



The Current Ethics And Civilisation In Bajau Society Today

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ABSTRACT

The construction and progress of a nation is parallel to the ability of its people to form a better civilisation. Progress can be referred to the harmony of life, a good education system, infrastructure facilities, well-being and health of the population. The indigenous Bajau community has begun to adapt developments from time to time and form a better civilization without having to erode their cultural heritage. The objective of this study is to explain how the Bajau community interacts towards diversity and facing challenges of the new millennium. Based on the requirements of this study, the appreciation of the concept of ethics and civilization is used as a guide in order to support the assessment and to achieve the objectives of this study. This study uses an ethnographic approach. The ethnographic approach uses field research methods such as observation, participation and interview techniques to collect data. This field study was conducted in Kampung Taun Gusi, Kota Belud, Sabah. A semi-structured interview technique was used to obtain consistent data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with influential individuals such as the Head of Natives who is the Head of Bajau Ethnic Customs in Kampung Taun Gusi. This study is also supported with secondary data through literature review. The results of this study found that the Bajau community in Sabah is able to form ethics and civilization equal to the progress according to the passage of time. This writing attempts to explain the process of the formation of ethics and civilisation in Bajau society. Then, analyse the impact of ethics and civilization among the Bajau community. It cannot be denied the fact is that the Bajau community in Kampung Taun Gusi, Kota Belud is able to develop better from various aspects each day with the birth of more generations of intellectual Bajau natives who elevate their socio-culture, way of life and the superiority of their ethnic heritage to be more effective and sustainable .

Keywords: ethics, civilisation, Bajau, heritage, new millennium

Introduction

Malaysia is a developing country that is rich with the population of various ethnic groups. This form of treasure is used as an asset in coloring the cultural image as well as the diversity of customs and heritage of the country. The fact that in order to get to this level, the country needs the unity of the supporting community through the development of civilisation. Furthermore, ethics and civilization are important elements that form civilisation and human capital better than the history of past human civilisations. Therefore, the complex and unique ethical values and past human civilisations need to be fully understood by a society so that an understanding related to history and the dynamics of society can be appreciated.

Nowadays, the Bajau community in Sabah is no stranger to the mainstream which is increasingly challenging such as in the aspect of economic vitality, knowledge in preserving heritage and tribes that show many changes through the impact of ethics and civilisation. However, this formation of ethics and civilisation does not affect the exotic identity of the Bajau community, a legacy of the previous *embo-embo* beliefs. Moreover, there are also some of their customs and practices that are still being maintained and reformed. Guided by ethics and

civilisation towards a civilised society, the Bajau ethnic group has begun to adapt their custom or way of life in the mold of the true Islamic religion in particular. In other words, the practice and appreciation of it can be achieved through several formation processes that clearly leave a positive impact towards the prosperity and well-being of a dynamic Bajau community.

Methodology of The Research

In order to clarify this research question, an ethnographical approach was used. One of them is using field research methods such as observation techniques to participate while collecting data. This field study was conducted in Kampung Taun Gusi, Kota Belud, Sabah. This method is carried out in the year of 2021 and 2022 by stages in order to obtain the necessary data and information. The observation was multiple direction during the field work. This participatory observation aims to confirm the data that has been obtained throughout the previous field.

The interview technique was also implemented to obtain the corresponding data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with influential individuals such as the Native Chief who is the head of Bajau ethnic customs in Kampung Taun Gusi. Among other informants includes Kuim bin Harun who is on duty at the Native Court, Kota Belud, Sabah. This study obtained abundant data from interviews due to the lack of specific writing about how the Bajau community interacts with diversity and oncoming progress.

This study is also supported with secondary data through literature review. Among the materials examined to obtain data through bibliographic research includes books, scientific books, journal articles, reports and program books. This study uses the concept of ethics and civilization to describe and support the evaluation of the study.

Concepts Of Ethics

Ethics comes from the Greek word 'ethos' which means values or knowledge, or something that is held by either individuals or groups of practitioners that determine their behavior. In other words, ethics refers to the personality of the individual which is produced through the rational human mind and becomes a yardstick for their actions in differentiating something good and bad. From an Islamic perspective, ethics refers to behavior based on correct Islamic law and based on the Qur'an and piety to Allah as the creator.

