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**RUBBER AND THE MODERNISATION OF THE PAKU IBAN
IN BETONG DIVISION, SARAWAK**

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RUBBER AND THE MODERNISATION OF THE PAKU IBAN IN BETONG DIVISION, SARAWAK

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1. Introduction

Rubber is the tree of modernisation for the Paku Iban in Betong Division¹ in Sarawak. The changes in the way of life of the Paku Iban in the first half of the 1900s were brought about by the wealth they obtained from planting rubber. Towards the end of the 1920s, for example, Paku Iban men were already wearing coats and ties during *Gawai* festivals. In the 1950s, according to Michael Hardin² (Bato, 2003), when the price of rubber was about \$2 per katie, “some families in Paku who had vast rubber gardens with hired rubber tappers were earning as high as \$200 daily”. “That made a number of natives from Betong wealthy”³, he said. With the money they had, they bought shop houses in Betong, Spaoh, in Kuching’s main bazaar and in front of the General Post Office⁴. During this time, “some of the prime land in Kuching ... also belonged to Betong natives.”⁵

In his study of attitudes towards modernisation in three areas in Sarawak (Paku, Lubok Antu and Kuching), Peter Mulok Kedit (1980) said that Paku Iban are more ‘future-oriented’ than the Ibans from the two areas when 74% of them put “disagree” as response to the statement ‘to live for the present’, compared to Lubok Antu Iban (40 per cent) and Kuching Iban (68 per cent). Why Paku Iban are more motivated to a future-orientation than even the Kuching Iban is very interesting?

¹ Betong Division is the eleventh division of Sarawak. The Division was created in 2002. Formerly, it was part of the old Second Division (later re-named Sri Aman Division) of Sarawak. Betong Division is made up of two districts: the Betong District (formerly known as the Saribas District) and the Saratok District (previously known as the Kalaka District).

² Michael Hardin worked as a Sarawak Administrative Officer (SAO) in Betong as well as in its three sub-districts of Pusa, Debak and Spaoh from 1956 to 1961. After that he served as the Secretary of the Saribas District Council until 1963. Before his retirement from the civil service, he had also served as the Resident of the Miri Division. In recognition for his service to the state civil service, Michael Hardin has also been bestowed the Datukship by the state government.

³ Quoted from Bato (2003: 5).