

## WHAT SO DISTINCTIVE OF THE IBANS CULTURAL ARTEFACTS IN THEIR LONGHOUSES IN SARAWAK?

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**Abstract:** Prior to the establishment of a museum in Sarawak by the Brooke family in 1891, the Iban society preserved cultural objects in their longhouses using their own distinct methods. Traditional care is the foundation based on their beliefs and conceptions of the world's existence. This ethnography study examines the traditional conservation of Iban cultural relics in longhouses. Qualitative research technique, including fieldwork, documentation, and interviews was employed. Data collection was done based on the collection of pieces of informant memory. The findings indicate that the traditional management and maintenance of the Iban cultural artifacts is enchanting because it mixes parts of their beliefs, the mysticism and believing those cultural items would come to life and active so that they can be used in rituals and ceremonies. This research provides a new perspective on the cultural insight of an indigenous ethnic group the Ibans' residing in the Borneo archipelago in with the anticipation that their identity known to the world and will be inherited for the new generations.

**Keywords:** Cultural Artifacts, Traditional Care, Iban, Longhouse, Sarawak

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The researcher expose to the culture and arts of the Iban community were through the researcher memory, listening to oral storytelling by the elders, observation, and verbal communication while was greatly enhanced by living and growing up in the practise and atmosphere of the Iban community in the longhouse. These elements have broadened the researcher perspective and drawn the researcher interest in Iban arts and culture, particularly about cultural artefacts that are usually crafted by head of families and passed down through generations.

Orally, the Iban community has produced and passed down their local beliefs and knowledge as their intellectual capacity for preserving ancestral history. In general, cultural artefacts are an integral aspect of the Iban community's longhouse culture, and the community highly values the physical or biological use of its cultural artefacts. Since the beginning of time, the Iban community has not only create and produced artifacts that reflect their local beliefs and knowledge which are rich in intellectually preserving ancestral history.

According to Kiyai (2022), cultural artefacts of the Iban are rich in ecstatic values echoing their traditional beliefs and taboos. He further argued that every cultural artefact that was created must adhere to certain cultural standards that have been passed down from generation to generation. In addition, he suggested that the Iban community has a high level of self-innovation in the creation of diverse patterns and forms of nature, including plants, animals, and spiritual motifs, in their production of cultural artefacts that have become their identity and legacy. This custom has continued in not only preserving but also in sustaining their ancient beliefs. Such activity was carried out in the longhouses which play a crucial role in ensuring the optimal conceptualisation and utilisation of Iban cultural artefacts.

Prior to the establishment of museums in Sarawak, the community practice traditional customs and ideas to preserve their cultural artefacts. The Western colonisation of Sarawak however, during the age of the Brooke dynasty (1841 to 1941) and the British (1946 to 1949), who introduced Christianity, and many have converted to the new religion. As such, the community's ancestors' practices have been transformed that have influence the pattern of culture and art of the Iban community in Sarawak at large. There were evidence that some cultural practises and artefacts preservation activities tend to be forgotten (Baginda & Bala, 2018). On top of that globalisation has also brought major deterrent leading to the demise of Iban cultural artefacts making and practices related to it. The Iban community desire

for progression and modernisation is gradually viewed as abandoning their forefathers' way of life. Because of communication and pursuing a better livelihood, they relocate to more urban regions which offer them better employment and educational in raising their quality of life. These factors have indirectly influence that may cause impairment and marred the Iban community's traditional identity.

## 2. THE IBAN PEOPLE AND THEIR CULTURAL RELICS

The Ibans were part of a group of Austronesians who settled in the Borneo Islands (Sarawak, Malaysia and Kalimantan, Indonesia) in the fourth century. They live in homogenous community and have strong conservation and supernatural beliefs.

The uniqueness of the culture and the vitality of the optimistic Iban community have prompted researchers from within and outside the country to study the Iban community and culture, not only to transcribe ethnographic documents for future generations but also to investigate the Iban community's contribution to academic study in the social theory. Past study since the end of World War II, there has been the emergence of local researchers among the Iban community, such as Sandin who had written on *'The most powerful in the history and culture of Iban people'* (a title given by Pringle in his book in 1970), former curator and director of the Sarawak Museum, late Tan Sri Datuk Amar Dr. James Jemut Masing who are an expert in *Gawai* Iban ritual ceremonies). Other local scholars such as the director of the Sarawak Museum Dr Peter Kedit, introduced the concept of *'Bejalai'* in Iban culture and Tan Sri Dato Empiang Jabu and late Datin Amar Margaret Linggi who mastered the art of Iban weaving. Although research on the Iban community has been most comprehensive but there are still many Iban cultures that were not written and studied that underpins the social theory that investigates the social wellbeing and culture of this community (Apell, 2001; King, 2019).

