



# The Function and Role in the IBAN Social Rank in their Communities

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## Abstract

The Sea Dayaks, better known as the Ibans, inhabit nearly the whole of Sarawak. The Ibans belong to the Proto-Malay groups and historically, they were from the Kapuas Valley in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. They migrated to Sarawak about fifteen generations ago in the mid 16th century (the 1630s). They went to the state through the Kumpang Valley and inhabit Batang Ai and then split to several places in Sarawak (Morgan, 1968). Although the Ibans have a social status in their traditional belief, they do not have a hierarchy of social status such as the Orang Ulu. However, they have elevated the status so-called Pengulu, Tuai Rumah, Tuai Burung, Lemambang, Manang, Beliau, Tukang Sabak, dan Indu Takar. The era of modernization has led to changes to the knowledge of the young generation, especially the younger generation of the Ibans who lack knowledge about the function and role of each rank status in their communities. Therefore, this study was conducted qualitatively through an interview with expert informants, observation, and documentation. This research was hoped to contribute to the general knowledge of the Iban community and other communities in the preservation of the function and role of each social status in the Iban community.

**Keywords:** rank status; function; role

## 1. Introduction

The Iban or known as the Sea Dayak is the largest ethnic group in Sarawak. Almost the entire state is inhabited by the Iban community. The majority of this community live in groups in the Iban longhouse, typically located near the waterfront and close to the highway to facilitate daily activities and communicate with each other. There are four main settlements of the population distribution of the Iban community in Sarawak, namely Sungai Saribas, Skrang River, Sungai Batang Lupar, and Rajang River.

When James Brooke first came to Sarawak in 1839, most Iban people lived in the Second Division. However, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were in the whole state. One important aspect of their way of living is their unique longhouse, which until now remains a symbol of identity and solidarity, although, in some states, the Ibans are no longer living in the longhouse.

Thus, according to Jensen(1), in a meeting between the *Tuai-tuai rumah*, *Lemambang*, *Tuai Burung*, and *Penghulu* of Batang Lupar, Batang Ai, Saribas, and Batang Krian held in Harden (Sri Aman) in 1961 to discuss the customs, culture, and ritual of the Iban, they found that they agreed on many things with regard to customs, stories, and oral literature even during the time they were separated by distance and time and never met to discuss matters concerned. For instance, people who are similar to the Iban community in terms of language, religion, culture, and customs are the *Muallang Dayak* and *Dayak Desa* located in Kalimantan, Indonesia.

## 2. Literature Review

Ibans do not have a hierarchy of social status such as the Orang Ulu in their lives. However, they have elevated the status of *Pengulu*, *Tuai rumah*, *Tuai Burung*, *Lemambang*, *Manang*, *Beliau*, *Tukang Sabak*, and *Indu Takar* or *Gaar*.

The post of *Pengulu* (chief of administration) was created in 1883 during the reign of Raja Brooke. Among the responsibilities of the leader are to carry out administrative tasks, collect taxes, and administer several villages (2).

Ahmad et al.(3) examined the non-Malays and found that the indigenous people of Sarawak also have headmen. *Tuai rumah* is the person responsible for maintaining the safety and security in the region. In addition, he is also responsible for solving problems such as marriage, divorce, regulations, and celebrations. Two important ceremonies determined by the *tuai rumah* were appointing the date of Gawai harvest festival and celebration of 'Beranyai'. Meanwhile, the responsibility to maintain the normative order for the Iban community centers in each domain consists of a longhouse chiefs (headmen) and chairman of other local community leaders (4).

In 2007, Christina studied the Iban community that found that they are rich with spirituality and faith which are delivered in an oral tradition. In the Iban community, some spiritual practices such as main *tuai burung* (forecasters, mainly associated with rice cultivation), *tuai rumah* (longhouse chief), *lemambang* (poet) and *manang* (shaman) are common. *Manang*, which is not a witch in the Iban community has knowledge of animism that can cure people affected by *Empa Ubat* (magic) and *tau tepang* (the evil eye). The beings in the spirit world faced by *manang* is *Petara* (gods) which is known as good-natured and well-disposed to human evil, while the *Panggau* (mythical hero) is believed to use their power to help the people who are elected. *Antu* is also believed as the spirits divided between good and evil.