



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***ALTERNATIVE MODERNITIES IN THE HISTORY OF IBAN POPULAR
MUSIC FROM 1950s TO 1970s***

CONNIE LIM KEH NIE

FEM 2019 19



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By

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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

August 2019

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2019

Chairperson: Loo Fung Chiat, PhD
Faculty: Human Ecology

This thesis provides an in-depth study of the history of Iban popular music (1950s–1970s) by analyzing how alternative modernity is articulated through Iban popular songs. In exploring the potency of popular music, it uncovers the socio-cultural meanings of song lyrics and paradoxes of the largest indigenous ethnic group in Sarawak who experienced modernity from pre-modern to modern, the flux and agents of change from Brooke Rule to British colonialism to the Federation of Malaysia. Fundamentally, I argue that the establishment of Radio Sarawak and Iban Radio in the 1950s not only disseminated information to the people but also created a critical identity-forming space where the Ibans articulated modernity through the creation of their own popular music. Historically, the Iban is a cultural group located geographically and politically on the periphery of the multi-cultural nation of Malaysia. Building upon Bart Barendregt (2014) historiographic accounts of ‘alternative modernities’ in Southeast Asian popular music, this thesis examines how Iban culture bearers created popular music in the image of mainstream trends, but covertly expressed their socio-cultural and socio-political identity as emerging Sarawakians. Using historiographic approach, this methodology unravels the intricacies of the emergent creation of Iban popular music through an intertextual analysis of Iban popular music and its song lyrics. Drawing on narratives of music making experiences from the singers and songwriters themselves, the research collected sentiments and interpretations from culture bearers who shared anecdotes during interview sessions. This guided musical and historiographical analysis and literature surveys. Although Iban popular music is a genre appropriated by Western, Malay and Hindustani music forms, I argue that Iban popular music articulated an alternative modernity for their socio-cultural and political history, allowing the Ibans to respond with a spirit of nationalism while simultaneously negotiating modernity in a new nation. They desired to transition and challenged themselves to be modern in a new landscape under the Federation of Malaysia. As with other ‘periphery ethnicities’ in Southeast Asia who were aspiring to be accepted in a new nation through popular music, the Ibans did not just conform to the mainstream industry but negotiated their own set of ideals, morals, values and traditions expressed in the Iban language and felt as a founding generation of Ibans who negotiated popular music in Sarawak.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KEMODENAN ALTERNATIF DALAM SEJARAH MUZIK POPULAR IBAN
DARI 1950-AN KE 1970-AN**

Oleh

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Tesis ini mengenai sejarah muzik popular Iban (1950an–1970an) dengan menganalisis bagaimana kemodenan alternatif telah dinyatakan melalui lagu-lagu popular Iban. Penerokaan muzik popular berpotensi ini menemukan maksud lirik lagu dari aspek sosio-budaya dan paradoks oleh kumpulan etnik pribumi terbesar di Sarawak ini, yang mana telah mengalami proses pemodenan dari era pra-modern hingga moden serta perubahan dari pemerintahan Brooke ke penjajahan British di Persekutuan Tanah Melayu. Secara dasarnya, penubuhan radio Sarawak dan radio Iban pada tahun 1950-an bukan sahaja dapat menyebarkan maklumat kepada rakyat, tetapi juga mewujudkan ruang untuk membentuk identiti kritis, di mana warga Iban menterjemah kemodenan melalui penciptaan muzik popular mereka. Menurut sejarah, Iban merupakan kumpulan etnik yang secara politik dan geografinya berada di pinggir negara Malaysia yang berbilang budaya. Dibangunkan daripada penulisan sejarah oleh Bart Barendregt (2014) mengenai kemodenan alternatif muzik popular Asia Tenggara, tesis ini mengkaji bagaimana budaya Iban mencipta muzik popular dalam imej aliran arus perdana, tetapi dalam masa yang sama menterjemahkan identiti sosio-budaya dan sosio-politik Sarawak secara jelas. Melalui pendekatan historiografi, metodologi kajian ini menghuraikan selok-belok penciptaan muzik popular Iban melalui analisis intertekstual terhadap lirik lagu dan muzik popular Iban. Dengan menggambarkan naratif pengalaman penciptaan muzik daripada penyanyi dan penulis lagu sendiri, kajian ini mengumpulkan sentimen dan tafsiran daripada pengembang budaya yang berkongsi anekdot semasa sesi temubual. Perkara ini memberi panduan kepada analisis muzikal dan historiografi, kaji selidik literatur dan kajian lapangan etnografi kajian ini. Walaupun muzik popular Iban merupakan genre diperuntukkan melalui bentuk muzik Barat, Melayu dan Hindustani, penulis berpendapat bahawa kemodenan alternatif dinyatakan melalui lagu popular Iban ini adalah berdasarkan sejarah politik dan sosio-budaya mereka. Hal ini membolehkan mereka memberi maklum balas dengan semangat nasionalisme dalam pada mengadaptasi ciri kemodenan baharu dalam bangsa mereka. Etnik Iban dilihat mahu berubah dan mencabar diri mereka untuk mengikuti pemodenan dalam landskap baru Persekutuan Malaysia. Sama seperti ‘etnik pinggir’ yang lain di Asia Tenggara yang bercita-cita untuk diterima oleh negara moden baharu menerusi muzik popular, Iban tidak hanya mengikuti arus perdana, tetapi melakukan perundingan berdasarkan ideal,

moral, nilai dan tradisi mereka tersendiri di dalam bahasa Iban. Hal ini memperlihatkan dengan jelas generasi Iban yang mengetengahkan muzik popular mereka di Sarawak.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

From the colonial period to post-colonial era, Southeast Asian nations have gone through dramatic historical developments and experienced political and economic changes. Many of these changes have resulted from modernity and modernization, terms used spontaneously in describing a country's transformation in socio-historical development processes. Looking at the history and transformation of popular music through the lens of the nation does not in itself produce the entire picture. Instead, we will be looking at "alternative conceptions of modernity" that problematize nation-centered narratives about the history of popular music in Southeast Asia (Barendregt, 2014). Barendregt observes that modernity's production of new fashions, markets and lifestyles offers, "... a glimpse of how and why people have taken up ideas of the modern, how it is made, un-made and re-made, paying ample attention to how such reconfigurations may serve various claims and are constantly haunted by yet others" (Barendregt, 2014, p. 6). Referring to the music industry, we will look at how and why popular music was created and produced to meet a market demand as it attempted to fit into the needs at that particular time creating its own trends and developments within society.

Recognizing the defiance of Western modernity, "alternative conceptions of modernity" avoid nation-centered narratives and take a holistic approach towards examining the multiple ways in which popular music is attached to socio-cultural developments. Some of the multiple factors include issues of socio-economic changes, stages of socio-cultural development, educational development, Christian values, and literacy, as well as advancements in infrastructure, lifestyle and technology. These are some of the critical factors influencing definitions of modernity in Iban society. Iban in Sarawak have encountered various waves of modernization since the arrival of James Brooke in August 1839 to the onset of when Sarawak as a modern nation-state began (Kedit, 1980a). The Brookes administered and maintained order but also paved the way for modernity to infiltrate Iban lifeways in order to meet the needs and demands of the economy from 1841 to 1946.

Since the 1950s, Iban have been constantly exposed to a barrage of Western, Malay and Indonesian popular music disseminating from radio broadcasts. With radio providing a model, Iban soon accelerated these innovations creating their own popular music. While expressing "Ibanness" through the use of their own language, they adapted Western pop music melodies into their early creation of popular music. Nevertheless, mimicking could also be seen as a reconfiguration in conveying their culture and expressing themselves through social entertainment.

1.2 Iban Identity and Iban Culture

Modernity and Iban

From longhouse to modernity, the time frame of the discussion of this section encompasses the Brooke monarchy until the 1980s. Prior before the arrival of James Brooke the Iban lived in the longhouses, large dwellings raised on stilts and comprises of a population of one or two dozen families living in separate apartments. Inter-group rivalry and warfare occurred frequently. The system of shifting cultivation required moving every few years to new land, and this land was sometime claimed by another longhouse or ethnic group as part of its territory. The Iban in Sarawak have gone through dramatic periods of social change that have strongly affected their lifestyle from the Brooke monarchy (1839–1946), to British influence from the colonization period (1946–1963) until the post-colonialism of the early Malaysian nation.

