

Social changes that happened to the nomadic penan history essay



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The Penan is a nomadic aborigine that roamed on the land of Sarawak Bumi Kenyalang and some other parts on Brunei Bandar Seri Begawan. They are a highly evolved egalitarian society and little gender division. Man and women shared mostly the chores among them. Such as, gathering the forest product and extracted sago from the sago palms. But they are still some part of chores was male dominated. For example, hunting.

The Penan practiced the ritual of 'Molong' which means 'never take more than necessary'. That had made them the hunter-gatherers. Not every of the Penans are nomadic hunter-gatherers. The present Penans are consisted with settled, semi-nomadic and total nomadic communities that fully reliant to the forest products. Nowadays, the number of Penan had officially stated approximate to 10, 000 people and around 350-500 of them are nomadic that scattered over Ulu Baram, Limbang, Tutoh and Lawas of Sarawak. Usually the nomadic Penan moves in group that consisted approximately 40 people included children and old people. They do not stayed for a long time in a particular place. Once the resources at the place that they stayed became fewer, they will choose other suitable places and moved again.

I have to narrow down the scope to the group of nomadic Penan that I would like to study about. The nomadic people that lived in the forest rely much on their traditional diet- Sago (starch from the Sago palm). As the Penan people valued the environment so much, only the matured and fully grown sago palm trees will be cut down. The leader will make sure an amount of sago starched enough from a single or a few sago palm trees and kept adequately for their supply. After that no more sago palm will be chop down until they are ran out of food. Besides that, the Penan also preys on meat. And the <https://assignbuster.com/social-changes-that-happened-to-the-nomadic-penan-history-essay/>

protein outcome in their daily diet was contributed by mostly wild boars, mouse deer and monkeys. The hunters hunt by using a blowpipe, made with the Belian wood and carved out with a bone drill. The darts that they used are made from the sago palm's tree bark and on its tip; the Penan dipped it with kind of powerful poisonous latex that extracted from a tree from the forest. However, their way of living is about to change due to the pressures that forced them to adapt the cultivation of planting and domestic animal breeding.

Issue to rise:

As the Real GDP (gross domestic production) growth in Malaysia since the year of 1999 to 2007 had improved in great percentage, Malaysia government had put a lots of affords on the timber industry in Sarawak district. Sarawak was blessed with lots of valuable trees. The government puts a strong emphasis on the processing timber that can maximize the local profits. It is believe vital to keep up with the large demand from Japan, India and the Far East countries.

Ironically, logging seems to bring great boons to the country, in Sarawak it destroys numerous of sago palm and depleting a vast area of rainforest that the Penan people lived in. Poorly planned logging trails had caused the issues of earth erosion, landslides and the silting of watercourses happened. The situation had affected the functional relation among the Penan and the forest.

Once the big trees were removed, soon the secondary bushy forest will take over the naked forest bed. Meat becomes hard to track and fruits that used

to be bountiful become less abundant. The Penan is having difficulties in collecting and hunting their food. Opposition from both the settled and nomads were ferocious. The government faced a hard time from those aborigines. The Sarawak government had often stated to bring upon the issue and promised to offer development to the Penan.

Almost all nomads Penan go up against with logging and it happened to be huge gap of trusting and understanding between the government and the Penan. The government puzzled why would anyone want so much to live in the jungle and hoping thoughtfully the Penan will come to their senses. On the other hand, the Penan had lost faith in their government as more and more bulldozers driven through their forest. In their perspective, logging only bring them disasters and they will lose it all if they move a step backward from their stand on protecting the forest.

What is more, at the same time they see the pristine forest been tear down, having their territories distorted into oil palm and acacia plantations is a catastrophe.

Anyway, as now the Penan had come across the problem, they have a choice to make. Shall they stand firm on their principle and let the opposition of deforestation continued or just accept what the government had offered and worked in tandem to prevail social harmony and peace? Can they resist the Penan society to change? Surely it is a hard decision to make, there are too many valuable things will have to be forgone and ultimately become memory.