With regards to Iban culture, there are two typologies of cultural their artefacts, that are: heritage and heirloom artifacts. Based on the production and acquisition of such cultural artefacts, these terms are only apparent. In Iban culture, the preferred phrase is 'legacy' which refers to artefacts shared and owned collectively by the Iban community and inherited via local knowledge in terms of production, philosophy, and importance. Additionally, inheritance refers to property acquired through economic activity such as buying and selling, salaries, payment of fines, or bartering. Such cultural artefacts are frequently passed down solely through a family's genealogy which is i an heirloom and have substantial monetary value (Kiyai and Tugang, 2020).

One example is the Iban woven textile known as *pua kumbu* which is a popular cultural artefact. Since colonization in the early 18th and 19th centuries, when the Dutch conquered Kalimantan while James Brooke colonized Sarawak, the world has recognized Iban woven textile (Kiyai, 2021). Originally, Iban weaving was an outgrowth of conventional weaving techniques. Through past scholars' examination, they concluded that Iban textiles were inspired from a "*highly important memory bank*" and that its iconography in nature that derived from "*important cosmological concepts and historical records possessed by society*" (King and Wilder, 2020: Haddon & Start, 2011).

Besides, the other artifacts of which the Iban are also extremely fond of is their weaved mats and baskets. They are quite precise with the techniques required to create the most beautiful weave so much so where the Iban women's social status is determined by their exceptional proficiency in mats and baskets weaving. There are different types of woven mats namely: (*tikai*), including *bemban* mats, *lampit* mats, and *idas*. The usage of *bemban*, rattan, and bamboo in the production of this mat were accessible and close to the Iban community's habitation. Mat weaving, however, is an abstract art form where the motifs are difficult to duplicate (Durin, 2014; Kiyai, 2017).

Another artefact, that is the carvings on the *sungkup*, a monument of the dead where their cosmology inspired the design, which is based on the fundamental layout of an Iban longhouse. However, it is supposed to be a simplified miniature dwelling for the deceased. Although *sungkup* monuments are constructed to be small but the Iban community believes that the deceased will be placed in a more enormous dwelling in after life than when they were alive (Mambut et al, 2018).

Previous research in multidisciplinary Anthropology, examines the origins and concepts behind the production of some cultural items in indigenous communities of the world, but preservation and upkeep of Sarawak's indigenous cultural artefacts have been under-emphasized. To ensure that the cultural artefacts remain in the community as symbols of the intellectual property and cultural identity of the community, it is crucial to debate and discuss the conservation of cultural artefacts to ensure that the artefacts continue to exist and remain in the indigenous culture such as found in the Iban community, particularly in the context of traditional care in longhouses.

With the introduction of Christianity and influence of globalization there was a decreasing interest among the younger generation of the Iban community on their ancestor cultural practices and subsequently less awareness of ancestral artefacts

existence (Baginda and Bala, 2018). It's a practice in the Iban community, cultural artefacts were frequently passed down through a family's genealogy which have substantial monetary value (Kiyai & Tugang, 2020). Sometimes, they were not being appreciated as it used to be. It was just an artifact that were displayed that were inherited.

However, subsequently the Iban community especially those living in the long houses, have strong cultural heritage that is reflected in their traditional beliefs and taboos. Longhouses, which are traditional communal dwellings, play a crucial role in the optimal utilization and preservation of Iban cultural artifacts. Their cultural artifacts especially were reflected in their production of textiles and clothes, basketry or plaits, buildings and structures, ceramics, silversmithing, and blacksmithing, are imbued with the values and creativity passed down through generations. These artifacts are not only important for their aesthetic value but also for the preservation of Iban identity and legacy. The Iban people have a tradition of self-innovation, incorporating diverse patterns and forms inspired by nature, including plants, animals, and spiritual motifs, into their creations.

As time has progressed, the establishment of museums in Sarawak has provided a more formal and centralized approach to preserving and showcasing Iban cultural artifacts. These museums now serve as important institutions for the conservation, research, and promotion of Iban cultural heritage. However, despite the development of museums, the cultural significance of longhouses and their role in preserving Iban cultural artifacts should not be overlooked. The longhouse remains an integral part of Iban culture, and the traditional practices associated with the artifacts continue to be passed down within these communal living spaces. The combination of museums and the continued use of longhouses ensures that the Iban community can sustain and celebrate their ancient beliefs while also sharing their cultural heritage with the wider world.

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Based on the literature reviews conducted by previous researchers, studies tend to be influenced by multidisciplinary Anthropology, which examines the origins and concepts behind the production of such cultural items in indigenous communities, as well as how these societies make such objects completely useful in their living activities. In previous studies, discussions on the preservation and upkeep of Sarawak's indigenous cultural artefacts have been underemphasized. To ensure that the cultural artefacts remain in the community as symbols of the intellectual property and cultural identity of the community, it is crucial to debate and discuss the conservation of cultural artefacts to ensure that the artefacts continue to exist and remain in the indigenous Iban culture, particularly in the context of traditional care in longhouses. Consequently, in the next section, the researcher examines the traditional conservation of Iban cultural artefacts throughout receiving, management, and storage in longhouses. Through collective memory, the objective is to restore the aesthetic and philosophical qualities of the culture, as the Iban community did in the past.

