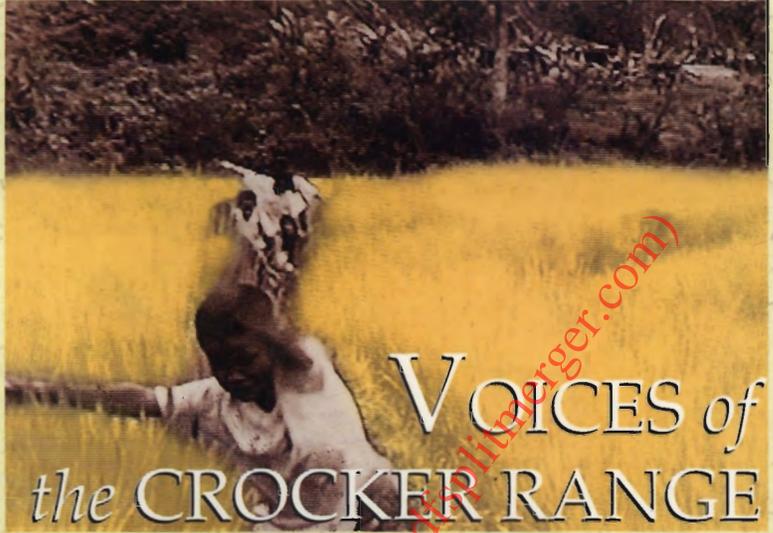
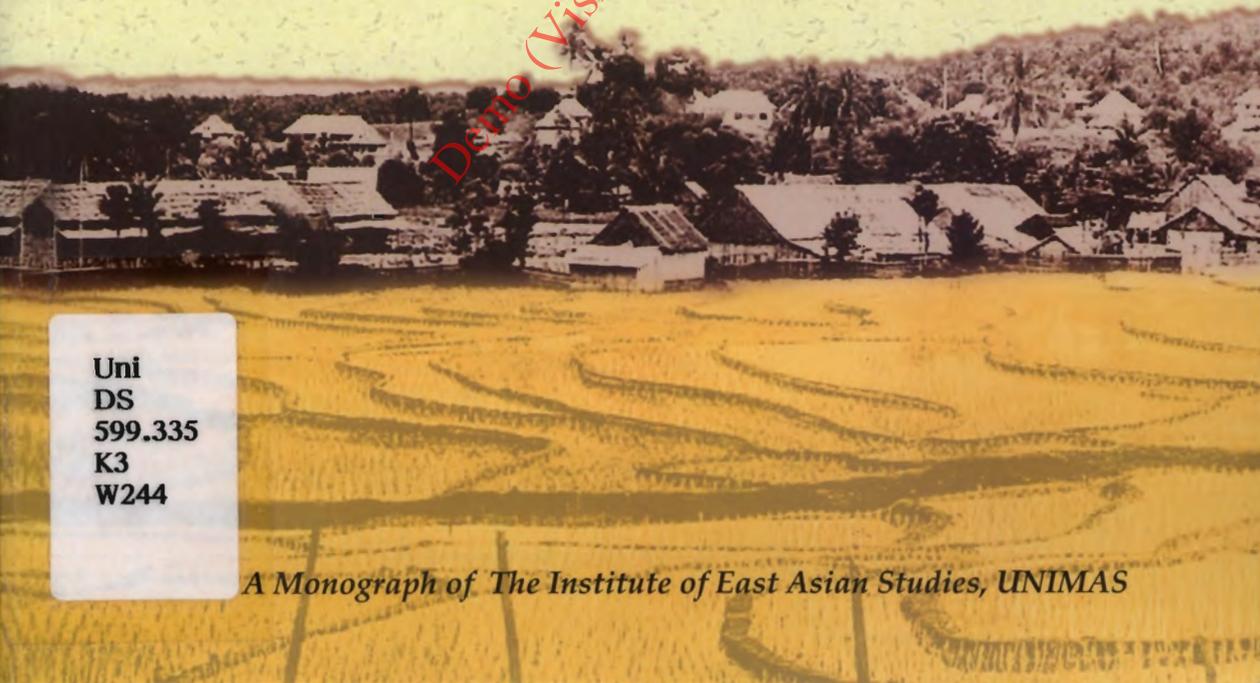