According to Bilton T, Bonnet K and the scholars, the diversity and

changeability of social structures are a centre theme, together with the <https://assignbuster.com/social-changes-that-happened-to-the-nomadic-penan-history-essay/>

revelation that human action can recast social relations and institutions; it reveals the human potential for liberation and creative social reconstruction.

(Introductory Sociology : 2nd edition, Bilton T, Bonnet K, Jones P, Stanworth M, Sheard K and Webster A. 1987. Mackays of Chatham PLC, Kent)

According to the statement above, social changes that happened to the Penan tribe was due to the reason of recasting and reconstructing into a liberal and creative society. But the point that I want to argue here is- Does the tribe want to change? Considered upon the motive that they fight over their rights on the land and the forest, I strongly doubted their willingness in changing their social construct and their social life. There was a cause that forced them to move out from the jungle; there was a cause to require them to give up their nature root. And it is our duty to unveil the secret.

Social change was defined as the time when external events happened, such as war and conquest and culture contact and diffusion, or environmental factors or internal events, such as innovations, invention and population shifts according to Barbara Marliene S. & Mary Ann A. Schwartz (2006)

In this point of view, the society of Penan changed when development and wealth interfered. Some of them accepted it and adopt a new life style yet some resisted it and willing to pay any price to defense their actual life.

Yet, this diffusion, the spread of culture traits from one society to another, is the inevitable result of contact between cultures. With modern communication technologies reaching into the most remote corners of the

globe, the rate of diffusion has accelerated dramatically since the turn of the twentieth century.

(SOCIOLOGY: Making sense of the social world, 2nd edition, Barbara Marliene Scott & Mary Ann A. Schwartz. 2006, Allyn and Bacon Pearson.)

The social change of the Penan tribe was occurred because of the culture contact and diffusion according to the statement above. When the culture of new economic bloom and the up raise national income due to timber industries disperse to the land Sarawak, the territories of the Penan tribe was the main venue to be affected. For example, large scale of logging operation encroach their land causing them to suffer under the pollutions. Their water catchment areas were polluted with sediment displacement, many sago palms were lost; wild boar, deer and other game became scarce, the fruit trees and medicine purposed herb were hard to find.

Therefore, their adrenaline prepared them to fight or flight. The result of social change among the Penan is remaining negative in terms of the government perspective. The Penan chose to fight. For example, many blockades were set up in attempt to stop logging operations on their land. Unfortunately, the efforts were hard to carry on and the situation turns bad with vast scale of clashes between the indigenous community and the state supported logging company. For example, SamLing Corporation, lead by CEO Yew Chee Ming, COO James Ho Yam Kong. In association with the honorable chief minister's privilege company known as STIDC. The Malaysian Timber Certificate Council (MTCC) had granted the companies with a logging

concession. It is mean that they have the power to log even on the land that traditionally inhabited by the aborigines of Sarawak.

Apart from the reason of culture diffusion, the social change that happened among the Penan was due to the cause of demographic trends. That is to say every birth, death, and migration rates can affect the size and composition of a population, which in turn, can have a major impact on a society. Barbara Marliene Scott & Mary Ann A. Schwartz (2006). For example, scarcity of food and contamination of environment.

Nowadays, the Penan is dealing with the exact problems that I have stated above. Their food becomes hard to attain and the inhabited environment was contaminated. These kinds of situation makes their life in the jungle becomes tough and unease.

On the other hand, the member in the group is keep decreasing due to migration. Migration refers to the movement of people into or out of a geographical area (Barbara S & Mary A, 2006). This is to say, many youngster who grew up in the nomadic group choose to move out from the community and headed to the life style in the city. The birth rate in the group becomes lesser and lesser as the young people rather choose a spouse from the city than they own people that stayed in the group. As time passes, only old generation and some few young people will stay on. Eventually, their group will turn out to be a smaller group and perhaps faded away.

It was not something surprise with the reactions that the nomadic presented.