According to Mohd Zain Mubarak (2021), ethics is a discipline that has been discussed since the Greek times by philosophers or western thinkers including Socrates, Aristotle and Plato. Moral philosophies that have existed since ancient Greece are guided by general philosophies such as idealism, realism, pragmatism and existentialism. The principle held by western moral and ethical theory is based on rational thinking.

Other than that, Mustafa (2002) explained that ethics is a matter related to attitudes that determine the behavior of a society. He added, it is divided into two, namely normative and metaethic. Normative is a guide and rule that describes good and bad behavior. Meanwhile, metaethic consists of two fractions namely analytical and critical. Analytical works to analyse the rules related to behavior whether good or bad, while critical is a medium to criticise the analysis that has been done before. The goal is to gain certainty through observation and strengthen the action or ethics that is carried out.

According to Hamzah (1985), ethics means a science in researching good and bad behavior by observing human behavior using common sense. Chronologically, various definitions are given to translate the meaning or concept of ethics. Indeed, this ethics can be formulated as a rule or a guide and the basic foundation of human beings in living their daily lives either individually or living in a society that leads behavior according to the principles of rules with elements of goodness and correctness. Ethics also plays an important element in human response to three types of social interactions that are important in their lives, namely interactions with the Creator, interactions with human beings and finally interactions with the universe.

Good propriety and ethics certainly help increase the level of national progress through various aspects such as economic vibrancy, marketability of dynamic society as well as religious development and adherence. Therefore, the Bajau community also moves along with progress guided by the appreciation and practice of ethics and civilised civilisation. Hence, current Bajau community has faced and are able to build an identity equipped with education and superior and high-value Bajau heritage.

Concepts of Civilisation

The concept of civilisation is a multi-disciplinary field because it is universal in various fields. It often talks about various aspects of progress achieved by humans, whether in the form of materialism or spirituality. In general, the concept of civilisation is associated with civilisation or culture although the definition may be quite different. Every nation, even though it is a different religion, definitely has a different definition or point of view. This view is usually based on ideology, philosophy and their view of the universe. Therefore, it is important to understand and appreciate the intended concept of civilisation more deeply.

According to the Third Edition *Kamus Dewan* (1997), civilisation comes from the root word '*adab*'. *Adab* means behavior and speech (politeness), refined and subtle manners. Civilisation is defined as "*the state and level of progress in the physical and spiritual life of a nation or society*". Therefore, from the explanation of the given definition it can be illustrated that the concept of civilisation is not much different from the definition of civilisation. In general, civilisation gives an overview of the progress of a nation at a certain time in various

aspects of life, whether spiritual or physical.

In addition, civilisation can also be referred to the level of achievement or human life that has reached the highest level of progress. The human progress referred, covers the progress and subtlety of thought in various fields such as religion, science and art, material progress and the level of achievement in social and political organisation. Secondly, the nation or people who have reached the level of progress as stated above in something or in a certain place as well as their way of life and culture. Finally, the process of a nation or community that has reached a high level of human progress civilizes itself or is civilised. With the definitions and explanations that have been given, it can be concluded that the concept of civilisation tries to explain some forms of progress achieved by human society in a certain era.

The Settlement of Bajau Community

According to *Gusni Saat* (2008) the Bajau ethnic population alone for three countries namely Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines is said to reach 860,000 people. Based on this findings of the population census in the Malaysian Statistics (2010), it is stated that the total population in Kota Belud alone reaches 107,243 people and the percentage ratio of 40.8%, the Bajau ethnic group is the second largest group after KadazanDusun with a ratio of 41.6%.

Kampung Taun Gusi also has a diversity of certain ethnic groups. This variation of various ethnic parents contributes to the socio-cultural change of the Bajau ethnic group whether consciously or not. This is because each ethnic group has their own custom and a system of norms as their guide. Elements of culture clash as highlighted by Wilbert E. Moore (1986) in the book *Social Change* also prove this statement. The proof can be seen through the display of Table 1.1 below which explains the total population by tribe in Kampung Taun Gusi, Kota Belud Sabah.