ZAWAWI IBRAHIM



VOICES of  
*the* CROCKER RANGE  
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES  
SABAH

SOCIAL NARRATIVES OF TRANSITION IN TAMBUNAN AND ITS NEIGHBOURS



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*A Monograph of The Institute of East Asian Studies, UNIMAS*

# VOICES OF THE CROCKER RANGE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES SABAH

*Social Narratives of Transition in Tambunan and its Neighbours*

A Monograph based on  
the UNIMAS led International Crocker Range Expedition 2000

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ZAWAWI IBRAHIM

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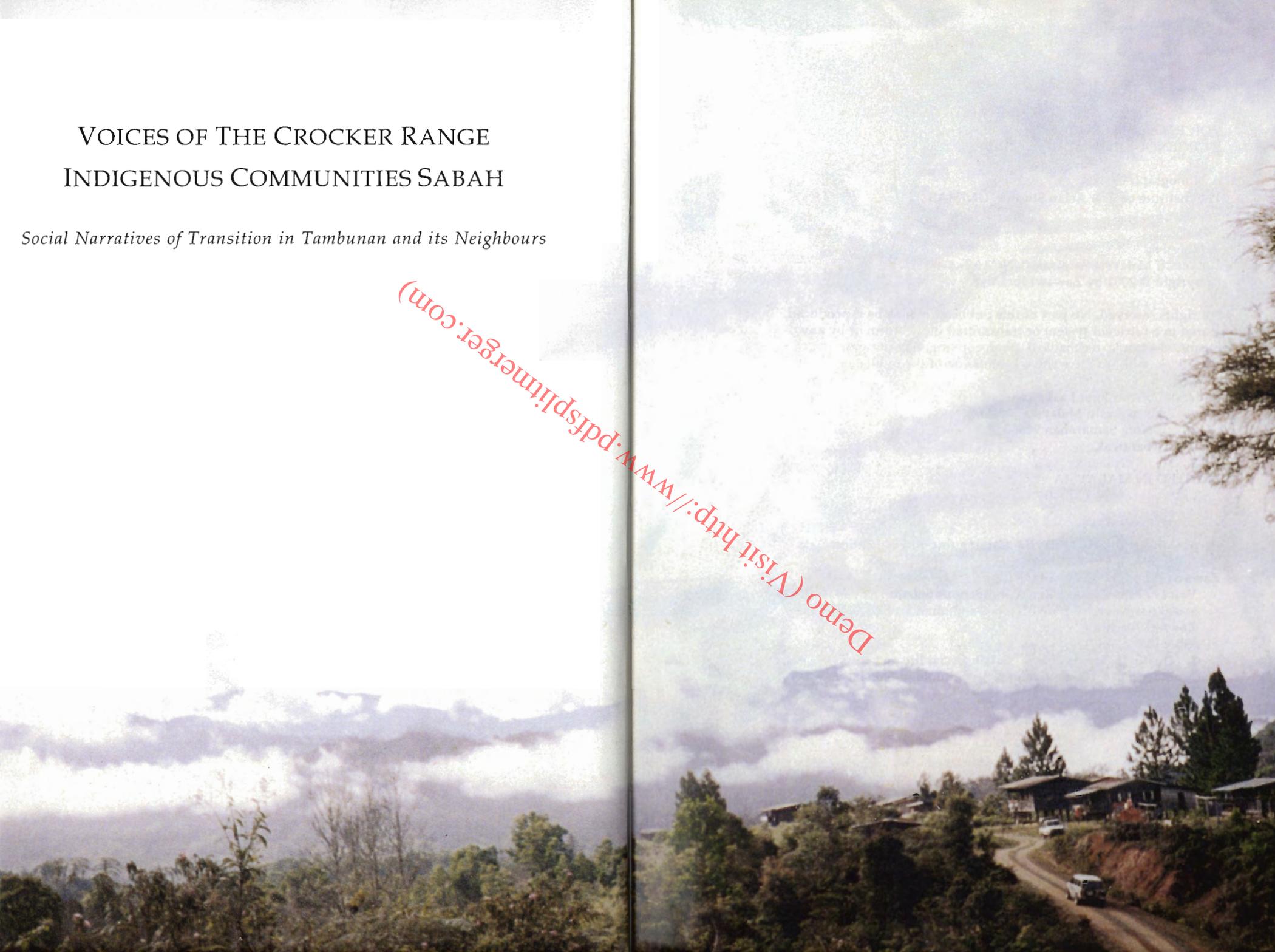
*The Institute of East Asian Studies*  
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2001