### 3. The Iban Cultural Artifacts

The construction of Iban cultural artefacts exhibits diversity and is not restricted to a single function. According to informant, Jimbun Tawai (2020), making Iban artefacts is unique and fascinating since its function in supporting the Iban community is not limited to a certain usage. For instance, basket making, the primary role of basket weaving is as a container for the people' daily necessities; nevertheless, the basket also serves as an ornament, sacred object in ceremonies, and hunting equipment, such as fishing equipment for the river. Additionally, cultural artefacts like *duku ilang* serve as war relics. The Iban community also utilises these artefacts as agricultural and paddy cultivation tools, as well as aids in collecting forest items or chopping firewood for cooking.

Another belief in the Iban cultural practise in relation the usage of artefact is that every practise is very susceptible to worldview/cosmos and is very sacred. They based on their traditional belief that the possession of artefacts in their life today is a gift from *Petara* (God). The Iban community did not build an artefact r without a purpose, but rather based on their needs and beliefs that underpin their cosmology. They truly created on two foundations namely: symbol and function. Symbols are incorporated into art's aesthetics (motifs and appearance). The functional portion relates to the capacity of cultural artefacts to aid and defend the community from

catastrophic calamities such as disease, evil spirits, and threats to their safety and deems that as long as they are in the possession of these artifacts that will be their protectors and guardians. In order to preserve what they believe having supernatural qualities, making miring offerings and some care practises will be conducted by their ancestors. They believe that such cultural artefacts have its own life, gender and sentiments that should be cared for just like individuals.

It is a known fact that the cultural artefacts of the Iban community are passed down from generation to generation as an inheritance. According to informant Datuk Sri Edmmund Langgu (2020), heritage is the shared culture of the Iban community. Shared ownership is seen in textile making such as *pua kumbu* in weaving, and ownership of military weapons. However, heirloom that were past from forefather to their sons are considered as private ownership.

The Iban woven textile *pua kumbu* is popular among scholars since the early 18th and 19th centuries, according to Haddon and Start (2011) and King and Wilder, (2020), Iban weaving has outgrowth weaving techniques. The motifs and design were a "highly important memory bank" and that its iconography was derived from "important cosmological concepts and historical records possessed by society."

Besides, Iban people also in possession of luxurious and expensive items, such as ceramics, copper and silver objects obtained through purchasing and inherit solely from their ancestor. They have the tendency to name every cultural thing they acquire with a certain "*ensumbar*" or title, especially those regarded something the aesthetics and appealing. The owner's *ensumbar* or title is a compliment to his cultural artefacts. This is a way to express gratitude for the cultural artefacts.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This research is an ethnographic study that focuses on traditional conservation of Iban artifacts in the long house. In general, ethnographic research is a scientific study describing, analysing, and interpreting cultural forms shared by a group of people such as behaviour, language, beliefs and practices, social structure, economy, cultural interaction and life (Hanson & Creswell, 2005: Gray, 2021).

This qualitative approach collected data by doing fieldwork that was done in three longhouses of the Iban community, in Rumah Liam, Rantau Kembayau Manis, Lubok Antu, Rumah Kunjang, Entawa Asal, Undop Sri Aman and Rumah Bujang, Rantau Kiran, Nanga Medamit Limbang in phases. The first phase in August 2019, where the fieldwork was conducted in Lubok Antu for four days, while the second

phase in October 2019 has conducted in Entawa, Sri Aman, for three days and the third phase was conducted on November 1, 2019, in Nanga Medamit, Limbang for five days. The purpose of selecting the location of this research is to obtain a variety of data based on the settlement of the Iban community by the river, namely Batang Ai (Lubok Antu), Batang Lupar (Sri Aman) and *Bilak Sedik*. *Bilak Sedik* is second migration from Batang Lupar, Batang Rajang, Saribas, Skrang and Batang Ai move to Bintulu, Miri, and Limbang. Second migration happened after the formation of Malaysia in 1963 by seeking employment as timber workers in logging companies in Brunei and Ulu Limbang in the 80s to 70s were also included in the research.

Interviews were conducted with the informants in the longhouse. Snowball sampling technique were conducted that focused on the Iban community those with expertise in Iban history and culture, such as *Lemambang* (priests) and Iban elders.

The researcher used data collection methods through collective memory to find out about the taboo in the object culture of the Iban people in longhouse. Data collection was done based on the collection of pieces of informant memory. Collective memory is an action that incorporates factors of collective representation (symbols, meanings, narratives, and rituals existing in a society), cultural structures, and individual memories that are personal and shaped by sociocultural (Olick, 1999: Kiyai, 2021). The memory of the selected informants was assessed into three categories based on the diagram above. The first is the memory of reflection, a personal memory of a person that involves interaction with people around him. It is difficult to forget the person who experienced the event. Second, the generation's memory was passed down by an older generation to the next or younger age. The Memory continues to live in the culture. Third, the memory of tradition is a static, past-oriented memory and conservative.

