

Analysis of the penan culture in malaysia



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Introduction:

The Penan is one of the groups in South East Asia and they are live in Sarawak, Malaysia. There are about ten thousands Penan live in Sarawak and only about two hundred of them are nomadic Penan people left. The nomadic Penan is the people who are move from one place to other new place in every month to get new places to stay and food. The most important in Penan community make me feel proud is they are not discriminate toward female and children. All the people are equal in dividing food and sharing food. They are fair in distributing item and especially in food. The hunters hunt animals and divided meat equality to each family. The most unique I think that in Penan community is their forest sign language. Forest sign language is very important to Penan people in the forest. The Penan has their forest sign language in the forest and it is a complex forest sign language. For instance, the sign like they hunting in the forest and went to this way. So, the other Penan people will know that they went to that way. In addition, there is also a sign can know that whether the person leaving the sign is in the good mood or not.

Culture in Penan community:

Culture mean “ learned behavior in any particular society includes those ideas, techniques and habits which are passed on by one generation to another. This learned behavior or social inheritance, of any society is called its culture”. “ It is the possession of a common culture and the ability to communicate and pass it on to others that distinguishes the human being from other animals. Human are human because they share with others a common culture, a culture which includes not only the artifacts of its living

members but also those of members of past generations. Human beings are able to develop and pass on their culture by means of language". (Tony Biton, Kevin Bonnett, Philip Jones, Michelle Stanworth, Ken Sheard and Andrew Webster, 1987, pg 11 and 12). Culture in Penan has already changed especially in materials culture. They have influence by western country materials like they have wearing jeans, t-shirt, shoes, and using plastic. The Penan can get the western materials when they exchange item with the loggers. The processes lead to culture change is diffusion. Diffusion is the movement of things and ideas from one culture to another. The logging companies are the cause of the culture change in Penan's culture. Loggers influence the Penan people by change item with them. The item usually change are knives, cloths, cooking item and so on. Most of the youngest are influence by the western culture. But the eldest not really influenced by western culture, they wear traditional cloths and traditional tattoos.

Besides that, they have using traditional hunting like using blowpipes. The Penan hunters usually use blowpipes to hunt wild animals. Blowpipes are the weapon that can use by them efficiency to kill wild animals. Blowpipes are made by hard wood and it got two holes at the beginning and the end of the blowpipes. The Penan hunters also have shotgun but they not often use it, because shotgun is very expensive to own one and hard to get shotgun. Short blowpipes are usually use in the short range in the forest. Blowpipes are use with the poison dart in order to kill the wild animals. Poison darts make from the milky latex in the "tajem" tress and warmed by fire to produce the darts. Specious darts are use to kill big animals while simple darts are use to hunt small animals. During hunting, the Penan hunters

usually carry two knives. One is long knife and the other is the shorter knife. These knives are use to cut meat, blowpipe darts and so on.

In religion, Penan people are belief in Christian since many years ago. Christian has brought into Penan communities by British since colonial time. The definitions religion includes “ beliefs about the existence of superhuman beings or forces, the practice of rites and rituals, the institutional forms that religion takes and the power relationships believed to be involved between human being and suprahuman beings”. (Robert Van Krieken, Daphne Habibis, Philip Smith, Brett Hutchins, Michael Haralambos and Martin Holborn, 2006, pg 390). But, they still strong believe in myths and spirits in some place. For example, some rituals can expel bad luck in hunting and unsuccessful in hunting. By doing the ritual the hunters can change their hunting bad luck become good luck in hunting. Besides that, blood pacts are one of the cultures in Penan community and usually happen between the Penan leaders and neighboring tribes. In some of the cases, the leaders would shed blood onto tobacco and then it smoke together, and then consuming each other blood and preventing future conflicts. If got a breach of this pact was believed causing vomiting blood and violent death.

Economy in Penan Community:

The term ‘ economy,’ from which we get ‘ economics,’ comes most directly from the Old French word ‘ economie,’ meaning ‘ management of a household.’ The French adopted the term from the Latin word ‘ oeconomia,’ which was in turn derived from the Greek word ‘ oikonomia.’ Oikonomia came from the word ‘ oikonomos,’ which separates into ‘ oikos,’ meaning house, and ‘-nomos’ meaning managing. (Mankiw, 2008, page 4). Economy

in Penan community is based on the animals' meat that they hunted, rattan make by themselves, sago and so on. Most of the item they sold is meat that their hunted in the forest to the loggers. The Penan people get their profit by selling these items to the companies. The Penan people were trade for manufactured goods like knives, cooking item, cloths and so on. Gaharu is the one of the goods sell to other country like China, Taiwan and Japan to get more profit from it. Gaharu is for medicinal, religious purposes and making perfume.

The patterns of economic subsistence are foraging and horticulture in the Penan community. Foraging is the most ancient of human subsistence patterns in foraging for wild plants and hunting wild animals. Most of the Penan hunters are hunting in a small group of relatives and friends. They have their own settlements that are not permanent which they can live in there while hunting. There are three major variations of the foraging subsistence pattern that is pedestrian, equestrian and aquatic. Penan hunters are using pedestrian while hunting wild animals. Pedestrian is diversified hunting gathering on their foot.

Hunting is the common activity in Penan to obtain meat from wild animals. Government has give permit to Penan for hunting in the forest. Male are taking part in the hunting activity. Most of the animals hunt by the hunters is wild pigs. They also hunt small animals like birds, squirrels and so on. Before logging begins, many wild animals can be hunted by hunters. After logging started in their forest, wild animals become less and the animals loss their habitant. Trees are chopping down and animals are decrease. So, the hunters become harder to hunt animals where animals are becoming less.