The diversity of ethnicity in Malaysia does create a gap between the communication and culture of these ethnic groups as long as they live in the same environment in Kampung Taun Gusi. Their tolerance and closeness is reflected through good relations and two-way communication. Differences in religion and beliefs are not made an obstacle for them to be understandable, respectful and learning to adapt to the situation when faced with the customs of the Bajau community in particular. In fact, they already understand the ins and outs of their custom and give way without any objection. It is clear that this diversity does not restrict the implementation of customs and rituals. The changes are made as improvements and align them according to the demands of the current situation.

Table 1.1: Total population by ethnic group in Kampung Taun Gusi Kota Belud Sabah in the year 2010

Ethnicity	Radius
Malay	130
Kadazan	215
Bajau	5,365
Murut	1
Other Bumiputera(Indigenous)	683
Chinese	15
Indian	-
Others	32
Non-Indigenous	571
Total	7,013

Source: Population and Housing Census of Malaysia 2010

The Improvement of Quality of Life and Infrastructure

Based on the report on Quality of Life in Malaysia (1999), quality of life involves changes in society and social systems from conditions that are considered from unsatisfactory to better conditions. Thus the quality of life does not only include economic development but also other aspects such as social, psychological, cultural, political and environmental. However, the most important aspect in providing a quality life to humans typically contains four things namely politics, economy, social and education (Szalai & Andrews.1980).

From a political aspect, Bajau ethnic residents in Kampung Taun Gusi, Kota Belud, Sabah uses the power or people's rights approach regarding the selection of candidate leaders. According to Mohd Kassim Hj. Mustafah (2022) the selection of candidates must also meet the mandatory criteria that have been set such as the level of education, experience and individual ability. Previously, the leadership of the "*Kedatuan*" group was traditionally appointed, which leadership are based on the origin of that family group only. Nowadays, there are many Bajau people who have made it to higher education to become thinkers or intellectuals that helped to develop Kota Belud, Sabah into a better region than before. Until eventually, the social system in Kota Belud can be clearly categorized according to different roles and responsibilities.

From an economic perspective, the Bajau community no longer depends on the concept of self-sufficiency economy, instead they follow the trend of time and the demands that influence their environment. This means that crops are made into larger sales products by opening retail stores, restaurants and cafeterias. Provided

with natural resources such as the view of Mount Kinabalu located on the hillsides and rice paddies, job opportunities can be created. Many of them have established resorts and cafeterias. Among them is the famous "Karanahan View" in Kota Belud. Simultaneously, the traditional clothing of the Bajau ethnic group is also used as an attraction for tourists for the purpose of taking photos and exposure. As a result, the Bajau community's economy is not focused solely on agriculture, they adapt their cultural wealth, skills such as making swords, arts and crafts, playing musical instruments and riding horses as a business-based resource. Other than that, from the perspective of social and education shows how Bajau people freedom to live harmoniously. The proof is that they are able to hold cultural activities in the large market in town involving various tribes. Some of the challenges faced with the previous infrastructure were the lack of roads and sea transport. In accordance with the previous situation, the residents had no choice but to walk or ride a *sampan*(boat). Therefore, the journey took long period of time. As a result, they arrived a little late and too tired when reaching their destination. This culture is a reflection of the local lifestyle of the Bajau community. Mohd Yuszaidy Mohd Yusoff and Muammar Ghaddafi Hanafiah (2021) define lifestyle as a way to cultivate independent identity and create cultural symbols that echo personal identity.

However, the construction of paved roads and the opening of forest areas as settlements with connecting roads are the best solutions to the problems faced by this community. They are able to take a shorter and safer route. In fact, they will have the freedom to choose to migrate to a new place in a wide open area like Kampung Taun Gusi. The schools are also closer to home and the standard of education is also satisfactory because the trained and experienced teachers that are placed there are imported from the Peninsula. Early exposure to education gives birth to a love of knowledge and the school changes the thinking patterns of the previously backward society to become better, advanced and successful in the future life. This can be proven as many Bajau natives today become great leaders and teachers. In addition, facilities such as the construction of hospitals, supermarkets or convenience stores also help meet their daily needs.