## 5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Iban preservation of their cultural relics in their long houses

In the past, the Iban community lacked a scientific conservation technique for managing artefacts. In general, they do not address the causes that could be deteriorate to longhouse cultural artefacts. Their care for cultural artefacts was based on oral transmission within their community groupings and was passed down through the generations. In addition, the community learns via observation, engagement, and experience from the elderly how to manage and utilize these cultural artefacts. The Iban community, which possesses a high degree of ingenuity, employs such measures to minimize damage to cultural artefacts. In general, the activities of the

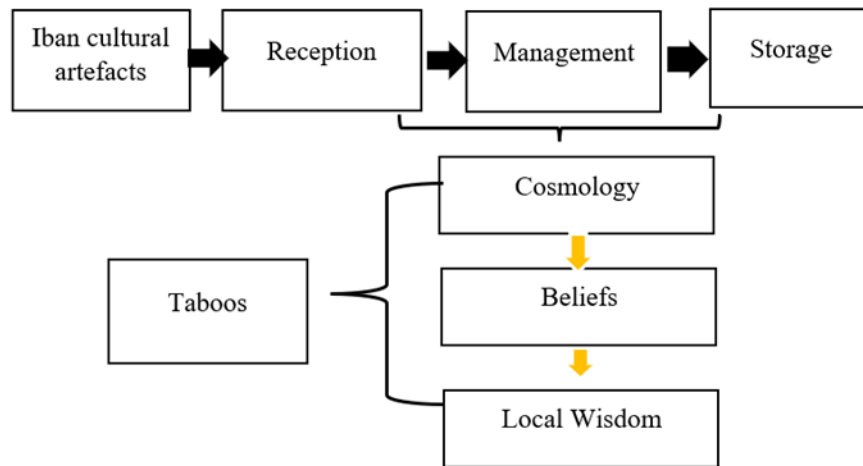


Iban constitute a scientific approach recognized by current researchers. However, the traditional Iban community does not recognize or comprehend the scientific significance of caring for and managing their cultural artefacts. They comprehend the concept of conservation due to their nature and their willingness to view the environment with an open mind.

The understanding and perception of the universe within the old Iban culture may differ from modern perspectives that emphasize rational and logical descriptions of phenomena (citation). However, it is important to recognize that indigenous tribes, like the Iban community, have developed their own unique cultures and identities, shaped by the lifestyle and traditions of their ancestors. These cultures are deeply intertwined with the cultural artifacts they possess, as their ancestors relied on them for their way of life.

This distinction sets them apart from other indigenous ethnic groups in Sarawak. The concept of conservation in traditional Iban civilization is not limited to maintaining and preventing the damage, destruction, or loss of cultural things. However, an act of how to preserve its 'spirit,' 'aura,' and 'sacredness' for the Iban community. The objective is straightforward and straightforward: to view the cultural object as an incredible force capable of assisting, protecting, and caring for its owner. Consequently, based on Figure 1, the notion of conservation in traditional Iban civilization is the implementation of management and maintenance of cultural assets based on their way of life and their values.

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**Figure 1:** The concept of traditional Iban conservation

The Iban undertake their traditional care in a distinctive manner. Every cultural artefact that is ready to be developed or acquired by the Iban community will be honored as a supernatural object. They aim to link supernatural powers to cultural artefacts to imbue them with life and soul. According to informant Jimbun Tawai (2020), the ideas on the life of the spirit in human life is based on naturalized, that is, on concept that God formed a pair of male and female human beings (corresponding to Adam and Eve) based on their appearance, multiplied them, and developed human civilization up until the present day. In Addition, he did not rule out the possibility the Iban community still believe in animism and dynamism that gives on the abstract of life referring to objects or natural objects that are deemed to have significant value to the life or cultural needs of an individual or community through ceremonies. Such cultural artefacts are subject to rituals, adoration, and worship offerings. The worship and performance of the ritual must be accompanied by faith and confidence in the existence of the spiritual force to seek help and blessings from his lord mighty. However, the rise of globalization and new religions did not impair and diminish the Iban community's belief in topics closely related to the researchersticism. They personally still believe in the spiritual values inherent in the sacred relics of Iban culture. Some Iban cultural artefacts, such as *pua kumbu*, *tajau* (ceramic), *parang ilang* (weapons of war), *antu pala* (the enemy head), carvings, musical instruments such as *gong*, *tawak*, and certain types of weaving, such as *lanji* and *tibang*, are considered to possess extraordinary power, according to this study. These cultural artefacts have substantially influenced the Iban way of thinking.

### i. The *Gawai* Ritual (Reception)

The entire inhabitants of the longhouse in *ruai* will observe the completed cultural ceremonies in preserving their artifacts that have been designated as sacred (central space shared by the entire longhouse population). The Iban community recognizes that all positive events should be commemorated with *gawai*. According to informant Datuk Sri Edmmund Langgu (2020), ritual or '*gawai*' in the Iban language is intended to commemorate a variety of things, including victory, luck, requesting luck, and averting calamity. In Iban culture, the concept of *gawai* is determined by the significance of the ritual to be celebrated. In this context, reference from Iban cultural specialists such as *lemambang* and *tuai burung* pertaining to the period and time of celebration, implementation of *gawai* and taboos in celebrating *gawai* will be emphasized. The objective of *gawai* is to honour the existence of such cultural artefacts by the performance of a tilt ceremony. In addition, the ritual seeks to mirror the beauty of such cultural artefacts through the recitation of verses of gratitude to the gods, goddesses, and ancestral spirits for granting the inventiveness, ideas, and courage required to create beautiful and potent motifs.

