within the longhouse, sometimes outside on a rough wooden platform. Coffins were also used, mostly by people too poor to afford jars. Then:
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After a period ranging from one to, some say, as many as ten years, though generally about two years, the last rites are performed, the relatives giving a big feast for which buffaloes and pigs are killed and quantities of arack brewed. The jar containing the corpse (or rather skeleton) is taken down and opened, the bones cleaned and transferred to a smaller jar and finally buried in the graveyard amidst firing of guns and apparently much rejoicing. (1894:215).

Thus Lun Bawang and Lun Dayeh practices generally resemble the Kelabit ones, apart from the megalith cult which is restricted to the highlands because stone is not available near the coast.

As for the Tring, they disappeared from the scene too early to attract much attention. A brief note by Moulton (1912) describes them as nearly extinct. He gives some account of Tring death rites, including a nulang ceremony in which the bones of the deceased were cleaned and inserted in a valuable old jar for final storage, and other details that are reminiscent of Berawan belief and practice. Batu Belah Berawan claim that Tring rites were similar to their own, and the evidence for this assertion is to be found throughout the Tutoh River area, but especially in the Apoh tributary. There one can still find the remains of carved posts in the tops of which were inserted the small mortuary jars. They are made in very much the same style as Berawan edifices, but since the latter have never settled in the Apoh, the posts can only be of Tring manufacture.

It may seem remarkable that a mere wooden edifice should survive, even in decayed form, so long after the Tring abandoned the Apoh. But the bilian wood from which they were fashioned is astonishingly resistant to rot. The old longhouse at Long Jegan has several massive supporting posts, their lower ends sunk in the ground, that have been moved from one site to another for over a hundred years. They are made of bilian, and have hardly rotted at all.

Turning to the lower Baram peoples, I have described the details of Berawan nulang elsewhere (Metcalf 1975b). They involve temporary storage of corpses in jars or coffins, rituals at which the bones are moved and sometimes cleaned, and final storage in elaborate mausoleums. Enquiries made in the field showed that the Long Tutoh folk had similar rites. They performed their last nulang before World War II, but old people can still be found to describe them. As for members of the lower Baram family that are now Moslem, their memories of pre-Islamic ritual are vague, but many confirmed for me that secondary treatment rites and jar burial were performed. Hose (1893:172) writes that the burial customs of the "Naroms, Dallis, Long Kiputs, Batu Blahs, Berawan, and Long Patas . . . present a similarity . . ." and elsewhere that the Bakong built death houses of the same type as the Berawan of the Tinjar River, but inferior in height and construction (Hose 1912:II:81). Examples
may still be seen in the Urong Stream, Bakong River. Certainly the Lelak employed the nulang; in fact it is largely their ritual that is preserved at Long Teru to this day.

Going southward out of the Baram, we find that the Kajang folk of Belaga are well known within Sarawak for their rites of secondary treatment of the dead. But even so, little is known about them. Thomas (1971) outlines the use of coffins for the first stage, and jars for the second stage of Kejaman mortuary rites (see also Leach 1950). Claye (1972) describes the fine charnel houses built by the Punan Bah, with elaborate carving and painted designs, in association with nulang ritual.

The final link in the chain takes us downriver to the coastal Melanau people. Jamuh (1949) briefly describes the erection of the funeral edifice called jerunai, a tall column with a niche at the top for storage of a jar containing bones or sometimes a whole coffin. His informants were old men who remembered pre-Moslem ways. An impressive example of a Melanau jerunai stands outside the Sarawak Museum in the capital city, Kuching. It is approximately forty feet tall, four feet in diameter, and ingeniously carved. Interestingly enough, these columns were sometimes topped with large slabs of stone carried laboriously from the mountainous interior, a practice harking back to the megaliths of the Kelabit.

These are the peoples of northern Sarawak who are known to have practised secondary treatment of the dead in historical times. That the Kayan and Kenyah have not performed nulang during the same period is difficult to prove. The Kenyah state firmly that they have never practised nulang or anything like it, and I know of no evidence to the contrary. The same is true of the Kayan of Baram, although there are reports of Kayan participation in secondary disposal rites in the Belaga river, upper Rejang. This I attribute to the extensive intermarriage of Kayan nobles with Kajang aristocrats in that area.