According to Barbara S & Mary A (2006), the behavior that is likely to <https://assignbuster.com/social-changes-that-happened-to-the-nomadic-penan-history-essay/>

emerge in such situation is called collective behavior, the relatively spontaneous and unstructured behavior engaged in by large numbers of people who are reacting to a common stimulus.

(SOCIOLOGY: 2nd edition, making sense of the social world. Pg63. 2006.

Barbara Marliene Scott & Mary Ann A. Schwartz. Allyn and Bacon Pearson)

The collective behaviors that the Penan tribe had were the attitude that they had shown. Such as, the confrontations with the logging companies and the blockades that they had made. Collective behaviors take many forms. Some are short-period, spontaneous and unstructured. But some are long-lasting, formalized and well-planned. The form the Penan tribe used to oppose their disagreement was categorized in the middle, which is social movement. It tends to be long -lasting because it has to achieve a certain goal of changing social order in some fundamental method. For instance, the leaders of the Penan tribe have a well organized plan to attain their goal of preserving their rights on the land. They even met with Al-Gore and Prince Charles regarding to their problems.

According to Barbara Marliene Scott & Mary Ann A. Schwartz, 2006 in Sociology 2nd edition-making sense of the social world, despite the enormous power of societal institutions and other social forces against the control of individuals, formal organizations of individual activism are often crucial to social change and can sometimes shake the foundation of a society. Such has been the case with various actions that had taken to show their dissatisfaction, including the protesting that brought upon the media and how the tribe fought against the political power and obtained the

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chances to speak out to the world. In my opinion, the ways that the Penan took in protesting their dislike was in the middle part of collective behavior and social movement. It is not as well-structural as the social movement because of their generally free-form approach. Apart from that, it does not involved large numbers of people. Compares to social movement, the way that the Penan acquired was only engaged relatively small amount of people, such as their leaders and alders. It also consisted a goal; a reason to fight for. So, it can also be said a goal oriented collective behavior. But, by gaining the momentum in their resistance and objection, they are to say a small step from becomes social movement and perhaps, it might succeed in the future!

Conclusion:

As everyone can see, social change is not a small matter. Many aspects in life have to be considered. Individual, groups, communities are reluctant to change and facing big struggle to adjust from the life style and conditions that they had used with. At the same time the society have to differ themselves to maintain existing conditions. For instance, as t-shirt and jean has been introduced to the Penan, they have always preferred chawat. However, when the time has come, changes have to be done. Conflicts and contradictions will occur within the process for sure.

The Penan resists change because of their romanticized notion of traditional values and “ the good old days”. (Barbara S, Mary A, 2006) For example, the Penan people valued their forest habitat and their traditional rituals very much, they like to bathe in the river; they enjoyed the hunting activities; they have used to every trees in the jungle. The fear of losing each of them caused them hesitated to receive changes.

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Not only that, nomadic Penan resists changes simply just because of inertia; they have become complacent, even if their lives are far less than ideal.

(Barbara S, Mary A, 2006) Changes required people to do something different, and it may cause a lot of discomfort. Often, the leaders who accept the legitimacy of status quo would probably resist changes the most. This is because with the acceptance, it might force them to reconsider the authenticity in the previous society that used to define their entire purpose and power. They might also be afraid of losing their people's hearts and their prestige in the society to the present government.

Some nomadic Penan refuse to accept changes due to the miscommunication and misinformation. (Barbara S, Mary A, 2006). For example, the Penan regarded the present government as something bad, and they are bad in the context of infiltrated their land and infringed on their rights. It was clearly shown with the logging systems. During the stay of Bruce Parry, the leaders came from afar just to ask Bruce to send their message to the government of British so that they can take over the government again. They felt furious and anguish towards the Sarawak government's doing.

Affords to promote social change expected to see resistance been provoked as there will always be someone who do not gain anything or lost something if not everything due to the process of changes. So, the phenomenon of the Penan resistance is natural and it is common if they persisted in their objection. Personally to say, the one who in charge of the forestation in Sarawak should have been more justice to the people. Government should

be the listening ear for the people not the taking hand. Only the righteous government can last forever in the people hearts.