Proper form of Administration

The political changes which are the class system and organized institutions have created a healthy environment. In relation, the community is able to determine the party and leader they want through process of elections. The democratic system was introduced and implemented in accordance with the plural society in Kota Belud. This phenomenon, allows the role of the hereditary class to no longer be biased in matters of administration but only involving matters related to customs. Although the social system is very friendly in its essence, the role of the social system is only used in death customs and culture.

The administrative structure of the Bajau community in Kampung Taun Gusi, Kota Belud, Sabah consists of several divisions of positions according to individual roles. The appointment of these individuals, usually takes into account their qualifications such as having skills and advantages or versatility in many things.

According to the testimony of Mohd Kassim Hj. Mustafah (2022) an organization's parent administrative system will be led by an OKK (District Head or *Orang Kaya-Kaya*). Meanwhile, the *Ketua Anak Negeri* acts as the head of the natives at the district level, followed by the role of the Village Leader or better known as the Community Leader. Then, the role of Security Committee Chairman, Imam, and the *Belia* and *Belia Wanis* (Youth Association).

Any violation related to Indigenous Customary Law in Kota Belud will be tried in the District Native Court. This administration will refer to three individuals, namely the District Head (OKK), the Native Head and the Village Head. Any community complaints related to the violation of custom and ceremonial matters will be discussed in the Native Court for the purpose of further action.

Other than that, the Village Head is usually responsible for taking care of the affairs and safety of the residents under his care. The head of the village is usually an individual who is an old and a knowledgeable person. This is because this individual needs to have the ability to solve problems in the village among the members before being referred to the Native Court.

Under the District Head, The position of Chairman of the Security Committee were created. The main purpose of the establishment of this position is to help the village head take care of the welfare and safety of the community from any unwanted things. These individuals act as guardians and protect the welfare and safety of the community from external and internal threats.

After the Chairman of the Security Committee, another influential individual is the Imam. Without eliminating traditional practices, this individual plays a very important role because they have expertise regarding religious matters and customs. A custom in the village will usually require their services as a person of religious reference. Such examples are in a feast or *mangan bangi* ceremony, death rituals, circumcision and any custom that has religious elements.

At the village level, *Belia* and *Belia Wanis* are created to represent the voice of young people. Their involvement is needed to facilitate two-way communication between the old and the young efficiently. Through this thread or link, the knowledge gap of the wider community can be conveyed well. Education is also taken into account in the selection of *Belia* and *Belia Wanis*. The educational background is considered important in order to ensure that they are able to be good role models and understand the motives behind the establishment of the organization, be actively involved, and able to bring ideas to the community independently. It is clear that, this group is needed as an intermediary to the younger generation, especially in the village.

Stratification or the administrative system in the village organization also involves the involvement of several

people who are responsible for carrying out tasks to take care of village affairs. Each layer of this organization has dependencies on each other. In continuance, they will refer to the strata above if the matter is not under their jurisdiction. For instance, breaking custom during the death ritual will be referred to the Head of the Natives for further action and discussion. This explanation can be referred to Figure 1.1 below.

The fact is, when there is an organized administrative system, it shows the development in a society. The writer can understand that the community has its own role and plays its whether they are in the upper or lower ranks. This situation proves that the Bajau community is capable of forming an organization and giving trust to certain individuals to help achieve a better civilisation or guarantee the well-being and quality of life altogether

