

Adaptability to Settlement Pattern and Choice of Subsistence Activities: Emergence of Material Culture within the Saribas Malay in Betong, Sarawak

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Abstract. Despite many job opportunities in the market and the challenges they have to face, some minority of the Saribas Malay community in Betong, Sarawak is still maintaining traditional subsistence activities in food production based on the *nipah* tree (locally known as *apong*) such as *gula apong*, *garam apong cuka apong*, *jarik mayang*, *air sadap* and the sago tree (locally known as *mulong*) produce, *lemantak*. This research examines the choice of subsistence strategies and settlement pattern of the Malay community who inhabit the Saribas region. Through the in-depth interview and participant observation, the finding suggested that reliance on a river as the main highway to connect them to the other parts of Sarawak and river as a source of marine resources determine the choice of linear settlement pattern along the river. The results also suggest that river terrestrial resources; *apong* and *mulong* accessibility and abundance availability that influence the community in continuing the traditional subsistence activities (*apong* and *mulong* based food production) related to those flora source. As such, the assemblage of material culture that exist within the Saribas Malay community is the representation and manifestation of their choice of settlement pattern and subsistence activities.

1 Introduction : The Saribas Malay community

The Saribas state has long existed. According to Sanib (2012, 2013), the Saribas, was among the other four Lost Kingdoms toponyms; Sarawak, Samarahan, Kalaka and Melanau, that appeared in the Brunei Sultanate various manuscripts and in the Javanese chronicle ever since 1365. Due to restricted sources of the Saribas Malay available in the present, this paper is an early attempts to documenting the material culture of the people of once been the prominent state in the Sarawak history. Three aspects of Saribas Malay are discussed in this paper: settlement pattern, livelihood strategy and material culture that emerge from the sustenance activities of the community; which is based on the premise that these three aspects are interrelated and characterized by their environment.

Cultural diversity of a community is affected by various factors associated with the customs, traditions, ways and lifestyle of the community. The objects of the Sarawak Malay culture are closely related to socioeconomic activities, and each one has its function and role, and vary significantly with the Malay in Peninsular Malaysia (Awang Azman, 2014). In fact, the term (in Sarawak dialect) used for the cultural objects is also unique among the Malay community from different parts of Sarawak (Mary Fatimah and Salbia, 2014).

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