

## Etymology of the Term “Dusun” from Literature Perspectives of Old Written Record

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### ABSTRACT

For a long time, the term "Dusun" has captivated our curiosity. Its origin is unmistakably an exonym. However, few people have written about it, synthesised it, or can explain it in depth. Thanks to advances in information technology, now it is possible to assemble documents or record about historical Borneo from diverse sources around the world. The tasks of collecting historical materials from the colonial of a bygone era has become easier. Due to this, it is a good time to explore a fresh perspective on the historical phases of this ethnic category. To describe the evolution of the phrase, the study includes explorers' journals, semi-autobiographies, historical sources, and other written scientific studies.

Keywords: *Austronesian, Dusun, Idaan, North Borneo, Sundaland*

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### INTRODUCTION

Around 35,000–40,000 B.P., the first known people from East Africa landed in Sundaland, a geographical continent (Jinam et al., 2017; Lopez S. et al., 2016; Oppenheimer, 2012), in an event known as "Out of Africa" (in Beyin, 2011). Other research shows how it spread outside of Africa, and how its descendants became the earliest ancient peoples in Southeast Asia (Oppenheimer, 2012). This ancient version of Southeast Asia was not the same as what we know now. Sundaland is believed to be a single continent that includes Sumatra, Peninsular Malaysia, Java, and Borneo. The region under question was about 130 metres below sea level today (Irwanto, 2019). The Younger Dryad, which occurred around 12600-11900 BP, occurred during the late Pleistocene/early Holocene. As a result of the abrupt rise in Earth's temperature, the sea level has been rapidly increasing (Irwanto, 2019; Oppenheimer, 2012; Carlsons, 2010). In the Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene, the result would have put a lot of pressure on population dispersal (Soares et al., 2018; Barker, G., & Richards, M. B., 2013). This drove people from Sundaland's lowlands to relocate to higher terrain, which is today Sumatra, Malaysia Peninsular, Java Island, and Borneo Island. Reassembled genetic dispersion studies (Yew et al., 2018; Kusuma et al., 2016; Lian et al., 2011), linguistic dispersion (Klamer, 2018), and archaeological evidence (Curnoe et al., 2016; Jeffrey et al., 2013) all support this dispersion to Southeast Asia's highlands. The rise in ocean levels was viewed as a significant flood by the people living at the time. Among the inhabitants of ISEA, this was told in various traditions and mythologies (Hossieni, 2018). During the Neolithic expansion, which began around 12,000 years ago, anatomically modern hunter-gatherers migrated from Africa into Southeast Asia as hunters and eventually transformed

into agriculturists (Higham, 2013; Barker and Richards, 2013). Some remnants of this practise can still be seen in Borneo today, such as the Punan communities in Sarawak who still hunt and gather (Soriente, 2020). For the rest of Borneo's population, it divided into various tribes, each with its own distinct language and culture (Blust, 2013; Lobel, 2013; Spriggs, 2011). Some Borneo groups have even made their way to the northern hemisphere. As is recorded in the mythology of the ten Datu of Borneo and the people of the Philippines' southern regions (Carreon, 1957). The so-called "Borneon stock" in North Borneo (Sabah), which may be genetically traced back to the older Austronesian (Yew et al., 2018; Yew et al., 2017), has evolved into separate tribes despite being the same group of people from the outset. The genetic gap between Kadazan, a kind of Dusun, and the Iban in Sarawak is well established (Tan, 1979), whereas the Iban may be traced back to Austronesian heritage (Simonson et al., 2011).