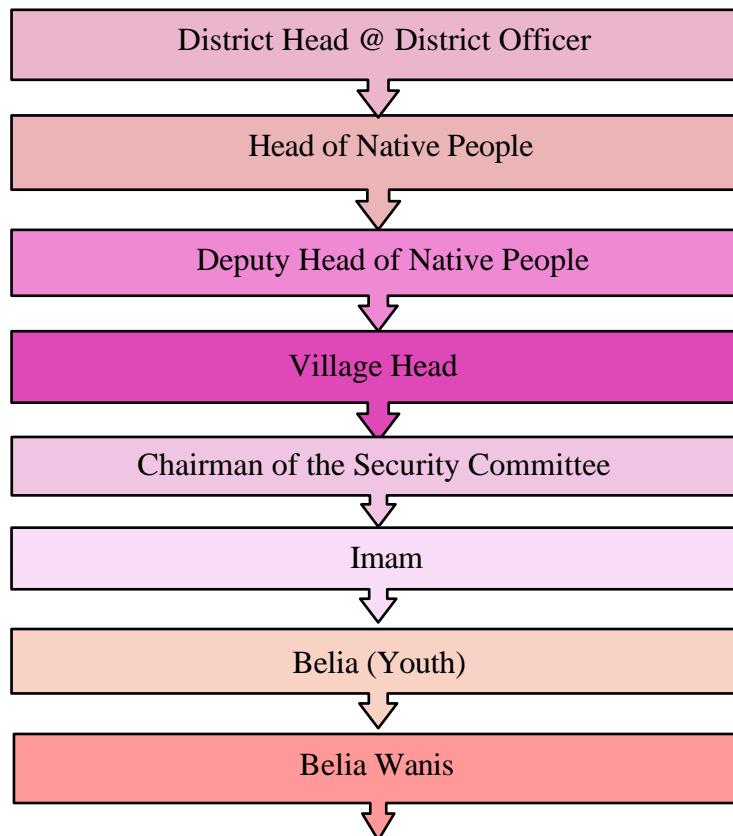


Figure 1.1 Administrative structure of residents in Kampung Taun Gusi

Interaction in Diversity

The ethics and civilisation of the Bajau community is seen in three layers of interaction, namely interaction with the Creator namely, God, interaction with other people including family members, friends, neighbors, fellow Muslims, and interaction with the universe such as the environment, plants and animals.

Interaction with the Creator is monotheism of God and obedience to the teachings of Islam. The journey of the circulation of religion goes hand in hand with human understanding of religion and belief. Before the arrival of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism became the religion and stopovers between the worlds of the prehistoric era of humans starting from the Paleolithic period and moving to the formation of the nation state including in Borneo. Halina Sendera Mohd. Yakin (2018) admits that other than Islam, the thought system and cosmology of Hinduism and Buddhism also leave an impact on the thinking of traditional societies. This can be seen through the influence of Hinduism in the performing arts such as *pesuk* customs, *mayang pinang* and *usunan* customs.

This statement is further reinforced by Kuim bin Harun and Mohd Kassim Hj. Mustafah (2022) who stated that these three customs clearly show the clash of Hindu influences. It is difficult to avoid the cultural clash or acculturation of other contributors in changing the perspective and manifested on the customs and rituals of death. Nevertheless, the establishment of Islam in Sabah has changed the cultural pattern and way of life as well as their religious beliefs. The Bajau community is also Muslim, they pray five times a day, fast in the month of Ramadan, celebrate Aidilfitri and Aidiladha and perform Hajj for those who are able. As a result, their culture and way of life, despite being made up of traditional layers of society that resulted through the influence of intermarriage of various tribes in Borneo, are still firmly based on Islamic Shari'a law.

Secondly, human interaction whether with family members, close friends, neighbors and other people. The population variation in Kampung Taun Gusi caused the influence and relationship of other ethnic groups. This diversity of ethnicity forms the sharing of religious knowledge, worldview and educational knowledge.

In fact, the residents of Kampung Taun Gusi live close together on their own land and build their own houses. This environment facilitates the concept of neighborhood and good brotherhood to be maintained. Indirectly,

the spirit of *assabiyah* (social solidarity) can be fostered and values such as love, respect and helping each other are instilled through the involvement of community or neighborhood activities.

At the level of family relationships, the Bajau community's way of life has its own variations. This cultural image can be seen through the application since they were children, which is the need to respect the layer of lineages according to titles using the dialect of the Bajau people. In addition, it has become a habit that young people have to respect the generation that is older than them. The concept of 'eating more salt', describes this group as a group that has experience and more knowledgeable in matters of life. Based on that understanding, the elderly are often given a good position in the strata of family relationships as individuals who must be respected and glorified.