As a gesture of embracing the presence of cultural artefacts that bring good fortune into the home, the *gawai* ceremonies play a significant role in the Iban community's culture. According to informant Datuk Sri Edmmund Langgu (2020), in the past, every time the Iban community-acquired or bought *tajau*, they would celebrate *gawai tajau* (a celebration to bless pottery) (a festival to bless pottery). During the *gawai tajau* ritual, various large *tajau* and newly acquired *tajau* will be placed in the *ruai* (principal room of the longhouse). Then the *tajau* will be wrapped with pua kumbu and chanted by *lemambang* (Bard) throughout the night. A *piring* offering of *kuih penjaram*, *tapai* (rice wine), betel leaves, cigarettes, tobacco, popcorn, glutinous rice, betel nut, salt, chicken eggs, and white rice was also presented with the *tajau*. The goal of the *piring* offering is to be delivered to *Sempulang Gana*, the God of Agriculture. After the completion of all *gawai tajau* ceremonies, the *tajau* will be carried into the chamber. The gained *tajau* have certain meanings and symbols that are retained in the longhouse, such as bringing good fortune, a symbol of prosperity, and a symbol of bravery and health.

Cultural objects such as *antu pala* collected from the *ngayau* expedition will be welcomed by the occupants in the longhouse with a thanksgiving prayer ceremony called *mangka ka selaing*. Iban cultural specialists will perform the ritual. Whether a wife or a daughter-in-law is selected, she will wait at the top of the stairs with *pua*

*kumbu*-patterned ceramic dishes. Informant Jimbun Tawai (2020) states that the *bali belumpung* motif is a sacred symbol in Iban culture. The center portion of the *bali belumpung* motif is left vacant to accommodate the *antu pala*, while the edges of the *pua kumbu* are adorned with plant motifs such as bamboo shoots. Once the heads were invited into the longhouse, they took turns as they danced and murmured prayers of thankfulness. The ceremony is known as *naku antu pala*, and it is followed by *taboh* music to summon *Petara* and *urang panggau* (gods). The procession is conducted until it reaches the center room (*ruai*) of the owner or the person who is mourning. In the past, the purchase of these items was inspired to terminate the custom of grieving in the longhouse to replace the lives of family members who had died or for marriage delivery to a single Iban man. The *naku antu pala* ceremony done by a group of Iban women reciting mantras to seek protection and blessings from *Sengalang Burong*, the God of War.

The highest performance of *gawai* in Iban culture is known as *gawai kenyalang*, which tries to implement supernatural directions and requires dream-selected persons to sculpt a hornbill statue. According to an informant Tan Sri Leonard Linggi Jugah (2020), the *gawai kenyalang* event is not the same as the annual *gawai* that the Iban community celebrates. The *gawai kenyalang* is an unquestionable command from the supernatural that must be carried out without debate. The studies on this culture were very well defined in the Iban literature, which depicts that if you want to be safe, want to prosper, have healthy and longevity, then it must be implemented immediately. He also stated that the implementation of *gawai kenyalang* is extremely complex and requires a great deal of effort and resources to be successful. The duration of the *gawai kenyalang* festival will be seven days and seven nights. The guy and his family will prepare hog, chicken, and a variety of side dishes for the honoring of all visitors. According to Iban belief, all of individuals who attend the *gawai kenyalang* celebration are not just humans, but also spirits such as ghosts. Therefore, to prevent spirits from upsetting people, the villagers will hold a cockfighting event that does not involve wagering money and is purely for fun.

## ii. Management

Iban people employ readily available natural materials as "tools" to care for cultural artefacts. Traditional Iban practices protect cultural objects from destruction. Longhouses store pots and ceramics in storage rooms wrapped in "wi" bark and rattan. To protect cultural artefacts from slipping and damaging the ceramics' designs and colors. Wi and rattan can also lessen the chance of porcelain fracture if dropped. Iban cultural artefacts are protected using natural materials.

The Iban society in longhouses has utilized this strategy to care for and manage its cultural artefacts, especially delicate ones like ceramics and earthenware, for decades. Elders taught them these management methods. Word-of-mouth has spread various care procedures. Ceramics and pottery, which were rare and precious at the period, should be given special attention. Informant Salmiah Aning (2020) states that the Iban must farm hill rice on a huge scale before they can get ceramics like *tajau*. If the harvest is good, you can buy traditional artefacts like *tajau* and *gong* and use the rice waste to feed the Iban family for a year.