Among the studies done in the area of social change are Iban urbanization migration (Austin, 1977; Kedit, 1993; Padoch, 1982b, 1984; Sutlive, 1985, 1992), schooling (Seymour, 1974, 1977), modernization (Kedit, 1980a; Sutlive, 1978), tourism (Kedit, 1980b; Zeppel, 1994), agriculture (Cramb & Willis, 1990; Cramb, 1985, 1989, 2007b, 2012; Padoch, 1982a), rural development (King & Parnwell, 1999; Mertz & Christensen, 1997), impact of television of radio (Postill, 1999), media and nation building (Postill, 2008), Christianity (Varney, 1968, 1969, 2012, 2013), and politics (Jawan, 1993; Jawan, 1994; Sutlive, 1992). From these research carried out by historians, anthropologists and other social scientist, it is seen that the processes of modernization since the last four decades have effected virtually every aspect of Iban society.

Hence, the first agents of change encountered by the Iban community were under the Brooke monarchy who paved the way for administration, control and regulation of the Iban as a socio-cultural group within a multi-cultural Sarawak society. The unusual political context of close partnership between the Brooke rajahs and the Christian mission had brought the Iban to the road of modernity. At the same time the Brooke monarchy altered the Iban institutions in order to prepare them to meet the challenges and demands of modern economic society (Kedit, 1980a). As mentioned by Mohd. Taib Osman, “The longhouse-way of life may remain with the Iban for some time yet to come but the modernizing process will surely overtake it. If the roads do not come to the longhouse, the traditional water-ways will be channel which will bring change.” (Mohd. Taib Osman, 1989, p. 18)

With the trunk road from Kuching to Sibul, modern amenities like the schools, hospital, radio and television, the helicopter and the hydro-electric dam are the sure agencies of change in the road to modernity. Hence, the process of modernization the Iban had gone through in these three stages and phases of Sarawak history has provided a sufficient platform for discussion. It has manifested several important socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-historical development and discourses in the area of Christianity and education, Iban language, economic transformation, culture, urbanization and political

administration. As will be demonstrated in this study, those effects had extended to the expressions of Iban identity through modernity and its reflection in the creation of popular music. The expression of modernity and how Iban responded to their surrounding experience and happenings are portrayed in the song lyrics. The source and consequences of modernity and modernization emanation could be seen in Christianity and education, Christian mission via dissemination of religion, the usage of the Iban language, capitalism and cultural transformation towards economic growth, institutional change since administration of Brooke till Malaysian nation state and migration of Iban community to the urban.

Iban Egalitarianism

Reflecting the Iban values and identity, egalitarianism is this a central value of the Iban. Derek Freeman where his research was based on the longhouses along the Balleh River described the Iban personality as “untrammelled individualists” due to their isolation, inevitably had showed a high degree of independence (Freeman, 1955, p. 129). George Appell research focuses in the Rejang Area and Clifford Sather focused in the Saribas area have described a more varied social and religious system than Freeman. Both their arguments show how Iban society was structured around “equality” and “hierarchy” (Sather, 1989, p. 53–57; Appell, 2001). Thus, it is arguably the Iban values were shaped in the course of the successful adaptation to the tropical rainforest environment. Hill paddy cultivation (rice cultivation) is the central of their economy and the requirement of large tracts of primary forest for cultivation of hill rice is congruent with the evolution of a mobile and martial society. The longhouse system of settlement gives the Iban both the mobility and defense capability which facilitates territorial expansion by conquest.

Military prowess the identity of Iban. The military strategy of the Ibans gives high value to the cultural norms of adventure, pioneering, courageous achievement and an aggressive stance. Their mythology and sacred texts assure them of the righteousness of their exploits for their cultural heroes and masculine, courageous, strong, resourceful, determined, and above all, successful warriors. However, cooperation is required from all longhouse members in such collective endeavors as building house, rice cultivation, and grand ritual festivals. The Iban individual is equal before others in the longhouse. Socialization emphasizes the need to respect the rights of others and to value group living.

Christianity and Education

The Iban from the Saribas district were introduced to Christianity as early as 1868 (Kedit, 1980a). Inspired by James Brooke, whose genuine interest in religious enquiry and considered introducing Christian mission from the beginning of his involvement with Sarawak. Influence by Raffles’ idea of co-operative effort between the British and local peoples to bring wealth, and by George Earl’s view that commerce would bring social blessing and that the indigenous people had innate virtues (Earl, 1837). For Brooke, Sarawak presented “an extended field for Christianity and commerce”, the two agents of civilization (Templer, 1853, p. 3). At the same time, missionaries introduced educational institutions and cash crops like coffee and rubber in the beginning of 20th

century, both of which brought profound changes to the Saribas Iban during the Brooke government in Sarawak (Pringle 1970). The Anglican missionary pioneered the educational and medical roles which were later supplemented by the government and mission's work in the circulation and dissemination of agricultural skills and knowledge. At the same time this firmly associated the Christian missionaries joining the government for a common objective (Sauders, 1992, p. 264).

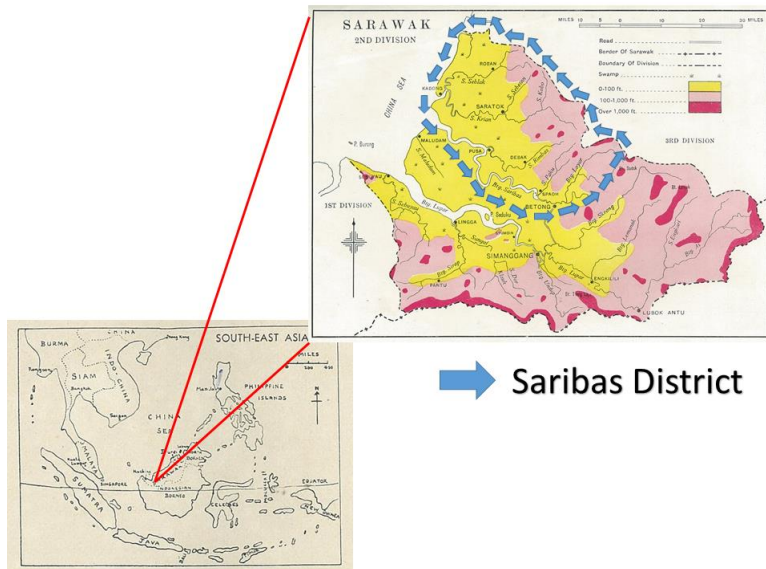


Figure 1 Saribas District comprises of Pusa, Spaoh, Debak village in Betong

Although the Iban in Saribas District (Figure 1) had converted to Christianity and other new western practices introduced by missionaries, they still maintained traditional pre-Christian ceremonies and their oral traditions (Pringle, 1970, vii). As observed by Kedit (1980a), the Paku Iban were relatively nominal Christians in such behavior as observing the various Church holy days, while at the same time, maintaining traditional customs and functional rituals in the longhouse socio-cultural contexts. For example:

“The longhouse way-of life may remain with the Iban for some time yet to come but the modernizing process will surely overtake it. If the roads do not come to the longhouse, the traditional water-ways will be channel which will bring change.” (Mohd. Taib Osman, 1989, p. 18)

From this scenario, it is seen that the Saribas Iban embraced the new religion for its benefits, such as education provided by the missionaries, and the freedom from having to observe many of the strict ritual restrictions of their existing faith system. Another adaptive behavior observed by Kedit (1980a) is how the Christian and non-Christian members in Paku longhouse negotiates with modernity, compromise and readapt their

belief in accordance with the requirements of longhouse in order to be on par to the wave of modernization.

Since the British colonial government, the Anglican primary and secondary school had provided teaching up to university entrance standard. Batu Lintang College for teacher training had recruited students from Anglican school. The introduction of music as a part of education by the missionary to the schools and Teacher's Training College had instill the knowledge of Western concept of harmony as well as chord progression and melody structure to the Iban. Besides singing the hymns, it had aroused their interest towards listening to pop music as well as leading them towards their own pop music creation. As the subject of popular music is secular, it often associated with the life events the Iban had experience, it is sung as a form of entertainment and merry making.