In this context, it is the time depth that concerns us here. Rites of secondary treatment are widely distributed across Southeast Asia and the Malayo-Polynesian world; from Madagascar to Toradjaland, from the royal rituals of Burma to the equally sumptuous funerals of Bali, to name only the obvious examples. Clearly such procedures are an ancient element in the cultural configuration of the area. As we would expect, the ideological underpinnings of such rites are even more widespread than the rites themselves, comprizing amongst other things, a belief that the spirits of the recently dead are personal and malevolent but change gradually into benign and anonymous ancestor spirits. The actual practise of secondary disposal in recent decades appears then as a retention from some earlier epoch when the custom was more nearly universal.
Possibly the remote ancestors of the Kenyah practised secondary treatment of the dead. The linguistic relationship between Kenyah and the lower Baram languages implies that they have some common ancestor, which Dr. Blust refers to as Proto-North Sarawak. Glottochronological estimates place this ancestral form at approximately 3,000 years ago. If we assume that secondary disposal was a part of the culture of the speakers of Proto-North Sarawak, it follows the Kenyah at some point chose to abandon the practice.

We are unlikely ever to know when this change occurred. The chances are that it was completed before the Kenyah occupation of the Usun Apau. My reasons for thinking so are as follows. Kenyah migration stories, like Berawan ones, begin in the Usun Apau. But obviously they did not spring from the ground there; the full story of their migrations must lead back to the sea, for the Malay-Polynesian were a maritime people. Kenyah stories enable us to estimate approximately when emigration from the Usun Apau occurred. In the same way we may estimate when the Berawan left. If we take at face value the Berawan claim to have preceded the Kenyah in the Usun Apau, the latter date sets a limit on when the Kenyah arrived there. Despite the obvious indeterminacy of such dates, we are clearly dealing in a time depth of two or three hundred years rather than two or three thousand. In recent decades anthropologists have time and again been struck by how accurately oral traditions, shorn of their more obviously mythical elements, preserve a record of real historical events. For this reason I am inclined to believe that when Kenyah state that they have never practised nulang, “never” means more than two hundred years.

However, they did erect large structures for the storage of single coffins. Tillena (1938:223), Hose (1912:II:40), and Lumholtz (1920:73), for example, all contain pictures of impressive Kenyah mausoleums, supported on two massive posts, or on numerous smaller ones. But at what point in the death ritual were these edifices built? Was it before death? Or during a prolonged funeral? If large resources of manpower were available, as would have been the case for the powerful chiefs of the Kenyah, possibly such a structure could be completed in a few weeks. Or were corpses moved in exceptional cases?

Oddly enough the literature is not specific on this simple point. Most of the accounts are those of travellers who saw various stages of the death rites and also the finished product, the mausoleum itself, but not the full sequence of rites as performed for important men. Stöhr (1959:97) states that the funerals of Kenyah noblemen lasted from four to sixteen days depending upon how long the mausoleum took to complete. Elsewhere he mentions that preparations for the funeral began before the death occurred, if the death was anticipated (1959:95), a thing unthinkable to Berawan. This indicates that the first and second alternatives are the correct ones. Stöhr bases his account upon Elshout (1926), Nieuwenhuis (1904), and Vossen (1939).
The Sebop case presents confirmation of this conclusion, and an interesting additional feature. The Sebop migrated into the Tinjar from the southern side of the Usun Apau long after the Berawan had settled in that river. The majority of them arrived in the 1880's, but one group, the Long Taballau Sebop, arrived earlier, and became allies of the Berawan during the time of intense warfare in the latter half of the nineteenth century. When the Europeans arrived in the Baram, the Long Taballau and the Berawan were living in one large longhouse at Long Batan in the upper Tinjar. It was this confederation of tribes that Aban Jau attempted to lead in opposition to white rule in the 1890's.

An interesting aspect of this confederation in the present context is that the mortuary ritual of both the Berawan and the Sebop peoples underwent changes at this time, as if they attempted to bring their practices closer together. This was no easy task, since the Sebop are truly Kenyah and do not practise secondary treatment of the dead. For their part, the Berawan retained the nulang but discontinued the practice of opening the coffin and cleaning the bones, and they are the only people in northern Sarawak to have this combination of traits. The Sebop did not adopt the nulang, but they did extend their primary rites so that they became the longest known among the Kenyah. The Oxford University expedition of 1936 attended the funeral of a great chief of the Long Taballau Sebop and they report that the corpse had been kept in the longhouse for fifty days, an exceptionally long period (Harrisson 1938:81). It was explained to them that the long funeral was necessary to allow the construction of a magnificent mausoleum. This structure is shown on page 83 of their book. It is clearly in the Berawan style, with carefully executed carving and painted designs. Typically, Kenyah tombs are rather crudely constructed and painted. The Long Taballau Sebop, having chosen to copy the Berawan style of edifice, were obliged to lengthen their funeral accordingly. The other Sebop groups, being less exposed to Berawan influences, retained the standard Kenyah tomb and length of funeral.