The artifacts like *tajau*, *pua kumbu*, *antu pala*, *lanji*, *gong*, and *ilang* (refer to figure 2) are delicate Iban cultural artefacts that might upset owners if mishandled. The artefacts were celebrated by offering chicken and pig blood called *genselan* (wages). *Tajau* is a popular Iban traditional artefact that requires special care. *Tajau* preserved for generations, some of which are hundreds of years old, grow more sensitive and should be handled with care. According to Iban beliefs, the *tajau's* stomach should be filled with rice or side dishes, and its mouth should always be closed with copper or ceramic things. To placate the cultural item, the *tajau* owner must make a food offering and place it over or near to its mouth every month. *Tajau* can disturb owners at night if not properly controlled. This cultural artefact can fall and make a noise in the middle of the room. *Tajau* cannot be placed anywhere in the room.



*Tajau*



*Pua Kumbu*



*Antu Pala*



*Ilang*



*Gong*



*Lanji*

**Figure 2:** List of the Iban Artifacts (Sarawak Museum Collection, 2022)

In longhouses, *pua kumbu*, which bears sacred motifs provided by Iban deities in the weaver's dream, must be handled with care. In Iban culture, a *pua kumbu* with a higher theme is more sensitive. To eliminate odors and grime from *pua kumbu* fabrics after *gawai* ceremonies, leave them for a few minutes. The *pua kumbu* must not be hung upside down (the motif of the head cannot be hung down), or the owner would hear cries at night. It hurts. To avoid termites and bugs, the Iban fold and store it in a wooden box or *tajau* after use.

Informant Datuk Sri Edmmund Langgu (2020) says, *parang ilang* is unique among Iban cultural objects. After the *ngayau* mission, the enemy hair was cut and affixed to *parang ilang's* head as a symbol of courage and to revitalize the *ilang's* spirit. The Iban will appreciate and admire the owner who went down to *ngayau* if the *ilang* had hair on its head". According to another informant, *Lemambang* Ijau from Ulu Engkari, mention a *parang ilang* cut off the enemy head to make its owner strong, but it will always thirst for blood. Nevertheless, the Iban community was used to "supernatural" stories (close to ghosts) in the artifacts. That artefact also emits laughter, weeping, and shouting when the moon is full. Yet again, the voices were the restless foes' moans. Besides that, the hair on the *ilang* becomes white like human hair when their owner keeps it too long. The Iban community's stored *ilang* cannot be taken from the head without a reason since its eyes are "thirsty" for blood and ask for *genselan*. Accidental machete openings cause illness and death. Thus, every *gawai* ritual, *parang ilang* is given a plate offering (meal) to preserve its sacred ingredients and sprinkled with animal blood as *genselan* (Ijau Buja ,2020).

Why are Iban cultural artefacts disturbing? This is due to the owners' irresponsibility in managing their heritage cultural assets. Even while they still hold these cultural artefacts in longhouses, this management method is no longer used because most Ibans have converted to Christianity and forsaken their forefathers' faith. The researcher observed cultural artefacts including *tajau*, *gong*, and *lanji* being relocated to *Sadau* (attic) and properly cared for. These rusting artefacts are spider and cockroach nests. Figure 3 shows the family's Iban artefacts after they neglected them. These causes will eventually degrade Iban cultural artefacts in their community's cultural environment.



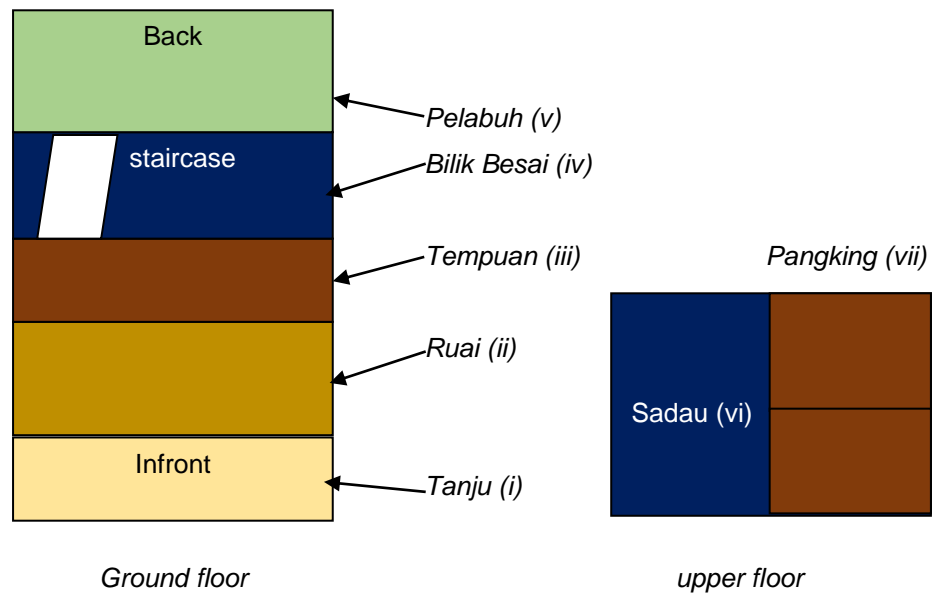
**Figure 3:** Neglect of Iban cultural artefacts (Sources: Chermay anak Iri, 2019)

Informant Jimbun Tawai (2020) suggested that Iban artefact owners should be more mindful of their ownership. Cultural artefacts, especially sacred ones, were not only ornaments or symbols of riches in a longhouse. Its purpose is spiritual after the *pengarap lama* (traditional Iban religion). If correctly stored, Iban cultural artefacts can provide luck, money, and protection from witchcraft and evil spirits, but if not fed through miring rites, they can bring calamity. To prevent a terrible omen, the owner must follow the artifact's energy's dream request for nourishment.