The Iban Language

The Ibans are classified as Austronesian people of Western Borneo. The language speaks by the Iban are closely related to dialects of a single Iban language part of a larger complex of Malayic Dayak languages (Adelaar, 2006; Hudson, 1970, 1978). According to the evidence, the original ancestor of Iban who are the original Austronesian speakers are found around 4000 BCE, spreading from the southern China through Southeast Asia into the Pacific and across the Indian Ocean (Bellwood, 1995, 1996). Those defined as Austronesian eventually extended from Madagascar to Easter Island are seen as on as one of the major population movements in human history. As compared to other ethnic group in Sarawak, the Iban have a common language with minor dialectal variations.

Language is a remarkable resource connected to time and space. From the written resources from oral literature, it contextualized the communication across the span of time and space as well as the chronological development in both narrative and historical form (Friedland & Boden, 1994). A major contribution made by the mission is the translation of the Christian liturgy text, into Iban language (Varney, 2013). Among the material being translated are bible, prayer book services, hymns, a life of Christ and the burial service and these were printed by the mission press in Kuching. As the desire of missionary to put the Bible in the hands of ordinary people, they started making translation into Iban language and other Sarawak ethnic languages. As the local church ministry is growing, the role of mission press is not only prayer books, hymn books and other devotional material in English, Iban, Land Dayak and Malay, it is also playing an important role ensuring the in making the Iban literature widely available and is used by the worship (Varney, 2013). Literacy began to spread rapidly, many had started to learn to read and write from their kin who had gained a basic mission education (Sather, 1994).

As a result, the immerse commitment of linguistic work carried out by the missionaries significantly proved the emergence of new identities among the Iban and the people of Sarawak. What the Sarawak had experience reflects in Etherington's finding that the first mission schools were set up to "train the local people" as church workers "to spread literacy so the Bible could be read and to form the minds of children when adults proved indifferent or hostile to the Christian message" (Etherington, 2005, p. 11). To a

missionary, it is a priority to teach the converts to read Bible, that is where the translation had become central to the work of all missions and it had shown a significant consequences as key concepts of the faith had to be conveyed in local languages and to different cultures (Sanneh, 1990).

Besides the Bible translation, the Western hymns are also translated into the Iban language. The missionaries discovered the effectiveness of hymn singing as an evangelical tool in Christian education. During the process, there was also agreement that the same tunes should be set to hymns in different languages so that all the church members could join in and singing them during the church service (Varney, 2013, p. 55). Hymnals and Bibles had been distributed throughout the churches. Hymns, of course is accompanied by a variety of religious rituals such as performed by the Anglican congregation and mission schools. In the early 1900s, the Saribas Iban already have an awareness of Christian liturgy as they are exposed and participated in singing hymns, plainsong and creed during the Church service as a congregation. Indirectly, they had learned the basic structure of music through memorizing the tune and lyrics of the hymns, plainsong and creed. These exposures to music had prepared the Iban to accept the western popular music as well as popular music from the neighboring states and countries which is aired on radio. Today, these hymns and the newly composed Christian songs are sung collectively by the congregation, often accompanied by guitar since 1970s. The vital of diffusion throughout the Iban community is seen through the introduction of new musical instrument, unfamiliar harmonic and melodic forms and approach in the very notion of collective singing. This development of was central and pivotal among the church and mission schools.

Contiguously in 1960s, the establishment of Borneo Literature Bureau had encouraged the Iban rural school teachers to put an effort in recording the oral tradition that was vanish rapidly. Surat Pembrita, the first Iban news publication started in 1941 during Japanese occupation (Postill, 2008, p.31). As an editor for the news publication, Benedict Sandin started to publish papers on Iban history and lore which includes Iban traditional belief, custom, folklore, mythology and tradition in the Sarawak Museum Journal and books with the Borneo Literature. Through literacy, Sandin (1962; 1964; 1967; 1968; 1970; 1972; 1974; 1980; 1994) had gained his own cultural competency which was taught and inherited orally by his father and at the same time cultivating and revitalizing the knowledge of cultural of his own people.

The Ibans possess a very rich oral literature. It comprises the sagas and legends of Iban culture heroes and deities (*ensera, kana, sugi*); and incantations and prayers used during drinking rituals (*timang, pengap, and sampi*); love poems and drinking songs for social occasions (*pelandai, sanggai, renong*); and numerous other forms of fables, riddles, proverbs (*jako, entelah, ensembar and sempama*). The Tun Jugah Foundation played an important role to preserve and promote Iban culture, arts and language through its collected, recorded, transcribed, translated and interpreted all forms of Iban folklore for study by contemporary scholars and future generations of Iban in particular. Among the publication published by the foundation are the four volumes of Encyclopedia of Iban

studies¹ published in 2001, the proverbs used in Iban society (Ensiring & Saleh, 2006), dictionary of Iban and English (Ensiring, Saleh, Sutlive, & Sutlive, 2016; Richards, 1981; Sutlive & Sutlive, 1994), Iban dictionary (Bup Sereba Reti Jaku Iban), Iban's rites and traditional festivals (Saleh & Wong, 2008; Uambat & Ensiring, 2004), Iban's oral tradition which are the *sabak*, the Iban dirge or Iban death chant (Saleh, 2000; Sutlive, 2012), an ethnographic study of Iban shamanic songs and their role in the practice of traditional Iban healing (Sather, 2001), stories based on Iban folklore (*Ensera*), Iban riddles (*Entelah*), ritual incantations text (*Leka Timanig*) (Saleh, 1997), songs of Iban tropes (*pantun*) (Saleh, 1998), *sampi* and *biau* (Saleh & Ensiring, 2001), *renung* (Ensiring & Saleh, 2001; Saleh, Ensiring, & Wong, 2001), and *pelian* (Uambat & Ensiring, 2002).

It is seen that the Ibans has a language with a long and rich history that often invoked and served as the basis of the Iban culture. Through the sources of oral traditional collected and documented, the symbolic force of Iban language and its ability could be defined as a contained knowledge transcended over a period of time and space which formed the basis of whole Iban civilization in Sarawak. This is supported by Masing (1997) as for until today, the Iban language has remained the most powerful emblem and the trademark of "Ibanness", it is more powerful than any material culture or architectural items.

The Institution of *Berjalai*

Berjalai is a custom practiced predominantly by men. As reflected in Iban oral tradition, one such series of *ensera* were closely related to the discussion of *berjalai*. The ideal image of manhood was portrayed through the exploits of Iban hero, Keling, whereas, the model of femininity were depicted through Kelings's beautiful consort, Kumang. They lived in the sky (*langit*) at their longhouse called Panggau Libau. The significant pointed of Keling is defined by Perham (1885), Keling is above all wanderers, but, he is not regarded as god (*petara*), but are tutelary spirits, who are sometimes presented with offerings and often invoked as helpers of men:

"When of age, he developed a tendency to a wandering life, and never applied himself to any regular pursuit, except those of pleasure and war. He was wayward and capricious, yet handsome and brave; he would often disappear for months and even year at a time, and be given up as dean, and then would re-appear at his mythical home, coming from where no one knew, and no one dared to ask." (Perham, 1885, p. 266)

¹ A four-volume work of more than 2,000 pages, with articles from 40 Contributing Editors. Contains more than 4,000 entries, with articles on Basketry, Bee trees, Birth, Botany, Burials, Brookes and the Iban, Colonialism, Contributions to Anthropological Theory, Development, Death, Expeditions, Farming, Festivals, Headhunting, Illnesses, Language, Logic, Malaysia, Material culture, Rituals, Shamanism, and Weaving (Source: The Tun Jugah Foundation, <http://tunjugahfoundation.org.my/publication-item/the-encyclopedia-of-iban-studies-vols-1-4/>).

As seen in the episodes of *ensera*, it tells the adventure of Keling; and the telling and retelling of these stories in the longhouse had inspired the Iban men to go on *berjalai*. It is a requirement for the transition from childhood to manhood, the act of *berjalai* is the test of character and an education for life. In the early to mid-adolescent years, each young man was expected to undertake *berjalai*, and initiate's journey. The young man shall not be accompanied by several companions, lived off the land and sought adventure and fortune.

In the Iban society, the institution of *berjalai* ensured not only that their men would be brave, but also that they would be knowledgeable. Joining Sarawak Rangers and Police Field Force as a form of *berjalai* where the Ibans could experience the traditional opportunities for adventure social mobility, and material gain that had existed in the days of headhunting and piracy (Kedit, 1993). It would be a bonus if he should kill an enemy where his bravery achievement shall be accorded a hero's welcome in his longhouse and gain the right to celebrate the *Gawai Kenyalang* (the highest ritual festival).

