

# A Preliminary Exploration of How Sarawak Indigenous Popular Music Contributes to the Development of Sarawakian Identity

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Received: 30 March 2023 | Accepted: 15 May 2023 | Published: 1 June 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ajress.2023.5.2.1>

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**Abstract:** *This study aimed to investigate the role of Sarawak indigenous popular music (SIPM) in shaping the identity of Sarawakians at personal, social, local, and regional levels. Using surveys and interviews, the research examined how SIPM was perceived by Sarawakians and how it contributed to the creation of their unique identity. The findings revealed that respondents identified SIPM as music that is sung or performed in Sarawak indigenous languages, incorporates musical elements of ethnic groups in Sarawak, portrays indigenous lifestyles and cultures, and represents identities of indigenous groups in Sarawak. The study also found that SIPM played a significant role in creating the Sarawakian identity, which symbolizes the state's diversity, distinctiveness, and harmony through its lyrics, rhythm, beat, and musical activities or engagements it generated. The study's implications suggest that indigenous popular music has a more extensive impact on shaping people's identity beyond their indigenous consciousness. Further research could build on these findings to examine the potential of indigenous popular music in constructing a sense of identity among diverse communities across the world.*

**Keywords:** indigenous, popular music, identity, Sarawak, Malaysia

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## 1. Introduction

With the advent of the internet and social media, Indigenous musicians are now able to produce popular music in their ancestral or mother tongues and share it with a much wider audience than ever before. As a result, an increasing number of people can listen to music produced by Indigenous Peoples from across the globe.

The appeal of Indigenous popular music (IPM) extends beyond Indigenous fans, as it can attract and emotionally connect with non-Indigenous audiences as well. In 2016, the song "Maimoatia" made its debut on the iTunes New Zealand Music Charts, instantly becoming a hit among many New Zealanders. This gospel-like song, which translates to "Cherish It," encourages all New Zealanders to speak te reo Māori, regardless of their proficiency in the language (Haunui-Thompson, 2016).

Indigenous popular music, such as "Maimoatia," goes beyond just entertaining and pleasing listeners; it also serves as a means for indigenous musicians to reclaim their roots and languages and advocate for the rights of their people (The Guardian, 2022). For example, Peruvian singer-