## METHODOLOGY

Etymology is a field of linguistic study that investigates the origins and derivations of words and their elements. Etymologists examine writings and texts about a term having a lengthy documented history to learn about how terms were used in past periods, how they evolved in meaning and form, and when and how they became what they are now. The study employs a literature review of a record available written by Borneo explorers to determine the proper historical origin of the term "Dusun," which refers to a specific community in Sabah. This study will employ narrative historical perspective from earliest record available to show the evolution of terms in order to investigate the term's evolution. Before the British North Borneo Company (BNBC) acquired North Borneo (NB), and after 1881, the literature will be divided into two eras. The archived documents are downloaded from various sources such as <https://archives.org>, <https://www.nas.gov.sg>, <https://www.gutenberg.org>, and as well as from other public domains. The literature was retrieved in pdf form, stored a directory, arranged, and thematic analyzed with the help of NVIVO Version 2020.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***Before 1881***

The earliest mention of the inhabitants of Borneo was recorded by Thomas Forrester in 1774 during his voyage to New Guinea. Four years earlier, Alexander Dalrymple had cartographed the area around Teluk Marudu (Manez, 2017), which identified some geographical places that are still identical to this very day. According to Forrester (1774):

“... In the north part of Borneo, is the high mountain of Keeneebaloo (Kinabalu), near which, and upon the skirt of it, live the people called Oran Idaan or Idahan and sometimes Maroots (Murut). The mountain is in the old maps, named St Peter's Mountain, and is flat atop. (p. 390) ...”

This is one of the first written accounts of Borneo's inhabitants, who were referred to as Idaan. He went on to say that the Idaan employed a dart laced with *ippo* that was shot through a *sumpit*, a hollow piece of wood (p. 391) and has the ability to kill everyone who is wounded by it. Further investigation revealed that the Idaan, who used to eat pigs as a source of protein, frequently transported their rice and fruits to the coast and traded salt with Bajau (Forrester, 1774).

According to the record by Leyden (1814), the districts of North East Borneo are separated into Pappal (Papar), Malluda (Marudu), Mangidara (now Sandakan), and Tirur (currently around Tawau). He went on to say that:

“... On the river of Ki-Manis, the inhabitants are termed Ida-an by Dalyrample, which I consider as only another name for Dayak...The river of Tempasak(Tempasuk) is also represented to come from the central lake of Kinibalu; after these come to the river of Lu and Tambalulan, inhabited by Idaans; Tempasak consists of 200 houses... Malludu comprehends the Northern end of Borneo, it abound with grain and provisions and is reckoned well peopled in the interior by the Idaans... The powerful tribes of Idaan or Dayak, who occupy the Country around the great lake and have a sovereign of their own, who is not dependent on the Malays, are represented as averse to commerce. (pp. 8-10) ...”

Dalton's, in his short notes on Borneo (Moor, 1838), explains that:

“... To the south, Borneo is bounded by the possessions of various savage tribes; amongst the most powerful and considerable of whom, may take account the Kayan, the Dusum, the Murut and Tatao; men who take pleasure in decapitating strangers; who glory in hoarding their skulls, and whose honours are estimated by the number of these trophies...”

The Idaan or Dayaks, who inhabit in the northern part of Borneo, were also identified as aborigines and the earliest immigrants of Borneo, fond of war, obsession for skulls, savage, barbarous, and tobacco-loving. In Belcher (1848), he describes the Dusun as:

“... peeping curiously in at the open doors and windows were numerous Dusuns, a wild tribe that inhabit the mountains of the northern parts of the island. (p. 504) ...according to Mr. Brooke, that they are agricultural people, having a peculiar dialect of their own. (p. 505) ...”

Maryatt (1848) reported that the Dayak of Borneo revered Mount Kinabalu and related a story about how pirate activities along the coast drove them inland. This account is based on observations, especially about the mythical existence of a great lake within the Kinabalu mountain, which has been proven now to be non-existent:

“...I have given a drawing of the mountain of Keeny Ballu, distant forty miles. At this distance, with the aid of the glass, you may perceive the numerous cascades which falls from its summit in every direction. The Dyaks of Borneo imagine that a lake exists at the top of this mountain, and that is to be their receptacle after death. (p. 59) ...”

“... it may be presumed that many years must have elapsed since the aboriginal tribes of Dyaks and Dusums were dispossessed of the rivers, and driven into the interior. Of these people I shall speak hereafter; there is no doubt but that they were the original inhabitants of the whole island, and that the various tribes I have mentioned are but colonists for piratical purposes. (p. 60) ...”

Keppel (1846) depicts that Dyaks of the South and Idaans of the North live in villages, cultivating the ground and possessing cattle:

“... but the Dyaks and Idaan are far superior, living in the villages, cultivating the ground, and possessing cattle...”