Bejalai has been transformed over the past decades, with young men working in the oil-fields of Miri and Bintulu, Shreveport and Galveston. As a modern form of *berjalai*, the Iban men will leave the longhouse to the urban centers, where their education could provide them with better career and job opportunities. As *berjalai* is part of their Iban traditional spirit, meaning to go for exploration with the intention of acquiring material profit and social prestige had played a role in the modernizing Iban economy had it has been a significant cultural institution among the Iban men as it provides an avenue for the achievement of traditional status by materials and wealth gained (Kedit, 1980a). As observed by Kedit (1980a) in visiting a longhouse in Lubuk Antu, he depicts:

“One can always detect the *bilik* which has a member (or members) who has (have) been on *berjalai*. This is by way of ostentatious evidence displayed in the form of: new, clean bedding (foam mattress and pure white mosquito net) arranged on the *ruai* a motor chain saw placed conspicuously outside the *bilik* as evidence of someone who had been a lumberjack. The price of a can say is about M\$1,000, hence if a *bilik*-family has one of these items, it is a sign of prosperity and also an evidence of success of *berjalai*.” (Kedit, 1980a, p.89)

As seen in Kedit's depiction above, *berjalai* is the key towards modernity and prosperity. The institution of *berjalai* remain essentially the same as the traditional way of life where the creation of a resourceful and resilient society. As conclusion, the significant of *berjalai* in the Iban society served as an agency of change often seen as an accomplishment and sense of achievement for a person, it is an important source of income for the longhouse and a means of contact between Iban men and other ethnic groups in Borneo.

Economic Transformation: The Rise of Capitalism

The strength and energy putting together in capitalism, industrialization, nationalism, science and technology has create and tremendous strength in early nineteenth century could be seen in railroad development, mushrooming across the Old and New World (Friedland & Boden, 1994). Saribas leaders had turned from headhunting to trade and cash crops after the Brooke pacification the area in the early 1860s (Postill, 2008, p. 30). The Paku Iban were among first people in Sarawak co cultivate cash crops as coffee and rubber. As noted by Pringle (1970, p. 202), “The same Saribas Iban who pioneered in search of jungle products and who sought out Christianity were also the first to plant new crops at the urging of the Government.” From coffee, the Saribas Iban turn to rubber at the beginning of 20th century, and by 1920 the Resident of Second Division reported “The Paku Dayaks (Iban) are very wealthy and industrious” (Pringle, 1970, p.205). The Paku Iban had become prosperous and in line to the rapid modernization introduced by the government before the Second World War as asserted by Kedit (1980a, p. 96) “With the buoyancy of their newly-achieved cash economy, the Paku Iban demonstrated their wealth in such ostentatious “castle-type” longhouse. They also took to education and became physically mobile, and that period saw many young men seek white-collared jobs in Kuching, Miri, North Borneo and Malaya.” Thus, the wealth and social mobility which given by rubber cultivation had increasingly changed their social and cultural behavior, to the extent where one can postulate it has been detrimental to the traditional Iban lifestyle. Money they earn from rubber plantation, providing them with sufficient funds to advance their children’s education for further studies had an adverse long term effect on the whole community.

Since the establishment of Iban section of Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM), it had served as a platform of disseminating the knowledge of agriculture. Information of modern agricultural practices, broadcasting the success stories of cash crop farmers through radio interviews serve as a communication channel to persuade shifting cultivation farmers to adopt modern agricultural practice (Postill, 2008). In another aspect, the road is one expression of the Paku Iban’s ability to utilize the establishment to take advantage of change and modernization. While encounter with modernity in the period of government planning and development in Malaysia, it is significantly seen the Paku Iban are self-reliance in economic development and they are relatively independence and self-sufficiency. All this evidence was opened to outside influences brought about by the road and is another successful re-adaptive strategy of modernity. Socio-cultural behavior in Paku was profoundly affected with the construction of the twelve-mile feeder road during the 1960s for the Ibans having easy and cheaper means of communication with the outside world (Kedit, 1980a). It had created the convenience and it had shorted the time of travelling, as compared to travel by river.

Ever since the introduction of cash crops and rubber planting by the Brooke in 1860 and the practice of Christianity beliefs and values in the daily life, the Ibans are not bound and abide with their traditional animism belief. Base on Iban traditional belief in animism, if they a bad omen or sign is encounter or observed in their dreams, or forbidding association, it is a symbol their will encounter a bad luck with a particular person, place, or thing. In order to gain prosperity, they need to perform a ritual base on their social or religious custom. Presently, the Ibans are no longer confined to the taboos,

which traditionally prohibiting or restricting them from performing a particular activities and practice. Agricultural and farming activities could be carried out without considering the taboos. Consciously, this will increase their productivity in life and continue their prosperity in life without worry about the taboo.

It has once debated by Gellner (1983, p. 140–143) the origins of nationalism in Europe lie in the rise of industrial society as the requirements of modern economy that aimed for sustained economic growth had lead to a new relationship between the state and culture. After Sarawak had become a Malaysia nation-state, agricultural subsidies are provided by the Ministry of Agriculture to the Iban in Saribas-Kalaka region in the form of the small scale planting grant, particularly the rubber and pepper planting (Cramb, 2007, p. 258). “In the light of modernization, introduction of new forms of agrarian practices and the intervention of large scale commercial activities into traditional system of land ownership and shifting cultivation” (Lee, 2010, p. 143) had contributed towards rapid economic transformation.

Urbanisation

Kuching was physically divided along ethnic lines with the Chinese and the Indian shops along the south bank of the Sarawak River, the Malay villages upriver from the Indian quarter with the Javanese, Boyanese and Minangkabaus moving across to the north bank downriver from the Astana. Kampung Surabaya, Gersik and Boyang still in the same location until today. The Iban lived in the Padungan and the European missionaries lived on the south bank inland from the shops which fronted the river. Commerce concentrated on the south bank along the Sarawak River while the north bank remained rural in orientation – rubber tapping, fishing, wood-cutting. The only link between the north and the south bank was by small sampans known as tambangs, operated by the Malays which are still in use till this day.

In the 1840s, apart from Malay, Chinese and Indians migrants, a 60-door Iban longhouse was already in existence on Padungan Creek about a mile from the main bazaar (Lockard, 1987). However, in 1858, a futher eight families of Balau Ibans from Banting and Batang Lupar established a longhouse near the bazaar. They were allies of James Brooke who helped him to quell the rebellion by Bau Chinese goldminers the year before. When the conflict ended, James Brooke decided that as a deterrent and for protection, this community of Ibans should relocate to his capital. However, with population expansion they were later resettled to Kampung Tabuan, a suburban area located 6.4 kilometers southeast of the bazaar (ibid, 1987). The ethnic and cultural diversity of Kuching was captured by visitors who gave colourful descriptions of Kuching street scenes. One account of Kuching in the 1850s included Ibans in their loin cloth ‘bristling with swords and spears, with tigers’ teeth inserted in the upper part of their ears, and huge black and white hornbill feathers rising from their heads’ strolling in the bazaar (Payne, 1960 in Ho, 1998:51).

As mentioned earlier, the Sebuyau Iban and the Balau Iban were the first to settle in Kuching. By the turn of the 19th century, Kuching Ibans had basically lost their rural

cultural roots of shifting paddy cultivation and were no longer staying in their traditional longhouses but individual dwellings like the Malays. According to Lockard (1987, p. 77) there were considerable intermarriages between the Ibans of Kampung Tabuan with the rural Sebuyau Ibans. Iban migrants from the Sri Aman and Sibu Divisions also added to their numbers in Kuching during the rubber boom of the early 1900s. Many became Christians and sent their children to Anglican schools – St. Thomas's and St. Mary's. Those who graduated from mission schools joined the junior rungs of the civil service or worked with the missions and moved to stay nearer the bazaar. Some also worked as collectors for the Sarawak Museum while others joined the police and armed forces.

