

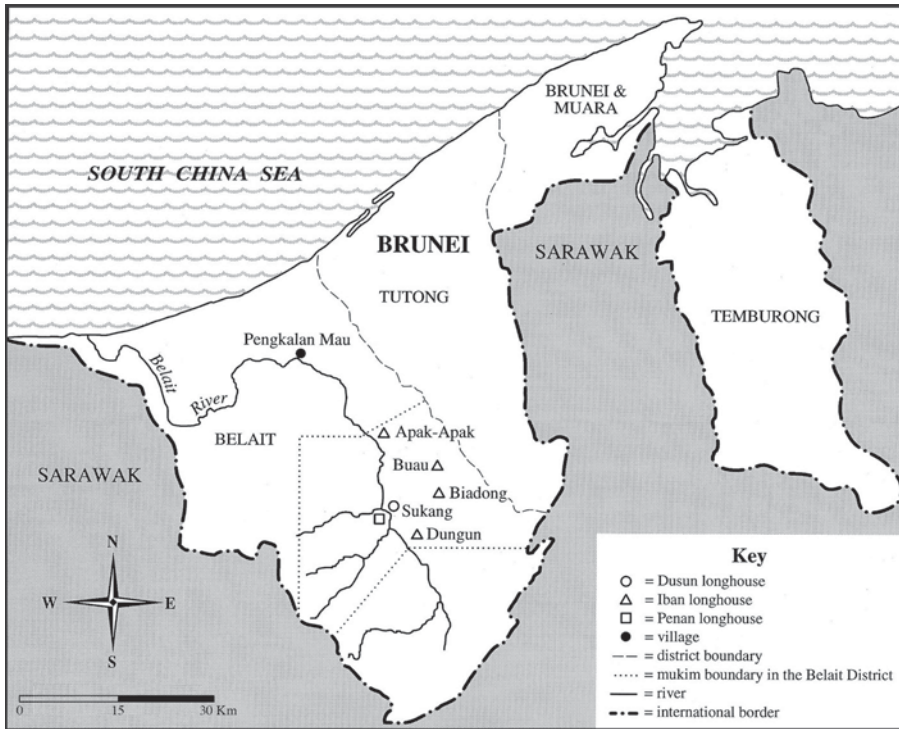
CONTINUITY AND ADAPTATION AMONG THE PENAN OF BRUNEI

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***Abstract:** This chapter provides etic as well as emic sketches of the Penan's situation in Brunei, in the form of an ethnographic description, and contrasts this with patterns of existence prior to their transition to sedentism in 1962. This juxtaposition is used to elicit and account for the forms and modes of transition that the Penan in Brunei have undergone (or themselves initiated) during the period since they first settled in Brunei.*

INTRODUCTION

The Penan of Brunei Darussalam comprise an ethnic isolate of 56 persons who inhabit Sukang Village, in the interior of Brunei's Belait District (see Map 10.1). Until Antaran's (1986) description, little information had emerged regarding Penan in Brunei, compared to more detailed descriptions of the Eastern Penan in Sarawak (e.g., Needham 1953; for further details of the Eastern Penan, see the introduction; and Needham in this volume). Antaran's article on the Penan in Sukang (1986) largely comprises a general description of Eastern Penan characteristics and provides little in the way of specific information about the Penan community. Where details are given, these have now dated considerably (for example, barter trade, which no longer occurs), and updated information is given later in this chapter.



Map 10.1. Location of Penan Sukang

Physical location, gradually emerging affiliations within Brunei, certain aspects of their socio-economic circumstances, along with other socio-cultural features, demonstrate that the Penan Sukang differ from Eastern Penan communities in Sarawak, in a number of significant ways (Sercombe 1996b), largely due to the national, areal, and local social and geographical environments that they now inhabit. At the same time, the Penan Sukang can be considered integral to the Eastern Penan ethnic congeries (which otherwise only occupy certain parts of north-eastern Sarawak), due to their close historical links – including consanguine and affinal relationships – with Penan in Sarawak, particularly with inhabitants of the village of Long Buang, a village on the Apoh, a tributary of the Tutoh River, in neighbouring Sarawak (*ibid.*).

This chapter, which is largely an outline ethnographic description, provides a thumbnail delineation of the Penan Sukang's history, social organisation, culture, economics, and patterns of language use. This report results from a number of separate periods I spent with the Penan between 1992 and 2000 during which the aim was to elicit features of social and cultural continuity, alongside

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adjustments that they have made since they settled permanently in Brunei. The account draws together observations in the form of an overall impression of their contemporary circumstances.

HISTORY

The earliest published reference to Penan in Brunei, of which I am aware, is by Andreini (1928: 144), who reports meeting Punans (*sic*) from Belait who were moving back into Sarawak territory. The next earliest reference was in a *Brunei Annual Report* (Davis 1948), regarding ‘nomadic Punans’ (*sic*). Subsequently, Harrisson (1949a: 130) mentioned that ‘[i]n the 1947 census of Sarawak and Brunei [...] Punans [*sic*] were located [...] 29 were in Brunei’, and a later *Brunei Government Report* (1955: 12) stated that ‘[i]n one area (Ulu Belait), there is to be found, but only after careful pre-arrangement, a small group of Punans [*sic*] – the real jungle people – or as sometimes referred to, the wild Men [*sic*] of Borneo’. Urquhart (1958) also suggested that the ‘Pennan’ (*sic*) are ‘perhaps in the *ulu* Belait’.¹ Harrisson (1975c: 42) further proposed that a small number of Penan had ‘for decades [...] come over sporadically from the Tutoh behind Marudi across into the Ulu Belait in Brunei’.

What is known is that before moving towards the Belait District, the Eastern Penan, who now live permanently in Brunei, had foraged in the Linei River basin (a tributary of the Tutoh, in Sarawak), the group elder being Tiung Uan, the current elder’s uncle (Martin and Sercombe 1992) and were closely allied with Penan who reside in Long Buang (on the Apoh River, in Sarawak), having ‘migrated together from Pelutan via Malinau to Linei where they split, one group to Belait and one to Long Buang’ (Needham 1953: 399–401). Needham maintained that those from Long Buang had themselves previously been foragers in the Penipir River area, in the southern part of the Belait District of Brunei.

It is known that, in the period immediately prior to 1962, the Penan Sukang had been full-time hunter-gatherers in the interior of the Belait District, in the southern part of Brunei’s western enclave. The present group elder, Luyah Kaling, has declared that the band foraged in an area stretching from the Kerawan and Penipir Rivers (tributaries of the Belait River) and further north along the Belait River as far as Sukang Village, as well as east to the headwaters of the Tutong River, in Brunei. At this time, the group also occasionally ventured south across the watershed that forms Brunei’s southern border with the Malaysian state of Sarawak, to the Tutoh and Malinau river areas north of Mount Mulu, to interact with other Eastern Penan in Sarawak. Nowadays, the Brunei–Malaysia border is

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more closely patrolled, discouraging free movement between the states, where there exist no official crossing points, in order to discourage illicit extraction of Brunei's natural resources from the rainforest and also to prevent unofficial entry into the country.

Some Penan in the ulu (upriver) areas of Brunei returned to the Penan settlement of Long Buang on the Apoh River in Sarawak (which had been established in 1928) during the early 1940s, to avoid the Japanese occupation in Brunei (Antaran 1986).² Prior to settlement, the Penan band in Brunei occasionally bartered with the Dusun in Sukang, to obtain tobacco, salt, and clothes, for which they exchanged blowpipes and rubber latex. It is claimed that, at that time, Penan already knew some Malay, which they would have acquired through trade with Chinese and sporadic interaction with local officials, and that the Dusun also acquired some knowledge of their language through trade meetings (Jamal Gantar, a Dusun from Sukang, pers. comm.).³ It was during these barter trade meetings that the Penan were eventually persuaded to settle by the local Dusun, who in turn had been encouraged to lobby the Penan by the local Belait District officer at the time. According to both Dusun and Penan, this district officer, a (British) colonial administrator, was a prime mover in initiating the Penan transition to settlement.

Finally, in 1962, Legai Madang, the then elder of the Penan band, made an agreement with the Belait District office to move into a longhouse in Sukang Village. Single family shelters in the forest (the standard type of nomadic Eastern Penan accommodation), normally located on ridge tops, were given up for a longhouse constructed from wood donated by a local Chinese sawmill. Twenty-one Penan settled next to the Dusun longhouse, on the right (or eastern) bank of the river in Sukang. These were later joined by 15 more Penan (Leake 1990: 105).

Legai reported that his band of Penan had originally come from the Pelutan River area of Sarawak (as mentioned above by Needham), an eastern tributary of the Baram River, south of the small administrative and commercial centre of Long Lama (located on the banks of the Baram). He also included, as part of Penan Pelutan, those who lived and still inhabit the villages of Batu Bungan, Long Iman, and Long Buang, each of which is located in the Tutoh and Apoh river areas of north-eastern Sarawak (around 50 km south of Sukang). Some Penan in Sukang also claim that they originate from the Selungo River, a tributary of the Baram farther south than the Pelutan, from which they had migrated north during an earlier period. However, the Penan in Brunei now refer to themselves as Penan Belait or Penan Sukang.⁴

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Luyah Kaling, the current Penan Sukang elder, does not know exactly nor is he greatly concerned about when Penan moved north to hunt and gather in Brunei.⁵ Following the death of Legai in 1973, Luyah became and continues to be the Penan community elder (as well as the oldest surviving Penan in Brunei), having been chosen by Penan longhouse members, with official sanction from the Sukang Sub-district *penghulu*, Simpok, a Dusun.

