

The Iban's Belief towards the Meaning of Pua Kumbu's Motif

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Abstract: This article emphasizes on the findings on the level of knowledge and perception of Pua Kumbu in young Iban generations. This includes the uses, meaning of motif and rituals related to this fabric. Factors contributing to the declining belief in using Pua Kumbu in their traditional practice were also explained. The knowledge in traditionally weaving the Pua Kumbu was mainly reserved to certain class of woman in the long house. The chosen motif was dependent on illustration that appeared in their dream, where they believe that this was a sign or omen. The rules of weaving motif were also explained. There were three significance motifs with its own hidden meaning found in Pua Kumbu; the *ular* (snake), *antu engkeramba* and *baya* (crocodile) which became the belief of the Iban people. This study suggests that the lack in knowledge and interest in the Pua Kumbu may come from factors such as relocation away from the long house, modernization, religion and generation gaps.

Keywords: iban belief, pua kumbu, textile, motif, traditional.

INTRODUCTION

Sarawak is one of the states in Malaysia but is situated in the Island of Borneo with its estimated population of 2,471,140 people in the year 2010. It is made up of 27 indigenous ethnic groups with the Iban as the largest ethnic group with an estimated population of 713,421 people [1]. This contributed to almost 30 per cent of Sarawak population. Iban people is categorize under the Malay Pronto group which is the same as Sumatera Malay and Peninsular Malaysia [2].

By tradition, the Iban are the riverine people, majority of them are still living in longhouse communities located along the main rivers and small streams of the rested interior [3]. They live as subsistence shifting cultivators with rice as their main crop, a culture which was maintained until this day. The record on the rice cultivation was reported as early as 1955 by Freeman [4] and Padoch [5]. They illustrated the traditional Iban shifting cultivation system in details. According to Kedit [6], the Iban people are originally known as the Sea Dayak. This is because the Iban people use the river or sea as a mode of transportation and also to differentiate them to another ethnic group, the Bidayuh or the Land Dayak. Thus, the Iban uphold the pride of them being great wanderers when they able to discover each and every river trail. To these days, the Iban are skilled trackers in the forest as the knowledge never cease and was passed down from one generation to another.

Globalization and modernization has changed the world and it has truly made the world a smaller place in social, political and economic scene. It has

affected individuals everywhere including the Iban community in Sarawak. As an outcome, the Iban community had experienced the change in time and space in their ethnic identity. Part of their history is now found in literatures, as gone are the days when the elders teach the younger generation of their culture and traditions. One of the tradition is the making of a traditional clothing called Pua Kumbu. Pua Kumbu are designed and weaved by the ladies at the landing of the long houses, and it is during this time they taught the younger generation on the technique of weaving. These days, more and younger generations pursue their studies away in the city or seeking jobs in the city, relocating from the long houses and settling in a city life. This has indirectly influenced their knowledge towards the making of Pua Kumbu's and the meaning of its motif.

According to Richards [7], Pua Kumbu is defined as a blanket made by *ikat* (tie) or *kebat* (dye) processes that was used as a ritual textile. The pattern on Pua Kumbu was created through warp *ikat* which involves resist dyeing the warp threads prior to weaving. *Ikat* or *kebat* was known as the principal