Kuching is not only a center for government bureaucracies, but it is also commercial, social, and political activities center. As a capital of Sarawak state, centralism, modern amenities are available to provide for the functions. Hence, public infrastructures include road, tall building, schools, hospitals, shops and markets, and mass media like radio station, newspapers, magazines, movies, television and other attractive aspects of urbanism that have considerable as extrinsic influence to the Kuching Iban. Demography and geography is one of the important factors in Iban modernity. As observed by Kedit (1980a, p. 109) the Iban who live in Kuching have adapted themselves to the urban economy as they have altered their traditional socio-cultural base structurally and also perhaps, their outlook to life. Due to the environment factors, the urban Iban lives closer to the hub of government and commercial activities in the country, their economic dependence on non-agricultural agencies, and their inter-ethnic relationships with other non Iban in the capital, they are widely different from other Iban in Sarawak. As observed by Kedit in two Iban villages in Kuching,

“...both Tabuan and Siol Kandis have the appearance of a typical Malay village. It is this single structured housing of nuclear family (or sometimes extended families) situations that affects the Ibannese of the urban groups. Close contact between kins, affinals and loved ones in the longhouse were all absent in single houses... However, the urban villages find substitutes in organizing their social lives around community associations for sports and other recreational purposes; attending the churches regularly on Sundays, and indulging in other social attractions such as films which are offered in Kuching town... Another environmental factor is that the urban Iban have lost their opportunity to maintain the intimate attachment with the land, which longhouse living would offer them. With such detachment, one can assume that they have also lost the world view of the typical Iban from the longhouse, with his indigenous folk knowledge of country or jungle environment. In short, the urban Iban are no longer jungle dwellers. At the same time, the isolated village setting provide the Iban with some opportunities to live according to a rural way of life that is being able to keep pigs and poultry, and also maintaining a separate community identity.” (Kedit, 1980a: 109–110).

From the field observation in made by Kedit (1980a), it is seen the Ibans who lives closely to Kuching city are having great power and modernization influences. They are

exposed to policies of nationalism and political parties and government agencies execute the overall programs of nation-building through public rallies, symbolic expressions in the media and other methods of molding a national identity. As portrayed by Kedit (1980a),

“The urban Iban participate in this process through their association, the Sarawak Dayak National Union. This association proves an important source of ethnic identity, cultural maintenance and moral support for the culturally disjointed urban Iban. In such activities as sports, cultural shows, mutual aid and regular meetings and assemblies in the impressive brick building of the association’s headquarters, the urban Iban have been able to extend their village boundaries and diffuse in to the wider Iban socio-cultural milieu, and hence again the psychological support that is most important for a minority group.” (Kedit 1980a, p.111).

On the other hand, it could be seen that, the association managed to sustain the spirit of kin among the Iban community and sense of belonging among its members. Kuching Ibans have been urbanized to the extent that they are alienated from their cultural roots in the longhouse. Hence, the association also help the urban Iban to cope with in a minority situation. Without the affiliation, the Iban would have no social-cultural representation and platform and would suffer alienation or even assimilation with other non-Iban cultural groups.

Institutional Change in Political Administration

The history of Sarawak from the administration of Brooke regime to British colonization had brought considerable institutional changes in creating the contemporary Iban in the modern society. Brooke rule had brought two major changes. Firstly, over the period of sixty years their territory was gradually extended, through pacification and by cession, to the area of modern Sarawak, much larger than Brunei in extent. Secondly, the Brookes established relative peace throughout Sarawak, distinguishing lawful from unlawful headhunting, and organizing impressive peace ceremonies between warring tribes. As for the Iban and other peoples in Sarawak, the Brooke government brought interaction, adaptation and exchange between their local custom (*adat*) and institutions and the government. Sarawak was part of Britain’s informal empire based on naval strength, and the Brookes sporadically obtain naval assistance. Britain tolerated and protected Brooke rule but gave little support to the development of Sarawak and it was only loosely incorporated into empire’s political and economic networks. The Brooke state did benefit from these networks, particularly from advance in the means of communication, including steamships, postal services and telegraphs and the use of the English language (Porter, 1999).

The Brooke Rajahs encouraged the Iban to maintain their identification as a cultural group within a multicultural Sarawak society. In the other hand, The Brookes had drastically changed and altered the social structure of Iban people and differentiated them into contesting groups among the various ethnic groups in Sarawak. Therefore, the British had prepared the Iban to face the challenge and demands of Malaysia’s modern political-economy. It is seen that the Iban are ready to play a role in the national political

arena and the history of Sarawak from the era of Brooke regime, British colonialism to the present state under the Malaysian nationalism provides a historiography framework in placing the Iban in modernizing society. As written by Kedit,

“Independence and the new nationalism mean changes from group loyalties to national loyalties. The abrupt change and challenges of political reality tax Iban socio-cultural collectively. Their previous successful adaptation and explanation of their world in religious terms, and their cultural repertoire were inadequate for the present situation. Their cultural tools which have assisted them in controlling the environment seem incompatible with contemporary demands. The implication of history is therefore clear for the Iban: the past exposure to change has brought them to the cross-roads between abandoning their traditional adaptation and re-adapting it to modern needs.” (Kedit, 1980a, p. 69–70).

Towards the path of modernity, Jenson (1974, p. 213–214) mentions three factors that already in the 1960s were radically changing the Iban way of life: (1) the spread of rubber and a cash economy (2) local authority schools and (3) mass conversion to Christianity. Thus, it is seen due to the environmental factor, the Iban have to make cultural amends, and at the same time adapt themselves to the socio-economic requirements of urban living. Here again, the establishment of village clubs and socio-cultural associations assists in this fending process of re-adaptive strategies. Take an example in Betong area (Formerly part of Sri Aman Division, Betong is in the Saribas area), one need only travel five miles away from town “to go from a tidy, Anglican, modernist, largely educated, semi-agricultural community (swapt padi) with electricity and running water to untidy, pagan traditionalist, large illiterate, farming longhouse (mixed swamp-hill padi) with very basic facilities” (Postill, 1999, p.92–93). Since the past 70 years, a continuous sequence of development had exposed the Iban in Saribas area towards the road of modernity. Hence, the urban Iban had gone through the modernity ambivalent stage of being modern and yet not wishing to be so completely modern as to be alienated from their own self-identity and culture.

Ever since the Malaysian nation-state, the educated urban Ibans had participated in political associations and administer the state as a cabinet minister, assemblyman and senior officers in various government departments which provides an important source of ethnic identity. As stated by Empiang Jabu (1989:30),

“For longhouse community their traditional world now is being turned inside out, and new problems of consistency and integration are emerging. The Ibans are citizen of the “world”, sensitive to political development in the Middle East, Kuala Lumpur and America, intrigued with the computer world and concerned with share and market prices abroad.” (Empiang Jabu, 1989, p.30)

As a part of Malaysia, governed by the Barisan Nasional (National Front), amalgamation of communally-oriented parties, the continuous process of modernization and modernity in Iban society had manifested the socio-historical developments in Sarawak ever since Sarawak joined Malaysia in 1963.

1.3 Background of the Study

Before I embarked on my research into the history of Iban popular music, a musician from Sarawak Broadcasting Department² questioned me about the aesthetic domain of the music: “Why do you want to study about Iban popular music history? It’s not original!” Although Iban popular music never achieved any significant commercial success outside Malaysia, the music is without question, part of the constellation of popular music history in the region of Southeast Asia. Perhaps when viewed as a subject in musicology, Iban popular music may appear inauthentic, lacking of creativity and imagination. This could be because on first listening it appears to simply appropriate Western tunes from the 1960s and mimic ethnic Malay popular music from Malaya and Singapore during the late 1960s to 1970s. However, these opinions and interpretations may be countered by a fundamental understanding that language is a critical determinant of cultural identity and that language is the key ingredient to Iban popular music, penned in Iban and not simply translated. From an historical perspective, lyrics are documents that capture meanings, sentiments and values of people’s lived experiences in a particular space and time. Within the historical context of Sarawak, as well as the changes in the Iban’s way of life from the Brooke era to a modern Malaysian nation-state, song lyrics take into account the socio-cultural changes and historical events that happened among Iban in Sarawak. Ever since the establishment of Radio Sarawak, Iban popular music was created to be played to fill in the airtime between programs for three to five minutes. This provided early popular music makers a discursive space for mediating a variety of social and cultural meanings about bravery, cultural heroes, the importance of education, working as a laborer, gambling, and the significance of exploration for acquiring knowledge and experience. I discovered these themes of utmost importance and value, thus forming the basis of my research into Iban popular music history; rather than the usual aesthetic criteria and musical style analysis.