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The Penan people have involved in the horticulture. Horticulture is the small scale and low intensity of farming. This subsistence pattern involved at least part time planting and tending of domesticated food plants. They have grown their own plants for food and they also keep the chickens and other relatively small domesticated animals are raised for food. Most of the foods are used by them and the surplus of meats will be sold to the loggers. They will gain profit when they sell their own meats to the logging camps.

Family and Gender in Penan community:

“ The family may then be defined as a small group of closely related people who share a distinct sense of identity and a responsibility for each other that outweighs their commitments to others, this group is commonly, but not necessarily, based on marriage, biological descent, or adoption”. (James Fulcher and John Scott, 2007, pg 447). In Penan community, most common forms of the family distinguished in the literature are nuclear families and extended families. The nuclear family is usually defined as “ two generation unit consisting of parents and unmarried children. A distinction is generally made here between the family of origin and the family of destination”.

(James Fulcher and John Scott, 2007, pg 448 and 449). Nuclear families in Penan community are less if comparing to the extended family. They usually live with their parents and their children in their own hut in the forest. “ The extended family includes other family members. It extends vertically to include at least three generations that is at least grandfather and grandmothers. It extends horizontally to include in law, cousins, aunts, uncles, though how far it extends will vary and depends upon perception of the composition and boundaries of the family”. (James Fulcher and John

Scott, 2007, pg 448). Most of the families in Penan community are extended family. They live together in a big family with their relative. Most extended family live in bigger huts in the forest.

Gender refers to “ differences in the way that men and women in a particular society are expected to feel, think, and behave. Thus, males are typically expected to feel, think, and behave in a masculine way, and females in a feminine way”. (James Fulcher and John Scott, 2007, pg 156). There are some differences in gender roles in Penan community. For instance, males are taking part in hunting activity and rough activity. Females are most likely doing soft works like taking care their children, making rattan, finding firewood and so on. Gender roles are that “ specify the ways in which men and women are expected to feel, think, and behave. These prescribe not only the kinds of work that men and women are expected to do but the feelings they can express and everyday aspects of their behaviour , such as the way that they speak and dress”. (James Fulcher and John Scott, 2007, pg 159). But, in Penan community, females, males and children are taking parts in making sago flour. There is no gender stratification in making sago.

Logging:

Sarawak forest has been logging seen 1970 years. The purpose of logging is to processed timber. The government of Sarawak has given permit to logging companies to log in the forest. It can enhance the local profits and become the first world in 2020. Most of the timber export to other country like Japan, India and Europe. The logging companies using bulldozers to clear up the forest and cutting down trees. The logging companies which include

Shin Yang, Samling and Interhill are logging in Sarawak. The company workers usually live in the houses that they have build when they logging.

The problem face by Penan is logging in the jungle where they live. Logging can cause many problems toward Penan people. Penan are very hard to live in the jungle where are many logger are logging in their habitant. The changes in the jungle will make them fill difficult to stay at the jungle. The change in the sound of the machines chop trees, the light in the jungle become brighter because of less trees and the temperature become higher than before. Besides that, Penan also facing problems like hard to hunt animals in the jungle where logging activities are started. All the animals run away from the jungle and animals are dying during logging. Penan also hard to get medical plants and food when many trees are destroys by the logging companies. The fruits tress and the sago palm become less after logging has started in Penan's forest. So, Penan people feel difficulty in getting the food and sago. The water in the river become mudding when raining. The mud from the trees has been chopping down. The Penan people cannot get clean water from the river.

Social change and development:

Social change is about change in the nature, social institution, social behaviour or social relations of a society, or other social structures. It also can also be said as any event or action affects a group of individuals that have shared values or characteristics. The factors that lead to social change are physical environment and poverty. Physical environment refers to the trees in the forest have been cut down by logging companies and the Penan people have to face the new change in their habitants. They are not able to

adapt the new life. This is because some of the changes like temperature, light and sound in the jungle have been changes. The dirty water in the river is also one of the social changes. They have to get use to it. Poverty is also one of the factors that lead to social changes. Logging can cause them into poverty. This is because they have less wild animals to hunt and less meat to sell to people. Less trees in the forest making them hard to find fruits in the forest and it is hard to make rattan when logging started. Furthermore, oil palm plantations have forced them into poverty. There is nothing left for them anymore. The loss of their forests, the Penan is force to poverty and suffers illness because of not enough foods and polluted water.

The government has promises to give development to Penan but until now there is no development in their community. Besides that, the Penan also not trust the government and they also do not want development. The government also does not understand why Penan does not want development. The logging companies have given the Penan people the broken and abundant house that the logger had made during logging. So, the Penan people do not feel there has been development in their community. According to Wallerstein (1991), “ development simply means “ more”, which is a capitalist definition referring to the accumulation of wealth and as a result of this accumulation, one area will remain poor as a result of exploitation by the rich (powerful)”.

Conclusion:

The Penan was live in Sarawak since many years ago and there are no troubles in their community. After logging companies come to their forest cutting down the trees and making the Penan suffer from many problems.

Logging makes changes in Penans' culture, their social, development, economy and so on. In my opinion, the companies should stop logging from destroying the forest and the Penan habitant. Logging will also cause to global warming and it will create disaster toward Penan people. The government also should be more careful in making decision in timber industry. The government must be more consider about the Penan feeling when logging in their forest.

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