Typically, the Eastern Penan in the interior of the Baram Division of Sarawak maintain fairly regular social contact with other Penan villages (through personal visits to close and extended family relatives), but the Penan Sukang have been without continuous close physical contact with other Eastern Penan groups in Sarawak since they settled in 1962 (see Sather 1995: 258), although sporadic contact has been maintained in other ways, which are described in subsequent sections of this chapter.

DEMOGRAPHY

Penan Sukang have moved from being a hill-top residing nomadic group to a sedentary riverine community, an almost universal phenomenon among Eastern Penan who have given up full-time nomadism for sedentism (see Rousseau 1990: 218). Rivers became, for many settled Penan, the new conduits of communication once they settled, replacing forest paths. This has again been changing in the last decade or so, with the increasing number of logging roads penetrating the interior of Sarawak, providing a cheaper and faster means of communication than rivers (albeit at considerable social and environmental cost, a fuller consideration of which is beyond the scope of this study, but see Chan in this volume).

For the Penan Sukang, the Belait River became and remains the main means of physical communication. Although the Penan commenced their settled existence on the right (or eastern) bank of the Belait River in Sukang, they subsequently moved to the left bank (becoming physically removed from neighbouring groups), where they have remained until now. The third, most recently constructed Penan longhouse was completed in 1982. Its basic layout is not unlike that of an *orang ulu* ('upriver people') longhouse, in the style and position of the roofed veranda (since it is without an open Iban veranda for drying *padi* or hill rice) and the internal arrangement of separate family compartments. Presently, the longhouse is in great need of repair or replacement.

The number of Penan in Brunei was first officially recorded as 29 (Harrison 1949a), although it is likely that the number of nomadic Penan in the Belait

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District was considerably higher before the Japanese occupation in World War II (Antaran 1986). Around the time of their settlement, some Penan adult males moved back to and married into Long Buang in Sarawak (*ibid.*). When McLoughlin (1976) conducted a physical morphological study among the Penan Sukang, the group size totalled 34. Seitz (1981: 279–280) recorded the number as being 39 in 1979, and it was apparently between 40 and 42 in 1980 (Groome and Waggitt 1990).

There has been some exogamy since the group settled in 1962 (discussed further below); there were also three infant deaths in 1980 (which may have contributed towards the move across river), but there have been no other upheavals, such as group fission or a fatal epidemic. The current total living in the Penan longhouse (in 2000) is 56 people. Group size has increased a little less than 100 per cent since their population was first recorded in 1948; this seems to have been slightly less than the general increase in numbers among other Eastern Penan groups in Sarawak who have taken up a settled existence (for further discussion, see Sercombe 1996b).

Apart from ethnic Penan, there is an Iban and a Bisaya' (both adult females), as well as a son of the Bisaya' woman, in the Penan longhouse – these women originating from Limbang in Sarawak but then married into the Penan community. Outside Sukang Village, there is a Penan male who lives between Sukang Village and the Iban longhouse of Biadong Ulu, having married an Iban from there. There are also eight Penan living in the Brunei coastal town of Kuala Belait and two more in Tutong town, but relatively few, compared to the number of Dusun and Iban who have migrated from Sukang Sub-district to coastal areas of Brunei. Younger Penan adults who have left school but not yet married are all (except two) living at home (see Groome and Waggitt 1990).

More recently, the Penan have been granted land by the government, and some have also been provided with timber (also by the government) to construct separate homes on the right (or eastern) bank of the river. None has so far built a new dwelling across the river, apart from the headman, and even he continues to reside mostly in the Penan longhouse (on the river's left bank).

SOCIAL FEATURES

This chapter takes a configurationist view that the Penan maintain a cluster of distinct characteristics that clearly distinguish them from other groups throughout Brunei. One of the major features of the Penan is that they traditionally represent

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what has been described as a cold (vs hot) society without institutionalised social hierarchies (see Lévi-Strauss, cited in Wiseman and Groves 1997; see also Sellato in this volume). Social stability is maintained largely through a balance of egalitarianism and in-group symbiosis. This remains largely the situation among the Penan Sukang, such that, relatively speaking, ‘there is harmony between societal and individual needs’ (Duranti 1997: 57).

Compared to the large number of social roles in more modern industrial societies, Penan Sukang relationships provide clear examples of mainly kin-based networks that carry clear rights and obligations with regard to all members of the group. For the Penan Sukang, their kin and social lives generally comprise and concern every member of the community (see Needham 1971: 204, and in this volume; also, Siskind 1973: 52), constituting a series of dense social networks such that individuals are bound together in multiplex consanguine and affinal relationships.⁶ All Penan adults in Sukang categorise themselves as part of the group, although a number of them nowadays have begun to develop close affiliations and cultural affinities with neighbouring Iban.

Community Rules and Leadership

As Ellen (1994: 202–203) has written, ‘[m]any food-collecting populations neither require, nor have the opportunity to create, much by the way of social institutions’. This still applies to the Penan in Sukang, even though food collecting is now but one means of production, as discussed in more detail under ‘Economics’, below.

A Penan elder’s role traditionally carries no institutional authority. As Needham (in this volume) has stated, a ‘group is usually headed by a recognised elder but he has no real power. Relative age is the most general and the most important social differential, but there are no age sets or recognised age grades’. The group elder, Luyah Kaling, however, now earns a monthly salary, for his official position as ‘headman’, which also requires that he has contact with government officials on a regular basis. In part, he has become a state emissary. He still has no socially prescribed authority within the group, but his official position and the salary that he receives reflect authority ascribed from outside. While Penan relations among the group remain important, in terms of material reciprocity and family obligations, Luyah’s material wealth reflects a new status, both among the Penan and within the village community, as an officially sanctioned government representative.⁷

Family Organisation

The concept of the Penan Sukang household is one of a nuclear family unit. One reason that extended family units remain small in Sukang is that there are no Penan grandparents residing among the group. Beyond nuclear family units, there is just one divorcee, an unmarried uncle, and a widow, who stay with their closest family relatives (on Penan family sizes, see Needham in this volume). The lack of Penan elders reflects an age-group vacuum and has probably acted to diminish certain aspects of Penan life in Sukang. This vacuum is keenly felt by the community, as has been vigorously articulated by a number of Penan adults.

Commensality remains a fundamental act of social solidarity, and the Penan eat together as nuclear families but not in larger groups', unless visitors are present and non-family community members feel that they can partake as their right to welcome and spend time with outsiders as part of a larger social occasion. This is also the case if guests or other community members have brought food, drink, or news to share with their hosts, and are making more than the most perfunctory visit.

While among other Eastern Penan groups living parents may still be referred to directly as *Tama* (father), or *Tinen* (mother), followed by the name of their eldest child, this no longer occurs in Sukang, where all individuals of school age and above are now mostly referred to by their given names.

There are not and have never been rituals associated with birth (Luyah Kaling, pers. comm.). There are no special taboos or proscribed foods for pre- or post-natal mothers, and nowadays women give birth in Sukang Village clinic, rather than among the Penan themselves; this is encouraged by the health authorities, in case of medical complications.

Children have never undergone special initiations or training between birth and adulthood (*ibid.*). When old enough, daughters help to look after younger siblings or relatives' children, especially since there is presently an absence of grandparents in Sukang. School-age children, who are able to, help with rice planting and harvesting nowadays, but there has been a decline in knowledge of the fauna and flora of the rainforest among younger Penan, particularly among those now under 20 years of age.

No longer are deceased Penan left in locations important to them (in primary rainforest), but they are now buried locally in a community graveyard and, as with other potentially significant social events, no specific ceremonies take place. It is told that, following a death among the Penan Sukang, an *atui* (a percussion instrument consisting of a log rested horizontally across the V sections

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of vertically placed crossed pieces of smaller logs) is played by striking the top with sticks (Arin Paren, pers. comm.), but no deaths among the Penan have occurred since I first came to know the members of this group, in 1992.⁸

Sharing

Penan in Sukang continue the convention of reciprocally sharing wild game, when it is obtained, with other longhouse members, as well as surplus rice if a family is in need (see Hong 1987: 23), a form of prestation. Sharing among Penan in Sukang (and elsewhere), nonetheless, only extends to perishable items; they are under no obligation to share money or other durable goods (see Needham 1953: 133–134). Not sharing food, however, would be tantamount to denying community relationships (see Siskind 1973: 9; Marshall 1976: 370). In fact, stinginess with regard to food remains taboo among Penan in Sukang and elsewhere among many Eastern Penan in remote areas where there is still a reasonable supply of game, although the sharing of wild meat no longer occurs among some communities of Eastern Penan in the middle Baram areas of north-eastern Sarawak. This is mainly a result of the greater economic pressures that they have suffered (Sercombe 1996b). A consequence is that Penan from Sukang do not sell or trade meat and, thus, a potential source of income is lost. In comparison, Iban from Sukang Sub-district occasionally sell wild boar downriver, at Pengkalan Mau, early on Sunday mornings, from which they derive cash income.