The history of Iban popular music connects with shifting social and material conditions where Iban were experiencing the desire to be modern at a time when fitting themselves into society was crucial to the developing nation state. The study of the history of Iban popular music is not simply a study of Iban modern music and musical styles. Rather, it requires historiography approach. I approached Iban popular music as a form of socio-cultural and socio-political expression because these factors rapidly changed the Iban experience from the longhouse to urban areas. In this way, songs and text are valuable and meaningful in interpreting flux and change in Iban culture. Through song lyric analysis, the aspirations of being modern and the response towards modern developments happening in Sarawak can be better assessed and interpreted. Pop music song lyrics are the narrative soundtrack that reflects Iban lifeways from pre-modern to modern. In the name of modernity, the Iban socio-cultural climate had changed dramatically by the mid-twentieth century. The story of Iban popular music history is both curious and exciting

² A public broadcaster in Malaysia. It is also known as Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) after 1963.

in its details, woven closely into the fabric of events in Sarawak since the century rule by the Rajah Brookes to Malaysia's nation state.

Merging both historical and cultural backdrops, the following questions are raised given the intertwined trajectories from Brooke monarchy to British colonization to Malaysian nation state, and the changes Iban experienced on the road towards modernization. How did Iban popular music develop and respond to the rapidly modernizing political and cultural environment during the 1950s thru the 1970s? What are the factors that contributed to Iban identity construction for musicians responding to modernity through the creation of Iban popular music? What did music mean to musicians, producers and consumers within a modernizing Sarawak from the 1950s through to the 1970s? This study is not merely an analytical challenge for an ethnomusicologist cum historian, but it is a very real history, a cogitation of lived experiences shared with me from Iban who actually negotiated modernity during a significant formative period of time.

Using historiographic investigation techniques, popular music is seen as a form of modern music expressing modernity as a "question". Placing Iban popular music here in distinctive socio-historical and socio-cultural settings, anticipating the focus of modern lifestyle and history, this investigation shall illuminate how the Iban in Sarawak engaged with modernity and witnessed the formative phenomenon of modernity.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Modernity is a key concept used across a range of philosophical disciplines including ethnomusicology and popular music studies. Hence, "modernity" and "alternative modernity/ alternative maternities" are fundamental concepts applied as core theoretical frameworks throughout the Iban popular music history discussion and argument in this dissertation. Currently, the literature surrounding popular music in Southeast Asia only references modernity in a top down view focusing on responses to mainstream culture in subservient ways that do not address bottom up viewpoints. As an introduction to this chapter, I would like to quote a description of Iban popular music in 1950s–1970s by John Postill:

"An Iban singer, Connie Francis, sang Tanah ai menoa aku (lit. my country's land and water, i.e., my Fatherland), the Iban/Malaysian answer to Indonesia's national anthem, while Hilary Tawan sang Oh Malaysia! This was a time of growth for Iban pop. The 1950s influence of the Indonesian and Indian music industry gave way in the 1960s and 1970s to British and American influences. Pauline Linang was now joined by her sister, Seniorita Linang, on frequent tours around Sarawak and recorded broadcast. They were both brought up listening to Western songs. Seniorita's personal favorites were, not unusually, Tom Jones and Engelbert Humperdinck. In her varied repertoire she sang in Iban but the rhythms and tunes were borrowed from the West. She knew her twist, rock 'n' roll, country and sentimental." (Postill 2008, p.48)

As stated in this quote, the desire to be modern began to be portrayed. From the above example, Iban popular music was responding to Iban's feelings toward their country and homeland, where an expression of modern Iban was portrayed in popular music. Modernity contributed to the Iban experience when they migrated to urban centers, gaining exposure to Indonesian and Indian music cultures. Radio airplay as well as 78 RPM records of Malay popular music filled the urban market soundscapes in Sarawak.

Influences from the Indonesian and Indian music industry in the 1950s gave way in the 1960s and 1970s to British and American influences. This phenomenon showed an impact on the musical styles, melody, rhythm, instrumentation and lyrics of Iban pop songs. "Iban pop is far from unique. If in the 1950s it followed Indonesian and Indian patterns, and in the 1960s-1970s Western ones, since the 1980s it has increasingly aligned itself with musical trends arriving from West Malaysia and absorbed concepts and words from the national language." (Postill, 2008, p. 79). However, Iban popular song is still one of the popular genres in the Sarawak music industry today. Since the 1950s, the rise of Radio Sarawak and the production of Iban vinyl records in 1968, marked the milestone of growth for Iban pop songs. Based on the statement mentioned by Postill (2008) above, the adoption of Western, Indonesian, Malay and Indian musical styles should be researched as an innovation in contemporary Iban popular music, not an imitation or simple mimicking of modernity, which is articulated through its style, content and form.

Western-based popular music studies principally rely on the chronologic unfolding of events to recount modern history. While effective in recounting facts, the chronological narrative approach does not depend on detail from informants who have lived through these recent histories to provide 'alternative conceptions of modernity as they surface in the realm of the popular and the everyday' (Barendregt et.al. 2014, p. 6). Therefore, this gap in the literature must be filled in order to address the profile of Iban pop songs, influences from other cultures, traits and musical styles as well as the appropriation and resistance of Iban in respect to the audience's perception of Iban popular music.

Current literature on popular music history in Southeast Asia has yet to fully identify Sarawak as a region or explore how popular music has developed the socio-cultural meanings behind Iban popular music. Hence, the issue addressed in this study shall be focusing on the musical development and socio-cultural meanings of Iban pop which is a popular music genre created by the Iban community during the late 1950s to 1970s in Sarawak. This study follows Barendregt's (*et al* 2014) approach that relies on historiography (archives, discography) through in-depth interviews to recount the lived experiences of Iban's most popular expression of music culture. The current literature lacks any substantial historical account of Sarawak's music industry as a part of the larger discourse on Malaysian popular music. No studies on modernity's influence in Iban culture have looked at how popular music has been an icon of identity within Malaysia as a nation-state.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

My project intends to study and trace the history of Iban Popular Music since the establishment of Radio Sarawak in 1954. The first objective is to analyze and interpret the history and development of the Iban popular music industry in Sarawak from 1950s–1970s. Secondly, this study intends to identify and profile identities in Iban popular music and their symbolic association with culture, lifestyle, social class and ethnicity in Sarawak. Thirdly, it attempts to discuss the musical backgrounds of historically significant Iban popular musicians as cultural mediators.

This research will be carried out through a qualitative approach to explore the history of Iban popular music through historiography method. The data of this research will include Iban popular music recorded primarily from the 1950s to 1970s. During the process of data collection, informants were Iban singers, songwriters, musicians, culture bearers and academics. The research design consists of two components, namely audio recordings of Iban popular music and interviews. The purpose of interviews is to obtain in-depth information from people who were connected to Iban popular music through their personal histories and cultural knowledge including beliefs and practices. The target of the interviews were representatives and key informants in the Iban music industry currently staying in Kuching, Sarawak. The procedure for an in-depth interview involved answering semi-structured and open-ended research questions and drawing out perspectives about Iban popular music from the interviewees.

This thesis will feature a series of anecdotes about Iban popular music. The composition of song lyrics itself constitutes stories. In the historical transition from Iban pop songs created for Radio Sarawak, broadcast on Iban radio, to commercial recordings recorded on 74 RPM vinyl records, songwriters moved away from metaphors, cultural idioms and allusion towards more direct narratives and a straightforward style more common in songs written since the late 1960s. Songwriters began to create scenarios, real-world situations and down-to-earth characters in songs; songs were framed with a theme. Songs established specific settings in time, place and events which represent a historical documentation of lived and experienced events of historical and cultural significance. In order to understand the songs composed during mid-1950s to 1970s, I collected a series of anecdotes through interviews. These song lyric interpretations with cultural meanings by Iban culture bearers and academics, stimulated conversations during interviews about the socio-cultural meanings of the songs and their relation to social class, gender, ethnicity and nation.

The purpose of this study is to highlight how Iban popular music dealt with historical crossroads and turning points in a modernizing Sarawak. In summary, this research seeks to understand and interpret the Iban popular music of that time by giving close and thoughtful attention to the interpretation about its nature, function and meaning. Paying close attention to musical development by tracing popular songs as text, this research analyzes them against the social and cultural backdrop in which they were historically produced and are currently remembered.