In his appendix section, he also defined a few concepts, such as Dusun, who are agricultural inhabitants on Borneo's northeastern part. The Dyaks, which are aborigines of Borneo, and Idaan, a Bornean tribe, was a name generally given to most of the inhabitants of the Indian Archipelago during that period (Kepple, 1846).

During his National Geography trip in Borneo, de Crespigny (1858) found the Dusun or Idaan as the region's inhabitants in a village near Marudu Bay with approximately 200 residents living in two longhouses during his journey, to northern of North Borneo (p. 344). He discovered that the men there were muscular and well-developed, while the women, with the exception of their black teeth, were very young and attractive. They work quite hard, pounding paddy and fetching water and wood. They have no written language, no concept of time other than the passing of the seasons, and no preconceived notions about their age. They keep their habits clean, and their homes are tidy on the inside. According to de Crespigny (1858), they do not appear to follow any religion, but they worship Kina (Kinoringan) as their first leader, ascended Mount Kinibalu, and vanished forever. They also recall Huang Sum Ping, a Chinese emperor's brother, and Malekbatata (Awang Alak Betatar?), whose names are linked to a local mythology. In another account, Spenser St. John noted in 1862 that on the way to the peak of Mount Kinabalu with Mr Low (Sir Hugh Low), he had the opportunity to pass through Piasau, Bongol, and Ginambur, which he said were inhabited by the Idaan tribe. They were able to hire Mr. Low's a guide, Lemaing, in Kiau to join them on their first ascent of Mount Kinabalu (de Crespigny, 1858; St. John, 1862).

#### ***Around and after 1881***

Around this period, British North Borneo Company (BNBC) became the official administrator of North Borneo. Many cessions were signed with the local rulers during this time, first with the east coast and then with the west coast (Bilcher Bala, 2015; Joko, 2014; Black, 1970; Tregöning, 1952). Securing the area under the rule of the "Pax Company". Later, when they were successful in suppressing local rebellions, such as the Murut rebellion in 1888, when William Crocker was acting governor; Mat Salleh's rebellion between 1894 and 1898; and the Rundum rebellion in 1915, BNBC was able to include the interior and unify the entire area into one single entity (Black, 1970). During the nation-building of unified North Borneo, many explorers, anthropologists, historians, ethnographers, or government officers started to use the term "Dusun" which was used by Bruneian as an official term to address the natives. The first Governor of North Borneo, Sir William Hood Treacher (1881), wrote in the official government record of British as:

“... The general appellation given to the aborigine by the modern Malay – to whom reference will be made later on – is Dyak, and they divided into numerous tribes, speaking very different dialects of the Malayo-Polynesian stock, and known by distinctive names, the origin of which is generally obscure, at least in British North Borneo, where these names are not, as a rule, derived from those of the rivers on which they dwell... the following are the names of some of the principal North Borneo aboriginal tribes:- Kadaians, Dusuns, Ida'ans, Bisaias, Buludupihs, Eraans, Subans, Sun-Dayaks, Murut Tagaas. Of these, the Kadaians, Buludupihs, Eraans and one large section of the Bisaias have embraced the religion of Mahomet; the others are Pagans, with no set form of religion. (p. 10) ...”

“... A few of the natives had, however, acquired the art of pepper cultivation, especially the Dusuns of Pappar, Kimanis and Bundu and when the Colony of Labuan was founded, 1846.(p. 56)...”

According to Roth and Low (1896), a visiting curator of Museum of Australia during that period:

“... Idaan is the name given them by Bajus, Dusun by the Borneans (Brunei people) ... The principal inhabitants of the districts (Gaya Bay) consist of the Ida'an or Dusun, the aboriginal population ... In the Kabatuan, Mengkabong, Sulaman, and Abai are some tribes of Ida'an, but I have not visited their villages; I shall therefore confine myself to those I observed on the Tawaran and Tampasuk. (p. 20) ...”