### iii. Storage

Intriguingly, when storing Iban cultural artefacts in longhouses, consideration taken by the community's views on the artefacts' power to help owners if placed in their rooms. The storage of Iban cultural artefacts as heirs (heritage) is not just a symbol of wealth, but they see that the artefacts "live" in their beliefs like humans with their own lives and genders. They'll perform rituals and food offerings to "charge the spiritual energy" in cultural artefacts to keep them strong.

Iban cultural artefact storage was heavily influenced by the longhouse's space. Iban longhouses have ground and upper floor. In ground floor had five area. The front of the longhouse has a (i) *tanju*, (ii) *ruai*, (iii) *tempuan*, (iv) *bilik besai*, and (v) *pelabuh* (store). In upper floor had (vi) *Sadau* (attic) and (vii) *pangking* (bedroom) (refer to figure 4). The Iban community has maximized this longhouse's storage of family cultural artefacts. The Iban community treasures most of its cultural artefacts.



**Figure 4:** Iban longhouse plan

The completed *kenyalang* statue carvings will be stored on the *tiang sandong* (hornbill pole) in front of the house (refer to figure 5). *Tiang sandong* must face west or sunset. The *kenyalang* statue should exorcise human sins and block death-related misfortunes from disturbing the longhouse. The *tiang sandong* will have a *Pancar* (ritual equipment) and prayers and food offerings for the *kenyalang*. Iban warlord *kenyalang* refers to *Aki Lang Sengalang Burung*, the God of War. After the seventh and final day of *gawai kenyalang*, the *kenyalang* effigy (the carving) will be place on the top of *tiang sandong* in the *sadau* facing west.



**Figure 5:** *Kenyalang* statue (Sarawak Museum Collection)

Besides that, *pentik* is a longhouses wood carvings placed outside the longhouse was the practice of the olden day. Today it rarely found. *pentik*, is a human-shaped wood carving, protects the longhouse. To protect the *pentik* from heat and rain, the Iban community will build a small hut. In Figure 6, indicate a space to store food for *pentik* banquets. Each month, the *pentik* will receive a plate of food on top of its head. A woven basket will offer the plate. According to informant Kiyai Uri



(2020), the carved *pentik* will be dressed like humans and stored in groups to form a family. The purpose was placed outside the house to take care of the longhouse and absorb positive energy to bring prosperity, harmony, a shady house, and courage to Iban men going to war.



**Figure 6:** *Pentik* Iban (Sources: Suara Sarawak Online News, 2020)

In the middle room, will display *antu pala* artefacts. In the older days (of which this is not practice anymore) during the *ngayau* expedition's *antu pala* (enemy headskull) were placed in *ringka* (a rattan weave) after all ritual were completed and will be hang in the *ruai*. Rattan *bungkung* will hold the dried head. It is important to note that only *Tuai Kayau* owns this artifact. During the interview with informant Datuk Sri Edmmund Langgu (2020), on reasons why *antu pala* be in the *ruai* instead of another longhouse room. He explained that the longhouse's *ruai* always welcomes guests and the owner like to display how courage they are and *antu pala* is the ancient symbols of victory. Guest will know the homeowner's status from antu pala hanging. If the Iban community does not want *antu pala* as a family heirloom, they will bury it like a human being. The *antu pala* must be wrapped in *pua kumbu* and placed neatly in the *sintong* (woven basket) coffin before burial. His last meal will be chicken blood. After completion, *antu pala* will be taken to the Iban cemetery and buried six feet deep. A small black flag will be hoisted upstream and downstream of the longhouse to mourn *antu pala* after his burial. The *antu pala* spirit's death will be mourned for seven days. Iban mourners must not bring bamboo shoots, ferns, or make noise.

According to Iban oral tradition, each *antu pala* has an owner. The *antu pala*'s spirit acts as a "slave" to help the owner with spiritual matters like cleaning the room, curing diseases, and growing rice. According to informant Jimbun Tawai (2020), *antu pala* is an angry spirit because it's unwilling to die but unfortunately was beheaded by an Iban warrior. If someone burns the *antu pala*, his zeal will kill all his descendants and will become *punas* (extinct). Thus, in such cases, the miring ceremony must calm *antu pala*'s spirit to prevent rage and anger.