1.6 Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How did Iban popular music lyrics develop and respond to the rapidly modernizing Sarawak in 1950s–1970s? (Chapter 5 to Chapter 7);
2. In the creation of early Iban popular music, what factors historically contributed to the construction of Iban identity for musicians responding to modernity in the mid twentieth century? (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4);
3. What contributions did Iban popular musicians make as historically significant cultural mediators of modernity? (Chapter 5 to Chapter 7).

1.7 Research Objectives

The research aim is to study and trace the history of Iban Popular Music since the establishment of Radio Sarawak. The research objectives are:

- To analyze and interpret how Iban popular music lyrics correlated to the history as well as events taking place in Sarawak from 1950s–1970s.
- To identify the historical profiles of Iban musicians who responded to modernity while laying the foundation of the Iban music industry during the mid twentieth century.
- To investigate the contributions of Iban popular musicians as historically significant cultural mediators of modernity.

1.8 Significance of the Study

Although Iban popular music has not enjoyed the commercial success that Indonesian dangdut and regional pop music in Indonesia has, serious efforts to study the history of Iban popular music have only just begun. There is a significant research gap in how Iban popular music was produced in the 1960s to 1970s, how history and modernity tied together shaping and contributing to its development, and the socio-cultural meaning of Iban pop music in the past fifty years. Thus, this study has the potential to make a new contribution to the field of ethnomusicology, particularly the area of development of popular music in Sarawak, Malaysia. Using historiography methods, identifying prominent themes and trends, looking into history, cultural studies and musicology with data drawn from a range of sources, it is my aim to map the infrastructure of the regional music industry in Sarawak. This will help to identify pop music genres, popular artists, musicians, composers, songwriters and producers thus building biographies of key artists. It will also compile an anthology of Iban pop music identifying the musical styles from different genres and eras.

Although Iban music is not fully original, the pop music reflects the popular culture and lifestyle of Iban people. How Iban express their culture, as well as their identity of Ibanness in the modernized environment, will be discussed to accomplish this mission. Thus, this thesis fills a gap in knowledge of Sarawak's popular music industry particular

to the Iban community produced during the period from British colonization to the formation of Malaysia. By doing so, it sheds light on Iban modernization making a new space through popular music and popular culture in this region by producing new perspectives on creating music as a cultural product of modernity.

1.9 Limitation of the Study

The limitations of this research are seen in the pivotal historical junctures of Iban popular music in three phases: the 1950s–1970s, the 1980s to 2000s and finally from 2000 up until the first decade of the twenty-first century. As this research focuses only on the 1950s to 1970s, this study focuses on the analysis of song texts which illustrate how the desire of modernity and living in a new, progressive nation saw Iban use popular music song lyrics to help them adapt to socio-cultural and socio-economic changes in the modern society. In conceptualizing modernity, I am also aware of the roots of Western music derived from the Brooke monarchy and the British colonization era. This phenomenon of modernity may be seen as a global process where the Iban not only receive but are in the process of appropriating and experimenting with modernity. Melodic, rhythmic and harmonic aspects of Iban popular music were not the focus of this analysis. This is because Iban popular music in the 1950s to 1970s was largely mimicking popular tunes from the cosmopolitan urban centers of Malaya and Singapore, as well as Western popular tunes. It was created through the appropriation and innovation of songs heard from mainstream Western and Southeast Asian popular media. However, song lyrics were repeatedly mentioned during my interview sessions with the songwriters and cultural bearers who expressed their desire to be modern. Concurrently, they emphasized to me Iban popular music was used as a cultural mediator during 1950s–1970s.



Figure 2 Geographical location of Sarawak within Southeast Asia and in relation to West Malaysia

To date, there has been no study conducted in Sarawak, Malaysia to investigate the history of Iban popular music since the establishment of Radio Sarawak in 1954. Iban is the largest group in Sarawak and Iban popular music could be considered as regional pop music. Articulating modern Iban identity through songs and album artwork, the Iban music industry in Sarawak contributed to this image as seen on album covers. It also contributed to modernizing the newly urban Iban population which increasingly demanded modern forms of entertainment not available through television. Therefore, looking into geographical locations (refer to Figure 2) and historical timelines, the objective of this research seeks to shed some light on the history of Iban popular music from the 1950s to 1970s in Sarawak within the lens of an alternative modernity.

1.10 Methodology

This is an ethnomusicological study of Iban popular music that uses a qualitative method to focus on interpretations of song lyrics, history and socio-culture phenomenon. Data collected for this research was carried out between 2015–2018 using historiographic method. Informants were selected based upon their direct involvement and experiential knowledge of the historical time period under investigation (1950s–1970s). During the fieldwork, face to face interviews were conducted individually as well as in small groups with Iban singers, musicians, Iban culture experts, Iban columnists, social scientists and former Iban politicians. In addition, virtual chat groups and online networks provided essential information for this study. Historiographic data from archives, libraries and personal collections of recordings and notes were also utilized for the triangulation of data for this study.

My choice of methodology is related to my initial encounters with this research topic. Before I began this research, I realized how Iban popular music played a role in social functions, where people were dancing along to the music after dinner for merrymaking. Besides, my experience as a musician in Sarawak Symphony Orchestra, I had observed Iban popular songs being played during The Sarawak Legislative Assembly dinner and public concerts. My colleague, Dr. Anna Durin shared with me her sentiments listening to the Iban popular songs through radio broadcast in 1960s to 1970s. In order to find out more about the story of Iban popular music, I interviewed Isa Anak Lee, who is the columnist for Iban entertainment news for the local newspaper Utusan Sarawak and Utusan Borneo. He gave me a general overview on how Iban popular music developed from 1950s to 1970s, 1980s to 2000 and from 2000 onwards. These conversations led me to decide the scope for this research.

Beginning with an initial three-month data collection from January to March 2016 at the Sarawak Broadcasting Department (also known as Radio Televisyen Malaysia, or RTM), I went through its Iban pop song collection recorded from the 1950s to 1970s in the audio archive. These recordings were either in the form of open reel tapes or 45 RPM vinyl records. As docketts available in the RTM library were not properly managed, it was my challenge to trace the Iban recordings chronologically. While listening to approximately 700 titles of Iban popular songs collected from RTM, I created a database compiling all recordings by listing the details of song titles, singers, album titles, recording companies and date.

As this thesis seeks to understand how alternative modernity was reflected in Iban popular song lyrics, my methods of data collection centering on historiography were necessary to reflect the centre-periphery narrative associated with popular music in Southeast Asia (Barendregt, 2014; Weintraub, 2010; Yamomo, 2018). The Iban in Sarawak are located geographically and politically on the periphery of Malaysia's power centres. Iban singers cum artists who were once popular and known during 1950s to 1970s were often perceived as central icons to Iban audiences. Their songs had reached listeners throughout Sarawak through radio broadcasts. But as history shows, their geographic location makes them periphery artists among the larger, more dominant Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Indonesia and Western artists. In order to problematize this narrative, the methods of interviews with artists who lived during the historical period was paramount in this research. Documenting their stories and experiences uncovers meanings and shared experiences that inform our understanding of history. Drawing upon the concept of alternative modernity in Southeast Asian popular music history proposed by Barendregt (2015, p.6), I had also taken the historical roots as a framework in analyzing Iban popular songs from 1950s to 1970s as emphasized by Grossberg (1992), Gilroy (1993), Lipsitz (2007), DeNora (2000), Marcus (1989) and Leland (2002).



Figure 3 Conducting an Interview Session with an Iban singer, Mary Awell on 14 October 2017 in Kuching

Guided by historiography method together with the concept of modernity, I tried to develop good relationship as well as gaining their trust. With the help of Isa Anak Lee and Dr. Anna Durin, I was introduced to Iban singers and musicians. Through referral by Iban singers, I was introduced to other singers and musicians living in Kuching, Bintulu and Miri. My informants who are currently in age 70 to 85 year-old, was once involved in the Iban music industry in 1950s to 1970s as a singer, songwriter or musician. Before the appointment, I obtained their kind approval to be interviewed and I also told them how their stories would be valuable to my research. I also respected those Iban

singers who declined to be interviewed as they were not in good health. Among the namelist of Iban singers and musicians who are still alive, I had managed to interview 14 Iban singers/songwriters and two Iban musicians who were once involved in the Iban music industry in 1950s–1970s. With the information and experience that they shared with me based on their memories, I had tried to connect the dots linking up historical records, geographical connections and the relationship between the Iban singers, songwriters and musicians.