The distribution of the nulang in northern Sarawak is shown in the accompanying map. Excluding the coastal Melanau, it has the form of an arc beginning in the upper Rejang, curving north through the lower Baram area and into the Limbang and Trusan valleys, and ending in the Kelabit highlands. This distribution I shall refer to for brevity as the nulang arc. At the eastern tip of the arc, adjacent to the Kelabit, lie two small ethnic groups that may also have practised secondary disposal, the Sa'aban and the Nibon. The former are close relatives of the Kelabit. The latter live in the upper Bahau, just across the mountain chain in Indonesian Kalimantan. They are usually classified as Lepo Maut Kenyah, but migrant workers from the area told me that they speak a non-Kenyah tongue and practise secondary burial, a situation reminiscent of the Berawan.
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To the west of the *nulang* arc lies the sea. To the east are the Kenyah and Kayan, whom we have already discussed at length. To the south are the numerous and widespread Iban, who have no rites of secondary disposal. To the north we again enter a different culture area, the languages of which are classified by Hudson as exo-Bornean, as is Iban. Information concerning burial rites in north Borneo (Sabah) is scarce and vague. Rutter (1929:215) indicates that most of the people of interior north Borneo did not practise secondary treatment, although they did employ primary burial in large jars. He does, however, mention one exception, the “Rundum Muruts”. More research is needed before we can be sure of the occurrence of *nulang* in north Borneo.

Conclusions

The distribution of secondary treatment of the dead in central north Borneo presents a simple and coherent picture. It consists of an arc composed of those peoples who speak languages of Hudson’s Apo Duat and Baram-Rejang groups. The Kejaman, Sekapan, and Punan Bah of the upper Rejang are classified in the census as Melanau. The term Kajang has been used for them in recent scholarly literature. The lower Baram peoples (Berawan, Narom, Long Kiput, Dali, Bakong, Miri, Belait, and Lelak) are now parcelled out into “Kenyah” and “Malay”, as we have seen. The Lun Bawang and Lun Deyeh are classified as “Murut”, both in the census and in popular usage, and this is inaccurate. The true Murut are a large ethnic group of Sabah, quite distinct from the Lun Bawang or Lun Dayeh. Only the Kelabit seem well served by their name. It is a true autonym, well known within Sarawak, and they are classified independently in the census. The only fault with this independence is that it makes them seem too singular; marooned in the middle of Borneo seemingly without affiliations to other groups.

A feature of the peoples of the *nulang* arc is that they appear miniscule and freakish when viewed in a parochial context. It is only when north Sarawak is viewed as a whole that their occurrence makes sense. I do not intend to suggest revisions in the classification of the national census. Such changes would be pedantic, since the present categories largely reflect modern political and social realities. The significance of the *nulang* arc is ethnographic.

The peoples of the *nulang* arc are now dominated by cultural influences that are extraneous, viewed in the context of their history during the last two hundred years. An interesting speculation is on their connection with the Ngaju peoples of southern Borneo, whose rites of secondary disposal are well known through the writing of Schärer and others. This trait emerges clearly as characteristic of the most ancient cultural traditions of Borneo. The archaeological record, incomplete as it is, supports this conclusion. Harrisson (1967)
reports evidence of secondary burial from the lowest levels of the great caves at Niah, which are located near the coast in Sarawak’s Fourth Division.

Perhaps also something may be learned from the shape of the nulang arc. There is no obvious ecological reason for this strip-like distribution. We would expect prima facie a more consolidated shape, and this is what is produced if we reconstruct a previous distribution by taking seriously the migration stories of the Berawan and others. As we have noted, the Berawan and Long Kiput have traditions of origin from the Usun Apau. The Lelak and other lower Baram peoples do not. The Kejaman and Sekapan tell of a folk hero named Tagau who led all of the Kajang folk out of the Linau River, which lies just to the south of the Usun Apau (Clayre 1971). Utilizing these clues, we may hypothesize that at some time before the arrival of the Kenyah and Kayan in Sarawak, the indigenous inhabitants of the area were distributed more evenly over all of north Sarawak.

The hypothesis is more than mere “projective history”. Archaeological evidence of second burial in the Usun Apau would be circumstantial evidence of a pre-Kenyah occupation. Admittedly, the case is less than watertight because of the varying evaluation that may be placed on Kenyah and Berawan oral history.

The present distribution is the result of migration down the major rivers that flow north, south, and west out of the Usun Apau. Since they radiate like spokes from a central hub, the result is a curvilinear distribution of peoples. We are left with the question of why those in the Usun Apau left it. The Berawan deny that they were displaced by the Kenyah. Population pressure may conceivably have started the move, though the Usun Apau is fertile and large, but why would the area have been left deserted? There is no obvious explanation. The next wave of settlers in the Usun Apau, the Kenyah, likewise abandoned it and moved down the rivers toward the coast. Their motives are equally inscrutable.

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