Roth et al. (1896) further observed that:

“... but the first tribe of true Bornean aboriginals met with Boolloodoopy, who have villages from Sugut to Paitans on the north to Tabunac on the south. Largely mixed up with them are Doompas on the north and Eraans on the south. Inland from these people the whole bulk of the population known as Dusuns or Sundryaks, is divided up into many tribes and sections, including the Roongas, Kooroories, Umpoolooms, Saga Sagas, Tunbunwhas, Tingaras, Roomarrows and many more. (p. 22) ...”

Roth et al. (1896) also commented on some of the confusing terms were used by westerners before him, regarding name and classification:

“... Mr Dalrymple makes frequent mention of the Idaan (Dusuns) but I have not been able to trace the above statement... The foreign term "Dusun" should be adhered to in distinction from "Dyak" i.e every aboriginal non-Dusun and non-Murut to call the Tambunan Dusuns "Dyak Besar" may be complementary to them, but is quite gratuitous and confusing...it may here be remarked that the term "Ida'an", for the true aboriginal majority of Sabah, is used by Bajau and Illanuns only (p. 26) ...”

In the book *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo* by Hose and McDougall (1912), he wrote some economic and cultural aspects, such as how their agriculture is practiced and some reference to the art of tattooing among the people:

“... there can be no doubt that of the Chinese traders who have been attracted to Borneo by its camphor, edible birds' nests, and spices, some have settled in the island and have become blended with and absorbed by the tribes of the north-west (e.g the Dusuns); and it seems probable that some of the elements of their culture have spread widely and been adopted throughout a large part of Borneo. (p. 29)...”

“... The plough is unknown save to the Dusuns, a branch of the Murut people in North Borneo, who have learnt its use from Chinese immigrants.(p. 67) ...”

“... In the north and extreme north-west, the Dusun seem to be of Murut stock with an infusion of Chinese blood and culture. They use a plough drawn by buffalo in the Padi fields, which they irrigate systematically. (p. 320) ...”

“... this form of tatu is found chiefly amongst the Idaan group of Dusuns ... living on the slope of Mount Kina Balu. (p. 157) ...”

Around early 1900, a historian by the name of Owen Rutter wrote a far more complete observation about these people, in which he added a more precise geographical location to these people. During this period, the term "Dusun" was more preferred than "Idaan":

“... the two great pagan peoples of North Borneo are Dusuns and the Muruts. Both these names are somewhat loosely applied to cover a number of tribes, and although some authorities consider the Muruts to be the true aborigines of the countries. (p. 51)...”

“... it is enough to say that the general distribution of the native population of North Borneo is that the Muruts occupy the hilly uplands of the far interior, the Dusuns the plains, the downs and the coastal ranges; some of the east-coast rivers are occupied by Orang Sungei or River Folk, who are probably Islamized Dusuns. (p. 52) ...”

“...The Dusuns may be divided conveniently into two main classes, the Lowland and the Upland or Hill Dusuns. (p. 54) ...”

“... in the old books, the Dusuns are usually referred to as Id'aan, but this name is never heard now, though the collective name Dusun is not usually applied by the people to themselves, and was probably originated by the Bajaus. Dusun in Malay means "orchard", so that "Orang Dusun" would mean "men of the orchards" farmers. (p. 58) ...”

Around 1886–1957 Evan (1922), a British anthropologist, ethnographer, and archaeologist who spent most of his working life in peninsular British Malaya and North Borneo wrote that:

“... The Dusuns are not a single tribe, but an assemblage of tribes ... Orang Dusun is not the name used by these natives to describe themselves; the people of each district or each assemblage of village communities employs a different term, but it is a name- meaning people of the orchards (orang = people; dusun = an orchard used by the Malays to denote those inhabitants of the greater part of the interior of British North Borneo. (p. 35) ...”

“... Dusun villages, Piasau, the two Tamboulions and others, are dotted about the plains on the side of the Tempassuk. ...the whole length of the Tempassuk valley inland is inhabited by the Dusuns, whose villages are mostly perched on hill-tops on either side of the river. (p. 48) ...”

“... The tribe which we speak of as Dusun or Dusuns is known to the Malays by that name, which means the "people of the orchards", to the Bajaus of Tempassuk as *Idaan*, and to the Sulus (or Suluks) as *Sun Dyaks*. (p. 53) ...”