Marriage and Formal Relationships with Neighbouring Groups

Penan marriage customs are relatively simple and flexible and, similar to other rites of social passage, marriages are not celebrated in any special way. Eastern Penan (including those in Sukang) can and continue to marry first cousins, and endogamous marriage in Sukang has remained more common than marriage outside the Penan group (*ibid.*). There remains, in theory, the idea of a bride price (of a blowpipe), but this is no longer generally honoured (Luyah Kaling, pers. comm.), and there are no rules regarding post-marital residence. Some Penan mothers and one father have said that they would like their daughters to marry a man who is not a subsistence farmer, and many parents perceive there being more chance of a daughter marrying exogamously than a son. Penan adults' aspirations are understandable, given the less physically arduous life endured by those in Sukang Sub-district, such as teachers, the village policeman, and health assistants, and what they are seen to earn for their work.

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From 1962 to 1983, there were only two exogamous marriages, both of which ended in divorce. In more recent times, during which there has been an increase in marriage outside the group, this has mostly involved Penan women marrying non-Penan, resulting in couples moving elsewhere.⁹ Those Penan not married to others in the Penan group have been betrothed to Iban, Chinese, Malay, or Dusun but mostly to the former. There is also one unmarried, middle-aged (aged 48) Penan man (an unusual occurrence among Penan) in 2000.¹⁰

Non-Formal Relationships with Other Groups

Nearly 50 years ago, Needham (1953: 162) stated that 'Eastern Penan are slow, patient, open, friendly, ingenuous'. I have found no reason to disagree with this in relationships established and maintained with Eastern Penan, in either Sarawak or Brunei.

For Penan in Sukang, social contacts are predominantly primary with few secondary relations, i.e., the people they know are also those with whom they mostly come into regular daily contact. For Luyah Kaling, the group elder, like for most other adult Penan in Sukang, consanguine and affinal relations with Penan in Sarawak remain important, as they have stated (and as may be inferred from the historical connections described above, even though Penan from Sukang are rarely able to travel to Sarawak). This has been demonstrated by Luyah's two visits, in recent years, to Long Buang (in Sarawak) when, on one occasion, he bought a diesel-powered generator so that the people of Long Buang could thresh rice by machine and have electric light in their village. Penan in Sukang are always eager for news of Long Buang and are curious about my visits there and when I intend to go again. Until recently, significant events in Long Buang were communicated by telephone to a Penan woman married and living in an army camp in the Tutong District of Brunei. Nowadays, communication can occur directly with the Penan longhouse in Sukang, where incoming telephone calls can now be received.

Since 1962, there have been no Penan visitors to Sukang from Long Buang or from any other Penan communities in Sarawak (see Sellato 1990a). Reasons for this include the expense involved in making the journey (stemming from the difficulty in earning cash for those living in the interior of Sarawak), the expense, time, and logistical difficulties of obtaining a Malaysian passport, as well as the problem of access since there is no public transport along the Belait River.

While the Penan in Sukang have been settled for nearly 40 years, they remain sympathetic towards the idea of full-time nomadism and Penan hunter-gatherers (see Voeks and Sercombe 2000), although they are no longer familiar with any

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nomadic bands. Many fully settled Penan in Sarawak, however, tend to be disparaging of nomadic Penan,¹¹ and it has been observed that '[a]griculturalists see nomads as inferior and the latter behave as if they accept this evaluation' (Rousseau 1990: 245). This observation is not novel; many observers (e.g., Douglas 1906: 68, among others) have described exploitation and even persecution of Penan by settled peoples. Needham (1953: 89) maintained that Eastern Penan 'accept in their mild fashion the indifference, the rudeness, and the maltreatment that accompanies the lowly political status that is accorded them by settled tribes'. Whatever the treatment of Eastern Penan in general (whether nomadic or settled), the attitude of others towards them has tended to remain one of condescension. Penan Sukang are aware of their lower status in relation to other local groups and of the ways in which they are perceived as socially inferior by their neighbours. As Rousseau (1990: 71) also mentioned of previously nomadic Borneans, '[f]ormer nomads still bear the stigma of their origin'.

Penan Sukang do not, however, live in vassalage to their neighbours (like some Eastern Penan in Sarawak do, albeit considerably less than before), although the local Dusun would like to employ Penan during periods of rice planting and (particularly) harvesting when they are otherwise overstretched. Penan will sometimes undertake harvesting work for Dusun, but have not infrequently complained that they are not paid enough (at B\$ 20 a day, the normal rate for unskilled labour) or sometimes not paid at all, that they have to work too hard, or that they have other commitments.

When a piped-water system was installed in Sukang Village, the local Chinese contractor (also the village shopkeeper since 1962, locally known as Panjang) hired foreign labour (workers from Thailand) rather than villagers, particularly the Penan. He does not hold a positive view of the Penan and will not extend credit to them – this being a common way of doing business between shopkeepers and villagers in isolated rural settings throughout interior parts of Brunei and Sarawak; neither do the Penan attempt to fraternise with Panjang.

Sather (1995: 229) has perceived the Penan, in general (like other Austronesian hunter-gatherers), as 'parties to a process of symbiosis with agriculturalists which has continued for several millennia'. This seems no longer to be the case, in general terms, and is certainly not the situation in Sukang, partly for the reason that Dusun and Iban no longer need or desire jungle products or craft items (such as *damar*, a resin that is burned to provide illumination; *gaharu*, or eaglewood, for the production of incense; bezoar stones for spiritual purposes; wild latex for rubber; or blowpipes for hunting), the kinds of items that Penan would have traded in the past.

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While informal relations with village neighbours do not appear dynamic in terms of social interaction (in the same way that they are between Dusun and Iban, with considerable successful cross-group cooperation and intermarriage), the Penan Sukang have formed out-group alliances with Iban. This may well be because Penan social institutions are structurally more compatible with those of the Iban than with the social organisation of other groups. For example, both groups are considered immigrant to Brunei, and they are both traditionally less socially hierarchical than other Bornean groups in Brunei. These common characteristics would appear, on the surface at least, to allow for easier integration between Iban and Penan. In day-to-day dealings, Iban are generally accommodating towards the Penan, in addition to which Penan regularly attend Iban festive occasions.¹² Some older Penan children maintain that Iban customs (e.g., *miring*, a ceremony involving offerings of thanks) are the same as those of the Penan, and that these are sometimes performed in the home of Luyah Kaling, the Penan elder. In fact, Penan have no history of *miring*; if this is seen by some Penan (in Sukang) as a Penan practice, it suggests the extent to which some Penan may wish to identify with Iban (for further discussion of this, see Sercombe 1996b; and see Nagata 1979). In addition, there is also a lack of eligible Penan marriage partners in Brunei, due to the small size of the group.¹³ Certainly, marriage with other Penan and residence in Sarawak is nowadays seen as less attractive, since Penan in Sukang are keenly aware of the widespread material hardships suffered by many Penan across the border, many of whom have lost portions of their land to logging, in the interior of Malaysian Sarawak.

Beyond Penan earshot, however, there are a number of impressions of the Penan held by Dusun and Iban in Sukang District. Both the primary school headmaster and a Dusun teacher from Sukang still believe that the Penan bride price is one blowpipe, and feel this to be highly amusing, although there is no longer such a practice (reflecting a lack of familiarity with Penan customs). Another preconception is that the Penan are highly knowledgeable in and about the rainforest. This notion is sometimes disproportionate to reality, as evidence suggests that Penan knowledge of rainforest flora (if not fauna) is deep but not necessarily as broad as that of some settled peoples (Voeks and Sercombe 2000; Voeks, this volume). Another impression is that Penan are seen as lazy, and that, despite being very competent hunters, they hunt game infrequently and rely more on traps and fishing than on their blowpipes. Iban and Dusun also cannot comprehend why the Penan do not appear to live in a more systematic way, i.e., in the same way as themselves.¹⁴ The village primary school headmaster (an Iban who converted to Islam) has said that the Penan make *tuak* (rice wine)

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from the *tampoi* fruit (known botanically as *Baccaurea*), and frowns upon this habit.¹⁵ One Dusun teacher (from outside Sukang Sub-district), who had been at the school seven years, had a very negative view of the Penan because, he said, they drink and allow their children to drink, and because they are considered dirty and do not heed the advice that they are given.

It seems that the community status of Penan adults in Sukang (and their children) is evaluated, roughly, according to a number of criteria overshadowed by one factor: When '[a] nomad [...] becomes sedentary [...] he enters the lowest part of the sedentary scale' (Glatzer 1982: 72), an assertion that also reflects traditionally settled neighbours' current perceptions of the Penan in Sukang. Other considerations include the following: whether a Penan is married and, if so, from which ethnic group the Penan's spouse originates; the extent of a Penan family's farm; the amount and condition of non-perishable materials owned by a Penan (e.g., outboard engine, boat, etc.); the physical appearance of a Penan family and its members, and whether or not female Muslim converts wear headscarves; whether or not alcohol is drunk by a Penan (especially if s/he is a Muslim convert), apart from during festival occasions; if shoes or other footwear are worn; the degree of academic success of a Penan family's children; the degree to which a family and its members are seen as industrious; and the range of languages and speech styles at their command. In most cases, the Penan Sukang are assessed as low in all these categories. In addition, Penan women have weak, almost non-existent, ties with women from neighbouring groups, and the latter state that they look down on many Penan women for their apparently liberal drinking habits, for looking scruffy, and for the relatively dishevelled state of Penan children.

The village primary school is an environment in which Penan children come into regular contact with neighbours and with teachers from outside the district. While Penan children (in the lower primary levels of the school) appear to have Dusun and Iban friends, I have never seen a non-Penan child enter the Penan longhouse. Furthermore, the headmaster, local and non-local teachers, and school cooks all hold negative impressions of Penan children, which seem to affect the ways in which they interact with these children in the school.