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INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES SABAH

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The Institute of East Asian Studies, UNIMAS

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**ERRATA:**

**Samazau** on **Page 11** and **Page 79**  
(**photograph caption**) of the monograph  
should be spelt as **Sumazau**.

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*air* [asli ilham rasa] graphic design © 2001



*A traditional Dusun (Courtesy of Arkib Negeri Sabah)*

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WAN ZAWAWI IBRAHIM Ph.D

*Professor of Sociology*

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

*Kota Samarahan 2000*

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*Polita and Fabia doing the Samazau dance*

## FOREWORD I

To objectively describe an environment, one needs to have a clear understanding of its biophysical elements which include the multifaceted landscapes and its diverse floral and faunal components. On the other hand, a subjective description of an environment must be done from the point of view of the human being; not only in his relationship with the external environment but also his internal environment - his thoughts, feelings, memories and consciousness as such. As the environment in this sleepy hollow called Tambunan continues to degrade from the rapid deforestation and logging activities carried out in the Crocker Range, the people of Tambunan continually cope to establish harmony and peace in their inner selves and also in relation to their biophysical surroundings. Today however they seem to be at a major crossroad. Placed in such a precarious situation, they must choose a direction. The myriad of environment problems they now encounter are merely the symptoms of a deeper crisis. They must heed these signals. But how far would this consciousness get them with their powerlessness? Professor Wan Zawawi set out to explore this deafening silence which lies deep inside of the people of Tambunan. The verbatim documentation of undisguised and candid views echoed by these common people somehow brings about a fresh air frankness in this whole engagement. Thank you Professor Wan Zawawi for being so enthusiastic about the idea of publishing this work as a monograph of the Institute of East Asian Studies UNIMAS.

PROFESSOR GHAZALLY ISMAIL

*Deputy Vice Chancellor*

*(Research & Services)*

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

*December 2000*

## FOREWORD II

There have been a series of scientific expeditions to the island of Borneo, carried out by well-prepared contingents of scholars. The expeditions organized in the 1920s and 1930s by Cambridge and by Oxford Universities have gone down in the annals of history.

Such an approach to enquiry carries with it both advantages and disadvantages. The clear advantage is the intense short focus, the interdisciplinary interactions between scholars, and also the relief for local people that all those intruders from outside will soon be gone and they can then resume "normal life"! Especially for social scientists, the big disadvantage is that the methodology is highly suspect when there is insufficient time to gain any more than a superficial glimpse, and gloss over the complexities of real living societies.

What Professor Wan Zawawi has done is to employ a methodology that takes advantage of the situation, by recording and reproducing in this volume the voices of the people themselves. Those voices have been chosen, purposively, to represent the people of this particular region, Tambunan.

Hearing their voices attunes us to their concerns, their lives and their aspirations. That is very important in itself, and is also a challenge to others to investigate many aspects of the life of the people, to listen carefully and not to be so quick to superimpose our own views.