Table 1.2 The terms of greeting are used according to the Bajau Sama dialect

Individuals	Titles and Callings
Embo' Tuut	Moyang
Embo' Denda	Nenek
Embo' Lallah	Datuk
Wife	Endo'
Husband	Ellah @ Ela
Children	Anak
Daughters	Anak Dendo
Sons	Anak Dela
Older Siblings	Kak
Younger Siblings	Dik
Relatives / Cousins	Anak Denakan

Source: Mohamad Said Hinayat 2003

The use of accurate and appropriate titles is considered very important in the kinship system because for the Bajau community this is an honor. Thus, they strongly emphasize the importance and ability of a person who is a Bajau ethnic to speak in their own accented language, which is the Bajau dialect. The following are among the terms of titles or calls according to the dialect of the Bajau Sama Kota Belud tribe. This explanation can be referred to in Table 1.2.

Interaction with the universe refers to human behavior and response to nature. For example, the use of natural resources such as *dun begiang* was previously used in the process of packing food in the *Ngeduang* custom. The majority of landlords in Kota Belud are devoted to the land, they diligently cultivate crops to be used as a source of food as well as a source of side income. Herbs such as certain leaves are also selected and practiced in the field of traditional medicine, accompanied by the recitation of the holy verses of the Quran as a medium for healing.

Other than that, the relationship with animals, refers to their care in the field of animal farming and is used during the holiday as sacrifice in particular. Animals are also treated well because of their contribution to their masters in the agricultural sector. The Bajau community believes that treating animals are just as it treats humans can formed a good personality because it instill the humanity that should be in every individual. They also believe that a person's evil actions can result in the occurrence of *saksagan* because it angers the *embo-embo* who observes the behavior of their grandchildren.

Industrial Revolution and Marketability

According to Mohd Zain Mubarak (2021) the industrial revolution is said to have started since the 18th century. These changes have left an impact in various aspects of human life whether agriculture, manufacturing and transportation to socioeconomics and culture all over the world. This indicates that the Bajau ethnic group living in Sabah are not left behind in accepting the development due to the impact of the industrial revolution. The pinnacle of the revolution that began in the 50s is known as the Digital Revolution which greatly simplifies the affairs of daily human life. For example, the introduction of WhatsApp, Waze, Foodpanda which clearly uses the internet application to access any job easily.

The industrial revolution related to the digital revolution began in the 1950s in developed countries that emphasized the development of digital and communication systems as well as the advancement of personal computers, the internet, and information and communication technology (Ateerah Abdul Razak, Nur Azuki Yusuff and Zaleha Embong 2021). The result impacted agricultural economic sector, creative art making, and the continuation of tradition more efficiently. Communication and information systems can also be delivered effectively and easily available in the market.

Unknowingly this approach indirectly provides initial exposure to the Bajau community to improve the quality of life. It is important for each individual to understand their own abilities. Individuals who are skilled in a certain field should make the best use of that ability. For example, expertise in architecture or art with the implementation of customs, music bands in *balu-balu* customs as well as creative arts of weaving. These individuals can continue their studies to a higher level which is the University and it is not impossible even overseas.

Therefore, the skills and knowledge generated in foreign countries can be utilized and applied in the

implementation of customs, leaving an impact or contribution to the Malaysian economy and market. Hence, the quality of life can be improved and human civilisation can be developed with economy, education and food resources based on the development and application of education.

Conclusion

For the Bajau community, ethics and civilisation are a reflection of an individual's personality. Bajau people are educated from childhood with good values and good norms through a tightly knit family, neighborhood and involvement in universal social activities. The concept of ethics and civilisation shows the dynamic thinking of Bajau society. The findings of this research found that their behavior and lifestyle, practices the elements of ethics and civilisation.

Henceforth, the change shown by Bajau society balances between its function and its pure values. This means, the culture and practices are changed without discarding the function on it. Interestingly, the change brings a new face that is rich in essence, messages, guidance and human values to be applied to the soul. For example, the value of respect, sharing, charity, helping each other and many more. It is clear that this culture is embedded in the Bajau community to foster good relationships and pure value.

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