For the Penan, contact with Bruneians who are from outside Sukang is mostly with school teachers, nearly all of whom have never entered the Penan longhouse, contrasting with their frequent visits to the Dusun longhouse in Sukang.

There is also the Penan relationship with the central government. This is mostly through the district office and via the Penan elder and, in this, Luyah Kaling is a kind of cultural broker among the Penan (see Dahlan and Wan

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Hashim 1979: 41). There are, however, issues that the Penan feel further reflect their social position. The land that they occupy (on the western or left side of the Belait River) is government owned, and the Penan have no rights of cultivation, needing official permission just to cut down a tree. Penan adults living but not born in Sukang are not full Brunei citizens, although their children, registered as being born locally, are granted full citizenship (see Azmi 1990: 9); all Penan are still categorised as ‘Other Indigenous’, rather than ‘Full Indigenous’ citizens of Brunei. The officially posted sign on the riverbank declares *Rumah Panjang Punan* (‘Punan Longhouse’), but *punan* means ‘fight’ in Penan, which is ironic since the Penan are well known for their pacifism and abhorrence of violence.

Contact with staff from the *Pusat Dakwah* (‘Centre for the Propagation of Islam’, a section of the ministry of Religious Affairs), in the capital of Brunei, has been ongoing and of a transactional nature since 1992. Employees of the centre have been encouraging Penan (as well as others in Sukang, and elsewhere) to become Muslim, since 1992 when the centre was given the role of coordinating ‘Visit ASEAN Year’ with respect to villages in the interior of the Belait District (see also the section on ‘Beliefs’, below).¹⁶

Finally, with respect to Brunei at large, in a recent informal survey of some first-, second- and third-year students at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, not one (out of 80) knew of the existence of Penan in Brunei (some not even having heard of this ethnic category), which reflects the degree of unfamiliarity and lack of contact between Penan and urban coastal dwellers in Brunei.

CULTURAL FEATURES

The concern here is with the various codes that shape social organisation, and ‘a system of participation’ (Duranti 1997: 46), as well as those elements ‘which can be learned or transmitted’ (Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman 1981: 10).

Regarding Eastern Penan culture, Needham (in this volume) has remarked that it is ‘characterised by a relatively meagre [...] inventory’, and this is certainly the case for the Penan Sukang, perhaps even more so now, in a non-material sense, than during the period (the 1950s) when Needham carried out fieldwork among Eastern Penan in Sarawak.

Material Culture

In terms of appearance, Penan males in Sukang have long since given up wearing the loin cloth that distinguished them (and other Dayak) from coastal Malays

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and Chinese. Luyah Kaling, the elder, wore a loin cloth until 1997, but was laughed at by Penan children, to the extent that he took to wearing trousers. He alone, among the Penan in Sukang, continues to sport a traditional Dayak haircut, cut straight around the head with a long pony tail, as well as extended earlobes (see McLoughlin 1976: 103).¹⁷ Nearly all the Penan Sukang have poor teeth, largely as a consequence of consuming sweets, sweetened drinks, and processed foods, while many do not brush their teeth, despite entreaties from government dentists when they visit the village (Udhi Kutok, pers. comm.). However, there are no overweight Penan living in the longhouse (although there are quite a few adipose Iban and Dusun in Sukang Sub-district).

Personal adornment consists of watches (for adults who can afford one) and modern style tattoos, earrings, and rings, for both boys and girls. No Penan Sukang now uses *jong* (on the arms) or *selungan* (on the legs), both being traditional Penan bracelets made from rattan, and Penan children laugh at the very idea of wearing these.

Every household has a radio, but there is only one television in the Penan longhouse; I have never seen this in working order. No Penan living in Sukang has a car (unlike many of the Dusun and Iban who leave their cars parked downriver, either at Bukit Sawat or, more likely, at Pengkalan Mau). In fact, the Penan in Sukang tend to have few permanent possessions, clothes being the most obvious of these, although not many are in fine condition. Those possessions most valued are either functional and traditional (i.e., blowpipes and machetes) or modern (radios, outboard engines, boats, watches, and shop-bought jewellery). Their limited possessions, many of which are easily portable, are seen piled in one place, in most family compartments. While the Penan no longer participate in any form of migration, they have the appearance of being ready for movement at any time.

Boats

The Penan in Sukang have become competent boatmen and boat makers since settling. Each Penan family owns a longboat and an outboard engine. This is an essential form of transport for access to shops and offices downriver, as well as for fishing and quick and easy movement to areas along the Belait River and its tributaries, which are known for fruit trees liked by game animals (so long as the outboard engines on their boats are functioning), and for transporting timber for blowpipe and boat construction or for longhouse maintenance. All these are home-made boats, and the wood, used in their construction, is obtained with their own chainsaws. However, most of the Penan boats and engines are in tatty

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condition and poorly maintained, compared to those owned by the Dusun and Iban.

Crafts: Blowpipes, Baskets, and Mats

Traditionally, Penan have been known as outstanding craftsmen, producing exquisite rattan mats and baskets, and blowpipes. Penan women in Sukang still demonstrate these skills in the production of mats and bags, as do males for blowpipes, but these artefacts are only for personal use, since there is no longer a ready commercial market for the sale of these products. There could be outlets for crafts through shops in Brunei's coastal towns, but shopkeepers can and do acquire similar goods from neighbouring Sarawak at much cheaper prices, due to the present currency exchange rates.

Longhouse

The Penan longhouse is spartan in its appearance and poorly maintained in comparison to the neighbouring Dusun and Iban longhouses – the insides of which are varnished or painted, decorated with photographs, traditional hats, and Dayak-style oil-painted designs, and are kept spotlessly clean. The Penan longhouse has some pictures of Malaysian pop stars taken from newspapers and pinned to walls, but it is otherwise bare wooden boards, as an Eastern Penan home would normally be. There is no longhouse generator, but three families have their own small generators, which they turn on just for electric light, some evenings of the week.

Unhealthy and mangy dogs roam along the longhouse veranda, the floor boards of which are worn and holed in places. The front stairs leading to the ground from the centre of the longhouse's front veranda have collapsed, and rubbish is widely strewn on the ground below. A number of small wild animals and birds (such as young squirrels and hornbill birds) can be seen occasionally in the longhouse, in home-made cages of wire or thin bamboo, caught and kept (a common Penan practice) when their parents were killed for food (on pets, see Seitz in this volume).

Apart from the longhouse, each family has a farm hut, and Luyah (the Penan elder) has a house across river on the right bank, and some Penan move to their farm huts during periods of planting and harvesting.

Health and Rituals

Some consideration of this topic among Penan in Sukang was undertaken by Voeks and Sercombe (2000), who 'examined the cosmology and ethnomedical

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beliefs of the Penan' (*ibid.*: 679). Their research concluded that the Penan in Sukang 'maintain a medical system that is limited in scope and detail compared to neighbouring swidden rice cultivators' (*ibid.*).

For sickness, the Penan have, to a large extent, abandoned traditional methods in favour of a service offered by the government-provided village clinic, where modern medicines can be obtained (see Voeks and Sercombe 2000), although most adult Penan in Sukang continue to perceive that sources of illness have a basis in what Metcalf (1991: 292) describes as 'soul loss and the infraction of primordial taboo' (also see Voeks and Sercombe 2000). Even so, most members of the group enjoy reasonable, consistently good health at the present time, as they did when McLoughlin (1976) undertook his morphological study in the late 1970s.

Recreation

Penan engage in a number of mostly cooperative pastimes. After school or during holidays, children of school age and of both sexes frequently play in the Belait River and fish by rod from the riverbank. When the weather is wet and cool, children gaze across the river, play tag, or engage in other group games on the Penan longhouse veranda. Teenage girls help their mothers by washing clothes in the river, while also swimming. Older boys (but not girls) play *sepak takraw* (a ball game using a rattan ball) in front of the longhouse, in the afternoons. Almost never do members of other groups such as Dusun, who live nearby, join in these activities with the Penan in the river. Occasionally, however, Penan play football with Dusun and school teachers in Sukang on the small playing field beside the primary school, during late afternoons. The Dusun are reasonably fit and skilled, and normally team up with outside teachers, who wish to play. Teams are often divided along ethnic grounds, with the Penan comprising one team. None of the aforementioned are really a match for the Penan, who are leaner, fitter, and much more skilled, although they are invariably both bareback and barefoot, or an individual may be wearing just one football boot. The Penan are teased mercilessly by outside teachers, who wear both boots and football strip, but they always lose games to the Penan and seem to resent it.

Pudarno Binchin (1991) described five games played by the Penan of Sukang for entertainment, as practice for developing strength and hunting and gathering skills, but I never observed them, and Penan said they no longer engage in these.¹⁸

I have never witnessed singing, dancing, or the use of traditional Penan instruments, such as the *pagang*, *keloré* or *oréng* (used by Penan elsewhere), which are not owned or used at all by Penan in Sukang, although none of these has ever

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had any ritual value for Penan (R. Needham, pers. comm.). While many of the adult Penan know traditional stories, none of these seems to be told nowadays. Penan seem indifferent to these aspects of their traditions, although by no means opposed to them. For those adult Penan who have a functioning radio, programmes in Iban, broadcast from Limbang, are listened to regularly. Programmes in Malay, especially popular music programmes, are also heard, often at high volume, such that broadcasts carry well beyond the longhouse.