The sense of relationship I developed with the Iban singers and musicians, during fieldwork helped me analyze and interpret the song lyrics as well as the Iban popular music industry scene during 1950s to 1970s within the framework of alternative modernity theory (Nettl, 2008, p. vi). Methodologically, understanding and interpreting Iban popular music includes ‘an ideology of nationalism, an emphasis on surveying social context, an ethical dimension’ (Titon, 2008, p. 29) which creates the ‘cultural constructed phenomenon’ (ibid, p. 30) among the Iban people.

Taking Nettl (2008) and Titon (2008) suggestions into account while listening to approximately 700 songs, I had categorized the songs into three broad categories based on nationalism, culture and lifestyle themes. The song lyrics were transcribed and translated with the help of Anna Durin, Alexander Chelum and Aeries Sumping Jingan. My colleague Anna Durin, who is an expert in Iban culture helped me with Iban song lyric translation and explaining poetic metaphors as well as socio-cultural meanings embedded in the songs. In order to understand the socio-cultural meaning and sentiments of headhunting, *Keling* (the immortal character), the usage of amulets (*pengaroh*), and the custom of *berjalai* expressed by songwriters, I developed relationships with and interviewed Iban cultural experts. To understand the significance of Iban popular songs depicting the prestige of Iban manhood, I managed to interview two Iban army veterans who were once Sarawak Rangers. In understanding the changes of landscape in Sarawak and the experience of the Iban under the new governance of the Federation of Malaysia in the 1960s, the views and sentiments shared by ex-Iban politicians and Iban social scientists helped me to contextualize the historical meanings painted in song lyrics. After the interview process, I transcribed and analyzed the interview sessions I had recorded with voice recorder.

Advocating fieldwork, Kay Kaufman Shelemay, Timothy Rice and Bruno Nettl have played a notable role in historical ethnomusicology. As addressed by Shelemay (1980), historical records have served as pivotal tools for ethnomusicologist to engage with the past for sense-making of the present. While defining the discipline of ethnomusicology, Timothy Rice raises a crucial question, “How do people historically construct, socially maintain, and individually create and experience music?” (Rice, 1987, p. 473). Asserting historiography in an ethnomusicology study, Nettl stressed the approach of historical ethnomusicology by tracing the development of music through the political movement happening in the twentieth century which includes ‘colonialism, nationalism and globalization’, emphasizing on ‘societies, classes and groups’ (Nettl, 2005, p. 284). Ruskin and Rice (2012) observed the combination of history and ethnomusicology in writing practice had gradually increased in the past two decades. Increasingly, researchers have started to redefine the meaning of music in the realm of modernity with a focus on history. Going through the historical records written by European administrators during the Brooke monarchy helped to trace the roots of Western music as a vital

precursor to the Iban popular music scene of 1950s–1970s in Sarawak. All social events that depicted entertainment scenes were reported in the *Sarawak Gazette*. In order to understand the atmosphere of the popular culture scene in Kuching during 1960s–1970s, I utilized social media as a tool. The Facebook group - Kuching Now and Then proved to be a vital site to collect memories from Kuchingnites who lived during 1960s-1970s. With Facebook group administrative permission, I posted questions asking Kuchingites who once lived and experienced the hype of popular culture entertainment scene in dancing halls and youth clubs. I managed to collect responses from the youth who had once enjoyed the music performed by Sarawak Constabulary Band and participated in dancing activities in youth clubs held in urban Kuching. The valuable comments left on my post on Facebook served as useful anecdotes for my thesis where they were reminiscing their experiences of youth culture in 1960s.

1.11 Organisation of Thesis

There are eight chapters in this thesis. Chapter Two provides an overview of modernity from the west and alternative modernity in Southeast Asia, which I employ in this study in analyzing the history of Iban popular music. This is followed by the literature review of current scholarship in the field of popular music in Southeast Asia and the Malay World where I provide of review of literature on the development of pop music genre in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia produced from 1920s to 1970s. It is important to note that Iban popular songs and its scene in Sarawak were seen as periphery to the history of this region. A diverse range of musical materials from foreign and western countries served as sources for in the early creation of Iban pop music. Iban's desire to be modern elicited in the form of music and song lyrics constitutes a flux of modernization in the sociocultural and political history of the Iban people in Sarawak.

Chapter Three traces an important chronology on how western music was established in Sarawak since the Brooke Dynasty. It began with the arrival of Rane Margaret in 1870 and migrant Filipino musicians as members of Sarawak Rangers Band in 1888. What was evident from the 1870s onwards was the establishment of the Sarawak social entertainment scene that included western classical music, dance repertoire and popular music from the west. Other influential musical precursors included the *bangsawan* performances starting in early 1920s, the establishment Sarawak Constabulary Band and Sarawak Musuc Society and the rise of Radio Sarawak in 1954 during British colonization. This had later led to the establishment of new music venues in conjunction with the rise of youth culture where musics from Western entertainment culture were consumed by the youth in urban Kuching during the dance parties.

Chapter Four traces the development of Iban popular music since the rise of Radio Sarawak in 1954. Conditioned by modernity and a desire to be modern, Iban popular music was created to fill up Iban Radio air time while simultaneously serving to display their socio-cultural identity through the urban soundscape. Other factors influencing creativity in the creation of Iban popular music included social interaction of upper class Iban in urban Kuching, the western lifestyle and entertainment experience with the Japanese and British governments. In this chapter, I begin to introduce the contribution of the Bayang and Linang family in the early conception of Iban popular music. These two families had responded to modernity and laid the foundation for the establishment of the Iban music industry. Iban singing talents were identified through singing

competitions held in major towns in Sarawak namely Kuching, Sibü and Bintulu from the late 1960s to 1970s. As such, this chapter introduces the Iban singers and musicians and the recording companies owned by the Chinese entrepreneurs who had contributed to the Iban recording industry from 1968 to the late 1970s.

Chapter Five to Chapter Seven uncovers the socio-cultural and socio-political meanings of Iban song lyrics correlated with historical events in Sarawak from the 1950s to 1970s. I argue that Iban popular musicians played a significant role as cultural mediators of modernity by penning Iban popular music lyrics responded to a rapidly modernizing Sarawak in 1950s to 1970s.

Chapter Five focusses on songs of praise, articulating the prestige of manhood in Iban culture within the framework of modernity during the pre-modern (Pre-Brooke era³) to the Malaysian nation state. I argue how notions of masculinity and prestige of manhood were articulated in Iban popular songs of praise, honoring the achievements of Iban Trackers and Sarawak Rangers during the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) and Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation (1961-1965). I also analyze the depiction of immortal character, *Keling* as an ideal man, the importance of amulets (*pengaruh*) that served as protective sources of spiritual strength during warfare and the significance of battle cry "*Agi Idup Agi Ngelaban*" (As Long as I Live, I still Fight) in Iban popular songs.

Chapter Six examines the context of colonization and the spirit of nationalism in Sarawak through song lyric analysis. Within the Iban territories, these chosen songs lyrics had once served as a media broadcasted on Iban radio portraying modernity and sentiments about nation building. In line with the new governorship under the Federation of Malaysia, I argue that the role of Iban popular music served as both cohesion and coercion in Sarawak, persuading the Iban to appreciate the country. I also discuss how Iban represented the Dayak community and other indigenous groups in *Gawai* festivals with newly composed *Gawai* songs, this is followed by a discussion on the importance of Iban popular songs as an important media promoting education.

Chapter Seven considers the juxtapositioning of traditional and modern socio-cultural and socio-economic realities for Iban who sang about new landscapes in Sarawak. As a new independent nation, directly and indirectly, songs discussed in this chapter served as 'propaganda pop' that pushed the development of Sarawak and how modernity had played a role in new spaces. As the song lyrics and melody were appropriated from Malay popular songs, I observe a closely calculated interaction between the cosmopolitan Malay identity and the Iban recording industry. As the Iban were paired with modernity, I illustrate how the Iban culture, values of valor, and the custom of *bejalai* were articulated in song lyrics during the height of modernization.

Finally, Chapter Eight concludes the findings of the present study and how it ties in with the research objectives and highlights the recommendations for future research on the history of Iban popular music.

³ Prior before James Brooke ruled Sarawak as the first White Rajah from 1841 to 1868.

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