We are indeed proud to publish this work as the first occasional monograph of the Institute of East Asian Studies, UNIMAS.

PROFESSOR MICHAEL LEIGH

*Director*

Institute of East Asian Studies

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

*December 2000*



*Dusun women in the field*

## PROLOGUE

The following monograph is the initial end-product of a research proposal submitted to the Centre for Postgraduate Studies UNIMAS, titled:

*Capturing the Man-Environment Social narratives and Cultural-landscape of Crocker Range: An Anthropological and Audio-Visual Documentation.*

The research is an attempt to capture the “peoplespeak” and “cultural-landscape” dimensions of the people-environment relationship of the Sabah Crocker Range. Specifically for the purpose of this monograph, the focus is on ‘social narratives’ – the ‘peoplespeak’ data i.e the spoken articulations and expressions of the above relationship. The methodology adopted is an attempt, especially in this initial phase of research, to avoid an authored view of the Indigenous communities of the Crocker Range. Whilst we had an idea of the kind of questions and themes we would like to pursue in the field, we knew little of the Crocker Range society combined with the fact that there was not much written social anthropological literature or research material on these communities. Hence, we thought that the above methodology would be a useful tool to adopt in the first encounter with such under-researched communities. Readers will find that there is no single but ‘different voices’ of authority of “the other” but of course some degree of authorial ‘intervention’ cannot be avoided.<sup>1</sup> For despite our ideals in

---

1 The taken-for-granted ‘participant-observation’ method in Anthropology has been the object of much rethinking and polemic, an important element in the whole debate centring around the authored ‘representation’ of the society/community studied. For some synthesis of the discourse and related issues, see: Kristen Hastrup, *A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory*, Routledge, London, 1995; also (eds.) James Clifford & George Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986; and (eds.) Allison James, Jenny Hockey and Andrew Dawson, *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology*, Routledge, London, 1997.

wanting to present an “unauthored” version of these social narratives, in the final analysis, we (i.e. author/researchers) are still the ones who decide as to who we should interview or speak to, and the kinds of questions we should ask or the themes that we want them to comment on or speak about. Finally, in the final editing of this monograph, I have also exercised certain poetic licence in ‘transforming’ the initial conversational dialogue between the researcher and the informant into the present narrative text. In the process, the researcher’s voice has been deleted out and some rephrasing has taken place so as to render the text more flowing yet retaining much of the feel of the original spoken words by the informants. In the text of the monograph, no change is made to the original language (being either Malay or English or in some, a combination of both) that was used by respondents in the interview/ conversation.

We are not claiming that what we are doing is new. As far as my own work is concerned, the present research is a third in the series in which I have used the methodology of “voices”, firstly, with the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia<sup>2</sup> and secondly, with the people living with AIDS in Malaysia.<sup>3</sup>

In this respect, the authors of “Hmong Voices” echo our exact sentiments when they say:

“We believe in letting out neighbours (i.e the Hmong) speak for themselves about their culture and experiences for any outsiders who may choose to listen. Thus we have conducted a series of casual interviews, gathering together a collection of words, which we think illustrate, if not describe, the wide-ranging experiences that contribute to making these individuals the Hmong....

We have occasionally cut out passages where we feel the speaker

---

2 Zawawi Ibrahim, *Kami Bukan Anti-Pembangunan: Bicara Orang Asli Menuju Wawasan 2020*, Malaysian Association of Social Sciences, Bangi, 1996.