It has become increasingly common for the few older adolescent Penan boys who have left school to hang around their longhouse smoking (if they have cigarettes), play *sepak takraw*, or sit around on the veranda of the longhouse. It is also common for them not to accompany their families to their rice farms. They are not reprimanded for not going to rice farms to help their parents, although their help is often needed.

Alcohol Consumption

For Iban, drinking rice wine (*tuak*) remains part of *gawai* (festival) tradition, and they have official, if unwritten, permission to produce *tuak* for important cultural events, such as the annual harvest festival, as it is otherwise illegal to produce alcohol in Brunei, for consumption or sale.

Traditionally, Needham (in this volume) maintained, Penan did not drink alcohol at all, for fear of becoming *mavuk* ('dizzy') and losing control, since being composed and in control of oneself is generally very important for a Penan. Certainly Eastern Penan have never been known to drink for any ritual purposes, because they have very few rituals and these are not obligatorily observed anyway. Even so, two Penan maintain that their parents and grandparents made wine from wild fruit as hunter-gatherers when they lived in ulu Belait, and a number of adult Penan (women included) unashamedly enjoy alcohol, which lowers their status in the eyes of their neighbours (especially when they become all noisy if they drink during the daytime and can be heard from the village school, across river). Nowadays, Penan do not make rice or fruit wine but occasionally buy it from Iban (at B\$ 5 a bottle), as well as illicit rice spirit (*arak*) from shops downriver. There is one Penan who has a reputation as a regular consumer of alcohol (*kaki-botol*) and who has never married (a marked occurrence among Penan), one reason being, it is said, because of his drinking habits.

Names and Naming

One clear example of cultural realignment among the Penan, over the last 25 years or so, has been the increasing use of Iban and Malay personal names.

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Traditionally, there are three types of Eastern Penan names: *ngaran usab*, an 'autonym', a given personal name; a tekronym, a kinship name, particularly for parents (*tamen*, 'father', or *tinen*, 'mother', followed by the name of the eldest child); and *ngaran lumo*, a necronym or death name, designating one's relationship to the immediate kin member most recently deceased. Among the Eastern Penan necronyms listed by Needham (1965), comprising an extensive list, only *uyau* ('deceased father') and *ilun* ('deceased uncle/aunt') are still known among Penan Sukang, and then only by those above 30 years of age. There is also the less well-known form *ngaran ai*, 'friendship name', first recorded among the Penan in Long Buang in Sarawak by Needham (1971: 206), and given to another by a close friend in memory of a shared experience. Penan Sukang report never having used *ngaran ai*, although they are aware of its use by other Penan, such as those in Long Buang, in Sarawak (where their nearest relatives reside).

Nowadays, Penan in Sukang use only given names (both in reference and address to those of similar age), and these have shifted, to a small extent, from Penan-type names used previously. Only Penan-type names for the group's total of 36 were recorded by McLoughlin (1976), while the percentage can be seen now to include 25 per cent indubitably Malay-like names (e.g., Sufian, Ahmad, Maslina, and Siti Marinah), and this does not take into account names that Penan are required to adopt once they become Muslim. While new Muslim names are adopted as a mark of conversion, Penan continue to use their (previous) given names as address forms and in reference to others, in day-to-day interaction. Needham (1954d and 1965) argued that the erosion of the Penan system of death names, otherwise an important aspect of group solidarity, was tantamount to the loss of Penan identity, and suggested a correlation between decline of necronym usage and assimilation to coastal society with the loss of their autochthonous values system (an issue that is discussed below).

Beliefs

Chatwin (1989: 220) made the observation that '[n]omads are notoriously irreligious. They show little interest in ceremonial or protestations of faith. For the migration is itself a ritual performance a religious catharsis'. A further significant explanation of nomads' tendencies not to be formally religious is that '[r]eligious beliefs support stratification [...] a binary distinction between high and low' (Rousseau 1990: 184), and hence these are generally incompatible with the egalitarian nature of nomads and open social groups (see Saville-Troike 1989: 41). As Rousseau (1990: 221) also observed with regard to swiddeners

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in Borneo, belief in omens can prevent movement, depending on the sign observed. This, however, would never have been practical for hunter-gatherers, as submission or even subscription to the power of omens has really been and remains a matter of personal preference, rather than obligation.

Certainly, until Western missionaries first arrived in Borneo, Penan (and Punan), like their settled neighbours in the interior of Borneo, were animists (if not fervent in their adherence to beliefs), and elements occurring in the surrounding natural environment were considered imbued with spirits, although Penan have generally been more relaxed in their beliefs. A further relevant factor is that Penan have never been headhunters, and so their beliefs and lifestyles are without any of the trappings of other Bornean peoples for whom headhunting was important with respect to their beliefs (see Needham 1953: 46), and this remains the case.

Hose and McDougall (1912, II: 186) were uncertain as to whether Punans (*sic*) had adopted 'their religious and superstitious notions from the settled tribes of the same region', or 'whether [...] the Punans represent in this and other respects the perpetuation (perhaps with some degeneration or impoverishment) of a more primitive culture once common to the ancestors of all, or the greater part of the tribes of Borneo'.

Needham (in this volume) argued similarly that '[t]he major characteristics of the indigenous religion of the Penan are in general, and in a somewhat impoverished form, those of the Kenyah religion as described by Elshout (1923 and 1926)'. Brosius (1988a: 91), in fact, suggested that the salient features of Penan and Punan religion included 'omenology, thunder, animal mockery, food-mixing, rich and poetic figurative vocabulary, supernatural world, concealment of human activities from malevolent spirits'.

The issue of religious and other kinds of beliefs is a potentially complex one, and a full treatment is beyond the scope of this chapter. What is certain, however, is that the few practices that can be associated with traditional beliefs held by Penan Sukang have become mostly moribund since they have settled. Animistic convictions are still held but in a typically flexible Penan way (for further details, see Voeks and Sercombe 2000).

Interestingly, Eastern Penan have no word for religion, and considerations of formal religion, for them, mostly concern certain non-obligatory rituals (Voeks and Sercombe 2000; also see Metcalf 1991), reflecting their rather minimalistic attitudes towards beliefs. Only Luyah, the community elder, makes use of traditional invocations, although, he freely admits, he is not rigorous in his use of these.¹⁹

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Among Penan Sukang, institutionalised religious beliefs are held only by those who have become Muslim. Four Penan couples in Sukang have embraced Islam, along with their children who are 12 years of age or above, but none has shown punctiliousness in carrying out the ritual requirements of their newly adopted faith (see Rousseau 1990: 74).²⁰

ECONOMICS

The economics of the Penan community in Sukang are perceived here as the various ways in which members of the group interact with their environment to create and sustain production for individual families and the community. Prior to settling, the Penan were full-time hunters and gatherers who hunted wild boar (among other wild fauna) and processed sago as the basis of their subsistence.²¹ The Penan also conducted barter trade for certain items that the rainforest could not provide, and they came to Sukang village prior to 1962, when they had moved into the area around the headwaters of the Belait River, to trade rubber for salt and tobacco with the Dusun.²²

Nowadays, the Penan Sukang are not wealthy in material possessions, relative to their immediate neighbours or coastal urban dwellers in Brunei. However, they are certainly considerably better off than most of the Eastern Penan in the interior of Sarawak (Sercombe 1996b).

The Penan household is the unit of production and consumption in Sukang (see Rousseau 1990). As in many rural (mostly subsistence) communities, men farm, fish with nets that they set, and trap game, while women cook (with wood they collect), clean, and gather wild fruits and vegetables. Both men and women work during periods of planting and harvesting, when families stay for several days at their farm huts, although Penan women do less planting work than males and less than either Dusun or Iban women.

The Penan diet consists mainly of rice, noodles (which are shop-bought), fish (which are caught by net), meat (or game, mostly caught in traps), wild fruits, a fairly minimal vegetable intake, and some tinned food (such as sardines or pork pieces, bought from shops in the small settlement of Bukit Sawat, downriver).²³ Vegetables comprise mainly ferns and cassava leaves gathered near the longhouse; these are not so much planted as grown incipiently, although some vegetables are intercropped with hill rice. Crisps and sweets are also bought from the village shop as snack foods, mainly by children.

In general terms, the Penan in Sukang have the following basic means of production.

Farming

Perhaps the most noteworthy contemporary feature of Penan Sukang economics is their basic means of production. This has shifted from sago processing to planting and harvesting rice, since they settled. Nowadays, if Penan wish to consume sago, they buy it as flour or pellets from the Sukang village shop or downriver.

Every family has a plot of land across the river from the longhouse, where they cultivate hill rice, the planting and harvesting of which is carried out on a cooperative basis among members of the Penan community. Sufficient rice is normally grown to support each family's basic needs for one year, although there have been cases where rice has been insufficient. No wet rice is planted, as is also the case among the Dusun and Iban throughout Sukang Sub-district, and all cultivation takes place to the right side of the Belait River, by government order.²⁴

The Penan did, at one time, keep chickens, but they all died. The Penan in Sukang have no other domesticated animals that they rear for consumption, although they do keep dogs (for occasional hunting forays) and other wild animals (for a further discussion of this issue, see Seitz in this volume).²⁵

Local Sources of Cash Income

Six Penan men (and one Iban, the school groundsman, but no Dusun) are labourers in Sukang Village for the Belait District office, which pays a standard local rate for unskilled labour (in Brunei) of B\$ 20 a day. The work of the Penan involves keeping the village and sub-district paths clear of overgrowth, between Sukang and Biadong Ulu (an Iban village about an hour east of Sukang on foot), and between Sukang and Dungun (an Iban village about ten minutes south, or upriver, from Sukang). One Penan male also works as an assistant in the local medical clinic, the only Penan from Sukang to have progressed beyond primary school education. Another kind of work, which is occasional, involves manual labour for the Dusun (mostly clearing old-growth forest for rice planting), although Penan do not have symbiotic transactional relationships with the local Dusun, as they did in the past.