“... in the Tempassuk the Dusun call themselves *Tindal*, but the people of Tuaran, or at least inhabitants of the villages near the Government post, seem to dub themselves *Suang Latud*. (p. 54) ...”

“... the Dusuns apply different names to themselves in different parts of the country; for instance, I have it on the authority of Father Duxneuney that the Putatan people call themselves *Kadasan*. (p. 79) ...”

## DISCUSSION

Based on a review of earliest Borneo literature, the name of the community that lived in this area went through many phases and transformations, from unknown to something that caused confusion to an exonym

that is widely accepted today. Due to not having a proper writing system, it was almost impossible to know where it began or what it was called in those times. First, what we understand today is that the term "Dusun" itself has numerous referents. The name is not usually applied by the people themselves, but by outsiders. Hence, an exonym. Dusun societies had nothing in common with other groups living in other vicinity, except for the fact that they had an established village structure and tended to plant trees and shrubs around their homes (Hose and McDougall, 1912).

When we look at all the records, we find a lot of contradictions about the identification and labelling of these communities. Before 1881, for example, the aborigines of this region were known by a variety of names, including *Idaan*, *Idaan* or *Murut*, *Idaan* or *Dayak*, *Dyak*, *Dusum*, or simply as *native*. Regardless of the label, the geographical location, characteristics, and habits of these groups are consistent in each case. These people can be seen in large numbers all around Mount Kinabalu, even as far as Marudu. Villages like *Tempasuk*, *Piasau*, *Bongol*, *Ginambur*, *Kimanis*, and *Mausulog* are also home to them. They are known for hunting with *sumpit* and *ipoo*, as well as bartering with *Bajau* at the beach. The males described as muscular, youthful, and attractive, as well as hardworking and clean in their habits, farming rice, smoking tobacco, and owning cattle and hogs. They are depicted as being self-governing, independent of Brunei, and living freely, with their measure of glory being the amount of skulls collected from their enemies. To the view of European visitor, apparently, they possessed no religion although they worshipped a deity known as *Kinoringan*. Their oral history identified a few individuals, including *Huang Sum Ping*, the Chinese emperor's brother, and *Malikbatata* (*Awang Alak Betatar?*), both of whom had link to local lore (St. John, 1852; de Crespigny, 1857; Forrester, 1774). According to one source, they were the original inhabitants of the entire island, with large rivers, but were progressively pushed into the interior by piratical or conquering actions (Maryatt, 1848).

Next, a British North Borneo Company (BNBC) consul in Brunei in the mid-nineteenth century, by the name of Spenser St. John, noted a tribe known as "*Idaan*" living in *Piasau*, *Bongol*, and *Ginambur*. On one of their ascents to the summit of Mount Kinabalu. Hugh Low and Spenser St. John was able to visit *Kiau*, that is remotely located in North Borneo and gain *Lemaing's* services as a mountain guide (St. John, 1862). Although this was discussed in different manners by European writers, there seems to be a homogeneous discourse on cultures, oral histories, economic activities, basic beliefs, and geographical considerations.

The term "*Ida'an*" (alternatively translated "*Idahan*" or "*Idaan*") was used by coastal Muslims from North Borneo's west coast, the *Bajau* (*Sama*), to refer to comparable non-Muslim people who lived in the interior area. Until the late 1800s, this phrase occurred in the notebooks of early English voyagers to the Borneo coast. The *Sulus*, on the other hand, called these people *Sundayak*, or simply *Sundyak*. This is especially true in places like *Tombonuo* and *Sonsogon* on the Northeast Coast (Roth et al., 1896). Following increased contact with Brunei Malay, English adventurers and colonisers coined the name "*Dusun*" to refer to the indigenous peoples residing in the northern regions of Borneo around Mount Kinabalu (Evans, 1922; Belcher, 1848; St. John, 1862).