3 *The Hidden Voices – True Malaysian Experiences of AIDS*, (eds.) Marina Mahathir & Wan Zawawi Ibrahim, Malaysian AIDS Council, Kuala Lumpur, 1999.

has drifted, and from time to time we have added a word or two to help clarify a particular point. But that is all. We hope we have achieved the right balance. To their words, we have added a few of our own to help give a fuller picture of their general lifestyle. But essentially this book is devoted to describing life as seen through their eyes, not ours.”<sup>4</sup>

We have divided the text into various themes and re-arranged appropriate texts (or parts of a text) from different informants into a particular theme. Each chapter focused on a specific topic, with each topic being further constituted into various inter-related sections or sub-themes. Their “voices” or “social narratives” address to the question of “transition” – among communities caught between past and present, and between tradition and ‘modernity’. As such, each theme or topic may be a combination of multiple voices – some centred or decentred, marginalised or fragmented, whilst others may be speaking in harmony or dissenting. There is no conclusion in this monograph; it is essentially a juxtaposition of social narratives representing a journey in the making. At the end of the volume, I have also inserted an Appendix, made up of various excerpts from the media where some of the issues in the main fieldwork text touched upon by informants have also been taken up as part and parcel of a larger public discourse beyond the bounds of village or local society. The above strategy represents a conscious effort on our part to further juxtapose other voices of ‘authority’ with those of the ‘peoplespeak’ text in the ethnography.

In this context, we have chosen a different way of “writing culture”<sup>5</sup> of Sabah indigenous society caught in the transition which stands in contrast to the work done by other scholars researching in the same

---

4 Jon Boyes & S. Piraban, *Hmong Voices*, Trasvin Publications, Chiang Mai, 1990 (p.2). Also see *Voices of the Lumad*, Friends of the Earth – Phillipines, publication (undated)

5 We do not claim that the following presentation of the research on indigenous peoples answers all the questions raised in Linda Tuhuwai Smith’s critical *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1999.

area.<sup>6</sup> We feel strongly that we should go back to the field again where we can pursue further some of the issues that have been raised by our informants in the monograph. For instance, a worthwhile focus for further research would be on the question of KadazanDusun identity at the village level in the context of Sabah or the Malaysian nation-state.

The Crocker Range communities with whom we interacted were those from Tambunan, Ranau and Tenom. But our main focus is on Tambunan and its surrounding villages. Partly, this is due to our limited time frame (in this initial phase of research, all the participants of the Crocker Range Scientific Expedition were given 10 days to co-ordinate their research work); on the other hand, we have also been driven by a strong sense of feeling that Tambunan has both a distinct physical and cultural boundedness about it. Even though most of the informants in the text are from Tambunan, we also brought out the voices of those from Ranau (the Muslim KadazanDusun) and Tenom (the Muruts). In Tambunan, whilst the majority of our KadazanDusun respondents are Christian, we have also privileged the voices of the less dominant Muslim section of the community.

The choice of Tambunan was also due to personal circumstances and indeed, an element of destiny (*takdir*): after having spent the first night at the main camp in Mahua, the cold mountain weather must have affected my breathing for as a consequence of which I had to be admitted to the Tambunan District Hospital for three nights. That later on however turned out to be a little blessing in disguise since it was through the nurses who were attending to me at the hospital that I was given leads and access to both information and personal networking into the local Tambunan society. The Hospital itself, situated against the backdrop of the picturesque and rolling padi fields of Tambunan

---

6 See for instance *Villagers in Transition: Case Studies from Sabah*, Hheiko Schulze & Suraini Suratman, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, 1999.

valley, is not only peaceful and tranquil but also has the people-friendly ambience to match.

I believe that this initial 'peoplespeak' ethnography from the field has its own moment and place in contributing to the field of anthropological knowledge of Sabah indigenous communities, in particular the place of the changing KadazanDusun in the Malaysian Nation-State. We hope that these fragments of the "Voices of the Crocker Range Indigenous Communities Sabah" will be a useful first base for future research.