Families who have converted to Islam and have no other cash income receive financial credit from the religious propagation centre. No Penan women in Sukang have wage work of any kind. Two Penan men have also worked as consultants for the Biology and Geography departments of Brunei's national university and the Brunei forestry department, identifying types and functions of certain flora. I have also paid Penan for translation work, but this has been

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irregular. An important point that emerges from knowing the Penan in Sukang, over a period spanning nearly a decade, is that cash seems to be spent quickly, and there appears little conservation of the perishable or disposable resources that they acquire, apart from rice and the rainforest around them.²⁶

Non-local Sources of Income

No Penan who is an ongoing Sukang longhouse resident works outside Sukang Sub-district. One family man did, in the past, work away from home, in the oil industry on the coast, but only for six months. The one single and middle-aged male occasionally works away from the village but is never away for periods of more than two weeks. Unlike many of the younger generation Iban and Dusun, younger Penan do not seem oriented towards the world beyond the village, for employment or other reasons (see Kershaw 1994: 183).

Fishing

The Belait River, next to which the Penan live, remains relatively free of pollution and provides a good source of fish, even though fish were not traditionally an important or preferred source of protein nutrition for Penan. They use casting nets, as well as fixing nets (which they buy) at suitable spots along the river during low water periods, sharing river space with the Iban and Dusun. Fish almost certainly provide the most consistent and easily sought source of protein for the Penan in Sukang, since fishing requires relatively little investment of time or money, although, as with other Penan tools, their fishing nets are often in poor repair.

Hunting

Nowadays, hunting takes place only during daylight hours at weekends, because adults have to be at home to collect children from school each day, they say, and men also state that they do not want to be away overnight, or to travel far on foot, as they become *muhau*, 'exhausted'. This is in dramatic contrast to pre-settlement days, when hunting constituted a regular economic activity for men, involving a day, or days and nights, away from a camp to hunt wild game. At the present time, animal traps are laid but not on a regular or systematic basis, although there is an increase of both trap laying and weekend hunting during fruit seasons, mainly to catch wild boar, the preferred meat (as for many other upriver non-Muslims).²⁷

One evolving consequence of the reduction in hunting is that Penan boys no longer seem to automatically acquire hunting skills in the same ways as their

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fathers did. Penan boys who attend school have less experience of the rainforest, as an exploitable resource for food, than their parents (see Janowski 1996: 57), and associate less with the forest. This can be seen from both their reduced knowledge of and interest in the rainforest around them. Few now hunt or seek game as a spare time or recreational activity. Instead, they play sports in the village.²⁸

Gathering

Sago processing diminished over a period extending from the time when Penan farms became fully productive, in the mid-1960s, to the time when adult males acquired wage work in Sukang, in the 1980s. Two preferred species of wild sago palm (*uvud* and *balau*), however, are available in Sukang Sub-district.

The Penan are not overly partial to the consumption of vegetables (although they do consume them) but sweet fruits are enjoyed as snack food. These are collected but not cultivated in orchards, although stands of bananas occur around Penan farm huts, a form of incipient agriculture. As mentioned above, different ferns are gathered, as are bamboo shoots and tapioca roots and leaves. The latter, as foodstuffs, are looked down upon by other residents of Sukang.²⁹ Penan also gather good-quality wood for blowpipes from the Sungai Ingai area (about 40 minutes upriver by boat from Sukang), but this is on a very small scale, since their need for new blowpipes is limited.

While Penan Sukang still believe in the idea of *molong*, a conservation strategy that prevents overexploitation of essential rainforest resources (see Langub 1989 for a more detailed description and discussion), it is no longer a relevant concept for the Penan Sukang, who have come to rely on wage income, cultivation, and the use of boats to satisfy their economic requirements. However, while the Penan may have undergone a number of subsistence-style changes, they maintain that the rainforest is still important to them (see Langub 1996a: 119), as a home with which they associate closely, and as an exploitable resource.

Trade

Trade has been claimed as a defining feature of nomad–swiddener relations (see Hoffmann 1986), although this remains only a hypothesis. If it ever was the case, it is no longer of any significance to the Penan in Sukang. Originally, Penan trade in forest produce in Brunei was really only with the Dusun (a stratified group) and not with the Iban (an institutionally unstratified group).³⁰ Nowadays, Penan Sukang do not trade with either Iban or Dusun, because the Penan have nothing that the latter want, except their labour, which the Penan sell or trade sparingly.

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For example, few Dusun or Iban, except elders, want bezoar stones (taken from a monkey's gall bladder).

Penan continue to make blowpipes for their own use, but only rarely are they able to sell or trade them with others, such as Iban. Spearheads, to attach to the ends of blowpipes, are obtained from Iban, who forge and subsequently sell them to the Penan for B\$ 70 each, which is expensive, given they can be bought for about B\$ 6 a piece in neighbouring Sarawak. Besides blowpipes, demand is negligible for mats and bags, which are finely crafted by Penan women but produced in sufficient quantities by Dusun and Iban to satisfy their own needs and wants. In addition, access to larger centres of trade in towns is currently relatively limited for the Penan. Moreover, the Brunei dollar currently has a comparatively high regional value, against, say, the Malaysian ringgit, and similar crafts, made by Penan in Sarawak, can be bought at much lower prices in the neighbouring towns of Limbang or Miri, in Sarawak.

A final remark here is that it seems that presently the only realistically viable way for the Penan to raise their standard of living is for their offspring to succeed educationally, allowing them a choice of work options among which would be skilled employment, either locally or, more viably, elsewhere in Brunei. To do this, they would need to be downriver to gain access to education beyond primary school, whether at secondary level, vocational school or, possibly even, in higher education (see Nagata 1979 for an incisive discussion of social mobility via education in Malaysia).

PATTERNS OF LANGUAGE USE

The issue of language use spans social, cultural, and economic dimensions of Penan lives, and it is considered highly significant as an index of both facets of continuity and adaptation and has been a subject of some discussion elsewhere (e.g., Sercombe 1996a and 1998).

The most significant factor in bringing about the present state of multilingualism among the Penan in Sukang has been the act of adopting a sedentary existence, which has brought with it ongoing contact with Dusun and Iban neighbours as well as with the local outposts of Brunei national institutions, which have resulted, virtually by default, in an expansion of Penan linguistic repertoires. Obvious potential sources of influence on Penan include Dusun, Iban, Malay, and English, the languages that occur in Sukang Sub-district (the latter two languages being taught as subjects as well as being the media of instruction in Sukang Village school). The linguistic influences on Penan were noted as being

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overwhelmingly from Malay and Iban, and this is despite relatively little contact with first-language speakers of Malay, since living in Brunei at least.

In addition, the contexts of use for Penan have been reduced. Penan remains a means of identifying the community in Sukang, but formal education, in Malay and English, appears to have partially usurped some of the informal educational roles of Penan. Certain domains of use for Penan were reduced as soon as the Penan settled in Sukang, particularly for children who began school and were exposed to formal education in Malay and English media. Interethnic contact among adults continued to be conducted in a superordinate code (Malay), just as it had been when the Penan were hunter-gatherers, but this contact would have increased considerably once Penan had settled, and would have given rise to group-wide acquisition of Iban, which had also become the sub-district's *lingua franca* by the 1960s.

The Penan in Sukang are overtly positive about both their own language and Iban (as the local *lingua franca* and the first language of the majority of the inhabitants of the sub-district). At the same time, they certainly do not appear negative towards other codes and ethnic groups with whom they come into contact, either regularly or sporadically.

It has not been possible to either observe or record (and thus analyse) the language knowledge and use of every member of the Penan group in Sukang, so the statements made below are not necessarily generalisable to every member of the Penan community. As mentioned, Penan are very positive towards Iban, the language that they view as the source of most of the code switchings and borrowings, of which they are aware, in daily language use. The degree to which the occurrence of non-Penan features can be seen as marked can be judged by the extent to which Penan themselves have perceived certain language features that they use as Penan or not, and whether or not it was possible for them to provide Penan equivalents for language items not perceived as traditionally Penan (for details, see Sercombe 2001).

I conducted certain tests with Penan children, to whom I was able to gain access in the primary school, which revealed some surprising results. Firstly, a number of Penan primary level children were found to be able to read and write in Penan with relative ease, despite having never before been exposed to printed matter in their own language. However, their general levels of Penan cultural and linguistic knowledge appear somewhat attenuated in contrast to adults' levels of knowledge and not just because of age differences. At the same time, all Penan primary level children with whom I came into contact were print-literate, which is not the case for Penan adults, among whom I found only three who

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were able to read printed text. Up until the present time, few Penan have been able to exploit their text literacy in ways that might benefit them as individuals or the group. If and when an opportunity to do so arises, this is most likely to be outside Sukang Sub-district, and the already limited domains of use for Penan language may be further reduced.

A number of factors suggest that Penan is an endangered language in Brunei – notwithstanding Krauss' (1992) suggestion that any language with fewer than 10,000 speakers is likely to be at risk. These include the small number of Penan speakers, the limited number of domains in which Penan is used, the low status of Penan, and the limited amount of institutional support that Penan receives, although, in the long run, it is unlikely that language maintenance will be achieved through institutional support alone (see Edwards 1984).