Another interesting aspect of the Iban community is residence in long houses which are unique in nature. Iban longhouses have kitchens at the front after the *ruai* (middle space), unlike most ethnic houses. A special hanger will hang the *ilang* machete in the *tempuan* (kitchen). It's a kind of knife-like weapon. The Iban community keeps these *ilang* machete near the *tempuan* (kitchen) as a defence strategy in case enemy attacks the longhouse unexpectedly. Iban warriors can easily grab these weapons for self-defense. Some machetes are used for cooking, like for cutting meat and weeding fish. Some Iban communities sleep with *ilang* machete that lines on longhouse walls. The traditional Iban community even places this *ilang* machete under their pillows to protect themselves from *Antu*-caused nightmares (*remban*).

Besides, Iban longhouses have fancy living rooms (*bilek besai*) with luxurious materials displayed such as ceramic (*tajau*). According to an informant, Lemambang Buja (2020), to keep the *tajau* as a family heirloom, the owner must provide a "house" called a *pantar* (a small wooden stage lengthwise) placed in the *bilek besai* (living room). To calm the spirit, *pua kumbu* will cover the *tajau*. The Iban believe moving the ceramic *Tajau* without a miring ritual (food offerings) will disturb its harmony and peace of spirit. The traditional Iban community's cultural artefacts, especially the valuable and high-value ones, will not be displayed to the public. Only family members will see them. *Sadau*, the upper floor of the longhouse, will store valuable artefacts like *tajau guchi* (the most expensive ceramic and has a beautiful design), gongs, weavings like *lanji* and *tibang* (a place to store unprocessed rice), and *pengaroh* (charms). *Sadau*'s is the store to keeps visitors out and prevents human damage. This prevents Iban warriors from stealing their heirlooms, especially luxury items like ceramics (especially *Guchi*), gongs, and *ilang*.

According to an informant, Jimbun Tawai (2020), the previous Iban community feared being discovered if they had valuable ceramics like *tajau guchi*. To avoid drawing attention, they will place the cultural object in *Sadau* (upper level) of the longhouse. *pengaroh* (amulet) cultural artefacts will be stored together at the *Sadau*. The Iban beliefs that if the *pengaroh* amulet was accident stepped on, it will lose its supernatural powers and may cause a deadly disease. The Iban believe that *Antu* (ghost) gave them the *pengaroh* (amulet) to help and protect its owner.

After the *gawai dayak* festival, a *gawai tanju* will be celebrated to revive the Iban power. The *gawai tanju* rituals is celebrated outside the house in *tanju* (platform). This is done usually in the evening at about 5 pm, where a group of women will cook rice and side dishes on the ground presenting food for the God. The men on the other

hand, will install *kayu raya* (flags). Using *chapan* covered in *pua kumbu*, the *tuai piring* (customary leaders) will encourage the mento bathed in morning dew, recited with prayer verses, and sacrificed *genselan* (reward) to supernatural powers to be alive. To avoid "bad omen" during this ceremony, all the offering will be prepared before noon. After the *gawai tanju* ceremony, *tuai piring* returns the owner and places it on the *sadau*.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The *tempuan*, the Iban traditional kitchen used for daily cooking, helps preserve Iban cultural artefacts. Iban cook with *tempuan* fires daily and traditionally they got up at 4 or 5 am to avoid bad omens. The bonfire smoke will spread over *Sadau* (upper floor), where Iban cultural artefacts like *tibang* (rice storage), baskets (*lanji*, *uyut*, and *raga*), and wood carvings are stored (refer to figure



**Figure 7:** *Tempuan* (fieldwork to Borneo Museum Culture, Sarawak,2022)



**Figure 8:** *Lanji*-the colour turn into black because of Fumigation (Sarawak Museum Collection, 2020)

The smoke from tempuan heat will turn the cultural artefacts in *Sadau* (attic) become black. The *lanji*, a woven basket used to transport rice to the longhouse after harvest, is fumigated. Fumigation from *tempuan* turns *lanji* into black colour (refer figure 8). These factors prevented termites and caterpillars from damaging *Sadau*'s baskets and weaves. The smoke spread to other rooms in the longhouse, covering the smell of fibre in the wood that detest termites. In the 18th century, the Japanese s used *Shou Sugi* or *Yakisugi* to fumigate by burning wood to prevent termite. Inadvertently, the Iban community in the longhouse has used *tempuan* openly to protect their cultural artefacts for decades. The Iban community was not aware that by doing so, they have naturally scientific treats their cultural artefacts efficiently from perish. For decades they were drawn into such practises due to their supernatural powers. Fumigation from *tempuan* used to cook and warm themselves at night and dawn accidentally treated the cultural artefacts. Iban cultural artefact researchers have never discussed this exhilarating discovery. The Iban community view their artefacts as cultural objects with historical value and believes these objects are "alive" and help them achieve harmonious wealth and avoid destructive disasters. Consequently, modern researchers view the care and management of traditional Iban artefacts as a systematic process that begins with inventorying, then ritual recitation, management, and storage. In conclusion, this study hope to introduce the Iban community to the world and hoping that the younger Iban generation would want to preserve the Iban cultural artefacts which is full with its aesthetic values.

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