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## INTRODUCTION

### *The Origin Of Tambunan*

Geographically, Tambunan is located in the interior region of Sabah. It is 80 km from Kota Kinabalu (the state capital) in the west, 48 km from Ranau in the North, and 48 km from Keningau in the south. The valley is surrounded by mountain ranges. The majestic Mt. Kinabalu (4,081m) forms a scenic spot in the northern part. Culturally, various myths and legends especially relating to the past traditions, customs and origins of tribes and names of places in the region still exist today. The tale on "Origin of Tambunan" as related below, is indeed an interesting story which has been handed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next among the Kadazan/Dusun people in Tambunan.

Long time ago, Tambunan area was only covered with thick tropical rainforest. The jungles were infested with various creatures ranging from the blood-sucking leeches to the wild buffaloes of Borneo. No man ever lived there in the beginning. As time passed by, pioneer settlers started to migrate southwards from Nunuk Ragang and some came to Tambunan.

The first group of people who reached Tambunan then was led by Gombunan. He was one of the great warriors from Nunuk Ragang, an able and sympathetic leader. He settled down on the fertile plain of Tambunan with his followers including their families. Planting crops such as hill padi, maize, cassava, gourds and yams were the main activities carried out by the women. The men engaged themselves mostly in trapping and hunting wild animals ranging from squirrels to wild boars and deer. Wild edible-fruits and berries were also collected as supplementary food. Food was abundant for everybody. Everyone was happy and contented. As the village population grew, more areas of land were cleared for cultivation.

The villagers who then called themselves the plain people (since

*Opposite:  
Dusun  
Natives 1951  
(Courtesy of  
Arkib Negeri  
Sabah)*

they lived on the Tambunan plain), grew prosperous and lived on peacefully and harmoniously under the leadership of Gombunan.

One day, a group of warriors of the Tonsudung tribe from the eastern hills came and attacked the plain people. They destroyed their crops and properties and even killed a few people in the village. Gombunan and his warriors were quick to act and succeeded in their counter attack. The intruders were badly defeated.

The Tonsudung bitter with their defeat decided to take revenge and kill Gombunan. This occurred one day when about 30 Tonsudung warriors caught Gombunan alone in his field and killed him. They cut his body into thousand pieces and brought his priced head back to their village as a trophy. It was hung on a high pole where the Tonsudung chanted and ridiculed the death of the plain people's leader.

The plain people were wracked with grief on knowing the dismal death of the their leader. They mourned for him for several days and vowed to seek vengeance. As a tribute to him, they named their settlement after him - GOMBUNAN. Meanwhile, another tribe from the western hills came to settle on the plain. It was the Tamadon tribe. The Tamadons were friendly towards the Gombunanians and even offered to help them fight against the Tonsudung as a common tribal enemy. The Tonsudung would certainly attack the Tamadons sooner or later. Therefore, in anticipation of any surprise attack from the Tonsudungs, the Gombunanians and the Tamadons joined forces.

Meanwhile, the Tonsudungs planned to return to the plain to kill the rest of the Gombunan's followers once and for all. They were not aware of the alliance established between the Gombunanians and the Tamadons.

When the Tonsudungs finally came to fulfil their vicious intention, they were shocked to find themselves out-numbered. A hard and bloody battle ensued. More than half of the Tonsudung fighters were killed that day. The remaining survivors took to their heels and disappeared into the eastern jungles, never to come back for a long time. Comparatively, the defenders suffered minor casualties.



The Gombunianians and Tamadons celebrated their victory over the Tonsudungs with a big celebration, food was served in abundance and the same with drinks (*tapai*). The peak of their celebration was marked by renaming the place from “GOMBUNAN” to “TAMBUNAN” after obtaining a consensus opinion from the elders of both tribes. “TAM” was derived from TAMADON and BUNAN from GOMBUNAN. Hence, the term “TAMBUNAN” was born and it remains to this day.

*(Petrus F. Guriting)*

Extracted from *Buku Cenderamata Jubli Perak Pesta Menuai, 1985.*

*Tambunan  
padi fields  
1951  
(courtesy of  
Arkib Negeri  
Sabah)*



*Tambunan sawah padi 1999*