The persistence of the Penan language in Brunei can be accounted for largely by factors related to both the physical and social environments inhabited by Penan speakers:

1. the relative rural isolation of Sukang, with only the Belait River as a practical means of access to other areas, limits the potential effects of state institutions.
2. the minimal and peripatetic presence of 'outsiders' minimises the effects of exposure to many of the norms and values of coastal dwellers.
3. physical and social separation between the Penan and others, within the village context, are significant factors in the continued use of Penan within the Penan longhouse community.
4. penan, by dint of their rural circumstances, have far more chance of maintaining their language, where the current opportunities and needs for group cohesion are increased, than if they lived in urban circumstances (where the possibilities for wider social contacts would be far greater).
5. economically, the Penan continue to be independent, even if materially poor.
6. penan is still the primary language of socialisation among the group.
7. most Penan males in Sukang continue to use their language because their social networks remain very much rooted in the Penan community. It continues to be more advantageous to cooperate with or assist a group member than someone outside the group. Penan essentially maintain the same socio-political system as when they were hunter-gatherers. This is reflected in the ongoing primordality and predominant Penan ethnicity of the group. As Gumperz (1968: 386) has suggested, 'separate languages maintain themselves most readily in closed tribal systems, in which kinship dominates all activities'.
8. a lack of success among Penan at school, due to a number of reasons – including a lack of fit between Penan culture and the values and beliefs practised

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in the village primary school – is perceived and occasionally referred to by teachers in the school and has an isolating effect, ensuring greater levels of Penan intra-group dependency.

9. telephone contact with relatives in Sarawak allows access to societal supports for Penan, one of which is continued use of Penan, although features of both Iban and Malay have begun to occur in inter-Penan-community discourse.

Among the factors that appear to be highly salient in language change is penetration of a language group by speakers of other languages. Another is colonisation, from which stems the creation of a hierarchy of languages of differential status by which previously non-existent concepts such as ‘minority language’ emerge (see Mühlhäusler 1989). As Williams (1991: 4) has suggested, ‘[l]anguages in contact are often languages in competition, and the ecology of language has much to do with questions of power, of control over resources, people and land, and the granting or abrogating of social rights throughout history’. It is felt that the social forces referred to by Williams are present to only a limited degree in Sukang Sub-district.

For the Penan language to either die out and/or for Penan to make a total shift to either Iban or Malay (the only other languages to which they presently have any significant degree of exposure), a number of conditions would have to arise, which are not presently in place. The social factors listed below would not necessarily be evenly distributed in terms of the influence they exerted upon the Penan community (see Weinreich *et al.* 1968):

1. easier access to urban coastal districts of Brunei (via roads), where the homogenising effects of large-scale institutional forces would be felt more greatly.
2. greater Penan participation in national social institutions to which they presently have only limited access.
3. greater exposure to both the national and international media.
4. greater participation in work that permits regular social interaction with speakers of Iban and/or Malay, as well as of other languages.
5. the Penan have so far placed little stress on individual achievement, with a consequential lack of socio-economic mobility among the group. Greater academic attainment among Penan children would ultimately allow for further economic opportunities.
6. penan would need to move to other locations for purposes of marriage (particularly exogamy or hypergamy, a particularly powerful factor in language shift, this remaining relatively unlikely at the present), work, or further education. Educational achievement would quite likely also have an effect on their chances of marrying out of the group. (The only Penan to have progressed beyond the primary level education has married a Bisaya’ from

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the Limbang District in neighbouring Sarawak, and presently has the most prestigious job among the Penan living in Sukang, as an assistant in the village medical clinic.)

7. if the Penan community is not replenished by more Penan in the form of immigrants or more children, then assimilation may take place if the group diminishes to a point where it may no longer be viable as a discrete community.
8. the lack of Penan in written form reduces the chances of its continuity.
9. in the continued absence of other Penan, those in Sukang are more likely to look towards their Iban neighbours for greater social contact and closer affiliation, as described earlier.
10. further conversion to Islam among members of the Penan community might encourage greater use of Malay (in the same way that it has among Dusun, but not among Iban in the neighbouring upriver sub-district or *mukim* of Melilas).
11. ultimately, language shift and death are caused by a shift in values (personal and group), and this shift has yet to happen in a way that has caused erosion of Penan to the point of its demise.

It currently appears that the Penan community continues to comprise, to a large degree, a distinct linguistic entity maintaining a distinct code, albeit influenced by surrounding languages.

CONCLUSIONS: SOURCES AND PROCESSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG THE PENAN IN SUKANG

This chapter has tried to outline a number of significant aspects of the current circumstances of the Penan in Sukang and, in so doing, elicit elements of continuity, as well as examples of transformation that they have undergone in the period since they settled in Brunei. This, of course, omits to take account of the possible social and cultural shifts that took place while the Penan were still hunter-gatherers in southern Brunei and northern Sarawak.

Social change is an ongoing universal phenomenon although it varies, quantitatively and qualitatively, according to context. Rates of social change typically increase as technology within a society advances, and material change is generally more rapid than non-material change. Generally speaking, sources of social change can be accounted for largely through the following: cultural processes, such as inventions and discoveries; diffusion via the spread of cultural elements and contact between societies through trade, immigration and mass communication. There remain very few contemporary hunting and gathering societies that are characterised by patterns of life little changed over the centuries.

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The Penan in Sukang are an example of a community that has undergone a fundamental shift regarding patterns of subsistence (like the majority of Eastern Penan in Sarawak, from the nineteenth century right up to the present day).

Social change is also driven by economic change often with an implicit assumption of improved economic status. Unfortunately, there appears, in the main, little evidence of overall economic progress for most Eastern Penan, since settling. They now farm rice, but no longer process sago, and all are still tied to the land (see Jawan 1994, regarding the same kinds of economic constraints on Iban in Sarawak), not that they would necessarily choose other occupations, given the choice. At the present time, however, Penan remain a true minority group in terms of their numbers, status, and socio-economics (see Mougeon and Beniak 1991: 1)

A number of processes have led to both shifts in procedural knowledge and reductions in the cultural inventory of the Penan Sukang (see Brosius 1992a: 75, on the effects of settlement on Penan). These include new methods of transport (along rivers by boat, rather than by foot along paths); new kinds of labour (wage work); changes in spatial orientation (from expanses of primary rainforest towards a more discrete permanently located community); the acquisition of new skills (e.g., farming and boat making), and a decline in traditional skills; this is concomitant with an overall reduced, but not inevitable, exploitation of the rainforest as a resource and as a marker of social identity, from an etic perspective at least.³¹ While Penan have given up elements of their culture (e.g., the practice of certain beliefs, their complex of naming systems), they do not appear to have adopted rituals and practices from settled groups, such as the Dusun harvest festival (*temarok*) or the Iban *gawai* festival, although some have become Muslims but not primarily from religious motives.

Apart from settlement (in 1962), significant transformations among the Penan include the following: locational proximity to a community of Dusun; proximity to and influence by Iban; cultural influence at areal level (by Iban) and at national level by a Malay-dominated society (including conversion to Islam); exposure to formal bilingual education; limited access to wage jobs; long-term separation from other Penan; the transition to a new basic means of subsistence; a decrease in hunting; the emergence of fishing as a significant economic activity; an increased use of alcohol; official Bruneian status; and institutionalisation of the Penan elder's role and social status within the larger community of the sub-district.³² At the same time, it can be observed, particularly from the section on social features above, that the Eastern Penan in Sukang have not yet undergone an ideological shift away from the egalitarianism of Eastern Penan hunter-gatherers,

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nor have they acquired economic wealth and social status through 'any' means (see Gurenther 1968: 131–132). Conversion to Islam has brought with it material benefits, but it has only slightly offset the relative material poverty among some Penan families, who had almost no other regular sources of cash income.

Physical isolation decreases chances of dramatic change. The rural and relatively inaccessible context of Sukang is conducive to the conservation and maintenance of village life, with its limited scope for social and physical change, unless imposed or heavily influenced from outside.³³

Future changes for the Penan can only be guessed at (see Sercombe 1996a and 1996b), and it would be imprudent to speculate how the Penan in Brunei will continue to evolve as a discrete community, if indeed they remain that. Turnbull (1983: 7) has suggested that,

[w]hen a culture persists with little apparent change, as that of the Mbuti seems to have done over a period of many thousands of years, it is not because of a preoccupation with the past, with the maintenance of 'tradition,' nor even because of a conscious readiness and ability to adapt to the present. Rather, it may be because the people, and the culture, are oriented toward what we would call the future rather than the past, or because both the future and the past are considered by them as relatively insignificant extensions of the ever-changing present.³⁴

It is the conclusion here that it is no longer the case that 'nomadism is the essence of being a Penan' (Needham 1953: 156). It is not necessarily the case that Penan, depending on 'length of settlement [...] exhibit progressive changes in social organisation and culture compared with traditional groups' (Needham 1965: 60). The place of settlement is also relevant. Needham's observations were among Penan on the coast of Sarawak, and residence in coastal areas of Borneo has frequently been shown to be a significant factor in social and cultural realignment. Neither is it the case that the loss of the death-name system is a direct reflection of assimilation to coastal culture (see Needham 1965: 69). While this may suggest social mutation, it does not demonstrate it, and the loss of death names (necronyms) may be interpreted as a symptom that does not, in fact, reveal the real extent of social change, in the same way that it need not reflect the extent of social continuity among this group.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author wishes to thank Kelly Donovan for drawing the map that accompanies this chapter.