The following stages of literary analysis are for works published after 1881. The appointment of William Hood Treacher as the first Governor of North Borneo is regarded to have marked the start of the British North Borneo Company's administration in 1881. North Borneo was once separated into roughly four areas: the west beaches were under Bruneian influence, the northern parts of North Borneo were under *Sherif Usman's* authority, the interior remained independent, and the east coast was supposedly under *Sulu's* influence. This issue, however, is still being debated (Bala, 2015; Joko, 2014; Gerlich, 2012; Bhar, 1980). After signing numerous cessions with local rulers to surrender their respective areas, piratical expeditions such as the *HMS Vixen*, and the suppression of local rebellions such as the *Mat Salleh* and the *Rundum*, BNBC was able to unify North Borneo and secure Queen Victoria's grant of incorporation, which gave the

company the right to rule over the territories and permission to trade (Leyden, 1814; Keppel, 1846; Treacher, 1891; Tregöning, 1952; British Government, 1852; Wright, 1966; Black, 1970; Gerlich, 2012; Joko, 2014; Bala, 2015).

Due to the new government's management of North Borneo, the labelling of natives changed. To effectively manage these newly acquired territories, the new government recognises the necessity for a census of their inhabitants. Thus, beginning in 1891, British North Borneo Company conducted the first census, which was followed by a second for all residents of newly formed North Borneo, which was repeated every ten years until current times. The colonialists' conduct in holding the census by chance gave rise to the group category (Reid, 1997). The British North Borneo Company's succeeding governor neatly accepted this traditional categorization of Dusun. One thing to bear in mind is that the census categories change over time; nevertheless, the term "Dusun" remains the same in every census. The Bruneian name "Dusun" was apparently used by the British colonisers of North Borneo to denote the main agrarian people of Borneo's interior. In contrast, the term "Idahan," which had previously been used to the bulk of North Borneo's inhabitants, was now applied to a tiny group of people beginning with the 1901 census (Ueda, 2016). "Dusun" was a term used by Brunei Malays to describe agriculturalists or hill people, in contrast to traders, town people, and Muslims (Reid, 1997).

This trend is slowly gaining acceptance. What actually happens is that terminology for ethnic identification taken from classifications of peoples not related to those being recognised may become accepted names for people groups rather than their autonyms, which recognise the locally relevant distinctions. In government censuses, the name "Dusun" refers to a culturally diverse group of people, and it becomes a permanent classification. Censuses conducted in colonial times were varied, and even the criteria used to make the classification were different (Ueda, 2016). For example, it was classified according to the convenience of the colonial administration, and not according to the actual anthropology classification. As a result, the majority of Sabah's multicultural community is often referred to under one umbrella as "Dusun". This was more of a historical accident than a deliberate ethnological group (Appell, 1968a).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the change of the label of a community largely depends on the current political situation at the time. This process is further accelerated by the absence of a good record keeping system by the community involved. In this situation, not having a writing system contributes much to the situation of compulsion to accept labels from outside the community, as opposed to labels adopted by the community itself. Despite the fact that the terminology used to describe a community has undergone numerous changes, it always refers to the same homogeneous collection of people. This was demonstrated in the latest study in the field of genetic, on how the people in the region are related (K. Subbiah, et al., 2018; Yew et al, 2018; Yew et al, 2017; Tan, 1979). This latest genetic study shows that the inhabitants of the region share the same ancestors thought to have originated from the same Austronesian stock, from around Formosa, now Taiwan, and arrived in the area about 30,000 B.P. (Jinam et al., 2017; Oppenheimer, 2012; Simonson et al., 2011; Bellwood, 1984). How it can be so widespread and different in terms of culture, and linguistics is still a matter of debate among academics today. This also demonstrates how community labels can change over time as a result of changes in history, custom, legislation, habit, and geographical circumstances. That is why it is so important to look at old documents as thoroughly as possible to figure out how the community we familiar now came about.

## FURTHER RECOMMENDATION



This paper is written based on the perspectives of the historical writing of people who lived during the time. However, it might not be comprehensive enough to explain the issues discussed amid many new research methodologies development. A further recommendation is to include perspective from the historical record and future research; it should collaborate the latest findings from anthropology, linguistics, genetics, and perhaps the latest theory to reflect current and updated understanding. This perhaps, may be able to address the problem of identity polemics among the so -called “Dusunic” community.

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