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NOTES

1. Urquhart (1958: 206) had earlier suggested that the term 'Pennan' (*sic*) derives from '[M]ennan [...] a word from a number of Kenyah dialects meaning "to stay in the jungle" [...] for two or three years and during that time not to plant crops'.
2. This seems (but may not be) ironic, since one reason given for the arrival of Iban in upriver parts of Brunei is that they were fleeing the Japanese occupation of Sarawak.
3. Leake (1990: 104) also suggests that 'some Bisaya' leaders [...] in turn "owned" groups of nomadic Penans for trading purposes. As the Penans wandered the deep rugged interior clad in bark loincloths, they would collect jungle produce such as hornbill feathers and bezoar stones to trade for iron knife blades and tobacco'.
4. According to R. Needham, the Penan Pelutan migrated between 1765 and 1790 further north, to the middle Baram (pers. comm).
5. Needham (1954d: 429) stated that 'Penan in general have short memories for genealogies and concern themselves hardly at all with the past [...] Penan are concerned to remember and locate as fully as possible the living members of their tribe and people but they do not occupy themselves with the past', a statement with which I would agree.
6. Needham (1953: 218) stated that 'Penan trace kinship ambilaterally'.
7. See Sercombe (1999), regarding Iban and the changing status of longhouse chiefs since they have begun receiving salaries for their positions; see also Needham (1965), regarding the emergence of contractual relationships resulting from settlement and contact with official hierarchical institutions, and the contrast to pre-sedentary Penan social life; also, see Steward (1972).
8. An *atui* has been set up in the Brunei National Museum of Technology as an example of Penan culture. See Langub (1989: 179) for further details of *atui* use among Penan. Barnes (1958: 639–645) also provides descriptions of Penan cemeteries on the Niah River.
9. Rousseau (1990: 227) cites Langub's observation that about ten per cent of Penan marriages are with non-Penan, and this is about the same for the Penan Sukang. Nagata (1979: 246) suggests, in relation to interethnic marriage in Malaysia, that '[t]he low rate of ethnic intermarriage is in no small part the result of cultural and structural incompatibility', which would apply to the Penan in relation to other ethnic groups, to some extent, particularly those with strong institutions of stratification.
10. R. Needham (pers. comm.) said that he had only ever seen one Penan not married, and this man was both ugly and weak, which is not the case with Udhi, although he is a heavy drinker, if given the opportunity.
11. The only exception that I have encountered in Sarawak was in the Eastern Penan village of Pa' Tik, to the south of the Kuba'an River, where some Penan remain semi-nomadic.
12. There is a telephone located in the Dusun longhouse, and people pay to phone out of the district – B\$ 1 for three minutes, when it works. Penan always feel very

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uncomfortable approaching the Dusun to make use of this facility, even though it is provided by the government. Now there is also a telephone in the Penan longhouse, but calls can only be received, not made.

13. One way to tease an unmarried Dusun or Iban adult male is to suggest that he obtains a Penan bride. In Biadong *Ulu*, there is a consensus among Iban that the Penan are lazy and chaotic in their daily lives. However, a Penan male is married to an Iban woman from Biadong and they live with her brother next to the path between Sukang and Biadong.
14. See Janowski's (1996) view that the Kelabit, in Sarawak, perceive Eastern Penan as children, although this has been challenged by Bala (2002).
15. This coincided with some Penan saying that they had made *tuak* from fruit when they had been hunter-gatherers.
16. In conjunction, however, a number of Iban – about 50 per cent – in the adjacent *mukim* of Melilas (which has only one longhouse with a population of just over 100) have converted to Islam, as have some Dusun in Sukang.
17. Penan in Sarawak have increasingly abandoned loincloths and traditional haircuts.
18. In the Penan village of Pa' Tik, on the Magoh River (between one and two days' walk from Bario) in northeastern Sarawak, I witnessed performances satirising loggers and government officials through mime and role-play. I have also witnessed, in Long Buang, *sayau* (Penan 'dance'), loosely based on the elegant dances of other groups but, in the case of Penan, it is mostly performed as a vigorous bottom-wiggle, the more vigorous the better, in a deliberate parody of refined longhouse-style dances.
19. Nowadays, following both missionary influence and that of settled peoples with whom the Penan come into regular contact, the majority of Penan in Sarawak have become evangelical Christians; and some openly disdain traditional Penan beliefs (see Sercombe 1996b).
20. Brunei's *Borneo Bulletin* (2000: 22) occasionally makes reference to the number of Muslim converts. In the 23 April 2000 issue (*Borneo Bulletin* 2000: 22), an article on this subject was accompanied by a picture of the Sultan, presumably to add prestige to this phenomenon: 'From 1971 to 1999 there were altogether 9,570 converts in the country', under the title 'More Embrace Islam'. The newspaper did not mention the economic and other social advantages to be gained from conversion to Islam, which may be significant attractions for those intending to convert, or the fact of compulsory conversion to Islam by marriage to a Muslim. At the same time, Brunei should not be seen as particularly different from many other nationalistic governments in their attempts at homogenisation towards a single religion, language, ethnicity, or political idea.
21. For more comprehensive descriptions of Eastern Penan foraging economies, see, among others, Langub (1989) and Needham (in this volume).
22. Rousseau (1990: 46) argued that Barth's (1969) view of 'ethnicity' as 'the most general identity' is inapplicable to Borneo because it is not the major marker of socio-economic differences. I would suggest that, in the case of Eastern Penan, ethnicity is a clear and useful marker since, wherever one travels among Eastern Penan, they are inevitably the poorest people in a given area. I am aware of no exceptions to this.

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23. The Penan cannot travel any further than Bukit Sawat, a small settlement downriver that adjoins both the road south from the coast and the Belait River, as no Penan in Sukang has a car. Penan are occasionally able to secure lifts in cars from teachers returning home, but not from the neighbouring Dusun, who are reluctant to take them, since their cars are more likely to be full with family members and/or supplies.
24. Leake (1990: 105) claimed that the Penan Sukang were planting wet or swamp rice and cultivating *rumbia* (sago palms), but the former has never taken place among any of the groups in Sukang Sub-district and the latter practice began to decline in the 1960s and stopped altogether in the mid-1980s.
25. Nearly every Penan village that I have ever visited has a similarly poor record of rearing chickens for domestic consumption.
26. Dusun and Iban buy foodstuffs in bulk downriver, which they can then store in their freezers at home in the upriver sub-district.
27. Penan store wild pig fat on the occasions that they obtain it.
28. Ellen and Bernstein (1994: 16) felt that Bruneians 'who traditionally made a living from forest products (Dusun, Iban, Murut and Kedayan) have been lured to wage employment. This has resulted in a flow of people to towns and the emptying of rural villages'. This is certainly true for Dusun, less so for Iban and Penan.
29. See Nicolaisen (1976b: 208; although his focus was actually Western Penan), who wrote that '[a]ll Penan still collect wild sago in the forest', as if this is a defining characteristic of being Penan, yet the Penan Sukang have abandoned this practice, but remain Penan. Brosius (1991a) suggested that Penan may abandon their traditional management of forest resources with increased availability of cultivated foods, and those which can be bought if they have access to these and the money to buy them. This is the case in Sukang. Sather (1995: 255) also suggested that '[w]hile foragers may be in the process of becoming sedentary, the end result is by no means a complete conversion to cultivation, much less to full-time rice agriculture. Instead, partially settled foragers usually continue to forage, often, in fact, intensifying their collection of forest products as they take up part-time cultivation for subsistence'. This is not the case in Sukang (see Ellen 1994: 205), where the Penan now rely mainly on cash, rice-farming, and fishing. In Sukang Sub-district, the Iban collect far more intensively and widely than the Penan, besides which the Iban do not mind being out at night in the search for resources, while the Penan do.
30. Sellato (1994a) has written that egalitarian groups like the Iban do their own commercial foraging and so do not need the services of the Penan.
31. Ironically, the Penan in Brunei make less use of the plentiful resources available to them than the Penan who inhabit the middle Baram areas of Sarawak, who have a far more limited range of natural resources to exploit.
32. In some respects, the Penan Sukang contrast considerably with Eastern Penan in Sarawak: among Penan in Sarawak, there is a highly developed sense of political consciousness (Sercombe 1996b). A number of Penan in Sarawak have received higher education, moved downriver, and taken up government administrative

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posts or returned to teach in upriver (Penan) schools. Among these Penan, there have been clashes with loggers, vociferous objections to oil palm projects, as well as close interaction with journalists and tourists. Penan in Sarawak are also aware of commercial markets and of the value of their culture as a commodity that has been put on exhibit, for example, at the Sarawak Cultural Village in Kuching. The Penan in Sarawak have had to adapt to deforestation, which has not affected the interior of Brunei to any great extent. And most of the Penan in Sarawak have been converted to Christianity (*ibid.*).

33. According to Jamal Gantar (pers. comm.), the Dusun and Penan did not affect each other, in any distinct social or cultural way, before, during, or after Penan settlement. It was only with the arrival of Iban that both Dusun and, subsequently, Penan were affected socio-culturally. Significant evidence for this has been the adoption of Iban as the *lingua franca* for Sukang Sub-district.
34. See Glazer and Moynihan (1975: 4), on the ways in which ethnic groups tend to be seen as historical relics, yet many engender change and regenerate themselves while clearly remaining identifiable as a particular ethnic group.